

Crossing the Color Line

*Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of
Colonialism in Ghana*



Carina E. Ray

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Contents

List of Illustrations		ix
Preface		xi
Acknowledgments		xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	The Stakes of Studying Sex across the Color Line in Colonial Ghana	1
PART ONE THE GOLD COAST		
<i>Chapter 1</i>	From Indispensable to “Undesirable” <i>African Women, European Men, and the Transformation of Afro-European Power Relations in the Gold Coast</i>	29
<i>Chapter 2</i>	“Undesirable Relations” <i>“Native” Women, European Government Officers, and Administrative Racial Classification</i>	56
<i>Chapter 3</i>	“A New Whim of a Most Unpopular Governor” <i>Embedded Officers and the Local Politics of Concubinage Cases</i>	79
<i>Chapter 4</i>	The Crewe Circular <i>The Life and Death of a Policy on Interracial Concubinage</i>	102
<i>Chapter 5</i>	“A Manifestation of Madness” <i>The Gold Coast’s Interracial Marriage “Epidemic”</i>	133

PART TWO	METROPOLE AND COLONY	
<i>Chapter 6</i>	“The White Wife Problem” <i>Intermarriage and the Politics of Repatriation to Interwar West Africa</i>	159
<i>Chapter 7</i>	“White Peril”/Black Power <i>Interracial Sex and the Beginning of the End of Empire</i>	190
<i>Chapter 8</i>	WASU, White Women, and African Independence	212
<i>Conclusion</i>	Sexuality’s Staying Power	226
Notes		241
Bibliography		299
Index		323

Introduction

The Stakes of Studying Sex across the Color Line in Colonial Ghana

AS KWAME NKRUMAH'S cabinet ministers walked through the gates of Flagstaff House on an early January morning in 1961, a disarmingly demure-looking Ghanaian woman lambasted them for threatening to tear her family apart. The woman in question, Felicia Agnes Knight, was the wife of a former British district commissioner, Brendan Knight, who had been in government service since 1940. The government of Ghana had retained Brendan's services for several years after independence in 1957, but at the close of 1960 he was notified that his employment would soon be terminated as part of the ongoing Africanization of the civil service.¹ It was this news that propelled Felicia out of the confines of her comfortable upper-middle-class home in an affluent section of the nation's capital, Accra, to the gates of Flagstaff House, where she launched a one-woman protest to save her husband's job and to ensure the viability of her family's life in Ghana.² It was not long before President Nkrumah got wind of what was happening and invited Felicia to his office to explain what the commotion was about. The Knights had been married since 1945 and were raising their children as Ghanaians, explained Felicia, who ultimately convinced Nkrumah that although Brendan was British, he had long ago committed himself to their life in Ghana. Shortly after his meeting with Felicia, Nkrumah granted her husband a special dispensation allowing him to remain in the civil service because, as government documents noted, he "is

married to a Ghanaian and has five children with her, all of whom have been brought up as Ghanaians.”³

As this brief vignette suggests, decolonization was a fraught moment for families like the Knights, whose affiliations, affinities, and affections did not neatly conform to the reconfigured political landscape of African independence and the retreat of the British Empire. The episode at Flagstaff House also dramatically illustrates how the lives of a relatively small number of people who crossed the colonial color line continued to attract the state’s attention, often at the highest levels, even after the Gold Coast gained its independence. Indeed, this was not the first time that the Knights’ union was the subject of official attention. Fifteen years earlier, Brendan’s plans to marry Felicia had so bewildered the then governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Alan Burns, that he wrote to the Colonial Office in Whitehall (London) to see “what can be done to stop this sort of thing.” He even suggested reviving an old circular from 1909, “warning men against living with African women, and adding . . . that the discovery that a man has been living in sin is not going to be over-looked just because he has made an honest woman of her.”⁴ In the end no official action was taken against Knight, or the three other government officers who had wed Gold Coast women in the preceding months, because the Colonial Office feared it would be accused of racism. Besides, argued a Whitehall adviser, these marriages were “a form of madness” that no circular could cure.⁵ Instead, it was reckoned that it would be only a matter of time before the officers’ marriages to African women diminished their authority and consequently impaired their performance as government servants such that they could be removed on grounds of “inefficiency.”⁶

Administrators’ panicked response to these late colonial marriages underscores the persistence and gravity of colonial anxieties about interracial sexual relationships and their assumed adverse consequences for administrative efficiency and repute. But their dire predictions of career suicide never came to pass, suggesting that administrators were wrong to assume that after marriage to an African woman, an officer was no longer “in a position to command respect and confidence.”⁷ Knight and the other officers in question not only remained in government service throughout the colonial period, they all enjoyed success and promotion, albeit not without some obstacles. Three of their number, moreover, continued to live and work in Ghana well after independence. Still, the four interracial marriages were unprecedented during the formal colonial period, confirming in turn what government officials admitted was the “much more frequent case of an officer living with an African woman without marriage.”⁸ In accepting this to be true, the Colonial Office implicitly acknowledged the failure of its efforts

in the early decades of the twentieth century to stamp out concubinage in an attempt to bring the sexual politics of European government officers in line with the increasingly stratified racial politics of colonial rule.⁹

Colonial administrators were not alone in attempting to regulate sex across the color line. Some Gold Coasters drew on the realm of customary law in an attempt to control European men's access to local women by exacting payment for customary marriage rights and seeking compensation when Europeans fell afoul of the laws regulating marriage and adultery, while others repurposed the colonial state's ban on concubinage to shore up their own interests. While sexual relationships between European men and African women remained commonplace, such unions were rarely publicly legitimized during the first half of the twentieth century—as the shock caused by the four marriages suggests—and thus conferred little in the way of respectability on the women involved. This, in turn, provoked early Gold Coast nationalists to condemn these relationships for corrupting the virtue of the “future mothers of the country,” as one Gold Coast writer put it.¹⁰

