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Nineteenth-Century British Female Emigration Societies



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Female migration · Philanthropy · Victorian era · Emigration societies · Gender

Introduction

Empire migration was a gendered concept for the British Victorian female emigration societies whose role was to organize essentially unmarried women's emigration to the British colonies. After the 1851 Census officially revealed the extent of Britain's female overpopulation, some philanthropic societies focused on the redistribution of the so-called "surplus" women by relocating them to the colonies, along with British gender norms and economic prospects. Many newspaper editorials, parliamentarians, and key commentators of the day depicted these so-called "surplus" women as burdens because they were unmarried, childless, jobless, and so considered unproductive. At the intersection between the upper working class and the middle classes, "surplus" women were gentlewomen who embodied British traditions and norms. They were expected to show self-restraint, serve men, and be submissive and feminine according to Victorian standards. They were educated in socially acceptable, religious, and conservative families and generally behaved on the upper-class model.

Female emigration was a compromise for women's access to work which was generally rendered difficult in androcentric Britain, but available in the colonies which ensured women's financial autonomy. As historian Adele Perry has pointed out, "inserting white women into the rhetoric and geopolitics of Empire proved easier than challenging the British gendered division of labour or even the more modest goal of finding women paid work in London" (Perry 2001). Therefore, the notion of voluntary emigration needs to be questioned in the case of organized "surplus" women's migration: were Victorian single gentlewomen emigrants voluntary migrants? As historian Bernard Porter has demonstrated, the term "voluntary" is inappropriate to qualify migrants who left home to avoid poverty (Porter 2006). Reminiscent of convict transportation, for some commentators of the time such as essayist and statistician William Rathbone Greg (1809–1881), "surplus" women were a problem to be transported elsewhere.

Female imperial migration also benefitted constructive imperialists who promoted a more organized settlement of the colonies. In 1899, historical economist W.A.S. Hewins described constructive imperialism as "the deliberate adoption of the Empire as distinguished from the United Kingdom as the basis of public policy"

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(quoted in Green 1999). Historians concur that the British Empire represented a political instrument to increase the metropole's revenue and profit, and this political economic approach impacted the populations in Britain as well as in the colonies. The female emigration societies partook in the constructive imperialist project to organize the Empire on economic and defensive. They also consolidated the political economy of the Empire by securing future market partners produced by their female emigrants. They guaranteed the racial unity of the Empire by sending out selected women who would then produce future partners in trade for the metropole and whose loyalty to Britain was expected to exclude external markets.

According to historian James Hammerton, Empire-building was a social engineering experiment: "to control sex ratios and to ensure male settler access to the services – domestic, sexual, and reproductive – of women" (Hammerton 2004). So, the role of the emigration societies was to redistribute the "surplus" women over the British Empire, and in turn these women were expected to guarantee imperial unity by producing British offspring. Yet, this view denies female emigrants' agency in the migration process. Intrinsically linked to the notion of "imperialism" is that of "power," but did the British Empire-building process empower these "surplus" women?

Female emigration societies used the British Empire "as a sphere of opportunity" (Midgley 1998) for gentlewomen emigrants as well as for themselves. Indeed, the female emigration organizers intruded upon a traditionally male sphere by taking a share in the Empire-building process, which turned them into female imperialists. Many emigration societies were founded in the nineteenth century; this chapter focuses on the later period's female emigration societies that organized the imperial migration of "surplus" women: Female Middle Class Emigration Society (1862–1886), the Church Emigration Society's Ladies Committee (CES 1886–1929), and the United British Women's Emigration Association (1884–1901) which was renamed the British Women's Emigration Association (1901–1919) in 1901. The sources used include the female emigration societies' publications in their official journals such as the BWEA's *The Imperial Colonist* and the CES's *The Emigrant* but also the Victorian press, emigrant letters, and colonial archives. The approach mainly dwells on constructionist imperialist theories, structuration theory, and philosopher Michel Foucault's spatial study of the heterotopias.

This chapter tackles the political economy of British Empire between 1860 and 1914 by focusing on selected women's imperial migration at a time when constructive imperialists promoted imperial unity. Indeed, government institutions and private organizations, such as the female emigration societies, examined the role and function of the Empire in detail in order to appraise the benefits of the Empire for the metropole. I shall therefore investigate the female emigration societies' contribution to the political economy of the British Empire through their participation in the constructive imperialist project. I shall also look into organized female migration as a process of social reproduction and investigate the nature of Victorian female imperialism in the context of organized emigration to the antipodes – Australia and New Zealand.

