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Crossing the Color Line: race, sex, and the contested politics of colonialism in Ghana by Carina E. Ray (review)

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Carina E. Ray, *Crossing the Color Line: race, sex, and the contested politics of colonialism in Ghana*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 8214 2179 6; pb US\$32.95 – 978 0 8214 2180 2). 2015, 333 pp.

In this creatively and brilliantly conceived book, Carina Ray uses the story of interracial sexual relationships between European men and African women in the Gold Coast and African men and European women in Britain as an entry point into a much broader history of racial and gender relations. Throughout, one learns about the interconnectedness of sexual and racial politics to the big question of colonial ‘civilization’. The author’s carefully sourced and previously untapped primary sources from both Ghana and Britain, combined with her ingenuity, give beauty to historical writing. Her detailed archival materials and oral interviews allow her to move from specific colonial trials of interracial affairs to big narratives on the transatlantic movement of ideas, practices and families, and anti-colonial struggles within the British Empire. The photographs of multiracial families strategically placed throughout further put a human face on her narratives, and bring readers another step closer to the lived experience of historical agents and the societies that produced them. The eight closely connected chapters introduce change and continuity in the politics of race and sex in both the Gold Coast and Britain, the factors responsible for change, and how social and political transformation of colonial legitimacy reshaped perceptions of interracial relationships across race, class, gender and location.

Any Africanist familiar with trends in the scholarship on race, gender, sexuality and empire would not contest the significant contributions of Ray’s *Crossing the Color Line* to African studies. For one thing, this book is another successful attempt at putting sexuality in its rightful place in the general history of the colonial encounter in Africa. Instead of following the established discourse of ‘sex peril’ or anxiety over the alleged rape of European women by African men in settler colonies of East and Southern Africa, Ray’s book presents convincing arguments and narratives that humanize socio-sexual relations and removes them from the margins of criminality and violence. Interracial sexual relationships went beyond the over-flogged perspectives of coercion. While not ruling out sexual exploitation, men and women of different races, as *Crossing the Color Line* affirms, have the capacity to fall in love and establish sexual relations and conjugal affairs – like any other humans. The pseudo-intellectual construction of racial difference, which individuals and groups have used to divide and rule societies, was challenged as Africans and Europeans contracted sexual relationships on both long- and short-term bases. Multiracial couples risked the social and political implications of going against the grain to establish families, some of which lasted for a lifetime. Yet Europeans and Africans also formed sexual and conjugal relationships to enhance their socio-economic status. Hence, Ray argues that ‘Gold Coast women’s varied sexual engagements with European men were part of a broader spectrum of self-determination strategies that women employed in their efforts to wield more control over their lives’ (p. 12). These interracial relations went beyond secret or public affairs between couples – they powerfully shaped and invoked social discourses of power, right and privilege in both the Gold Coast and the metropole. They made significant inroads into the ordering and othering of colonial society.

Ray does not treat the colony and the metropole as separate spheres of political and social power. Rather, she creates a nuanced analysis that brings them into analytical dialogue in order to explore the contestation over interracial sexual relationships. This approach is important in coming to grips, first, with how practices travel and are transformed and domesticated in different locales and

in shifting circumstances. Second, it demonstrates that studies that treat racial politics as discrete local practices, impervious to external ideals, overlook the power of human agency in the rapidly globalizing world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Third, and most importantly, it puts the anti-colonial movement in its merited place in the history of sexuality. Whether it is the story of the 1919 race riot in which white men blamed black men for taking their jobs as well as their wives, or the case of Felicia Agnes Knight, who protested about the impending termination of her white husband's appointment in Ghana in 1961, the intersections of race, nationalism and sexuality come to life in an important manner. The 1919 race riot in Britain and its implications for black men's economic survival and immigration status assumed new meaning in the contestation over interracial marriage and sex in the 1920s and 1930s, as Gold Coasters decried the increasing 'enticement' of their women by 'irresponsible' white men who abandoned the children they had fathered. While cases of deliberate abandonment of multiracial children existed, the big questions about interracial affairs often dovetail with the core features of anti-colonial struggles that viewed white men's sexual relations with African women as another arm of capitalist expropriation.

Thus, the contest over the injustice of colonialism in the Gold Coast included the exploitation of the sexual body, in addition to the abundant solid mineral and agricultural resources of the colony. The intersections of sex, race and anti-nationalism find another interesting dimension in Ray's analysis of interracial affairs between white women and members of the West African Students' Union (WASU), who shaped the anti-colonial movement and politics in the immediate post-independence era. Ray's observation that romantic affairs between WASU members and white women 'were not just personal, they were also political and politicized' (pp. 212–13) is compelling and apt.

Crossing the Color Line is tier-one scholarship, capable of directing a new course in historical research on sex, gender, race, diaspora, empire and identity formation, among other themes and subfields of African colonial history. In Carina Ray's rigorous hands, the reader is introduced to stories of men and women across location and race as they encountered and contested shifting metropolitan and colonial conceptions of race relations, power and gender.

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Emily S. Burrill, *States of Marriage: gender, justice, and rights in colonial Mali*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 8214 2144 4; pb US \$32.95 – 978 0 8214 2145 1). 2015, xiv + 239 pp.

Emily Burrill's *States of Marriage* is an innovative study of law, gender and colonialism in the colony of the French Sudan (present-day Mali). Employing the concept of the 'marriage legibility project', it demonstrates the centrality of marriage to colonial state making. Drawing from James C. Scott's notion of 'legibility', Burrill argues that the colonial administration sought to 'draw African marriages under the purview of the colonial state and render them "legible" and recognizable, in order to create a codified definition of African marriage' (p. 4).

An introduction and six chapters trace the evolution of the marriage legibility project over the course of the twentieth century, moving between a local context (the town and surrounding region of Sikasso), a larger colonial context (French