ACCOUNTING FOR CHANGE IN THE GOLD COAST'S INTERRACIAL SEXUAL ECONOMIES

Africans and Europeans, including the British, had not always viewed intimate relations between African women and European men as a threat to moral, social, and political order. In fact, they had once been regarded as instrumental to the consolidation of Afro-European economic and political relations. Interracial marriages contracted in accordance with African customary law and, less frequently, those recognized as lawful by the religious and administrative bodies associated with the various European powers present on the coast, were regular features of its trading enclaves during the long period of cross-cultural contact and exchange that preceded the territorial expansion and formalization of British colonial rule from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Evidence of these marriages comes from an array of sources, including travel narratives, wills left by European men, administrative records, official and personal correspondence, genealogical records, and even visual sources. Beginning with Margaret Priestley's pioneering work on the Brew family, historians have used these sources to fashion compelling accounts of prominent Afro-European trading families, making them an iconic feature of the coast's precolonial history.¹¹ Many scholars credit these relationships with successfully integrating European men into local West African societies and enabling African and multi-racial women to carve out entrepreneurial niches for themselves in the

transatlantic slave trade by capitalizing on their links to both African and European sources of power and profit.¹² They have also come to symbolize the cosmopolitan and culturally hybrid character of the precolonial Atlantic trading ports and towns interspersed along the West African coast during a period when power was largely in the hands of free Africans, not Europeans.

When set against the precolonial period's centuries-long tradition of intermarriage, the changes in policies, practices, and perceptions that shaped colonial-era interracial sexual relationships appear particularly striking. Gold Coasters lamented this transformation in the pages of the colony's indigenous press. In 1915 Atu, a regular columnist for the *Gold Coast Leader*, reminisced about bygone "Dutch times" when "conditions were wholly different, marriage relations between black and white being honest . . . and fathers of mulattoes made honest efforts to train up their children."¹³ The historical moment and attendant socioeconomic and political imperatives that informed Dutch policies and practices in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries were indeed "wholly different" from those of the British in the early twentieth century. The power relations of bygone "Dutch times" contrast markedly with those of the British in 1915 when Atu was writing. Despite their long tenure on the coast, the almost exclusively male Dutch presence remained very small and was highly dependent on support—curried partly through customary law marriages with African women—from local populations. This was hardly the case for the much larger, self-imposed British presence in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The institutionalization of alien political rule, as Ato Quayson astutely observes, was characterized by "a fundamental . . . conversion of what had been the relations of dependency and accommodation that had defined the commercial interactions between Europeans and local groups since the fifteenth century to one of domination without accountability by the end of the nineteenth."¹⁴ Part and parcel of this pronounced but incomplete transformation was the shift away from intermarriage. This, however, had less to do with a distinctively British viewpoint—after all they too had once embraced it, if less systematically than the Dutch—and more to do with the racial politics and grossly uneven power relations of formal colonialism in early twentieth-century Africa and Asia. The Dutch, it should be remembered, similarly renounced intermarriage as Dutch East India Company rule gave way to colonial rule in Indonesia and eventually condemned concubinage, albeit selectively and ineffectively.¹⁵

Atu's remarks are nonetheless noteworthy because they remind us that Gold Coasters during their own time remembered precolonial interracial sexual relationships in ways that emphasized their honor and respectability,

not unlike many historians in more recent times. Historical narratives about the ubiquitous nature of publicly recognized intermarriages between entrepreneurial African women and European men during the precolonial period are important in their own right, but they frequently gloss over the range of other kinds of sexual encounters, including concubinage, prostitution, and rape, that formed less visible—and hence less easily documentable—strata of the interracial sexual economies of the Gold Coast’s precolonial trading hubs.¹⁶ Although the rape of enslaved women during the Middle Passage is fairly well documented and remembered, much less has been written about the pre-embarkation period when female captives were confined in the coast’s slave forts and castles. It has nonetheless been memorialized in the harrowing narratives that many of the castles’ tour guides tell visitors in places like Elmina and Cape Coast.¹⁷ Only recently have scholars begun to grapple with the rape and sexual exploitation of the female slaves who worked for the castles’ European residents.¹⁸

Even where marriages were concerned, we must bear in mind that these unions were a constitutive part of the Gold Coast littoral’s trade-based economies, which became almost exclusively focused on the slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While these commercially minded interracial unions predated and outlived the slave trade, they were nonetheless an integral part of the development of a highly functioning and elaborate slave-trading system that enriched some at the expense of many. European traders and the companies they represented obviously profited the most, but many of the women involved in these relationships also benefitted from being able to exploit the labor of those they enslaved or to profit from their sale. Like their counterparts in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, and Madagascar—the *signares*, *nharas*, and *zany malattas*—these women were “individuals, who, through chance or by design, were not victims but beneficiaries of the [slave] trade.”¹⁹ Thus, the model of female agency that they have often been made to represent is worthy of critical appraisal rather than applause.

It would, however, be a gross oversimplification to assume that African women either enjoyed the status of wife and reaped the respect and financial benefits associated with their lucrative marital ties to European men, or else suffered rape in the bowels of the coast’s slave dungeons, or were bought and sold to meet the sexual and domestic needs of European men temporarily living on the coast. The binary opposition between consent and coercion obscures the complex, overlapping, and changing nature of the range of sexual relationships between African women and European men during the precolonial period, as well as the changing dynamics of power between Africans and Europeans within which these relationships were situated.²⁰

The consent/coercion binary is even less helpful for the formal colonial period, when the sexual terror associated with the slave trade ended as the slave castles were transformed into administrative centers of British colonial power, or fell into disrepair, and publicly recognized intermarriages—no longer of use to a British regime that asserted rather than negotiated its power and presence—were almost unheard of. Indeed, during the opening decades of the twentieth century, Africans and Europeans alike commented on the paucity of marriages between African women and European men.²¹ The disavowal of intermarriage reflected and reinforced the changing political climate and increasing, but hardly complete, social distance that separated Europeans and Africans by the early 1900s.

