Responses to T.J. Tallie

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Policing the Boundaries of Citizenship: Race, Gender, and Imperial Belonging in Colonial Natal

What does it mean to be a citizen in a liberal empire? T.J. Tallie's critical account of marriage, race, and straightness in *Queering Colonial Natal*, read alongside Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds' *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, reveals interesting rifts among white members of the British and American empires. Rather than a unified approach to governing non-white populations, they depict a process of constant contestation between the imperial center and the colonized periphery over how to manage the racialized boundaries of citizenship. Debates over marriage laws in colonial Natal in the late 19th century, and over immigration to the United States and British dominions in the early 20th century, pitted racial extremists against more liberal voices over not only policy but the meaning of democratic citizenship within these ostensibly liberal empires.

Per Tallie, white settlers in Natal claimed a position of racial virtue, emphasizing their demographic precarity vis-à-vis larger indigenous and Indian immigrant populations in order to portray themselves as defenders of white civilization against non-white encroachment and corruption. Within Natal, they sought to make themselves the "new natives" by eliminating, subjugating, or controlling the social practices of the indigenous population. In the wider context of the British Empire, though, they portrayed themselves as the "true" representatives of white civilization because they—not Whitehall—were the ones fighting to maintain its integrity.

In doing so, settlers in Natal challenged the metropole's idea of a global, multi-ethnic society predicated on imperial citizenship by framing whiteness as the *real* criterion for citizenship. When faced with resistance, colonists went even further, defecting in a sense from the empire and claiming a transnational *racial* citizenship. They believed that they needed to defend this citizenship not just in Africa, but in Australia and America as well. In the process, they tied the demographic fears of settler colonialism to immigration paranoia in Australia and America. According to Tallie, "British settlers and colonial officials alike envisioned Natal as part of a global nineteenth-century Anglophone settler project" (Tallie 2019, 2).

Under pressure from its militant periphery, the imperial state in these accounts was split between a conception of citizenship based on global, transracial subjecthood and one based on transnational whiteness. This conflict forced non-white subjects into a particularly difficult position. They could fight for recognition of equal subjecthood within the empire, in a public sphere increasingly dominated by virulently racialized discourse, or they too could defect and pursue redress of grievances through other routes, like nationalism, the precarious discourse of universal natural rights, or the even riskier framework of transnational indigenous solidarity.

Gandhi's career—first as an activist for Indian rights in Natal, and then as a fighter for Indian independence—encompassed both options. His early activism in Natal on behalf of the Indian immigrant community mainly appealed to the metropole on the basis of the Crown's promises of equality for all subjects (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 121, 326). The subsequent arc of his career towards Indian nationalism demonstrates that in the face of withering racism, many non-white imperial subjects eventually opted for an activism based on anti-imperial principles. Extrapolating from this example, we wonder whether the available sources reveal a similar

tension among Natal's indigenous population. Did they favor arguments for rights and dignity based on an imperial-subject logic, or in opposition to colonization? Did this tendency change over time?

This was not a one-sided conflict for the soul of the empire, however. While settlers tried to push their views of racial purity onto London, London also used race as part of its governing strategy by depicting itself as the benevolent protector of indigenous interests against settler oppression. Tallie shows this paternalistic strategy at work in describing the Zulu King Cetshwayo's visit to London in 1883, four years after his defeat and deposition in the Anglo-Zulu War. Natal's settlers and the British state were entirely at odds over how the defeated Zulu king should be treated, and particularly whether he should be returned to power (as the British government desired). This became a longstanding point of conflict between the colony and the center.

Settlers in Natal did not just use race to construct citizenship, but also gender. By employing discourse about ostensibly oppressive indigenous marriage practices like *ilobolo*, they argued that they needed to exercise social control over indigenous populations to protect their women. The narrative of *ilobolo*-as-woman-slavery let settlers claim to be protecting both native women and liberal ideals, all while pursuing their own racist goals. There are, of course, much more recent examples of this type of discourse: in carrying out the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, neoconservatives in the George W. Bush administration argued that, as First Lady Laura Bush so powerfully phrased it, "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Bush 2001). Similar justifications for violence as a crusade for liberal democratic ideals came from what scholars have called the "good Muslim" and "secular feminist" camps (Akbar & Oza 2013, 152-153).

