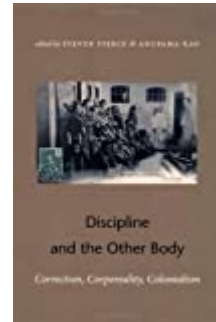




Steven Pierce, Anupama Rao, eds. *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. vii + 355 pp. \$23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3743-0.



Robert Vicat Turrell. *White Mercy: A Study of the Death Penalty in South Africa*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004. ix + 281 pp. \$94.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-325-07126-8; \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-325-07132-9.

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Colonial Violence and Difference

In 1746, two African slaves in the Cape Colony, who were charged with murder, hung themselves in their prison cells. Deprived of the opportunity to demonstrate their authority, the Dutch East India Company officials had them cut down from their makeshift nooses, and dragged through the streets of Cape Town. Their disfigured bodies were then exposed upside down in the gallows before the inhabitants of the town not as a punishment for murder, but for suicide: a more serious breach of the Company's monopoly on the legalized use of violence (Steven Pierce and Anupama Rao, eds., p. 52). Two centuries later, but not too many miles away, William Sobekwa was convicted of killing his mother, Nonasi Sobekwa. The Cape Colony had now become part of the Union of South Africa, and its Governor-General, Lord Clarendon, exercised his prerogative to grant mercy on Sobekwa, whose mother was a reputed witch and who had threatened to kill him (from Robert Turrell, p. 188). To Clarendon, the belief in witchcraft was a psychologi-

cal defect to which Africans were prone, and his power to commute death sentences was part of Britain's benevolent trusteeship of African populations.

These two seemingly unconnected incidents, from two very different books, nevertheless demonstrate an increasingly substantiated argument about colonialism rooted in the work of scholars like Michel Foucault and Frantz Fanon. This argument posits that modern governmentality was partly shaped through the experience of colonialism, which located at its core the alterity or difference of the subject. For Clarendon, the power to grant mercy was the proof of Britain's humanitarian mission, but it could equally be argued this power was just another side of the coin of colonial sovereignty, which was equally demonstrated by the careful maintenance of the right to commit violence on the bodies of the colonized, both before death and posthumously. This is a point that comes into focus through the joint reading of

the two books reviewed here, one of which unabashedly wraps the notion in post-colonial theory, and the other of which carefully integrates it into a solidly social science approach.

Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, and Colonialism is a collection of allied works by historians and anthropologists concerned with the links between governance and violence in colonial settings. In eleven chapters, the editors and authors argue that colonial discipline, while similar to state violence elsewhere, was guided by both the “civilizing mission” and the categories of difference that underpinned colonial projects. Violence and correction in the colonies was perceived to be capable of curing barbarism or civilizing colonial subjects; on the other hand, it was not bound by the laws and mores of the metropole and was often hybridized with pre-existing and developing local systems of law. In this context, it served to establish and maintain categories of “differentness” that were not however uncontested. These arguments are powerfully brought together in this genealogy of colonial violence by the shared understanding among the authors that colonized bodies were the site at which ideologies of difference were enacted (pp. 5, 23). This argument buys deeply into Foucault’s understanding of the modern states’ attempts to govern subjects by manipulating knowledge and bodies. It recognizes, however, that the racial, gendered, and cultural alterity of the colonial situation made it possible for state violence to be employed somewhat more emphatically in periods, by which time it had become more limited in Europe. The close ties between liberalism and colonialism meant that the liberal contradiction between humanitarianism and participation, on the one hand, and the exclusion of the irrational, on the other, operated in cases of discipline and punishment as well. Colonial violence was thus justified both as civilizing and corrective and, at the same time, the only language understandable by “savages” and “deviants.” In both modes, however, it served to demonstrate the dominance of the state and its power over the bodies of its subjects. These arguments are at the very core of post-colonialism as a theory and its critique of colonialism as a system of knowledge, and are universally mobilized by the contributors and editors, if not always with the same degree of fanaticism.

It is in this context that the anthology’s first contributing author, Kerry Ward, seeks to understand the treatment of suicides by the officers of the Dutch East India in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Cape Colony. Suicide, she argues, threatened the state’s monopoly on violence. The suicide of slaves was espe-

cially threatening as a form of resistance as well as property theft. In addition, officials understood suicide as a sign of “differentness” among some populations: as in the “amok” or frenzy of Malay servants and slaves, which was seen as a culturally-specific form of murderous suicidal rage (p. 53).

