Gender

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The study of England's overseas corporations is not a particularly new field of enquiry. The spectacular collapse of the Virginia Company two years after the "Massacre of 1622" triggered a corpus of printed reflection in what was, admittedly, a politically charged public sphere.¹ Similarly, the emergence of the English East India Company as an expansive imperial and colonial power in the eighteenth century triggered intense study of the nature and characteristics of the corporation as a territorial ruler, from contemporaries and Victorians alike. From Robert Orme to Thomas Babington Macaulay, a host of company officials turned historian in an effort to explain the transformations of the corporation, supposedly from commerce to sovereign rule.² As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the theorist Harold Laski asked important questions about the separate legal and political identity of the corporation, and its autonomous role within the state.³ And, more recently, both Phil Withington and Philip J. Stern have reintegrated the corporation into central understandings of the formation of the state, both domestic and colonial.⁴

One of the most significant and fruitful lines of enquiry to have emerged from recent research on the centrality of the corporation to early modern public and political life, is its social nature. As Stern observes, the corporation may have been a "body politic", but as their charters announced, they were also "a fellowship as well".⁵ Conceptualised and described interchangeably as associations, companies or societies, they were incorporated not just for the regulation

1 For example, John Bargrave. *The Information of Iohn Bargraue, Shewing the Seuerall Abuses of the Gouernment of the Plantation in Virginia*. London, 1624.

2 Robert Orme. *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*. 2 volumes. London, 1803, reprinted 1861; A. J. Grieve, ed. *Thomas Babington Macaulay, Critical and Historical Essays, Volume 1*. Edinburgh, 1840, reprinted London, 1907.

3 Harold Laski. "The Early History of the Corporation in England", *Harvard Law Review* 30 (1917).

4 Phil Withington. *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Philip J. Stern. *The Company-State: Corporation Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

5 Stern, *Company-State*, 8.

of their legal, commercial, civic or religious interests, but for the formalisation and ordering of their social ties. Although not the only body to do so in early modern England, nonetheless corporations and especially their emerging overseas incarnations, were key agents of social regulation and change, “with all the elaborate rituals, restricted membership, rules, conventions, and internal hierarchies that they entailed”, and the diversification of – and challenge to – these that occurred in this period.⁶

Understanding England’s overseas corporations in the years 1550 to 1750 therefore demands an appreciation of their more inherent social mechanisms and dynamics which defined their structure and behaviour. The study of gender, in particular, can help us shed light on the legal, political and commercial properties that defined the way in which corporations developed beyond the local and national levels, to what was an increasingly transoceanic and global scale of operation and, subsequently, integration. Indeed, the distinctive global sociology of the corporation comes into sharp relief when observed through the lens of gender. Perhaps most broadly, the constitutional parameters of the corporation can be traced through the erection and transplantation of regulatory regimes between the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Asia which defined the roles of the sexes as well as governed the sexual relationship between them. More specifically, the way in which corporations subordinated themselves to foreign states in an effort to entrench their members and networks within local and regional orders is illustrated in their adaption to non-European gender norms and regimes in places such as Virginia. The most visible manifestation of this consisted of the marriage of company officials to non-European women in an effort to consolidate political, commercial and cultural ties. Similarly, the processes of integration undertaken in corporate settlements is revealed through the protection and adoption of polygamous cultural practices and beliefs in places such as India. All of these social mechanisms utilised and exercised by overseas corporations make gender a primary lens through which to view them in practice, and in doing so, sheds light on the protagonist nature of the corporation in Global History in the years 1550 to 1750.

Finally, if the primary task of Global History is to recast Europe from the “knowing subject” to the “object”, as Maxine Berg has rightfully demanded, then the overseas corporation proves the actor best suited to meeting this challenge. A study of gender serves to uncover the extent to which non-European communities, agents and contexts shaped these supposedly nationalist,

6 For the breadth of incorporated communities in this period, see Phil Withington. “Company and Sociability in Early Modern England”, *Social History* 32 (2007): 298.

mercantilist enterprises at every conceivable level. As Durba Ghosh observed in her survey of the field of gender, its study “eschews national histories and narratives, promotes transnational and interdisciplinary work, and challenges the bounded fields with which historians conventionally identify”.⁷ As such, viewing corporations through the lens of gender also shines a bright light on the non-European agency that was critical to integrate into corporate activity and operations if they were to establish durable networks and local partners across the world. The non-European slaves, mistresses, wives, families, agents and trading partners of company officials transformed not just the formation and expansion of corporate settlements and the local realities of corporate trade and diplomatic relations. They also challenged metropolitan policies and strategies for the wider development of the corporation, forcing them to adapt to the changing realities on the ground in the Atlantic and Asia. In doing so, corporations diverged from the social and cultural expectations of their domicile nation-state, illustrating, as they did, their jurisdictional evasiveness and political autonomy.

Gender in England and Empire

The early modern world order was a gendered one. From social hierarchy to cultural norms, from economic production to political debate, gender shaped English society. The relationships between men and women and their place within local society were inextricably defined by their gender. In the years 1550 to 1750, this consisted predominantly of the organisation and regulation of the sexes through “a clear subordination of wives to husbands”, a principal that “provided the model for all relationships between men and women”.⁸ Contemporaries were fully conscious of the gendered order of their lives, and institutions of state and society were obsessed with reinforcing this patriarchal principal at the familial, local and national levels. As Daniel Defoe stated in *The Complete Family Instructor* in 1715, fathers had to constantly look to their “duty in the future directing, teaching and governing his family”.⁹ Vicar Charles Primrose followed this advice to the letter in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The*

7 Dura Ghosh. “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?”, *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004): 755.