The Female Emigration Societies' Constructive Imperialism

In 1883, British historian J.R. Seeley famously remarked in *The Expansion of Britain* that "we seem to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind" (Seeley 1883). Seeley meant to attribute Britain's territorial expansion to private rather than state action. Female emigration societies led a private enterprise that was meant to consolidate the Empire without government support, which they were officially denied. Indeed, in 1897 Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), then at the head of the Colonial Office, clearly indicated that the government would give no funding to the female emigration societies, thus leaving "surplus" women's emigration to private organizations and colonial immigration schemes:

> I am afraid it will be felt that I am disappointing the audience when I say that I cannot offer pecuniary assistance on behalf of the British Government... I think it possible, if not probable, that the authorities of the new colonies, recognising the extreme importance of this work, the immense advantage it would be to them that the emigration of women should be successfully carried out, will find it possible to contribute towards the expense. But after all, in this as in most philanthropic work, it is to private beneficence, private philanthropy, we must look in the first place, and perhaps for our principal support. (UBWEA Report 1897)

The above quote thus coheres with Seeley's arguments concerning privately directed Empire-building as the government did not financially support the organization of "surplus" women's emigration. Yet, the female emigration societies did not contribute to Empire-building "in a fit of absence of mind": they were rather well organized, visible, and showed obvious signs of imperialism.

The female emigration societies indeed contributed to the national effort turning the Empire into a coherent structure in order to organize the colonies on the British model. For instance, they participated in imperial conferences that examined the relationships between the metropole and its colonies, and the BWEA had its offices at the Imperial Institute in London. The female emigration societies' contribution to constructive imperialism was above all defensive. Indeed, the imperial nation was thought to face external menaces with the risk of exogenous intrusions from other imperial powers and neighboring nations. To counter these threats, the female emigration societies proposed creating a colonial space based on the British model, which would be safeguarded by respectable educated women. Their actions thus symbolically cohered with the defense policy promoted by constructive imperialists, which was essential to secure the economic stability and maintenance of the Empire.

In the new imperialism period (c. 1870–1914), the territorial race between imperialist nations implied a danger of exogenous invasion in the Pacific, which the British expected to imperatively erase in order to safeguard the "almost purely British Colony" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1911). Therefore, the female emigrants' main mission was preventive: they were expected to protect the imperial frontiers by acting as biological shields, ensuring the reproduction and the purity of the British imperial nation. This biological argument was taken up by the female emigration societies: "In what lies the hope of the Empire and the world? For what does the home primarily exist? There is but one answer to these questions: the child" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1914), the BWEA declared in an article promoting colonial motherhood. The female emigration societies were indeed well aware that they acted to defend the Empire against exogenous intrusion, as they declared in *The Imperial Colonist* in 1910: "Closely connected with the question of emigration was that of alien immigration" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1910). Australasia, a white settlement colony surrounded by Asian nations, was expected to preserve its frontiers against potential neighboring intrusions. As a way of promoting patriotic emigration from Britain to Australia, references to this pressing issue affecting the Empire's borders were not rare in *The Imperial Colonist*. The following extract from an article entitled "Emigration and Common Sense" thus indicates "there is the grave danger that if Australia cannot acquire enough inhabitants of British stock she may be overrun by Asiatic races" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1913). The British Empire needed to consolidate its frontiers, a task commonly attributed to women as their natural biological and cultural mission. In 1897, BWEA's Vice-President Ellen Joyce described her emigrants as the "wives and mothers of the present and future makers of the history of our colonies" (*Westminster Gazette* 1897). Gentlewomen were thus expected to become the mothers of the British imperial race but also to consolidate the colonial identity by spreading the British norm.

The Political Economic Orthodoxy of Empire-Building

Linked with the political economy of the British Empire, imperial unity was expected to strengthen Britain facing international rivalry and to secure

imperial trade. Indeed, the British Empire represented a potential market for Britain's export. As historian E.H.H. Green notes, in 1914 imperial markets were the recipients of 51.7% of British cotton exports, 33.5% of woolens, 45% of non-textile manufactures goods, and 48.2% of pig iron and metal goods. Although British trade outside the Empire was greater, imperial markets represented a future investment which was to be safeguarded through imperial unity (Green 1999). Imperial unity could be best sealed by the controlled settlement of British immigrants, such as the women selected by the female emigration societies.