Clearly, the intersection of race, gender, and citizenship within a liberal empire remains both discursively powerful and continually contested. This dynamic of contestation between center and periphery over the meanings of race and citizenship troubles adds an important dimension to our understanding of imperialism, settler colonialism, and their continuing ramifications for colonized and colonizer alike. How does thinking about the contestation between center and periphery over these issues change our understanding of settler colonialism? And what role does the native actually play in this contest? For instance, does indigenous resistance strengthen the metropole's more distant, ostensibly benevolent approach to managing native populations, or does it favor the more aggressive tactics of settlers?

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Reading Anxiety in the Colonial Archive: Race, Gender, and Archival Interpretation in Colonial Natal's Classrooms

In *Queering Colonial Natal*, Professor Tallie demonstrates both the structures used by white settler society to establish a "normative" order in colonial Natal, and the ways in which African and Indian communities subverted (or were perceived to subvert) those structures in their dress, actions, drink, and relationships. Of the many theaters where such normalizing and subverting took place, the colonial classroom was a particularly apt stage. Describing developments in education in late nineteenth-century colonial Natal, Tallie writes:

> As indigenous Africans, Indian migrants, and British settlers all clamored for access to education, Natal's settler legislature attempted to foster institutions that forced various peoples into roles most amenable to an emerging colonial hierarchy. The piecemeal creation of educational institutions in late nineteenth-century Natal offered opportunities for social advancement but also operated as a disciplining space that produced raced and gendered identities through the *collisions* of competing peoples. (151; emphasis added)

Thus, Tallie describes the efforts of the colonial settler state in Natal to establish—through legislation and institutional support—educational spaces which could shape the settler, indigenous, and migrant populations into roles which would best serve the needs of the white settler demographic. Educational spaces as spaces for the creation of "ideal" demographic types have been explored by other scholars as well, and Tallie references Robert Morrell's *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920,* a text in which Morrell delineates the ways in which ideal white settler masculinity was often inculcated in the school space—a space in which "boys" became "men."

What does it mean to envisage the coming together of people across racial, class, and gender lines as anxiety provoking? Tallie's use of the word "collision" –a word with violent, antagonistic connotations—when describing the disciplining and meeting of differently raced and gendered bodies in educational institutions is key, because this coming together of differently raced bodies was a source of significant anxiety for the settler state. The fear of providing educational access to indigenous African and migrant Indian populations was two-fold. Firstly, there was a belief that this access could lead to non-white populations acquiring subversive ideas and articulating demands for inclusion within the body politic. Secondly, there was also fear stemming from the literal collision of differently raced bodies in educational spaces —a collision which could lead to the formation of subversive ties of intimacy, association, and recognition. The opposition to interracial education was often couched in terms of morality, i.e., that a mixing of white and non-white populations could result in moral defilement for white children who were the future of the colonial settler state: "Certainly morality in this instance is a coded phrase for fear of racial intimacy" (171).

According to Tallie, then, "[e]ducation became another battlefield in Natal where ideas of citizenship, inclusion, and civilization were all fiercely debated" (153). However, this battle did not end with conclusive victory for the settlers as the consistent reformulation and recalibration

of the colonial state's stance on education indicates. It is in these constant reformulations and recalibrations that Tallie reads in the colonial archive that we find indications of deep settler anxiety and non-white subversion.

We would like to turn now to this colonial archive and the particular methods used by Tallie to engage with this archive. As with any study of the ways in which both colonizer and colonized operated in a nineteenth-century imperial settler society, the primary sources for Tallie's analysis were necessarily written in the colonizer's hand, thus demanding a unique approach to account for colonized voices. To do so, Tallie enlists an approach used by Keletso E. Atkins in her 1993 history of nineteenth-century African labor in Natal, *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money!*. Faced with African archival absence, Atkins and Tallie read between the lines of colonizer sources, looking for African experience through the lens of British anxieties. For Atkins, this involves, among other print sources, English-Zulu phrasebooks, considered essential for the management of servants in any British settler household. For Tallie, this involves surveys, debates, newspapers, decrees, and letters penned by colonial administrators, politicians, and teachers, all concerned with the existential threat of racial and gendered boundaries being crossed. From the gaps in the archives, Tallie reconstructs crucial aspects of colonial Natal society, a society that both depended on rigid categorization for the maintenance of settler authority but was also characterized by constant challenges to these categorizations.