8 Susan Dwyer Amussen. *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1988, 95.

9 Daniel Defoe. *The Complete Family Instructor: in five parts*. 2 volumes. London, 1715–1717, 1, 32.

Vicar of Wakefield, describing his household as “The little republic to which I gave laws”.¹⁰ With the right to govern and exercise authority reserved for men, women were expected to subordinate themselves accordingly and assume domestic identities and responsibilities. According to a Grey’s Inn lecturer in 1660, women were largely excluded from local office because their “incapacity to learn the law rendered them incapable of exercising discretion”.¹¹

By the later century, the patriarchal regulation of household and family was woven into the fabric of social authority and cultural practice to such an extent that it became symptomatic of the wider English polity. This period witnessed an explosion in the publication and circulation of manuals and guides to the good government of the household. These rule-books anxiously “elevated the household as the key unit of social control”, so that the regulation of sexual relations also became the cornerstone of political stability as well.¹² As Gordon Schochet has shown, the organisation of gender relations within the household into a patriarchal order was one of the most defining currents of political thought in the seventeenth century, a period in which “public” and “private” spheres had yet to emerge as distinctively as they would in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Political theorists such as Sir Robert Filmer advocated the dominance of men over women in an attempt to legitimise the authoritarian aspirations of the Stuart monarchy.¹³

Filmer’s *Patriarcha* opened up half a century of political argument over the construct and meaning of gender and the family household, a debate heightened by John Locke’s criticism of patriarchal government through the promotion of consensual and contractual gender relations in his *First Treatise*, as well as the constitutional ramifications of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9.¹⁴ As Laura Gowing has pointed out, the prominence of patriarchal discourse did not always reflect the reality and day-to-day practice of gender.¹⁵ Men may have anxiously justified and projected patriarchal principals,

10 Oliver Goldsmith. *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Harmondsworth, 1766, reprinted London: Penguin, 1986, 50.

11 Steve Hindle. *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550–1640*. Basingstoke: 2000, 214.

12 Lena Cowen Orlin. *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England*. London: 1994, 3.

13 Gordon J. Schochet. *The Authoritarian Family and Political Attitudes in 17th Century England*. London: 1988, chapter 1.

14 Rachel Weil. *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680–1714*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, 50.

15 Laura Gowing. *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern England*. Oxford: 1996, 185–6.

especially in the household, but “Many women resisted ideals of female submissiveness”.¹⁶ Indeed, gender was certainly “Bound to a historical-social order”, but it was also “challenged through the practices of everyday life”.¹⁷ In the early seventeenth century, historians have even identified a “crisis” of social order partly brought about by a collapse of the patriarchal order. “Was there ever seen less obedience in youth of all sorts, both menkind and womenkind, towards their superiors, parents, masters and governors?” declared one Puritan at the time.¹⁸ Women challenged their husbands’ support for the Glorious Revolution, and the politics of divorce took on a new prominence in Parliament.¹⁹ By the early eighteenth century, the social and political landscape of England was populated with a plurality of gendered positions and tensions, and contemporaries were more aware than ever of the centrality of gender to the world around them.

As may be obvious from this brief survey, histories of early modern gender have proliferated in recent years. Historians of all fields and backgrounds are now increasingly situating – or re-situating – their research within a gendered context. This has especially been the case for historians of New Imperial and, more recently, Global History, for which “gender is a particularly useful analytical category for transcending national and imperial frameworks”.²⁰ Following the release of the *Oxford History of the British Empire*, a companions series on gender was published which stressed that “the building of empires themselves cannot be understood without employment of a gendered perspective”, one that, crucially, did not just constitute “women’s history”.²¹ As Catherine Hall observes, “ideas about masculinity and femininities permeated the practices of empire”.²² At the same time, as David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick formalised the “British Atlantic World” as a new analytical framework for the

16 Karen Harvey. *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 3.

17 Kathleen Wilson. *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century*. London: 2003, 1.

18 Cited in D. E. Underdown. “The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England”, in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds. *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 116.

19 See Weil, *Political Passions*, chapters 1 and 3.

20 Susan D. Amussen and Allyson M. Poska. “Restoring Miranda: Gender and the Limits of European Patriarchy in the Early Modern Atlantic World”, *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012): 343.

21 Philippa Levine. “Introduction”, in Levine, ed. *Gender and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 1.

22 Catherine Hall. “Gender and Empire”, in David Cannadine, ed. *Empire, the Sea and Global History*. London: 2007, 134.

integrated study of Europe, Africa and the Americas in the years 1500 to 1800, Sarah Pearsall impressed the critical need to bridge this with the burgeoning literature on gender, with the caution that “Melding them is a profound challenge to historians in both fields”.²³ As England’s early modern trading corporations similarly begin to present an exciting new framework for understanding, in this case, Global History, both the urgency and caution of Pearsall’s survey of gender in the British Atlantic World must also be echoed. Unlike the latter concept at that time, however, corporations already enjoy a long historical scholarship, and thus the need to bridge these two historiographies within the context of Global History is therefore equally fraught with difficulty.

One of the primary difficulties in a transoceanic analysis of gender and England’s overseas corporations is the perceived imbalance of population and, in consequence, of the sexes. As James Horn has argued, unlike the large scale migration of European men and women to the settlements of the Virginia and Massachusetts Bay Companies, the settlements of the Levant, Royal African and East India Companies in comparison hosted much smaller European populations.²⁴ In the seventeenth century, 300,000 people migrated from England to the Atlantic settlements. In contrast, by 1700 there were perhaps no more than 1,000 English men and women in Asia, including soldiers, covenanted servants, and their families. By 1680, New England alone had a population of approximately 80,000 people. On the other hand, the Madras agency numbered about 500.²⁵ Indeed, Atlantic corporate territories are seen as spaces of settlement and families, with an approximate balance in the ratio of men to women, perhaps slightly in favour of women in Massachusetts in this period. In contrast, corporate activity in the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia is seen as a predominantly male enterprise, with corporate settlements overwhelmingly masculine in nature.²⁶ An integrative analysis of the role of gender in both

23 Sarah M. S. Pearsall. “Gender”, in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds. *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*. London: 2002, 133.