The racialization of colonial violence is one of the key themes of this book. The increasingly rigid lines of race in the three centuries it covers might be debated and resisted, but largely because they steadily came to define the status and corresponding treatment of individuals by the state and its agents. This is clear, for example, in Shannon Lee Dawdy’s chapter on colonial Louisiana, where race steadily came to be codified not only in the punishment meted out to criminals, but also in the position of the executioner. While in the early eighteenth century the administration employed a former slave named Louis Congo as executioner, after 1737 local officials seemingly decided that it was inappropriate for a black subject to be the agent of punishment for white criminals. Similarly, Isaac Land argues in his chapter on sodomy, piracy, and the British Navy that white sailors campaigned against flogging by using the language of race to reposition themselves. Flogging had been justified, in part, through the discourse of sailors as deviants vulnerable to piracy, sodomy, and cannibalism. In seeking the abolition of flogging, sailors came to maintain, instead, that they should be seen first as white men, and, in so doing, shifted the burden of “differentness” (and thus the employment of flogging) onto their black compatriots. Nor were sailors the only group to attempt to use the categories employed by the state to improve their own lot. In a later chapter, Laura Bear demonstrates that Indian employees of the East Indian Railway experimented with language in petitions to administrators and station agents complaining of bad treatment (pp. 250-251). Their petitions reveal the railway bureaucracy to have been a place of violent despotism, but also show that employees sought to make their arguments more powerful by employing metaphors and language they felt would have a strong effect on their employers. Their lack of success in breaching the lines of race and punishment reinforce the conclusions drawn by Steven Pierce in his chapter on flogging in northern Nigeria. Pierce argues for the centrality of violence in maintaining the alterity so central to the colonial project. This association of categories of punishments with categories of people works equally well with the evidence in all three of these chapters.

Colonial attempts to extend control over subjects ex-

tended to women's bodies and to sexuality as well as violence. This has been extensively argued elsewhere, but is best represented in this book by Douglas M. Peers' article "The Raj's Other Great Game: Policing the Sexual Frontiers of the Indian Army in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century." The article begins with the British East India Company's conundrum over how to address marriage and relations between its soldiers and Eurasian and Indian women. These cross-cultural relationships were a danger to the Company's sovereignty, because the children born to them undermined rigid racial categories. However, officers also believed that celibacy was bad for morale and that prostitution had unacceptable costs in terms of venereal disease. Marriage therefore became a preferred option, and the administration eventually adopted the strategy of regulating marriages, in part, by sponsoring orphanages for Eurasian girls, where they were trained to become suitable mates for soldiers. In the two chapters consecutive to Bears' chapter, Dorothy Ko and Susan O'Brien demonstrate the ongoing repercussions of gendered colonial governance. In the first, Dorothy Ko suggests that early twentieth-century Chinese nationalists sought to "liberate" Chinese women from foot binding as a metaphor for overcoming China's economic disempowerment and military humiliation. O'Brien, similarly, argues that women's bodies in the current period have become the location at which Sufi spirit-healers in Nigeria have sought to establish their authority in response both to the state and to anti-Sufi Muslim reformers.

Many of these themes are continued in Robert Turrell's *White Mercy*, an investigation of the death penalty in the pre-apartheid Union of South Africa. In this volume, Turrell asks on what basis was murder distinguished from manslaughter, by judges and juries, and was mercy granted by governors and executive councils. Although lacking the theoretical trappings of post-colonialism, Turrell's book is also about the relationship between the colonial state and its subjects. He underpins his argument, that the application of the death penalty and the exercise of mercy "was racist and sexist and ... always political" (p. 231), with the attempts of the state to make its control pervasive. The author demonstrates that this state, as a system, may have assigned different positions and status to different people; nonetheless, its main characteristic was the maintenance of racial categories and state authority over all subjects. However, because the South African judicial system was made up of many different agents (juries, ministers, judges) with different views and interests, its allocation of justice was

subject to numerous debates. Many of these differences of opinion were fought out in specific cases, where decisions were required as to whether or not to commute death sentences.

It is through the investigation of these cases that Turrell exposes many of the same findings as the authors of *Discipline and the Other Body*. In early twentieth-century South Africa, as elsewhere, the defense of the state sovereignty necessitated strict punishments for rebels. However, the racialization of the state—and especially the participation of white juries—meant that advocates existed within the system to argue for leniency towards white rebels. Sometimes this brought race considerations and class considerations into conflict. This happened, for example, with the Rand strike of 1922, which led to a constitutional crisis between politicians, who wanted striking white workers convicted of murder to be punished as rebels, and judges, who wanted to grant them mercy (pp. 111-113). Race and racial alterity also figured prominently in debates over whether or not to commute the sentences of Africans. Because decisions were made, in part, on the basis of premeditation and motive, convicted Africans' sentences were often commuted on the basis of their perceived "savagery." Not only liberal Britons, but also pragmatic South Africans like Prime Minister Jan Smuts, accepted the pseudo-scientific rationale that belief in witchcraft could be an extenuating circumstance for "natives," as in the case of William Sobekwa. In general, Turrell finds that the race of the victim played a more important role than the race of the perpetrator in leading to execution (p. 237). Crimes that did not affect the white community were often seen as unimportant, whereas allegations of murder, rape, or even attempted rape of a white citizen by an African frequently led to conviction and ultimately execution. Rape cases were especially evocative to white juries, for reasons that Pierce and Rao explain more extensively in their volume than Turrell does in his.

Taken together, these two books provoke the imagination. They raise questions about the state, justice, colonialism, and modernity. Neither book is enormously ground-breaking: Pierce and Rao are, at times, a bit complacent in their now well-trod post-colonial theory, a point brought into focus by Turrell's incorporation of much the same framework without the need for impenetrable theory. Turrell, on the other hand, sometimes appears a bit shallow in his reading of obviously code-laden documents. Yet, even considered separately, the two books manage to be intellectually satisfying despite the dreadfulness of their topics. Taken together, the rigor

and sturdiness of *White Mercy* and the careful complexity of *Discipline and the Other Body* provide the reader with a significant understanding of the relationship between the modern colonial state and its subjects.

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