In the 1860–1914 period, Britain possessed one of the largest Empires in the world, yet it was also a time marked by uncertainties as to its sustainability and stability. The British female emigration societies participated in imperial consolidation by sending out selected women who would safeguard the British Empire against exogenous intrusion by producing the offspring of the imperial race – "pure" in blood and proud heirs of Britain's cultural heritage. In turn, these colonial settlers were expected to become Britain's customers and partners in trade. The metropole indeed had economic and political interests in the colonies, which the female emigration societies were well aware of. In 1912, the BWEA indicated that it encouraged the consolidation of commercial relations between Britain and its colonies through the migration of future commercial partners from Britain: "those settled under the Flag become at once customers and producers for us" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1912a). Indeed, Australia and New Zealand represented poles of influence and commerce in the Pacific, which the female emigration organizers promoted. The following article from 1912 thus read:

> To Australia, people mean wealth and security. To Great Britain, the filling up of this vast and enormously productive and exclusively British continent with more men and women of her own stock, means an indefinite enlargement of a most valuable market for British trade, as well as a great blood support in time of trouble. (*The Imperial Colonist* 1912a)

The female emigration societies were well aware of the political economic orthodoxy at the heart of the Empire-building process and thus promoted closer links with the Empire which would secure valuable markets for the metropole. Although they focused on organizing female emigrants' departures, their publications – as the above articles show – also reveal that they supported constructive imperialist endeavors and participated in the political economy of the Empire by securing future market partners produced by their female emigrants.

Given material value, female emigrants' human capital represented a British investment in the construction of the Empire and "a potential source of wealth" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1909). By organizing the departure of "surplus" women, the female emigration societies increased the viability and *profitability of the Empire*, which depended on its reproductive capacity. They participated in the political economy of the Empire thanks to their organization of unmarried women's imperial migration, who would marry colonial settlers and reproduce the imperial race. Britain was thus getting rid of a population that the metropole could no longer maintain – the "surplus" women – and investing these women in the peopling of the colonies, a transaction which seemed beneficiary to both the sending and welcoming communities. Selected female emigrants were thus meant to sustain the growth and maintenance of the Empire by reproducing the race, and their biological contribution to the political economy of the British Empire was often praised, as in *The Imperial Colonist* in 1902: "Englishwomen make home wherever they settle all the world over and are the real builders of Empire" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1902). The female emigration societies thus resorted to the traditional values of the home to account for the emergence of female imperialism.

Women's Nuanced Empowerment and Imperial Unity

In turn, women's contribution to the colonies' domestic economy went along with their

increased financial autonomy and nuanced empowerment. Whether they became teachers, school owners, or governesses, they now managed their own lives and budgets on their own terms as emigrant Mary Richardson wrote in her letter to the FMCES in 1863 from Australia: "I have no one to interfere with me in the least." Although not all female emigrants were successful, Miss Barlow's letter from Australia in 1863 is yet another example of women's nuanced empowerment through imperial migration, as new choices and autonomy opened to them: "My school has prospered beyond my expectations though I have had many heavy expenses and my remuneration is very small … however it is a much more independent life than that of the Governess and I like it." These women were often aware of their contribution to the demographic stability of the imperial nation, as Annie Davis indicated in her letter from Australia in 1864: "According to statistics, men greatly outnumber women in this land, yet it seems to me that the women find it nearly as difficult to get their daily bread here in Sydney as in London, many are the sad tales." They also knew that they represented a burden to the metropole's economic stability as Gertrude Gooch acknowledged in a letter from Australia in 1862: "there are enough of us at home" (FMCES Letter Books).

In order to promote migration within the Empire, the female emigration societies refused to assist emigrants willing to settle outside the imperial frontiers. This was made clear by the CES's announcement in 1907 that "the Society does not assist with loans or grants of money those desiring to settle in the United States" (CES Report 1907). They were engaged in the Victorian movement against emigration and actively promoted imperial mobility as a component of the political economy of the British Empire, as the following article from 1912 shows "Among those who do not realise the Empire as an integral part of Britain, but talk of going abroad, there is an outcry against emigration. As if it were a loss and not a transplanting into better soil and sunshine of the human asset" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1912a).