24 James Horn. “British Diaspora: Emigration from Britain, 1680–1815”, in P. J. Marshall, ed. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 28.

25 Estimates for the Atlantic are taken from Peter C. Mancall. “Native Americans and Europeans in English America, 1500–1700”, in Nicholas Canny, ed. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: the Origins of Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, table 15.1, 331; for Asia, see Henry Davison Love. *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640–1800*. 4 volumes. London: 1913, volume 1.

26 For this concern, see Philip J. Stern. “British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections”, *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006): 693–712.

Asia and the Atlantic may therefore seem like a specious study in face of this overwhelming imbalance.

However, a number of factors serve to mitigate this somewhat misleading comparison. As Stern has shown, the East India Company did not comprise just its European employees in Asia. It formed, was granted, and acquired substantial jurisdictional government across India and South Asia over hundreds of thousands of Indian and Asian peoples – both men and women.²⁷ The city and corporation of Madras, for example, included not just the European “White Town” of Fort St. George, where the civil and military establishment was headquartered, but also the adjacent “Black Town” where the majority of the Indian population were resident, as well as a number of surrounding villages, some of which were newly “planted” by the company, consisting of thousands of imported weavers and dyers.²⁸ The company’s own estimates of the size of Madras varied, and the directors were embarrassed when they could not provide a definitive answer when James II enquired in 1686. Following this, their concerted efforts estimated the population in 1692 at 400,000 men and women.²⁹ Even a quarter of this certainly inflated figure of a single East India Company city places the demographics of corporate settlement across Asia and the Atlantic on a far more similar pattern.

Constitutional and Regulatory Gender Regimes

Domestic corporations, whether municipal, civic, commercial or otherwise, were established for the government of their members and subjects, a remit which led them to order and regulate the corporate body for the public good.³⁰ As this extended to everything from moral behaviour to cultural practices, the corporation was therefore anxiously concerned with defining and regulating the roles of the sexes. Even as corporations in early modern England undoubtedly empowered men and worked to uphold patriarchal authority, they also legitimised women as citizens and imbued them with legal and constitutional representation that made them more than just wives or daughters.³¹ The prominence of the corporation within the English state-formation process from the

27 Stern, *Company-State*, 31.

28 See Neild, Susan M. “Colonial Urbanism: The Development of Madras City in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, *Modern Asian Studies* 13 (1979): 217–246.

29 Love, *Vestiges*, 1, 547.

30 See the chapter by Edmond J. Smith.

31 Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, 197.

mid-seventeenth century onwards and the gendering of its body of members placed it at the forefront of the discourse and practice of gender in the years 1550 to 1750. Thus for historians, gender presents an immensely valuable gateway into perceiving the constitutional parameters of the corporation. As they exercised a variety of constitutional tools to proscribe and regulate the gender roles of their members, including the use of legal and religious institutions and authority, overseas corporations were also forced to redefine and adapt to the more every day, porous and contested reality of gender in corporate spaces. They reacted to this by seeking expanded powers from new Crown charters and non-European privileges and concessions.

Indeed, if the social order of gender became highly contested in England, enforcing traditional gender roles and relations in overseas corporations was even more difficult. Trading companies had to engage with a broad range of foreign constituencies, over or even across a vast array of global regions. This meant, most principally, operating within societies and cultures with different gender orders and values to those of their own domicile nations.³² Moreover, members of trading corporations had to adapt and integrate themselves within these if they hoped to achieve commercial and political success.³³ Unlike later large-scale colonial settler societies of the Atlantic, a majority of English overseas corporations ingratiated themselves into larger and more centralised polities, such as the Levant Company in the Ottoman Empire or the East India Company in Mughal India. The need to impose and maintain a homogenous gender order upon a corporate community entrenched within dozens of drastically distinct foreign states and cultures, therefore caused more emphasis and rigidity on regulatory regimes of gender in corporate spaces – especially by metropolitan bodies – such as on-board ships, at trading factories and in settlements.

The constitutional nature of England's overseas corporations becomes most visibly perceptible through their attempts to regulate the relationship between the sexes. In the later seventeenth century, the East India Company launched a reformation of the social order and behaviour of its factories and settlements, from St Helena in the Atlantic to Madras in India. The Company's directors believed that affairs had become increasingly disorderly due to their servants' "absence from prayers, adultery, fornication" and other such "debauched"

32 For the sexual division of labour amongst Native American cultures, see K. M. Brown. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial America*. North Carolina: 1996.

33 See the introduction in this volume, also Alison Games. *Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 83.

behaviour.³⁴ In India, Streynsham Master toured for thousands of miles around the Company's factories and settlements between 1678–81, issuing at each his "Ten Commandments" concerning, amongst other things, marriage and sexuality.³⁵ At the same time, in 1681, the court of directors in London instructed their servants on St Helena to avoid "Fornication", whilst the island's governor published a table of punishments following "very scandalous Reports of loose Women going on board our Ships".³⁶ Corporate authorities believed that any deviation from polite and orderly gender roles and behaviour may have undermined its commercial operations and the stability of its government overseas. In the Levant Company, factors were forbidden altogether from bringing out female companions, whether wives, daughters or otherwise. According to James Mather, "the general expectation was for the Levant merchant to sustain bachelorhood until he had made his fortune, then marry upon his return".³⁷ The general absence of women in Levant Company factories was therefore seen as a successful gendered policy, allowing young men to prepare themselves for marriage without the distraction of female companionship. Only the most senior officials were allowed to bring wives out with them to the Levant, and when they did, their roles were suitably domestic, no matter the context. While her husband conducted matters of state with Ottoman officials, the wife of Sir Thomas Bendish entertained guests at the English palace in Galata with her "obliging carriage".³⁸ In codifying social behaviour at Madras, exercising judicial punishment on St Helena, and banning European women from Levant factories, overseas trading companies exercised their constitutional powers to erect a gender regime based upon the patriarchal organisation of the sexes, on a transoceanic scale.

