



Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule

Ann Laura Stoler

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Why, Ann Laura Stoler asks, was the management of sexual arrangements and affective attachments so critical to the making of colonial categories and to what distinguished ruler from ruled? Contending that social classification is not a benign cultural act but a potent political one, Stoler shows that matters of the intimate were absolutely central to imperial politics. It was, after all, in the intimate sphere of home and servants that European children learned what they were required to learn of place and race. Gender-specific sexual sanctions, too, were squarely at the heart of imperial rule, and European supremacy was asserted in terms of national and racial virility.

Stoler looks discerningly at the way cultural competencies and sensibilities entered into the construction of race in the colonial context and proposes that "cultural racism" in fact predates its postmodern discovery. Her acute analysis of colonial Indonesian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries yields insights that translate to a global, comparative perspective.

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