As colonialism's racial prescripts ruled out the possibility of publicly legitimized marriages between European men and African women, they also clearly demarcated customary practices as the exclusive preserve of Africans. This marked a break with the precolonial past, when European men had readily availed themselves of customary marriage rights to African women as part of a wider complex of indigenous sociocultural practices for integrating strangers into local societies and fostering trade. Accommodation and assimilation, whether through marriage or through other kinds of practices, including polygyny and concubinage, ran counter to the entire premise of Britain's "civilizing mission." While colonial ideologues argued that through education and religious conversion, Africans could move from the domain of "barbarism" into "civilization," it was absolutely out of the question for European men to "go native." Colonial officers were expected to become conversant with the traditions and customs of the people they presided over, but they were not supposed to participate in those practices, as many European men before them once had.

Crucially, the demise of publicly legitimized interracial marriages occurred at a time when ideas and expectations about marriage among Africans were rapidly changing in the Gold Coast as the result of the spread of Christianity and Western education and the creation of a dual legal system based on English and indigenous customary law, the latter of which remained malleable and responsive to social change despite its increasing codification. Of particular importance here, the 1884 Marriage Ordinance gave Gold Coasters an alternative to customary marriage. There was no more hotly debated topic in the African-owned Gold Coast press during the decades after its introduction than the 1884 ordinance. With its Christian underpinnings, the ordinance became synonymous with "European marriage," otherwise defined as a monogamous companionate union. Although

many elites, especially the small but growing number of educated Christian women, as well as newly educated and recently converted aspirant elites, praised the merits of ordinance marriage, a group of vocal male elites—who were typically Christian themselves—defended the institution of customary marriage and rejected ordinance marriage as an intrusive colonial imposition that fomented moral decay and social chaos by endowing women with too many rights. But even this group of men doubted the legitimacy of customary marriages when contracted across the color line. Thus, regardless of what marriage form Gold Coast elites favored, there was a consensus among this group of literate, relatively prosperous, and politically active Africans that interracial customary marriages were a thin veil for profiting from the sale of the colony's young women to “demoralised whitemen,” as one Gold Coast writer put it.²² In this way elite ideas about interracial customary marriages echoed colonial ideologies that cast the institution of customary marriage among Africans as “slavery in disguise.”²³

The families who brokered interracial customary marriages, some of the women involved in them, and many of the Gold Coasters who observed these unions, however, simply described them as marriages. In turn, the term “native wife” could connote radically different things. For some it marked an African woman as the legitimate wife of a European man by customary law, even if the descriptor “native” implicitly stripped away some of the term's veneer. For others “native wife” was synonymous with concubine or worse yet, prostitute. Given the range and complexity of interracial sexual practices and arrangements, as well as the vastly different ways they were viewed and assigned meaning, the only way to fully understand them is to eschew neat binaries in favor of grappling with the gray area that most of these relationships fell into.

In the early decades of formal colonial rule, British authorities focused their prescriptive powers on one such gray area—concubinage between government officers and local women—because it was a vestige of the past that remained a stubbornly integral part of European men's lives in the African colonies in ways that officials believed diminished their officers' credibility and undermined good governance. These efforts hardly did away with interracial concubinage or customary marriages—practices that were blurred in the minds of many colonial bureaucrats and in the view of growing numbers of Gold Coasters—but they could no longer be publicly recognized without serious consequences for a European man's professional prospects and position in colonial society. As a result, such unions were typically clandestine, which in turn made them a wellspring of derision and shame, and for those

willing to expose them, a source of leverage. Thus, the precolonial-colonial divide marked an important shift in perception and practice: unions with European men rarely held out the possibility of conferring elevated status, respectability, and prestige on African women, even as some women sought to empower themselves through these relationships.

As the twentieth century opened, Gold Coasters were publicly confronted with the question of whether they would “continue indifferent when you see your sister, your daughters sold for *prostitutes*—while you aspire to rise and shout *Excelsior!*” This would not be the last time that the “traffic in ‘Native wives’” for European men would be posed as an obstacle to racial uplift.²⁴ Less than two decades later, white men’s sexual exploitation of the colony’s young women became the subject of intense public criticism in the African-owned Gold Coast press. Growing indigenous opposition was tied to how these relationships had changed over time, rendering them a source of racial denigration and moral degeneration. And yet, two decades later—in 1944 and 1945—four European officers, Brendan Knight among them, would take the seemingly unfathomable step of publicly wedding Gold Coast women in civil and church ceremonies. In Knight’s case as well as others, their civil unions were preceded by customary marriages that were clearly meaningful and binding to the parties involved. Thus these were years of vast change in terms of official policy, public opinion, and everyday practice. Africans and Europeans alike recalibrated their thinking and approach to these relationships in conversation with the shifting terrain of race relations and political power in the colony. But these changes should not obscure the degree to which interracial sexual relations remained an enduring feature of colonial society.

Crossing the Color Line explores how and why interracial unions in the Gold Coast became a source of colonial anxiety and anticolonial agitation during the first half of the twentieth century. Far from being death knells, regulation of and resistance to these relationships signify their staying power, while also serving as indicators of the changing social and political climate within which these relations had to be negotiated. Studies in a similar vein by Ann Stoler, Durba Ghosh, Emanuelle Saada, and Owen White, as well as important edited collections by Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, and Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, utilize the rubric of empire to challenge and complicate conventional understandings of how colonial empires work by showing how the management of sexuality and allied concerns were at the heart of imperial statecraft.²⁵ *Crossing the Color Line* shares these intentions, but it has other ambitions too. It seeks to more firmly situate the history it tells within the growing bodies of historical scholarship on race,

gender, sexuality, and nationalism in Africa, in order to rethink that history from a more African-centered perspective.