Servants of England's overseas corporations were of course acutely aware of the hemispheric and even regional differences within which they operated. "These people", the East India Company's Agent of Madras observed of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Golconda in 1650, "are not lyke ye naked, unlearnt Americans, but a most subtle and pollitique nation".³⁹ Conscious of the distinctiveness of the cultural and political landscapes of Asia and the Atlantic,

34 Miles Ogborn. *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company*. London: 2007, 87.

35 Stern, *Company-State*, 108.

36 Ibid., 109.

37 James Mather. *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World*. Oxford: 2009, 80.

38 Mather, *Pashas*, 81.

39 Cited in Beckles Willson. *Ledger and Sword: The Honourable Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies, 1559–1874*. London: 1903, 254.

England's overseas trading corporations and their members nonetheless exchanged, circulated and disseminated the discourse, experience and traditions of both regions to provide a global framework of corporate integration. For example, the East India Company's new "plantation" of St Helena purchased male and female slaves from the Royal African Company in West Africa. The new settlement was modelled on that of Barbados, and in 1683 "a system of the laws and customs of Barbadoes" was adopted, which included the regulation of male and female slaves.⁴⁰ When the company established factories on the West Coast of Sumatra from 1685 onwards, they received shipments of these Barbadian regulated St. Helena slaves, and the Atlantic "system" was adopted at Bengkulu.⁴¹

The transoceanic integration of ideas, systems and practices meant that the regulatory regimes of corporations were shared across the globe. Servants of Atlantic and Asian corporations travelled between one another, bringing with them their experiences and expertise, in what Alison Games has termed a "Web of Empire". Thomas Dale, for instance, served as governor of the Virginia Company's settlement of Jamestown in 1611, and in 1618 took employment as a soldier with the East India Company in 1620 to defend against Dutch aggression.⁴² In fact, when Dale arrived there, he met Patrick Copland, a company chaplain. As Copland informed and educated Dale about Asia, he returned the favour by recounting his stories of Virginia, which subsequently inspired Copland to travel there himself and raise money for a new school in the Atlantic settlement.⁴³ The English overseas corporate world was criss-crossed by such transoceanic actors, circulating and disseminating the models, practices and experiences of one corporate theatre to another. Both Sir Thomas Roe and later Sir William Hedges had served the Levant Company in the Ottoman Empire, only to travel to India in the service of the East India Company later in their careers. When he arrived at the Nawab of Bengal's court in Dacca in 1682, Hedges used his Levant expertise in his negotiation to reduce custom dues on Company goods. When Hedges conducted these in Turkish and Arabic, the Nawab was "pleased and admired to hear [their language] from a Frenge (as they call us)".⁴⁴

40 Court of Directors to St Helena, London, 1 August 1683, in Hudson Ralph Janisch. *Extracts from the St. Helena Records*. St. Helena: 1885, 23.

41 See Frenise A. Logan. "The British East India Company and African Slavery in Benkulen, Sumatra, 1687–1792", *Journal of Negro History* 41 (1956): 339–348.

42 Games, *Web of Empire*, 3.

43 Games, *Web of Empire*, 3–6.

44 Henry Yule, ed. *The Diary of William Hedges during his Agency in Bengal*. 3 volumes. London: 1887–1889, 1, 44.

As they traversed the early modern world, corporate actors transplanted regulatory gender regimes from one region to another. This was particularly evident in the formulation and projection of gendered ideas of power when interacting with foreign states and host societies.⁴⁵ Proprietors and colonists of the Virginia Company drew on patriarchal thought to inform and legitimise regimes of authority there. Bloody reprisals against Native Americans following the Virginia Massacre of 1622 was justified with the statement that “Children are pleased with toys and awed with rods”.⁴⁶ Members of the Massachusetts Bay Company recorded how the Native American societies they dealt with defined their structures and relationships of power through a gendered hierarchy. The language of kinship was paternal, chiefs being defined as “fathers”, and those subject to their authority were “children” and “women”.⁴⁷ But, as Malcolm Gaskill has shown, native articulations of power as gendered was often an imposition of English understandings of their own gender order. Thus according to the Virginia Company clergyman Alexander Whittaker, when disparaging his Native American counterparts in 1612, they were “much like to the counterfeit women in England who faine themselves bewitched, or possessed of some evill spirit”.⁴⁸ For early seventeenth century corporations in the Atlantic, gender shaped not just the contours of political authority, but the perception and understanding of foreign cultures and polities.

The constitutional rights acquired and exercised by corporations through Crown charters similarly placed gender at the centre of governmentality and the projection of state power in the Atlantic and Asia. Kathleen Wilson has emphasised that the formation of corporate government at settlements such as St. Helena in the Atlantic and the West Coast of Sumatra in Asia “focused on the organization of social life ... among colonizers and colonized alike”. For Wilson, the challenges of governance, regulation and demographic control “permeated” corporate regimes at these places, “where the imperatives of ‘trade’, security, and social stability often violently contended”.⁴⁹ The need to create a stable gender regime in an effort to stimulate government efficiency and commercial growth was the paramount concern of Deputy-Governor

45 Amussen and Poska, “Restoring Miranda”, 344–5.

46 Cited in Bernard Sheehan. *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia*. Cambridge: 1980, 170.

47 Jenny Hale Pulsipher. *Subjects Unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England*. Philadelphia: 2007, 12–15.

48 Cited in Malcolm Gaskill. *Between Two Worlds: How the English became Americans*. Oxford: 2014, 30.

49 Kathleen Wilson. “Rethinking the Colonial State: Family, Gender, and Governmentality in Eighteenth-Century British Frontiers”, *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 1296.