This was meant to increase imperial loyalty and thus guarantee the unity of the Empire through controlled population settlement, in keeping with the constructivist imperialist project of Empire, as advocated by Chamberlain who linked his campaign for imperial preferential tariffs with the theme of racial unity. In 1903, Chamberlain stated that the aim of imperial preference was "to consolidate the British race" (quoted in Green 1999). Hence, constructivist imperialists promoted both a racially unified Empire and imperial economic interests.

In 1895, Chamberlain declared: "I believe that the British race is the greatest of governing races that the world has ever seen" (Chamberlain 1897), thus spelling out the ideology of triumphant Anglo-Saxonism. The female emigration societies were also convinced that Britain was a superior nation. They exalted the British nation's exceptional fate, which they expected to become the global world matrix, hence promoting migration within the Empire as a patriotic act. To this end, they often reminded their readers that the power of the nation depended on its population. This was illustrated by *The Imperial Colonist* in 1911:

> Beyond all nations of the world, this Britain of ours had become a mother nation, a proud position. The fighting energy of our soldiers. . .had planted our race on all the new Continents. . . Today, after 125 years, we had become one of the mightiest nations of the world, with 90 millions of people, Australia had four millions, South Africa two millions, and New Zealand, one million of people. The future was pregnant with the greatest possibilities for the human race. . . That was how we had won our Empire. The only way to build the Empire was on homes. If we would reap the advantages we had got we must create homes in those countries, and we could not have homes without women. (*The Imperial Colonist* 1911)

In parallel to the ongoing national and imperial exaltation, the female emigration societies entrusted their emigrants with a monumental mission for Britain, but also for the whole of humankind. They were expected to become the proud representatives of the chosen nation and to act as "augmenters of Empire," as the title of a 1902 article indicated in bombastic terms: "They [women] must slough off the pettiness of the past and rise to the height of Imperial

womanhood, remembering that to have had the vision of Greatness is an immense responsibility" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1902).

Although British gentlewomen were sometimes glorified, their role in the British Empire-building process was nevertheless commonly restricted to their basic biological function. They were even described as "human links" between the different parts of the Empire in 1904: "human links of Empire upon whom depend the unification, development, and perfection of that great and glorious country whereof we are sons and daughters, on which the sun never sets" (*The Imperial Colonist* 1904). Their role as unifiers and developers of Empire, here celebrated by Miss Chitty, symbolically turned female emigrants into active agents of Empire.

Although the female emigration societies presented their actions as social acts, in reality, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they acted in favor of the British imperialist ideology, the triumphant Anglo-Saxonist doctrine, and imperial patriotism. They aimed at safeguarding, justifying, and replicating Britain's conservative social classifications in the colonies. The emigrant gentlewomen's influence indeed reinforced the idea that the Anglo-Saxons were a dominant and organically unified race. Yet, this did not prevent the fractioning of the imperial nation. At the end of the nineteenth century, the colonies were emancipating themselves from Britain's domination, and the colonial settlers progressively redefined their identity on account of their location and birth land rather than their allegiance to the Empire. Nevertheless, the female emigration societies never failed promoting the organic unity of the Empire, thus participating in the constructive imperialist project that was grounded on a mixture of racial and economic endeavors.

Female Emigrants' Marketing Value

Female emigration societies offered "surplus" single gentlewomen individualism and a fresh start. They did invest their female emigrants with power and agency unlike the "shovelled out" (Wakefield 1849) pauper emigrants of the first half of the nineteenth century. Along with a developed access to work, these philanthropic societies were opening up a new role for women in the colonies and in gendered Empire history – that of Empire-builders. Quoted in the 1898 UBWEA's report, Sir George Baden Powell acknowledged the empowerment of "women, whom he considered exercised an enormous power in building up the Colonies" (UBWEA 1898).

However, the notion of female empowerment should be further investigated in this case. For philosopher Michel Foucault, some colonies were heterotopias born out of the metropole's need to compensate its failings. They were the same societies as home, but perfected (Foucault 1984). For instance, Tasmania was described as "a better England" in a UBWEA's report (UBWEA 1891–1892). In the second half of the nineteenth century, Australia and New Zealand were often imagined as absolutely perfect places peopled with perfect British settlers, places where human perfection could be achieved when it had failed in the metropole. In the same vein, historian David Cannadine considers "the British Empire as a mechanism of export, projection and analogization of domestic social structures and social perceptions" (Cannadine 2002).

