Introduction:
Shifting Gendered and Colonial Spaces in Africa

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In the past ten years, a number of important studies synthesizing scholarship on gender and colonialisms have been published, providing complex and multilayered insights into power relations between men and women, colonizers and colonized, post-independence leaders and post-independence populations[1] – which in turn enable us to have a much more nuanced understanding of such binary oppositions.

The challenge of applying a gendered perspective to the study of colonial experiences has not only been to reintegrate women into colonial narratives - "women" is of course not synonymous with "gender" – but also and above all to engage in an epistemological rethinking of the categories, methodologies, and sources we use. Approaching colonialisms through gender is one means of moving away from the opposition between metropole and periphery, multiplying and provincializing metropolitan sites. The gendered approach is key in demarginalizing colonial experiences, analyzing these as highly complex issues, and highlighting the ambiguities which lie at the heart of colonial systems and their practices.

We consider here colonialism as the ability of a polity to project its influence beyond its own geographical borders and render selectively permeable the boundaries of other polities through domination. One of the objectives, therefore, of this special issue is to trace some of the responses to the experiences of European rule in Africa, highlighting the differences between gendered discourses and practices. Another aim is to surpass the

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[1] Important interdisciplinary publications in this field include the edited volumes by Clancy-Smith and Gouda (1998), Midgley (1998), and Roach Pierson and Chaudhuri (1998). For francophone research, the edited volume on the history of women in colonial situation by Hugon (2004) is a major contribution to the field. More generally, the field of colonial studies has experienced a significant revival in the past ten years. On this re-emergence and related epistemological issues, see Cooper (2005).

artificial boundaries which are used to frame "the colonial period," addressing more generally the connections between gender strategies and various expressions of power relationships.

The idea of "fracturing binarisms" is certainly not new. The title of this special issue comes from Chilla Bulbeck's *Re-Orienting Western Feminism: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World* (1998). Using case study material drawn from India, China, and Japan, Bulbeck explores the permeability of and interaction between previously diametrically opposed categories such as the West versus the rest of the world or tradition versus modernity. However, whilst the comprehensive literature on gender and colonialism has extensively criticized these binarisms, it has tended to be focused on the Asian subcontinent and on British colonial spaces. Far less attention has been paid to how these new ways of thinking might be applied to the African colonial and postcolonial context.[2]

Moreover, the theme seems to be far from exhausted. Indeed, binarisms feature increasingly predominantly, as contemporary ideologues and politicians persist in defining the world in black-and-white, judgment-laden terms: East/West, North/South, tradition/modernity, good/evil… The idea of "fracturing binarisms" is not without its own difficulties, with the inherent problem that avoiding old categories often means creating new ones. Nevertheless, we believe that the process of reflecting on what these binary categories mean is worthwhile. Deconstructing binary oppositions serves not only to neutralize them, but is also a way of recognizing the violent hierarchy inherent within them, often imposed by colonial powers in Africa. To deconstruct the opposition is to overturn the hierarchy in order to find new ways of thinking no longer controlled by previous gendered categories.

The history of colonial Africa is a history of political, economic, social, and cultural *métissages* experienced by gendered colonial populations, colonized peoples, imperial powers, and anti-colonial movements. African women and men were able to cross socio-economic, cultural, colonial, and "racial" divisions to create new identities. However, in striving to achieve nuance by foregrounding the hybridity of the colonial encounter, and by emphasizing the *bricolages* inherent in the colonial "project," we risk losing sight of the fact that colonialism remains a relationship of domination. The

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[2] Notable exceptions are Walker (1990); Hunt, Liu, and Quataert (1997); Allman, Geiger, and Musisi (2002); Woodward, Hayes, and Minkley (2002); Goerg (2007).

binary opposition of dominator/ dominated, even with all its nuances, is unavoidable if we do not wish to become colonial apologists. This is perhaps worth emphasizing in the current political (and indeed historiographical) climate. Examples include the popularity of Niall Ferguson's bestselling Empire: *How Britain Made the Modern World* (2003) and its accompanying TV series and the French 23 February 2005 law on the "benefits" of colonization.[3] Or indeed, Nicolas Sarkozy's speeches both during and after his successful presidential campaign demanding the "adepts of repentance" "what right do you have to ask sons to repent for the faults of their fathers, [faults] that often their fathers only committed in your imagination?"[4] and opposing the "modern human being" to the "African peasant" who refuses to enter into History.[5]