Joseph Collet at Bencoolen. This ardent Baptist and City merchant sought to govern the West Coast of Sumatra as he did his own expansive family: as *paterfamilias*. In 1714 Collet arranged for his four daughters to be brought up with “Virtue and a good education”. From Asia, he dictated to his daughter Elizabeth in London how best to correspond with potential suitors, in a way that “ought to avoid both the distance of a Mistress and the fondness of a Lover”. The women of his family, he declared, must dedicate themselves to the study of religion and the “Domestick Life”.⁵⁰ In 1718, he reminded his eldest daughter that “Whenever you marry, remember that is the Husband’s part to be head and Protector”, encapsulating the patriarchal order of gender in its entirety, adding “and the Glory of the Wife to be his delight”.⁵¹ His son, who had travelled with him to Asia in the service of the East India Company, was no less regulated. He was ordered to improve himself “in Writing and Accounts”, and was warned to avoid alcohol and women, the latter being “the fatall rock on which so many Youths miscarry”.⁵²

Joseph Collet conducted his deputy-governorship almost entirely in reference to gendered thought and practice. In the years 1712 to 1716, he held a frequent correspondence with his old Clapham minister, Moses Lowman. The minister was a prolific publisher of literature on the rights of magistrates and princes to regulate social relationships and exercise the “Power of directing the Actions of the Community” as a means of strengthening the “Soul of the Body Politick”.⁵³ Typically, this centred on ordering the sexes into a patriarchal hierarchy. Collet preached from these, and other influential patriarchal tracts such as those by John Tilloston and John Wilkins, to the inhabitants of Fort Marlborough at Bencoolen every Sunday. The covenanted servants under his rule accepted subordinate male roles, such as those of children. “Gov’r Collet useth me like a Son”, declared his secretary, William Palmer.⁵⁴ Collet addressed the second most senior official on the West Coast, Henry White, chief of Bantal, “in the Stile and with the freedom of a Father ... which he returns with the duty and affection of a Son”.⁵⁵ Unmarried European women meanwhile were “adopted” by Collet as the *paterfamilias* of the government and community, and he arranged their marriage to the most promising of his subordinates.⁵⁶

50 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/2, Joseph Collet to Elizabeth Collet, York Fort, 26 August 1714.

51 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/3, Joseph Collet to Elizabeth Collet, Fort St George, 28 August 1718.

52 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/2, Joseph Collet to John Collet, York Fort, 8 June 1714.

53 Moses Lowman. *A Sermon Preach’d to the Societies for Reformation of Manners*. London, 1720, 6.

54 Lowman, *Sermon*, 6.

55 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/2, Joseph Collet to Elizabeth Collet, York Fort, 5 May 1714.

56 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/2, Joseph Collet to John Bedwell, York Fort, 23 October 1712.

To his brother at home, Collet summarised the rigid gender order that he had erected on the West Coast of Sumatra in 1714: "And as for the English we make up one great Family of which I am the head and common Father, to whom all pay the Reverence, Respect and Obedience of Children".⁵⁷

The Malay subjects of the Company, both within the town of Bencoolen and up and down the West Coast at various forts and outposts, were similarly brought under Collet's patriarchal rule. According to Wilson, he "vigorously campaigned to reform and regulate the sexual and gender ... practices of local people".⁵⁸ Collet claimed that Malay men were "addicted to Women", and so he set about regulating social and marital practices, intervening in disputes and punishing instances of adultery, prostitution and fornication.⁵⁹ But to those not directly subject to Collet's authority, and especially to those states that the East India Company relied upon for political and commercial privileges, Collet had to adapt his gendered interactions and subvert the political dominance demanded by his patriarchal authority. Thus in 1714 the neighbouring Raja Dupaty Kalippa wrote to "humbly beg of my Brother the Govr. Of Bencoolen", an egalitarian dynamic which was evidently an established practice by Malay rulers on the West Coast, especially in regards to European Companies whom they treated not as superiors or masters, but as allies, partners, and sometimes even subordinates.⁶⁰ Whether as a subordinate or as an equal, then, corporate regimes shaped social relationships and political governance through a gendered perception of the world and its inhabitants, whatever their race or culture. Most crucially, when Collet left Sumatra in 1716, he transplanted his patriarchal government to India as Governor of Madras, from where he also discussed and encouraged a "reformation of manners" at the Levant Company factory at Smyrna, across the other side of the world.⁶¹

As in England, however, the regulatory gender regimes constructed by corporations from the Atlantic to Asia, were also highly contested, but perhaps even more so. As Betty Joseph has argued, the expansion of commerce in this period, largely instigated by corporations, "enlarged existing social networks" so that "all markers of identity and subjectivity (whether gender, nationality,

57 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/1, Joseph Collet to Samuel Collet, York Fort, 1 March 1714.

58 Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State", 1302.

59 Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State", 1302.

60 See Barbara Andaya Watson. *To Live as Brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1993.

61 Joseph Collet to Daniel Dolins, Madras, 28 August 1718, in H. H. Dodwell, ed. *The Private Letter Books of Joseph Collet*. London: 1933, 196.

or race), previously held to be 'natural,' were rendered ambivalent and unstable".⁶² In fact, the time and resources dedicated to enforcing and upholding patriarchal regimes of authority by corporate actors was largely a response to its highly contested nature. As Christian Laidlaw has shown, many corporate settlements were host to populations of European women who had either rejected or been ejected from patriarchal gender regimes. One deputy-governor of the East India Company in 1675 complained to London that "some of these women are grown scandalous to our nation, religion and Government interest". Independent and, more importantly to corporate authorities, unregulated women in settlements undermined the entire social and political order, and could rarely be tolerated. In this case, their persistent "scandalous" behaviour resulted in the threat of imprisonment where they would be restricted to "bread and water".⁶³ If women failed to conform to their obedient roles, men could also fail to live up to the paternal patriarchy demanded of masculine authority. In Levant Company factories, there were complaints of young factors engaging in "Gaming, Drinking, Whoreing".⁶⁴ Similarly, the Council and quarter sessions records of St. Helena betray a gender regime that had, in many respects, completely broken down by the turn of the eighteenth century, with instances of, amongst other things, polygamy, prostitution, sodomy, incest and even child rape.⁶⁵ Clearly, overseas corporations sought to uphold a transoceanic gender regime, but it was one that was highly contested and, in some regions, not altogether successful.