In the heterotopias that the Pacific colonies represented, British women were to be ideal women, especially when selected by British female emigration societies: "free from mental or bodily defect" (*The Woman's Gazette* 1877). In the economy of symbolic exchange and social construction, women are tools to reproduce men's symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2002) and domination. Single women were indeed generally perceived as national merchandises, as an Australian journalist quoted by the FMCES founder, Maria Rye (1829–1903), indicated: "We may bring the young women here, but what if they do not suit the young men? What shall we do with the articles which don't "move off", and the goods which are found unsaleable?" (Rye 1862).

In the "social engineering" process promoted by female emigration societies, the role attributed to women in Empire-building was to reproduce the British middle-classes' family model: women

were to be kept at home under male control, even in the antipodes. This is exemplified by British imperialist writer Charles Dilke's (1843–1911) record in *Greater Britain*, which echoed judge William Blackstone's (1723–1780) 1765 theory on married women's legal status as being incorporated into their husband's and which denied married women's individuation: "Our theory of marriage – which has been tersely explained thus: "the husband and wife are one, and the husband is that one" – rules as absolutely at the antipodes as it does in Yorkshire" (Dilke 1885).

As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues, women – when considered symbolic goods constitutive of cultural capital – can be circulated and traded (Bourdieu 1994). Single female British emigrants were thus symbolically traded between the metropole's men who did not need so many women and the colonial settlers in great demand for female partners. For instance, whereas the 1851 Census had revealed that there were about 300,000 "surplus" women in Britain, women only represented between 37% and 49% of the population in the Australasian colonies in 1861 and 1871 (Census 1851, 1861, 1871).

Central to contemporary debates, the use of the Empire for the metropole evolved from distress relief to British Empire consolidation, as it was clearly expressed at the 1889 CES Manchester Meeting: "being abroad should remain at home under the British flag" (CES 1889). It was the female emigration societies' role to ensure that the British colonies would be peopled with respectable young women who would keep up the British race's standards abroad: as the FMCES rules stated it, they concentrated their selection on educated gentlewomen: "The Society confines its assistance entirely to educated women. . . Every applicant is examined as far as possible, with regard to her knowledge of cooking, baking, washing, needlework, and housework" (FMCES 1862). The emigration societies proposed to turn the metropole's so-called idle "surplus" gentlewomen into useful Empire-builders, perfect keepers of traditional gendered structures. Yet, by making the decision to emigrate, women were empowered with an agency they never had before – the decision over their own fates – thus endangering Victorian gender norms. Women's emancipation symbolically materialized in the passage to the New World – in geographical as well as social terms. As sociologist Karen O'Reilly does, I consider migration "as a structured and a structuring process" (O'Reilly 2012).

If women were empowered with the decision to emigrate, their agency was however still limited by traditional structures – a concept Bourdieu has termed "habitus." Habitus is a combination of acquired dispositions produced by social and historical exposure, which determines individual agency. For Bourdieu, social interaction is set within fields with dominant capital owners and agents striving to gain more capital and legitimacy – agency thus being limited by the field's contextual necessities. On the one hand, the British Empire allowed female emigrants to acquire more social capital by giving them access to work and financial opportunities. Yet, on the other hand, within the imperial field, women's role was limited, by gender habitus, to the displacement of their cultural and social capital to other territories.

According to sociologist Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, based upon the structure-action dyad, actors are self-reproducers of the conditions necessary to their activities, and norms are factual social limits (Giddens 2005). The dialectical combination of their developing agency and the gendered structures of power did not allow women to fully emancipate through emigration. Structures, both habilitating and constraining (Giddens 2005), were too constraining by gender habitus in this case. Hence, within the context of the British Empire, the antipodes offered a stage for social reproduction.

Mirroring the women they assisted, female emigration societies' organizers were generally religious, conservative gentlewomen well imbued by class and gender habitus. As such, female emigration leaders contributed to keeping women within the domestic field, the colonial professional opportunities that they advertised being mainly domestic and their selection generally based on domestic criteria. Under the cover of

female access to work, emigration societies ensured the reproduction of traditional gendered structures. Recreating a social universe in the colonies, the female philanthropic societies conformed to British gendered traditions which they proposed to transport to the New World.