Aware of the multiplicity and complexity of the colonial situations experienced by the African continent, the overall ambition of this special issue is to explore the multiple intersections between gender and colonialisms by underlining the limits of dualist approaches, including gendered ones, to such questions. The meaning of gender often tends to be presumed rather than questioned for its ideological role. Gender is defined as a matrix of performed identities, behaviors, and power relations that are associated with one sex. The social construction of masculinity and femininity has varied among societies; their meaning has constantly shifted. Gender is both socially constructed and reconstructed through time. It is presented as a neutral concept although it is crucial to situate its historicity and to highlight its (temporal) location (Miescher, Manuh, and Cole, 2007:

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[3] Article 4 (on the "positive role of the French overseas presence") was repealed in January 2006 after the *banlieue* riots of November 2005 and protests by academic and members of the civil society, but the rest of the law, including its equally controversial clauses allowing for financial indemnities for former members of the OAS (*Organisation armée secrète*, a terrorist army splinter group which violently opposed independence) remain.

[4] "…de quel droit demandez-vous aux fils de se repentir des fautes de leurs pères, que souvent leurs pères n'ont commises que dans votre imagination?" Extract from speech by Nicolas Sarkozy, 7 February 2007, Toulon. Quoted in Manceron (2007).

[5] Speech by Nicolas Sarkozy, University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, 26 July 2007, also known as "Discours de Dakar." Available at:
<http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/2007/juillet/allocution_a_l_universite_de_dakar.79184.html> (Accessed 18/08/2007). This speech has been thoroughly commented by African and non-African scholars and politicians as well as in the larger public option. A non-exhaustive list of these reactions is available at: <http://www.ldh-toulon.net/spip.php?rubrique131> (Accessed 18/08/2007).

3). Why for example do we often presume that, as for sex, there are only two genders?

As authors such as Oyěwùmí (1997) and Amadiume (1997) suggest, it is crucial to (re)think critically where gendered categories come from, and to examine how "gender" is sustained by its own histories, connotations, and conceptual roles. Gender cannot be considered as *a whole* but is a category of analysis among others. It is therefore important to go beyond the concept of gender as the title of the path-breaking edited volume *Africa after Gender* suggests (Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, 2007). One of the best-known responses to this dilemma has been to analyze gender in relation to other concepts, such as class, race, ethnicity, imperialism, generation, and sexuality, without which gender cannot be rendered intelligible and clearly located and vice versa. Such an approach emerges clearly from Laura Dennis-Bay's article. She begins by pointing out that many scholars have looked at gender in Marie Cardinal's work, and then demonstrates through her simultaneously gendered and spatial approaches how gender must at all times be cross-referenced with the importance of class, age, and "race." Similarly, Dior Konate's article demonstrates that youth and gender also need to be analyzed in interrelation. Each situation being specific, it would however be misleading to see these categories as mutually symmetric, as most of the contributions in this special issue illustrate. These categories must be questioned in relation with each other in order to analyze their concordances, discordances, weaknesses, and limits.

In raising the issue of locating "gender," let us not forget to define where we ourselves are situated. Our location is an international one. The editors and contributors to this journal were born in Africa, Europe, and North America. We work in universities in Austria, Canada, France, the UK, and the USA. Whilst this unavoidably influences our perspectives, at the same time location determines neither who one is nor what and how one thinks (Miescher, Manuh, and Cole, 2007: 6). The fact that all the contributors here work on gender means that we share in the belief that gender is important. Coming from different backgrounds and disciplines, we have found here a common location from which to speak, even if our approaches contain a number of differences.

In analyzing discourses, in deconstructing categories, in elaborating theories, academics are clearly often far from the daily lives and realities of African women and men, the vast majority of whom will of course never

read what has been painstakingly researched and written about them. Nor can they really control the knowledge produced about them, even if considerable attention has been paid in the past few decades to conducting research in conditions which do not take advantage of the researched (Imam, 1999: 15).