Sexuality, Marriage and Strategies of Integration

A transoceanic gender regime of regulation and governance was therefore the product of England's early modern overseas corporations integrating a global framework of movement, thought and expertise. From the Levant to Virginia, from Massachusetts to Sumatra, the patriarchal order of gender was circulated and transplanted from one global region to another. Yet if the government of corporate actors such as Joseph Collet on the West Coast of Sumatra represented the formalisation of this process, they were also reflective of

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- 62 Betty Joseph. *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender*. London: 2004, 37.
- 63 Christian Laidlaw. *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century*. London: 2010, 173.
- 64 Mather, *Pashas*, 84.
- 65 Wilson, "Rethinking the Colonial State", 1310.

the subordinate and responsive nature of corporate regimes, settlements and societies in relation to non-European cultural agency, social forces and even political supremacy. The fiscal-military weakness of most English overseas corporations relative to their host societies in the years 1550 to 1750 forced them to adapt and negotiate new strategies for securing their ends, whether the acquisition of trade goods or the security of colonial enclaves. This meant seeking non-European sources of constitutional and commercial authority distinct from those delegated by the English Crown. And, like the latter, in exchange for these, corporations were expected to subordinate themselves to non-European systems and societies. When corporations attempted to operate beyond this system, for example by exercising force to achieve political or commercial advantages, it usually ended in failure or, more dramatically, the collapse of the corporation altogether.⁶⁶

Considering the significant role played by gender in the ordering and regulation of overseas corporate spaces and communities, it is little surprise that the sexes bridged the gap between the political and commercial aims of English corporations and their accommodation with, and adaptation to, non-European cultural and social orders in an effort to achieve these aims. Sexual relations and more formal arrangements of “marriage” were the mechanics of these cross-cultural ties and channels of interaction. Of course illicit liaisons, temporary unions and illegitimate offspring permeated company settlements. Sexual encounters ranged from “long-term cohabitation to short-term sexual alliances as well as polygamous arrangements”, many of which “emerged as part of the master-servant contract”, as Durba Ghosh reminds us, “between many men and their housekeepers, maidservants, and slaves”.⁶⁷ Exploitative sexual encounters and rape of non-European women were a common feature, especially owing to the significant slave populations of corporate settlements. These were not just confined to the Atlantic, either. On the West Coast of Sumatra, East India Company settlements developed sizeable slave villages. One hundred miles south of Joseph Collet at Bencoolen, the English resident of the pepper trade post at Silebar lived publically and openly with a company slave.

66 For the collapse of the Virginia Company following the 1622 “Massacre”, see Wesley Frank Craven. *Dissolution of the Virginia Company: the Failure of a Colonial Experiment*. Oxford: 1932; for the instability and chaos unleashed by the East India Company’s wars on the West Coast of Sumatra, see David Veevers. “‘The Company as their Lords and the Deputy as a Great Rajah’: Imperial Expansion and the English East India Company on the West Coast of Sumatra, 1685–1730”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41 (2013): 687–709.

67 Durba Ghosh. *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the Making of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 107–108.

When he visited the Deputy-Governor at Fort Marlborough to the north, as he did in 1714, he brought a new-born boy with him, "born last month of one of our Slaves ... begot by himself".⁶⁸ But such coercive sexual encounters were not confined to slaves alone. In Japan, English factors wrote about their sexual relationships with disturbing and violent language. Furthermore, not only did they share and circulate their Japanese mistresses, but they were often commodified and sold off.⁶⁹

However, in keeping with more formal corporate gender regimes, there was an emphasis on stable social relations and the integration of non-European families into the hierarchy of corporate community and life. Interracial family-formation was rarely the same as European family-formation, marriages often being "temporary" or consisting more of a formal household arrangement through social contract. Nonetheless, these cultural marriage constructs were widely acknowledged as socially acceptable and even officially sanctioned by corporate authorities. As Linda Colley has argued, company officials upheld the institution of marriage as they believed that, for women, "marriage offered protection, children and a guard on their virtue". But at the same time "it signalled and confirmed women's dependent status, and accordingly reinforced and made clear the differentiation between male and female roles".⁷⁰ Indeed, non-Europeans were incorporated into England's overseas corporations through sexual and marital unions, as long as these also conformed to the regulated gender regimes that so anxiously sought to uphold patriarchal authority. If they did not, whether due to adultery or prostitution, then the full force of corporate governance and law would be brought to bear on both men and women. In the Massachusetts Bay Company colony, English courts developed complex rules and regulations in regards to the marriage of Christianised Native Americans with English colonists and "freemen", in which adultery was vehemently prosecuted and punitively punished with expulsion from the colony.⁷¹ In this respect, English corporations could be as discerning of gender as they were of race or culture.

The integration of non-European women and mixed-race families into corporate communities and hierarchies was sanctioned and encouraged on a number of levels. First, and most powerfully, non-European women provided

68 BL, APAC, MSS Eur D1153/2, Joseph Collet to Henry White, York Fort, 13 March 1714.

69 Games, *Web of Empire*, 105.

70 Linda Colley. "Gendering the Globe: The Political and Imperial Thought of Philip Francis", *Past and Present* 209 (2010): 144.