A constitutive element of Victorian Britain's identity, the Church of England also needed to secure its survival in the new geopolitical and social contexts: the CES was thus founded "to strengthen the hands of the Clergy in the Colonies" (CES 1887b). The Church needed to remain the repository of the salvation capital (Bourdieu 1971), which justified the CES's foundation in 1886. At a time when emigration societies were proliferating, the Church needed to regain its symbolic capital and to secure its power and legitimacy against those who had taken a share in the salvation enterprise. The main reason for the CES's creation was the threat of the Church of England's followers turning to other religions, once away from the metropole: "emigrants [...] may be kept from settling far apart, as without this aid they usually do, in communities alien to the Church and without their ministrations, there to fall from her" (CES 1888a). Through the CES, the Church of England secured its symbolic and social capital in Victorian England with an obvious expansionist agenda: "for the interests of English colonization all over the world" (CES 1888a).

Educated British women could support the Anglican Church's preeminence and expansionist project. The ideal colonial female profile enhanced morality and healthy child-rearing potential, which model only gentlewomen were considered to correspond to at the time. Women were the most efficient medium to reproduce the Church of England's religious capital in the Empire. So, the Ladies' Committee of the CES was soon founded, led by Miss Denison, and given an office away from the main – the CES's office was located at 9 Victoria Chambers, Westminster, whereas its Ladies' Committee was at 196, Cromwell Road, South Westminster (CES 1887b). Indeed, reminiscent of Victorian gender norms, the emigration of men or families and that of single women were to be dealt with separately.

According to Bourdieu, the Church is antifeminist, the official reproducer of a pessimistic vision of femininity following the patriarchal precepts according to which women are inferior beings (Bourdieu 2002). Indeed, the CES made sure that women were in charge of female emigrants, while men dealt with "serious" imperialist matters. Whereas legitimate Church authority figures were often quoted in the organization's quarterly *The Emigrant*, very rarely was Miss Denison so: she was not considered a legitimate dominant religious symbolic capital holder while clergymen were. Even though female emigration was publicly defended as an important matter to the Church, there were much fewer articles devoted to women's than to men's and families' departures. The CES gave legitimacy to the norms imposed on women and thus operated the class-differentiated and gender-focused nature of Empire-building.

Female Imperialism

Empire-building can be analyzed as a strategy to maintain sex inequality, so-called "natural." Yet, the female emigration organizers managed to acquire symbolic capital as they soon turned into expert organizers of female migration: they were listened to by men and participated in official and public debates on migration, which was a way to do politics (Richardson 2013) when the political field excluded women at the time. Selecting and assisting their fellow female emigrants indeed gave legitimacy to their imperialist discourse. Female emigrants were to be kept under the domination of the higher capital owners – men – who delegated the organization of female emigration to female experts. The balance between deliberate action and cultural determinism structured the actions of female emigration promoters and their emigrants in the imperial context. Male domination needed no justification: the androcentric vision imposed itself as a legitimate toxic consensus that led to accepting the categories constructed by the dominants (Bourdieu 2002). This justifies the female emigration organizers' insistence upon

keeping female emigrants within the domestic sphere.

Yet, as sociologist Umut Erel has pointed out, "the very act of migration disrupts ideas of linear reproduction of cultural capital" (Erel 2010). On the one hand, in contemporary propaganda, the British Empire was often referred to as a mere extension of Britain. However, on the other hand, female emigration societies provided training for emigrants before departure, such as in the Leaton Training House, which was necessary to model and adapt their female emigrants to the conditions in the colonies. Preparation to a new rougher context was required for gentlewomen emigrants to take up the domestic function they were assigned to. Adaptation thus contradicts cultural capital's linear reproduction.

To avoid failure, middle-class women (mainly lower middle-class) were preferred to working-class women by emigration societies. According to historian Philippa Levine, working-class women were believed to have a greater libido, and their alleged downgrading sexual and moral habits did not make them ideal representatives of the nation (Levine 2007); it was believed that only gentlewomen had the moral qualities required to spread Britishness. A class-differentiated access to the Empire was therefore initiated. To Cannadine, the British Empire was indeed "a class act" (Cannadine 2002). Maria Rye never concealed her class-structured attitude when she selected emigrants: "an elevation of morals being the inevitable result of the mere presence in the colony of a number of high class women" (Rye 1861). For Rye, "high class" women were religious, conservative, and submissive raised in respectable families. Highly moral and educated to become perfect wives and mothers, so were her "high class" women: women that Britain could be proud of and expected to reproduce in the colonies.