SEEING THE COLOR LINE IN COLONIAL GHANA

In titling this book *Crossing the Color Line*, I was mindful that for many readers, especially those in North America, it would call to mind W. E. B. Du Bois's prescient warning that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line," as well as familiar images of those early pioneers of desegregation—the Freedom Riders, Rosa Parks, and Mildred and Richard Loving, among many others—who crossed the color line at their own peril. My intention was to draw on the familiar in the context of a very different locale, that of colonial Ghana, in order to remind readers that the problem of the color line was—and still is—global, even as it played out in locally specific ways. This expansive view of the color line's reach is precisely what Du Bois intended to convey to his readers when he defined the problem as "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."²⁶ The starkness of the color line in places like southern Africa's settler colonies has rendered visible the racial crossings of people like Ruth and Seretse Khama in Botswana, and South African Communist Party members Ruth First and Joe Slovo, who, though white, were lifelong comrades of the African National Congress, in ways that resonate with US struggles. But ever the visionary, Du Bois understood that even in a place like West Africa, where whites formed a tiny minority, race relations and racism were critical issues nonetheless.

Yet, historians of Africa have only recently begun to grapple with race as a significant analytic category outside the context of settler colonialism. Hitherto, where questions of identity, social formations, and group interactions were concerned, the study of ethnicity and religion preoccupied Africanists. This has enriched our understanding of intra- and intergroup relations across the continent, and their relationship to cultural, political, economic, and social change. It has also left much to be said about the ways in which local histories of race have shaped the historical landscape of a continent that has for centuries been at the heart of the West's racializing discourses. Recent work by Chouki El Hamel on Morocco, Jonathon Glassman on Zanzibar, and Bruce Hall on the West African Sahel, as well as work by Eve Troutt Powell and others on Sudan and Egypt, has met this challenge by broadening our understanding of race in Africa beyond the white/black binary, and offering eloquent and insightful analyses of how Africans constructed and deployed their own ideas about race in ways that

upend the stubbornly persistent myth that racial discourses in Africa were the sole provenance of European colonizers.²⁷ In the process, these pioneering studies demonstrate that white settler colonialism was not the only African context in which race mattered.

While studies of race in Africa are beginning to shift their focus away from the settler colonies, some of the most compelling work probing the intersectional nature of sexuality and race in Africa returns our attention to them. Numerous scholars have skillfully explored how the racial politics of settler colonial rule and the sexual economies and ideologies that developed around African women and men mutually informed one another.²⁸ This is particularly evident in the robust literature on the region's so-called "black peril" scares—the periodic outbreak of panic in settler colonial communities over the sexual threat that black men allegedly posed to white women—which scholars widely agree had little or no correlation to actual sexual crimes.²⁹ As a result, we know much about the specter of "black peril" in southern Africa, but very little about intimacies between black men and white women there or elsewhere on the continent. The scholarly preoccupation with "black peril," moreover, has overshadowed and perversely normalized white men's pervasive sexual abuse of African women and in the process undermined its historical significance.

Crossing the Color Line adds another layer of complexity to the scholarship on race and sexuality in Africa by exploring interracial sexual relationships during the opening decades of the twentieth century in the Gold Coast, when a new emphasis was placed on the creation of racial boundaries as a means of consolidating colonial rule. This led to the introduction of segregated European residential areas and social clubs, the exclusion of Africans from higher posts in the administrative service and the West African Medical Service, race-based discrimination in salary and benefits that disadvantaged the colonial service's African officers, and efforts to bring interracial fraternizing to an end. Rather than being self-evident or inevitable, this turn says more about the inchoate nature of the colonial color line at this particular moment and the kind of racial work that was required to further develop and institutionalize it. Sexuality became an important site for delineating these boundaries, but it also emerged as a key site for contesting colonialism and exposing the intensifying racism at work even in administered colonies like the Gold Coast, which lacked large white settler populations. The colonial politics of race and sexuality had profound consequences for Africans and Europeans alike that set the parameters for the kinds of relationships that could develop across the color line, but these boundaries were continuously transgressed, contested and revised over time. Accordingly this

book presents the color line as a site of provocation and dissent, foregrounding the ways that it was crossed rather than simply the ways that it divided.

BRINGING COLONY AND METROPOLE
INTO A SINGLE ANALYTIC FIELD

Despite almost two decades of scholarship that has powerfully argued for bringing colony and metropole into a single analytic field, most studies of colonial-era interracial sexual relationships remain geographically bounded within either metropole or colony. By extending its analysis to the British ports, where scores of West African seamen who worked for the shipping lines that plied the Atlantic formed relationships with white women, *Crossing the Color Line* vividly illustrates how “the United Kingdom could be as much of ‘a contact zone’ as the colonies themselves.”³⁰ Intimate relations between black men and white women emerge here as a constitutive part of the history of interracial sex and empire in ways that have been obscured by the far more robust bodies of literature on relations between colonizing men and colonized women and on “black peril” scares. Although hardly racial utopias, Britain’s polyglot ports offered black men and white women intimate access to one another in ways that would have been unthinkable in the colonies. This was not lost on black men, who were also well aware that white men had nearly unfettered sexual access to black women in the colonies. Rather than signaling that the racialized sexual economies of metropole and colony were hermetically sealed off from one another, this awareness demonstrates just how entangled they were.

These connections were particularly evident during and after the 1919 race riots when black men were blamed not only for taking jobs away from white port dwellers, but also for taking *their* women. White women who partnered with black men were, in turn, widely disparaged in the press as lascivious race traitors. As the ports became tinderboxes of racial tension, black men were targeted for repatriation back to West Africa. Colonial authorities, however, acted quickly to ensure that they were not sent back with their white wives, whose presence, it was feared, would grossly undermine European prestige in the colonies. By bringing metropole and colony into a single analytic frame, *Crossing the Color Line* shows how “powerful sexual taboos [that] policed white female sexuality” were not the only mechanisms that kept white women and black men from openly coupling in the West African colonies.³¹ State power was also used, a move that says more about the vulnerability of colonial rule than it does about its omnipotence.