71 See Ann Marie Plane. *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England*. New York: 2000.

emotional companionship and sexual gratification for company officials. Dudley North of the Levant Company maintained a household for a local Greek woman on the shores of the Hellespont with “the view that a little recreational sex helped him concentrate on his business”.⁷² Further East, the English consul of Aleppo hoped that the Levant factor John Lethieullier would settle down with an Englishwoman on his return home, rather than his own preference for “Miss Modesty of Scanderoon, or any of your Scio Madams”.⁷³ Similarly, James Phipps, captain-general of the Royal African Company on the Gold Coast, complained that it was “very hard for a Gentleman to live abroad ... and there to spend his youthful years ... in a continual view of a threatening death”.⁷⁴ Thus, despite the gentrified pretensions of his father in London, Phipps married a local mulatto woman, with whom he had four daughters and a son, and lived happily together as a family at Cape Coast until his death.⁷⁵ Such families were the norm in corporate settlements. Over half of marriages at Madras in 1700 were between European men and non-European women.⁷⁶ When official figures did become available in the later eighteenth century for births, more than half of baptisms at Calcutta were for “natural children”, meaning those that were either illegitimate or of mixed-race.⁷⁷

Second, non-European women were viewed as valuable cultural and commercial brokers, imbedding corporate commerce and settlements more durably into the local economy and landscape. At the East India Company factory in Hirado, marrying a Japanese woman was considered fundamental to navigating the complex cultural rituals and norms which determined commercial success. Similarly at Nagasaki, where the Japanese wives of company factors tended to be Christian, valuable political channels to the ruling Christian elite were opened up – at least before the religious persecution of 1616 onwards.⁷⁸ The Virginia Company regularly sent young boys to live in Indian communities as a way to learn the language and customs, although this often led to a fuller cultural conversion than the Virginia Council had sought. As an alternative,

72 Laidlaw, *British in the Levant*, 167.

73 Mather, *Pashas*, 83.

74 Cited in David Henige. “‘Companies Are Always Ungrateful’: James Phipps of Cape Coast, a Victim of the African Trade”, *African Economic History* 9 (1980): 33.

75 Henige, “Companies”, 38.

76 David Veevers. “The Contested State: Political Authority and the Decentred Foundations of the Early Modern Colonial State in Asia”, in William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Gopalan, eds. *The East India Company, 1600–1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian Connection*. Abingdon: 2017, 187.

77 Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 39–40.

78 Games, *Web of Empire*, 105.

the cultural assimilation of Native American women was sought through marriage to Englishmen, creating kinship alliances with Indian elites without the threat of compromising the loyalty of company-men. Of course the most well-known instance of this is the marriage of John Rolfe to Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, chief of the Tsenacommacah Indians of the Tidewater region of Virginia. The possible advantages for the Virginia Company through this marriage alliance were so tantalising that another mission was sent from Jamestown to the chief in the hope of persuading him to marry another daughter to the governor, Thomas Dale.⁷⁹ According to Alison Games, while this did not go ahead, the Spanish Ambassador to London informed Philip III in 1612 that at least fifty other Englishmen had married Native American women.⁸⁰ As well as commercial advantages, such marriages had considerable political implications, too, with Rolfe's marriage to Pocahontas bringing an end to the Virginia Company's war with her father in 1614.⁸¹

Third, the colonising dynamic which underpinned many corporations encouraged demographic expansion to create self-sustaining colonial communities, and even new sources of revenue-raising. This was certainly the case for the East India Company, who conceived of their settlements as both bases for securing and expanding their trade, but also increasingly by the eighteenth century as "colonies" and "plantations" which provided markets, revenues and even self-sustaining garrisons. "As in other European overseas plantations", demonstrates Phil Stern, the company "understood attracting women to these settlements as a key to sustaining a solid colonial population".⁸² Following the failure of the company at home to attract female British migrants to its settlements in Asia, it encouraged its servants on the spot to cultivate local marriages and establish interracial families for the growth of its settlements, even providing European soldiers with a financial incentive to marry non-European women.⁸³ As the directors in London declared to the governor of Madras in 1687: "The marriage of our Soldiers to the native women of Fort St George is a matter of such consequences to posterity".⁸⁴

While each of these factors served or catered to the interests and needs of English corporations, non-European constituencies facilitated and often

79 Games, *Web of Empire*, 131.

80 Games, *Web of Empire*, 132.

81 See Helen C. Rountree. *Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough: Three Indian Lives Changed by Jamestown*. London: 2005, especially chapter 7.

82 Stern, *Company-State*, 35–7.

83 *Ibid.*, 38.

84 BL, IOR/E/3/91, Court of Directors to Madras, London, 8 April 1687.

instigated these cross-cultural unions for their own ends. To return to that ardent patriarch Joseph Collet, when he first arrived on the West Coast of Sumatra in 1712, no less than three Malay rajas sent him their wives or daughters as gifts “to attend me”, as he delicately put it to his brother in England.⁸⁵ Collet rejected these sexual liaisons, but the Sumatran elite succeeded in tying themselves to other senior Company servants on such a level, forging lucrative commercial and political alliances. Similarly, while the Virginia Company expected to establish a straightforward trade with the Powhatans which involved the provision of corn and pelts in exchange for metal goods and textiles, they discovered that Indian exchange culture also demanded the formation of alliances, gift giving and even consolidation of negotiations through marriage. The expectations of the Virginia Council in London had to adapt in the face of advice from their servants on the ground not to offend the Indians.⁸⁶ Corporations quickly realised that in operating in non-European regions, they would have to service the wide variety of needs foreign rulers and their elites demanded in exchange for commercial and political cooperation, from Western gifts and trinkets to military intelligence and expertise. Unsurprisingly, corporations were also called upon to supply European women. In 1614 the Sultan of Aceh requested an English wife in exchange for privileges in the pepper trade for the East India Company. The court quickly procured a young woman, whose father offered to accompany her to Sumatra, but domestic pressures, including clergy anxiety for the woman’s spiritual purity, eventually led to the project’s demise. However, as noted by Games, the importance placed on this potential union by the court betrays the urgency corporations placed on satisfying non-European interests and needs.⁸⁷