Tallie and Atkins, thus, present a methodological challenge: what if, instead of interpreting archival absence as silence, we read it as noise? Their conscious decisions to unearth colonized voices by reading for settler colonial anxieties yield urgent questions for current and future scholars: What does it mean to be using different methods of archival interpretation in our current moment? What are the politics of methodological choices?

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Friend or Foe? - Friendship in the Colonial and Neo-Colonial State

Interpersonal relationships across boundaries of race and gender form a core characteristic of modern, liberal, and democratic society. The same holds true for the settler-colonial state, yet in vastly different ways. Friendship between the occupying settler and the perceived colonial subject was a site of complex interaction. In *Queering Colonial Natal*, T.J. Tallie examines how these affiliations could function to reinforce, but also to undermine "hierarchies of race, gender, and colonial power" (Tallie, 92). On the one hand, a positive affiliation between settler and colonized was integral to the idea of a civilizing mission. However, far from uplifting them to the status of equals, for most colonists, their subjects "were to be ensnared in an affective relation of constant indebtedness" (Tallie, 99) to their colonial masters. Thus, the friendship between settler and subject was fundamentally impossible and always had to remain unfulfilled. Additionally, it even served to normalize the violence that was constitutive to the settler-colonial society.

On the other hand, affiliation also held the potential to destabilize the settler-colonial state, as friendship could "underline a shared humanity" (Tallie, 94). This was probably best exemplified by Zulu King Cetshwayo's visit to London in 1882. He was able to use the idea of colonial friendship to cast himself not only as a deserving colonial subject, but also as a fellow human, and as the intended result of his colonizers' supposedly uplifting influence. In doing so, King Cetshwayo successfully negotiated support in the metropole for his reinstatement in the colony, a significant, if brief, political victory.

Similarly, Franco Barchiesi's "The Problem with 'We'" explores how, throughout the twentieth century, settlers in South Africa continually constructed friendships with their perceived subjects, albeit with racism as a means to resolve the tension between the democratic settler promise and the colonial reality. Together with its inherent violence, the settler project of occupation, linked with a civilizing mission, was always deeply contingent on the construction of racial categories. In this regard, Barchiesi emphasizes the settler practice of separating the perceived human 'native,' deserving of civilization, from the savage 'black,' relegated to an unredeemable and static existence. This fundamental "Blackness-as-slavery" in the colonial project fortified an "absolute and permanent dereliction" within non-white subjects (Barchiesi, 129). Thus, while friendship offered opportunities to both the colonizer and the colonized, racialized conceptions of the static otherness of non-white African subjects ultimately prevented real affiliation.

Adding to debates around colonial friendship, Barchiesi then explores South African nationalism in neo-colonial times. He traces the rise of *non-racialism* as a concept fundamental to the African National Congress (ANC) and the modern South African state. Yet, while it promises a raceless society and some form of equality, *non-racialism* emerged from these racial categorizations and the denial of humanity to the colonized, and is still built on emphasizing the subjectivity of the acceptable 'native' in contrast to a perceived threatening and uncontrollable blackness. Therefore, as "'anti-Blackness' [became] the foundation of whiteness-as-humanity" (Barchiesi, 129), he emphasizes the longevity and the pervasiveness of settler-colonial power structures.

Given Tallie's insightful account of anxieties of affiliation in the settler colonial state, and taking Barchiesi's argument that a modern non-racial South African society is fundamentally built on colonial conceptions, we have to ask what kind of interpersonal connections across race and gender are possible in the (neo)colonial state in the first place?

It is then interesting to think not only about the limitations to friendship, but also if there is an alternative to friendship in the colonial or neo-colonial state. If so, what would such alternative modes of affiliation look like, both within and outside the structures of that state? Lastly, if an escape from these power structures is impossible, what form does friendship need to take in order to subvert colonial structures, or is affiliation the wrong place to search for such a project altogether?

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