The 1919 race riots and the state's draconian response to them triggered a powerful critique, on the part of Gold Coasters, of the sexual politics of empire and its potential consequences for nation building. *Crossing the Color Line's* focus on these kinds of indigenous responses to interracial sexuality offers new vantage points from which to consider questions that have long been important to scholars of gender in colonial Africa, namely, the innovations, transformations, and challenges to gender relations occasioned by the colonial encounter and their political consequences. Established historical arguments about the "gender chaos" that gripped the Gold Coast during the late 1920s and 1930s, for instance, are given even greater historical depth by analyzing an earlier moment when the "wayward" behavior of some of the colony's young women with white men generated fears about national decline among the early vanguard of anticolonial nationalists at the close of World War I.³² Here, we see a clear example of how contestations over race, gender, and sexuality were deeply implicated in the rise of African nationalism decades before the heyday of political nationalism in the aftermath of World War II.

Anticolonial discourses about white men's sexual exploitation of African women, in turn, offer new insights into the diverse ways that male power holders engaged with the colonial state to assert their authority. Familiar narratives about traditional political authorities who collaborated with the colonial government to reassert their patriarchal control over "disobedient" women get a new twist by focusing on the ways that politically marginalized Gold Coasters discursively constructed the sexual libertinage of the colony's young women as proof of the demoralizing influences of European men, and by extension colonial rule, in order to bolster their own patriarchal claims to power.³³ But like other scholars who have explored similar questions, the goal here is to probe the experiences of African women in ways that attend to their subordination to both indigenous and colonial systems of patriarchal power without obscuring the extent to which they could also be agents of their own sexuality.³⁴ Indeed, the stories presented here show 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. It would be a fallacy, however, to suggest that these relationships were solely or only ever instrumental. As Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas rightly assert, affective ties could coexist alongside or even be forged through exchanges of material resources for sex.³⁵ Rachel Jean-Baptiste takes this argument a step further by insisting that historians of sexuality in Africa need to do more in the way of analyzing how sexuality is expressed through emotions, "such as desire,

pleasure, yearning, and pain,” so that we are better able to see how “African historical actors thought of and embodied their sexuality.”³⁶ *Crossing the Color Line* heeds this call by offering a multivalent reading of these relationships that takes their emotive aspects seriously.

The vast literature on empire and sexuality has made clear that colonial paranoia about interracial sexual relationships was the soft underbelly of Europe’s new imperial expansion, although such concerns, as Durba Ghosh has persuasively shown, were already evident in older corners of the empire.³⁷ As Europe’s limited governance in service of trade throughout much of Africa and Asia transformed over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century into formal colonization characterized by large-scale land acquisition and the expansion of governance structures, often achieved through military conquest, the dynamics of race relations palpably changed. Yet, the material conditions of dependence underpinning everyday interactions and intimacies between Africans and Europeans in British West Africa remained relatively unchanged. If in the workplace Native officers and clerks were the “hidden lynchpins of colonial rule,” in European officers’ bungalows and residential areas, African men, in their roles as cooks, stewards and servants, gardeners and watchmen, were the lynchpins of colonial life.³⁸ So, too, were African women who continued to meet the sexual and domestic needs of European men, even as colonial governments came to view—in different measures and in different ways—such relationships as a hindrance rather than a help to the new colonial dispensation. As a result, administrators and policy makers focused their attention on eradicating interracial concubinage. It is instructive that marriage and prostitution were generally not the targets of these efforts. The racial etiquette of colonialism across Africa was already so deeply entrenched by the turn of the century that interracial marriages sanctioned by civil or church authorities did not require prohibition—they were simply unheard of.³⁹ At the same time, the vast majority of European men were not permitted to bring their wives to the colonies, and so administrators tacitly, and sometimes explicitly, tolerated prostitution to ward off the even greater perceived threat of homosexuality.⁴⁰

Like heterosexual sex across the colonial color line, the first studies of homosexuality in the context of the colonies largely privileged the perspectives and experiences of the colonizer.⁴¹ This is beginning to change as scholars have increasingly turned their attention toward more African-centered explorations of homosexuality. Apart from documenting the indigeneity of same-sex practices in Africa, helping to counter the myth that homosexuality is a Western import, some of these studies underscore the contemporary

origins of the recent headline-grabbing homophobia in a number of African countries by analyzing how African communities responded, historically, to same-sex relationships and the individuals who practiced them, while also illuminating the contingent nature of these practices and the conceptual limitations of Western-derived categories for understanding them in Africa.⁴² Among these studies, Stephanie Newell's *The Forger's Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* and Neville Hoad's *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* point us in directions that must be pursued if there is to be a convergence between the new literature on (homo)sexualities in Africa and the older literature on empire and sexuality. Although the focus of *Crossing the Color Line* is on heterosexual sex across the color line—a result of the limits of my sources rather than an accurate reflection of the range of cross-racial sexualities in colonial Ghana—no book of this kind would be complete without acknowledging that interracial sexuality was managed in the colonies in ways that had much to do with colonial assumptions about the dangers posed by homosexuality to the “civilizing mission’s” moral credibility—a question I return to in the conclusion.