The adaption and incorporation of non-European practices and expectations gradually widened the stakeholder constituencies of overseas trading corporations, serving the needs of Native American chiefs and Mughal princes as much as they did directors and shareholders in London. In fact, as James Mather has shown, when European men entered into marriages with local women, they became subject on a private level to non-European constitutions, law, cultural customs and social expectations that often caused grave concern in metropolitan bodies for the loyalty of their servants. When the Levant Company factor Samuel Pentlow married a Greek resident of Smyrna, it was remarked that “whosoever marries a Woman that was a Subject of the Grand Seignior, did by virtue of such

85 David Veevers. “Inhabitants of the Universe: Global Families, Kinship Networks and the Formation of the Early Modern Colonial State in Asia”, *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015): 106.

86 Games, *Web of Empire*, 135.

87 Games, *Web of Empire*, 103.

a Match make himself a Subject to the Grand Seignior also".⁸⁸ And indeed when Pentlow died, by law his property passed to the Ottoman Sultan, not the Levant Company. Thus even when metropolitan or senior authorities within corporations sought to manipulate or even cease some of these sexual or marital strategies altogether, their utility to non-Europeans rarely made such changes possible. Interracial unions were one way in which English corporations, through their transoceanic expansion in the seventeenth century, ultimately conceded agency over their development and expansion to non-European constituencies. The Japanese daimyo Matsura Takanobu was well aware of the centrality sexual relations played in his interactions with the East India Company factory in his province. When the Clove arrived in his port, he went aboard to greet the English factors with four women, clothed in silk garments, "well faced, handed, and footed ... very curteous in behaviour, not ignorant of the respect to be given unto persons according to their fashion".⁸⁹ The non-European strategy of tying company servants into the local social, political and commercial order, one that placed them within a subordinate position to local rulers, was highly successful. All of the English factors at Hirado had Japanese mistresses or wives, whom they lavished with expensive gifts, independent households and their own retinues of servants and slaves.⁹⁰ As Games notes, "the terms of relations [between English men and Japanese women] were shaped and dictated by the Japanese".⁹¹ England's overseas corporations continued to act as vehicles for the interests of their domestic audiences and stakeholders, but by the turn of the eighteenth century these had to contend just as much with non-European stakeholders and the interests of global audiences if they hoped to survive and flourish.

Conclusion

This chapter has hopefully shown the utility in observing the corporation through the lens of gender in the early modern period. In doing so, we're able to understand the distinct characteristics and dynamics of England's overseas corporations that made them uniquely suitable and adaptable to the global

88 Cited in Mather, *Pashas*, 82.

89 Cited in Games, *Web of Empire*, 104.

90 Derek Massarella. *A World Elsewhere: Europe's Encounter with Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. See also Anthony Farrington, ed. *The English Factory in Japan, 1613–1623*. 2 volumes. London: The British Library, 1991.

91 Games, *Web of Empire*, 107.

stage. It does not present a picture of the projection or expansion of nationalist, monopolistic ambitions through the vehicle of the company, as has been the traditional analytical perspective of historians when pondering the Royal African or East India Companies, for instance. Rather, it has shown the process through which corporations sought to accommodate themselves with non-European rulers and states in an effort to create durable and successful relationships around the world. By the eighteenth century, the strategies, systems and models companies adapted to achieve this had established a global framework that was distinctly corporate, and very much integrative. When corporations came and went relatively quickly, such as the Virginia Company, it is because they were unable to adapt to this process or failed to sufficiently subordinate themselves or integrate, or negotiate with, internal and external constituencies. Yet when corporations succeeded in these respects, and when they were able to remain autonomous and jurisdictionally evasive, the scope of their operations could prove remarkable. The Muscovy, Hudson Bay, Levant, Royal African and East India Companies lasted beyond this period, to certain degrees, largely because their distinctive global sociology succeeded in integrating their European and non-European interests, stakeholders and communities into a functioning framework, whether at the local, regional or global level.

Understanding the gendered nature of the corporation brings these dynamics into sharp relief. The need to regulate patriarchal hierarchies across spatially and temporally diverse regions demanded the expansion of constitutional powers to enforce these on ships, at settlements and in garrisons across the world. As actors and agents circulated between different corporate regions, from Virginia in the Atlantic to Sumatra in Asia, they transplanted these regulatory regimes and adapted them into forms of governance over both Europeans and non-Europeans. Perhaps more importantly, however, the marriage of company officials to non-European women demonstrated the way in which corporations regularly subordinated themselves to local rulers, elites and merchant communities in an effort to entrench and expand their own commercial networks. This was especially evident in India, where newly formed corporate settlements relied on the credit and capital provided by cross-cultural kinship networks. Marriage to local women frequently placed non-European women and their male relations in a position of power over Europeans and corporate settlements, as in the Levant when marrying local women placed European men and their property under Ottoman jurisdiction, or in Virginia when marriage into local tribes demanded conformity to Native American traditions and norms. The establishment of sexual and marital relations between European men and non-European women may have often been a corporate strategy to realise commercial or political ends, but as such unions became durable and

entrenched, creating interracial settlements, cross-cultural trading systems and interdependent diplomatic and political arrangements, the importance of non-European stakeholders within the corporation increased, to the extent that satisfying such interests often took precedence over the demands and orders of metropolitan directors, shareholders and interests. Ultimately, the formation and development of England's overseas corporations in the years 1550 to 1750 was neither a national nor a European phenomenon, but a distinctly global one.

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