On the other hand, many of the articles of this special issue carefully attempt to focus on the daily lives of African men and women. A feature of the articles here is that they do not uniquely focus on "intellectual" women and men or/and on gendered discourses. Research on urban, educated, socially privileged, and thus visible, women has long dominated the literature on women and gender, as it was of course these women who left the most traces of their activities behind them. Such a focus excludes the vast majority of African women and men, rural and illiterate for almost the entire colonial period, and falsely suggests that the colonized were a homogenous entity. One of the current pitfalls of gender studies is that by writing the history of discourses and gender constructions, we risk creating another kind of screen, masking what men and women *did* behind what they were *supposed to* or *presented as* doing. In the following articles, the authors rediscover the voices of some of these women, using techniques such as reading court records against the grain (Stacey Hynd and Dior Konate), and looking at "third sources" beyond the binary of colonial/colonized source, such as the rural women's petitions in UN archives (Meredith Terretta).

One of the challenges facing some historians who want to work on Africa is the apparent scarcity of written sources.[6] History passed down orally rather than in written forms, archives destroyed, lost or "repatriated," and dispersed by the colonial powers upon independence, a lack of investment in maintaining archives in post-independence states and censorship in both the former metropole and former colonies challenges scholars working on histories of Africa to be multidisciplinary, and the contributors here draw upon geography, anthropology, sociology, literature, and Islamic studies in their articles. Transgressing the boundaries of academic disciplines, adopting an interdisciplinary and indeed transdisciplinary approach is common amongst many scholars today, but is perhaps particularly necessary in former colonial spaces. The separation

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[6] We say "apparent" here as often these sources are underestimated as a means of recovering African voices.

between what kinds of material and approaches belong to one discipline or another is a form of binarism which the authors here begin by fracturing.

The contributors to this special issue have thus adopted different approaches with different results. Both Neil MacMaster and Meredith Terretta look at what happened to women who had played a prominent role in the liberation struggles, only to find themselves marginalized after independence. In explaining how and why this happened, Neil MacMaster applies both anthropological and sociological perspectives to his analysis of Algerian history. He concludes by underlining the "persistence of patriarchy" rooted in Algerian society (Knauss, 1987). In her case study of Cameroon, Meredith Terretta concludes in a rather different way, insisting on the particular conjunction of a post-independence order supported by the former colonial regime.

By grouping together articles on countries which were part of the French or British empires, we hope readers will be able to gain a comparative perspective on different colonial spaces. It would be interesting in future publications to broaden the scope to other and new forms of colonialisms in Africa (Belgian, Portuguese, African, American, Chinese to name but a few possibilities). Contributions were also encouraged from scholars who crossed the geographical and scholarly boundary of the Sahara desert, recognizing that North African countries (in the case of the two articles in this special issue, Algeria) are also a part of African Studies, not just tacked on to Middle Eastern Studies,[7] just as "African" is not synonymous with "Black."

The main objective of this special issue is to explore the double sense of "subject": the active construction of subjectivity as well as being subjected to processes of domination, in order to investigate how the African subjects fluctuate(d) between these positions within their own communities and within the colonial society. These fluctuations often encouraged them to adopt ambiguous positions, which disrupted supposedly fixed relations of gender and power hierarchies. Analyzing the intersection between colonialism and gender in Africa is thus also to examine these ambiguities.

In a recent interview with Natalya Vince, Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi, a linguist at an Algerian university, spoke about how she defined herself. She

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[7] Notable publications on gender which consider North African countries alongside the Middle East are: Meriwether and Tucker (1999), Moghadam (2007). Exceptions which cross the Sahara include Clancy-Smith and Gouda (1998).

works at a university and is a published author, but here she seems to be speaking less from this privileged intellectual position than from the broader perspective of a woman in Algerian society:

> I'm a woman of my time, I want to participate in the life of my country through what I do, by training young researchers, girls and boys. At the same time, I'm proud of my roots, even those which might seem "archaic" because they are the foundation of what I am. And they allow me to enter into a relation with the Other […] whoever that may be, as a woman, it's men, or the other who isn't Algerian, who isn't Arab, who isn't Berber. [I have to] assume who I am, with all its contradictions […] I have to compromise with society. In a certain way, a woman like me negotiates her equilibrium on a nearly daily basis.[8]

As will be shown, compromise, negotiation, and accommodation are recurrent themes in the articles published here.