While colonial approaches to the management of sexuality were relational, they were hardly fixed or uniform. Rather, their form, severity, duration, and targets varied across different colonial contexts and shifted in response to the dangers those contexts presented. The timing of some of the better-known efforts to end concubinage, for instance, occurred in the wake of the forceful application of alien political rule over much of Africa and Asia. Far from confirming the legitimacy of imperial power, conquest at this scale entailed serious risks to European supremacy and thus constituted precisely the kind of moment in which concubinage was ripe for coming “under more direct attack.”⁴³ To minimize these risks, colonial regimes attempted to legitimize, institutionalize, and professionalize their administrations partly through sexual regulation. French Cambodia’s Governor-General Doumer attempted to whip his ragtag colonial service into shape at the turn of the twentieth century by taking “immediate steps to police the private lives of French administrators,” which included instructing them “to avoid relationships with native concubines.”⁴⁴ Similar injunctions against concubinage were soon made elsewhere in Indochina. While interracial concubinage was never officially prohibited in French West Africa, by the early 1920s colonial administrators were no longer openly encouraging the practice, although it remained common.⁴⁵ This change in attitude was spurred in part by colonial anxieties about the racial status and citizenship rights of the métis offspring of these often-temporary unions and fears that they would cohere into a group of “dangerous *déclassés*” instead of “indispensable auxiliaries.”⁴⁶

As Emanuelle Saada observes, in the context of France's second colonial empire, "the phenomenon of *métissage* acquired a new face: it became the 'métis question,' or the "métis problem," as it was frequently called.⁴⁷

The early twentieth century also witnessed significant changes in official attitudes and policies toward interracial sexual relationships throughout much of British Africa and in many of Britain's Asian and Pacific colonies.⁴⁸ Among the African colonies it was the Gold Coast government that led the effort to eradicate what its governor, Sir John Rodger, called "very undesirable relations being maintained by European government officers with Native Women" in a 1907 anticoncubinage circular.⁴⁹ Notably, Rodger's anxieties about concubinage were not tied to the progeny of these relationships. Thus, if strikingly similar colonial discourses, authored by the French, British, and Dutch alike, tied the dangers of *métissage* to the "métis problem" in vastly different colonial contexts, the case of the Gold Coast suggests a different trajectory altogether: colonial discourses could condemn interracial relationships, especially concubinage, as problematic without ever constructing "mixed-bloods" as a problem, let alone a problem in need of fixing through state intervention.⁵⁰ Indeed, amid the overabundance of colonial correspondence about interracial sexual relations in the Gold Coast, there is relative silence about their progeny. Where the British were concerned, it was domestic authorities and civil welfare groups in Britain who raised the alarm about the offspring of West African men and British women in port towns and cities like Liverpool and Cardiff. The alleged ill fate of such children—as outlined in the infamous "Fletcher Report" of 1930—was used to disparage their parents and to urge authorities to adopt stricter immigration and labor restrictions against West African seamen.⁵¹

When anxiety over multiracial children was expressed in the colony, it was by Gold Coasters—not Gold Coast administrators—who worried that white men abandoned their offspring "to the precarious protection of needy native families."⁵² These concerns, however, were not used to make demands on the colonial state's coffers, but rather to highlight the immoral behavior and paternal failings of white men as part of a wider challenge to the moral legitimacy of British colonial rule. Indeed, I have found only a few cases in which individual Gold Coasters petitioned the colonial government for aid in caring for multiracial children abandoned by their European fathers.⁵³ Concerns about the burden of care placed on local families underscore the germane point that such families generally assumed responsibility for these children. Even in cases where multiracial children were placed in care facilities, this did not typically signal an end to the maternal familial relationship, but rather an attempt to secure a better future for the child in question.

The tendency of local families to absorb these children and the enduring connections to African societies that absorption fostered, combined with the colonial state's noninterventionist approach and the nature of British nationality law—factors that are explored in greater detail in chapter 1—help to explain why multiracial people in the Gold Coast were not ultimately categorized separately from other Africans; why they did not seek out that distinction for themselves; and why they did not form sociopolitical organizations or mutual aid societies, as they did in numerous other colonial settings, including elsewhere in British Africa.⁵⁴ When they confronted the colonial state for increased rights, they did so as part of the larger vanguard of educated elites and anticolonial nationalists in the Gold Coast who hailed from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Thus the narrative that unfolds in *Crossing the Color Line* is not about multiracial people—for such a category of being had little salience in colonial Ghana for Africans and Europeans alike—rather this book is about the deep and enduring, but nonetheless shifting investments that Africans and Europeans made in interracial sexual relationships.

CURBING CONCUBINAGE IN THE GOLD COAST

While curbing concubinage in the Gold Coast was not a prophylactic solution to the thorny problems of racial classification and citizenship status or (presumed) disaffection and alienation that multiracial people raised in other colonial settings, it was certainly in keeping with the postconquest defensive posture assumed by other colonial governments in which imperial security was linked to sexual and racial order. In this regard the timing of Rodger's anticoncubinage decree, released just five years after the Asante Kingdom had finally been militarily defeated and incorporated into the colony in 1902, is telling. Far from signaling the triumph of British rule, we might better understand the end of the “pacification” campaign as marking the onset of even greater uncertainty as the British government was now faced with the challenge of administering the colony. Indeed, a culture of paranoia and doubt was evident throughout the colonial period in the government's efforts to protect itself against a range of perceived threats that was hardly limited to interracial concubinage. Officials actively sought to prevent African American repatriates from settling in the Gold Coast and barred the white wives of working-class Africans from doing the same because it feared their presence would be subversive.⁵⁵ For similar reasons, they restricted the entry of Dusé Mohamed, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other “race agitators” to the Gold Coast and sought to ban their “anti-British propaganda” from being disseminated there.⁵⁶ Even the showing of a film titled *The White*

Man's Grave in the colony set off a flurry of colonial correspondence over the “harmful” effect that films like this could have on “the half-educated and . . . illiterate communities of the African race,” a description that says more about the racist assumptions of colonial administrators than it does about the intelligence of Gold Coast filmgoers. Such concerns resulted in tighter import regulations on films and greater censorship powers.⁵⁷