As a commentator declared in 1885, a skilled female emigrant was a nation's future mother, the repository of Britishness, responsible for making "the happy home of the future" (M.A.F. 1885). This notion was openly expressed by the FMCES's secretary in 1883: "These women are to be the mothers of the race in this province; shall we do what we may to attract the best of their class to Canterbury (Lewin 1883)?" They were to contribute to the nation's political economy by producing the imperial "race" and would thus no longer be Britain's unproductive "surplus" women. Their ethnic cultural capital was also based on national "character," an exclusive masculine notion of ethnicity modelled on moralistic whiteness. Women's appropriation of "character" was a claim to equality: they thus proclaimed their Britishness, on the same terms as their male counterparts.

Yet, this was to be at the expense of colonized men and women. Recent research has focused on the negative impact of British female imperialists' reforming actions on indigenous women as, for instance, Professor of Indigenous history Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, among other works. Indigenous people, men and women, were neither granted existence nor any kind of recognition by the colonizers, unless as tools for imperial power. Writing from Australia in 1862, Maria Barrow described the Aborigines from an ethnocentric perspective and underlined their perceived weakness, creating a symbolic gap to the advantage of the British race: "They are very ugly and old, the women particularly and I was rather afraid of them. However they appear to be quite harmless" (FMCES Letter Books). This territorial perspective sheds a new light on the subject under analysis, as what was intended as a positive impact on British women sometimes ended up having a negative one on indigenous populations. If imperialist women endeavored to change their status from subjugated beings in the metropole to imperial agents in the colonies, some of them may simultaneously have contributed to the imperialist subjugation of other women and men, in the colonies.

Central to contemporary debates was the fear of exogenous intrusion, and Cruikshank's popular reaction to the British female "emigration mania" (Cruikshank 1851) took the shape of a sharp satire. He called Australia "the land of the wifeless" and debunked the propaganda toward single female emigration: "If the desire for emigration among females is not stopped, England will soon

be like a bee-hive, with only one female in it, and that – the Queen. . . . London will be womanless." Besides, he denounced the risk of racial degeneracy and the threat of reverse colonial invasion into Britain, of intermarriages, and foreign influence upon Britishness when he said "Ladies will have to be imported to supply the place of the exported . . . The love-sick bachelor, armed with a "tasting order," will hurry to the docks to try the sweetness of the charming Negresses before taking them out of bond" (Cruikshank 1851). This description of men rushing to the harbor to find wives is reminiscent of the many tales of Australian men rushing at the arrival of vessels full of brides-to-be from Britain – situations mocked at in the metropole, still the dominant figure over its needy colonial offshoots. To female activists who denounced the transportation of women as an excuse to postpone solutions to be found at home or who complained that the best stock was taken away, the female emigration societies responded that "they made special effort to promote the Emigration of those whose work is least needed and least productive here" (UBWEA 1889–1890), thus justifying their selection limited to the unproductive educated gentlewomen – "surplus" women – who were given a chance to turn productive in the Empire.

From the 1880s on, the emigration societies' rhetoric was overtly imperialistic, hegemonic, and expressed an "imperialism of inevitability" (Porter 1996): the world was to be British. Beyond concerns for endogenous reproduction, women were to spread ideological domination in the form of cultural imperialism which entailed the imposition of universal British standards (Dunch 2002). As feminist historian Leila J. Rupp put it, "women's internationalism in the period before World War II points the way to one form of global identity" (Rupp 1994). Through their Empire-building actions, women became the agents of dissemination of ethnocentric Britishness.

For British men, women were granted the roles of domination tools and foils as was declared in the female periodical *Woman* in 1887: "the Englishwoman abroad" is a glorious institution. [. . .] They say, of course: "If England produces this sort of women, what splendid fellows the men must be! She does more to maintain the prestige of the British Empire, than all our ironclads put together" (*Woman* 1887). The perfect female emigrant was a valuable asset to British male Empire-builders, an item of superiority over the other nations' men, thus reinforcing Britain's cultural and imperial capital. As expressed in an article published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1882, British women's physical superiority over the other nations was natural: "Englishwomen are, in general, the most beautiful in the world" (Ross 1882). If femininity is a form of complaisance toward men's symbolic domination (Bourdieu 2002), the emigration societies' careful selection, based on moral and physical grounds, thus served to assert both male domination and Britain's superiority. British superior masculinity over the other races was to be asserted worldwide, and women were the most efficient tools to spread it. As Empire-builders, they were therefore given a secondary role in the male-centered imperial enterprise, the one of assisting foils.