Gender identities are non-stable, "volatile" (Miescher, Manuh, and Cole, 2007: 5). Because of the volatility of the meaning of gendered behaviors, ambiguity has been a useful strategic tool which helped colonial subjects to create, with more or less success, an alternative, undetermined way out, a third space. We can question the existence of this "third space" from which the subalterns can speak (Spivak, 1988). Most of the articles in this special issue respond by highlighting that this "third space" is far from being homogenous and is constantly driven by ambiguities. The focus of Laura Dennis-Bay's article on Marie Cardinal is specifically on a woman who has created her own third space. From a well-off, landowning,

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[8] "Je suis une femme de mon temps, j'ai envie de participer à la vie de mon pays à travers ce que je fais, à travers la formation de jeunes chercheurs, filles et garçons. Dans le même temps, je suis fière de mes racines, même celles qui peuvent paraître « archaïques » parce qu'elles constituent le socle de ce que je suis. Et elles me permettent d'entrer en relation avec l'Autre. […] qui que ce soit, en tant que femme, c'est l'homme, ou l'autre qui n'est pas Algérien, qui n'est pas Arabe, qui n'est pas Berber. [Il faut que j'assume] qui je suis, avec toutes les contradictions. […] Il faut que je sois en compromis par rapport à la société. Quelque part une femme comme moi, négocie son équilibre pratiquement quotidiennement." Interview by Natalya Vince with Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi, University of Algiers (Algeria), 5/03/07. Author of *Les Algériens et leur(s) langue(s): éléments pour une approche sociolinguistique de la société algérienne.* Algiers: Ed. el Hikma, 1997 (2nd ed.).

Catholic, and rather prudish *pied-noir* family, on the surface, Cardinal has all the ingredients of the stereotypical "colonial woman." And yet as Laura Dennis-Bay shows in the analysis of space in Cardinal's novel *Au pays de mes racines*, she refuses to conform to and subverts the categories of both "colonial" and "woman." The women petitioners in Meredith Terretta's article on Cameroon create another kind of transnational space, subverting the gendered power relationship between colonizers and colonized by sending their protests about colonial abuses directly to the United Nations.

Both Stacey Hynd and Dior Konate's articles reveal the problems the colonial authorities had when faced with women's behavior which did not fit into what they considered to be gendered norms. Stacey Hynd and Dior Konate show how judicial incomprehension combined with a patronizing view of the "native mind" meant that violent women were often less harshly punished than violent men. By focusing on changing attitudes towards these women on the margins, murderers (Stacey Hynd) or juvenile delinquents (Dior Konate), we see how landscapes shifted – and how individuals shifted between landscapes.

Many of the articles (Stacey Hynd, Dior Konate, Neil MacMaster) consider how the colonial authorities saw "the African family" as a place of "non-change," "tradition," and "custom," which justified colonial intervention. At the same time, we can see how through laws, the colonial authorities attempted to shape a new African family, with new gender relationships based on those considered the norm in the metropole. At the same time, with discourses on "respecting traditions" and "banning traditions" the role of the colonial authorities in creating these so-called "traditions" becomes clear. And alongside interference, we see in Dior Konate's article that the colonial state also only reformed when confronted with new cases.

Finally, a number of the articles published here (Neil MacMaster, Laura Dennis-Bay, Meredith Terretta) span both the colonial and post-independence periods. The post-independence period has often been neglected by historians, seen as the territory of sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists – thus obscuring both possible continuities and the impact of the independence process on men and women, their identities, and relationships between them (Hugon 2004). Looking at the postcolonial period in relation with the colonial era is central in order not to exclusively focus on the past or the present as such but also to analyze the

relations between the past and the present and indeed how our knowledge of post-colonial African states has influenced our understanding of their past.

This special issue does not claim to cover all of the complex interactions between gender and colonialisms in Africa - far from it, especially as much work remains to be done in this field. For example, how does the legal system in African countries function in a gender? To what extent is this a legacy of colonial law? Research undertaken by Roberts (2005) has already begun to explore the complex relationship between gender and colonial laws, and another highly anticipated publication in this field is the forthcoming special issue of *Cahiers d'études africaines* on "Les femmes, le droit et la justice" (Women, Law, and the Justice System) (2007). More research is also needed in the field of family and marriage. These topics have often been neglected by African historical scholarship as they have been too quickly regarded as belonging to the realm of "tradition" and as being marginally affected by historical change. They were therefore considered as a matter only for anthropology. Numerous questions await further exploration: how were African institutions such as marriage affected by a shifting colonial landscape and by the colonial discourse on the African family? How have reproduction, fertility, and maternity been used by some African women and men to counter the colonial discourse? How has family ideology been manipulated by colonizers, colonized, nationalist movements, and post-independence regimes? How were certain patterns of femininities and masculinities constructed, rejected and appropriated within this framework? The essays in this special issue hope to encourage further questioning and new research.

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