Interracial concubinage was particularly troublesome, however, because unlike the aforementioned examples, it was a threat that came from within. In asserting that these were relationships that European government officers “maintained with” local women, Governor Rodger recognized the purposefulness and intent with which his officers made these arrangements. They were neither accidental nor occasional occurrences; indeed, it was “with much regret” that Rodger said he came to know of their “prevalence in this Colony and its Dependences.” Thus despite the phrase’s lack of precision, “undesirable relations” referred in the main to concubinage. In Rodger’s view, officers diminished their own authority by participating in these relationships and in the process compromised the government, a situation he declared was intolerable.⁵⁸ Rodger’s circular was followed two years later by the better-known and more widely disseminated Crewe Circular of 1909, which similarly sought to bring European colonial officers’ sex lives in line with the new racial politics of British colonial rule. The Colonial Office condemned interracial concubinage because, in the words of the secretary of state for the colonies, Lord Crewe, it was “not possible for any member of the administration to countenance such practices without lowering himself in the eyes of the natives, and diminishing his authority to an extent which will seriously impair his capacity for useful work in the Service.”⁵⁹

Although concubinage took many forms involving widely varying degrees of cohabitation, sexual and emotional intimacy, and domestic labor, colonial authorities assumed it was more likely to draw officers into compromising webs of social relations and obligation with local families precisely because it was an ongoing relationship, unlike prostitution or “occasional illicit acts,” as one Whitehall adviser put it.⁶⁰ Concubinage was thus held responsible for enmeshing officers into local families and communities that apparently they would have otherwise remained aloof from. This reasoning put the cart before the horse. Expanding our view of cross-racial intimacy beyond sex allows us to see how deeply embedded European officers were in the African communities they lived and worked among and how ensconced Africans were in the colonial households and workplaces they inhabited.⁶¹ The highly dependent relations officers formed with their cooks, stewards, headmen, clerks, and other “native” subordinates were the most common

conduits through which relations of concubinage came into being. That concubinage was so commonplace—and administrators agreed that it was—reflected the quotidian familiarity that already existed between Europeans and Africans in the colony, while also helping to further it. It also reflected the fact that at this fairly early juncture in Ghana’s colonial history, the color line needed to be drawn rather than defended.

Despite their shared intentions, in a number of striking ways the 1907 and 1909 circulars arguably did more to blur the line between colonized and colonizer than they did to clarify it. First, by disciplining the sexual habits of European officers, the circulars raised uncomfortable questions about whose sexuality was actually in need of “civilizing.” Second, by making concubinage a punishable offense the circulars put a premium on keeping these matters quiet, which in turn pushed some European men, “anxious to avoid publicity,” into native law courts where they could discretely settle their “so-called ‘woman palaver[s],’” as a German colonial official curiously noted in his 1912 legal survey of the Gold Coast.⁶² Incentivizing colonial officers to have their sexual misdeeds adjudicated by “native” authorities is hardly what Governor Rodger or Lord Crewe could have imagined when they issued their respective circulars. Compounding all of this was the fact that the circulars transformed concubinage charges into powerful tools of coercion and sabotage used by both Africans and Europeans to achieve a range of different goals, chief among them extorting money, redressing workplace grievances, and ruining rival officers’ careers. In the process they further undermined British authority and credibility, the very things they were charged with securing. The Crewe Circular’s unanticipated adverse consequences prompted the Colonial Office’s decision, in 1924, to let it “fade into oblivion,” and on these same grounds its distribution was officially discontinued in 1934, although concubinage remained a punishable offense for the duration of the colonial period.⁶³ While the circulars did not succeed in stopping interracial sexual relationships, they did push them into the recesses of colonial society where they were less visible—or so many Europeans thought. Ironically, then, British efforts to end concubinage helped to create the unseemly and illicit picture of interracial sexual relations that early Gold Coast nationalists increasingly began to draw in the pages of the colony’s lively indigenous press.

Not least by showing how these relationships hastened the end of empire, *Crossing the Color Line* contributes to the substantive and still-growing body of research that explores the myriad and changing ways that interracial sexual relations sustained and complicated Europe’s new imperialism.⁶⁴ These studies have unequivocally demonstrated that interracial sexual relations were

the subject of intense discussion, debate, informal and formal policy making, surveillance, and regulation underscoring their central importance to the colonial state. Yet, this prolific body of scholarship has often been less successful in illuminating what these relations meant for the colonized. *Crossing the Color Line* charts British colonial concerns, but it pushes beyond them to show how the “domain of interracial sexual relations”—conceived here as the sphere of knowledge, influence, and activity that constituted, informed, and transformed these relationships—was shaped to a far greater extent by the social practices and interests of the colonized, in this case Gold Coasters, than much of the scholarship has hitherto acknowledged.⁶⁵ Together Africans and Europeans coproduced sexuality as a “volatile symbol in debates about the character of national identity,” and thus the goal here is not to counterbalance European perspectives with African ones, but rather to show how the interaction between African and European approaches and practices influenced the historical trajectory of these relationships.⁶⁶

METHODOLOGY, SOURCES, AND ORGANIZATION

This book in a narrow sense is about interracial sexual relationships between African women and European men in the Gold Coast, African men and European women in the colonial metropolis, and the various ways in which these geographies of interracial sex collided and influenced one another. My aim in documenting these relationships, however, is not simply to elucidate patterns of continuity and change in the relationships themselves. I use them as an entry point for discussing colonial race relations more broadly and to explore the connective tissue between the racial and sexual politics of colonial rule and its contestation. I am able to do this because the archival link between sexuality and race is profound and persistent: references to sex consistently exposed the contested racial politics of colonialism in the Gold Coast and Britain. Official inquiries into European officers’ alleged sexual misconduct with African women, for instance, disclosed vivid details about the tensions between European and African government officers, while also illustrating the often petty but nonetheless vicious intraracial rivalries between European officers.⁶⁷ These grievances were strategically expressed through concubinage charges because government prohibition gave them teeth.