Beyond cultural imperialism, by exporting their women, the British were trying to achieve identity imperialism. "Superior" British women were identity-keepers and spreading agents involved in what historian Denis Judd calls "imperial Darwinism" (Judd 1996). Traditions, common history, norms, and sense of belonging, which constitute national identity, were expected to be safeguarded by peopling the colonies with "respectable" British subjects. As historian Anna Davin has pointed out, "women would take their place not only as Empire-builders, but above all as Empire-conservers" (Davin 1978). For some French imperialists, imperial domination was best implemented through women and children and an article published in 1896 in *Le Moniteur Universel* described British female emigration societies as a model to be followed worldwide (*Le Moniteur Universel* 1896). This highlights that, to some extent, British female emigration societies succeeded in becoming a symbol envied by other nations, thus perfecting the objective for global cultural standardization, on the British model, endeavored by their fellow male imperialists.

By the end of the nineteenth century, British female emigration organizers managed to turn into imperial agents and assisted male Empire-builders in the construction of a collective global identity. To female imperialists, the Queen was the feminine model to follow: she embodied authority and maternity. The maternal rhetoric that historian Julia Bush defined as "imperious maternity" (Bush 1998) was the major instrument of female imperialist propaganda. Yet, gender habitus was still perceptible in the female emigration societies' discourse. They reproduced the male bombastic imperialist and expansionist rhetoric with a maternal touch:

> [England] is the mother of a large family of colonies scattered over the world. The sun no sooner sets on the parent shores than it rises on the cliffs of one of the colonial children; and, indeed, the empire of Great Britain has been truly described as one on which 'the sun never sets.' . . . There is . . . plenty of room for more people, and this means plenty of work to be had. (*Work and Leisure* 1885)

Thus, a mixture of maternalism, patriotism, expansionism, and emancipation endeavor is what defined female imperialism in the last quarter of the Victorian era. Their imperialist propaganda was opinionated but ladylike, a new voicing mode for women. In this way, female imperialism endangered gendered norms, but it was a price British men had to pay to secure Britishness against external intrusion.

Conclusion

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the female emigration societies' participation in the organization of the Empire contradicts Seeley's analysis that the British Empire was gained "in a fit of absence of mind," at least until the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the organizations participated in the constructive imperialist project. In the New Imperialism period (c. 1870–1914) marked by worldwide expansionist race, the British Empire's stability was at stake, and female emigrants' symbolic capital was a tool to secure a stable colonial nation – on the metropolitan model – and to reinforce racial frontiers against exogenous intrusion. Female emigration organizers' newly acquired agency did not create a new social system but reproduced the traditional one within the imperial context. However, female emigration societies did threaten gender habitus by granting their leaders agency and by endowing their emigrants with decision-making power over their own fates. At the time, there were constraints that female emigration organizers could not overcome and traditional structures were to persist despite spatial mobility, but they – as imperialist women – used their agency as a medium to lead the way to their selected emigrants' nuanced empowerment. In this somewhat convoluted way, female emigration societies' leaders can be described as Empire and history agents.

Women's civilizing power, as well as their biological ability to reproduce the nation, participated in the constructive imperialist project promoted by Chamberlain. The "surplus" women, who were expected to guarantee "the survival of the fittest" within the Empire, were thus turned into symbolic instruments of constructive imperialism. The philanthropic societies under study were finally going to make way for the state's official handling of selected female emigration in 1919 with the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (SOSBW, 1919–1962). In 1962, the SOSBW was finally replaced by the Women's Migration and Overseas Appointments Society (1962–1964). This represented official acknowledgment that private enterprise was no longer deemed able to handle imperial responsibility. As E.H.H. Green puts it, "constructive imperialism was one of the first attempts to design a form of co-partnership of Commonwealth structure of Imperial relations, whose relevance was to become apparent in the inter-war period" (Green 1999). Hence, the female emigration societies' contribution to the British Empire's political economy focused on guaranteeing the racial unity of the Empire by sending out selected women who would then produce future partners in trade for the metropole and whose loyalty to Britain was expected to exclude external markets.

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