In drawing on the records generated by official inquiries into these charges, I have been mindful of the very particular kind of sources they are. Historical actors, whether African or European, who levied sexual misconduct charges against government officers were often motivated by reasons that had little to do with sex itself. Nor were they necessarily concerned

by the breach of racial boundaries that such relations represented, even when they exposed such relations in order to assert power over and within the colony's administrative racial hierarchy. Accusers often hoped that the charges would be an effective way of gaining the upper hand over officers with whom they had grievances—they were a means to an end. For their part, the accused were deeply invested in either refuting or minimizing the charges against them because their careers hung in the balance. Depending on the severity of the charges, government officers risked demotion, financial penalties, early termination of their contracts, or dismissal if found guilty. Official censure was compounded by the social disgrace, financial loss, and diminished prospects for future employment that could accompany these kinds of charges.

The expansive corpus of colonial correspondence generated by imperial efforts to manage, prohibit, or otherwise control sex across the color line dramatizes a point that Anjali Arondekar has made about the historical visibility, rather than the oft-assumed invisibility, of sexuality in the colonial archive. What is particularly compelling about Arondekar's argument is her insistence that we seek out "how sexuality is made visible in the colonial archive" in order to "paradoxically disclose the very limits of that visibility."⁶⁸ In the case of the Gold Coast, interracial sexuality was made visible in ways that clarified the colonial state's investments and inconsistencies in regulating sex across the color line among its own officers, who were subject to its anticoncubinage circulars. The significantly larger population of privately employed Europeans was not beholden to these directives, and as a result their relations with local women rarely made their way into the colonial archive. The increasingly virulent culture of racism and racial segregation that underpinned these circulars, however, stigmatized interracial relationships in ways that were surely palpable to all Europeans in the colony. Despite the risks, European men in government service and in private employment continued to pursue these relationships, making them a wider phenomenon than this book's emphasis on concubinage between European officers and African women reveals.

Sexuality was also made archivally visible in the ways that accused officers sought to defend themselves by compromising others, both African and European. In a number of cases accused men made similar allegations against their fellow officers in order to diffuse the charges against them, while others painted themselves as the victims of unscrupulous African men and women who blackmailed or thrust involuntary liaisons on them. Drawing on Arondekar's insights, it quickly becomes evident that while the colonial archive provides ample evidence of officers' exculpatory strategies,

which frequently drew on the lexicon of colonial racism that painted African women as sexually promiscuous and crafty, and African men as immoral and oppressive, these sources rarely opened up spaces for Africans, especially women, to reverse the gaze.

The voices of African men occasionally entered the evidentiary record as they sought to show how European government officers' sexual relationships with local women interfered with their official duties, biased their actions, or constituted a form of administrative and/or racial abuse. Although sexual relations with African women were supposedly at the heart of these inquiries, they were almost never directly questioned about their relationships with European men. Rather, African and European men spoke for or about them. Only in a few instances, when these women were involved in legal proceedings (as opposed to administrative inquiries), do their voices enter court records. When their voices do emerge, the nature of what they say is circumscribed by the venue of the court and the kinds of questions posed to them. Nonetheless, archival fragments reveal how some women used their relationships with European men to assert their independence and contest their subordination to African and European men. But opportunities for Africans to weigh in on these cases were quickly curtailed because the government became skittish about soliciting evidence from them about European officers' sexual relationships with local women—a fact that worked in the favor of a number of officers charged with sexual misconduct.

Given the scarcity of women's voices and perspectives, it is unwise to suggest that the few female voices we do hear spoke on behalf of anyone but themselves. To frame them as representative of women's experiences, rather than what they are—the experiences of individual women—would be nothing short of asking them to perform the function of the “native female informant,” just as European men had once demanded of their “sleeping dictionaries.”⁶⁹ I do, however, attempt to speak to their individual experiences and motives, when and where I can, by reading between the lines of what was said by and about them and by contextualizing their actions within wider patterns of gender relations and social change in the colony. If we have to work hard to recover the voices and experiences of African women, we must not let the overabundance of male voices minimize our analytical scrutiny of what they had to say. The stakes were high for the men involved in these cases—Europeans faced serious professional repercussions, but so too did Africans who made sexual misconduct charges against Europeans—and thus it is often easier to discern motive than truth in the colonial archive.

Other sources proved more capable of yielding a range of African insights and perspectives less mediated by colonial power and its archival

logic. The numerous African-owned Gold Coast newspapers published during the first half of the twentieth century make it possible to access African perspectives—albeit predominately those of African men—outside the colonial archive. While these press sources illuminate the growing discontent in the colony with interracial sexual relations, they also have much to say about the changing and challenging terrain of gender relations between African men and women. Letters, petitions, and oral histories were another rich but limited source for African perspectives. Interviews with two Ghanaian women, Mercy “Kwadua” Roth and the late Felicia Agnes Knight, both of whom married European men in the late colonial period, as well as interviews with the children and grandchildren of a number of the interracially married couples whose histories I take up in several chapters of the book, provided much-needed insight into the experiences of the ordinary and at times extraordinary women and men who, in part, made this history. Because of the sensitive, highly personal, and at times contested nature of the information revealed during these interviews and in the archives, I had to make difficult decisions about what information was appropriate to disclose. While some details might have made for a more gripping read, I refrained from revealing information that made living family members uncomfortable.

Taken together, the sources this book draws upon form a qualitatively and quantitatively rich, if uneven, corpus of evidence. Concubinage cases may have numbered in the tens rather than the hundreds, but the vast correspondence generated by individual cases speaks volumes about the anxieties these relationships generated. Likewise, the number of interracial families that fought to be repatriated to the Gold Coast during the interwar years was small, but their efforts nonetheless left sizable and rich archives. Indeed, one such family generated upward of five hundred pages of correspondence over the span of a decade. As a result of the nature of these sources, the chapters that make up *Crossing the Color Line* move across different registers, shifting from the micro-politics of individual concubinage cases to transatlantic networks of family, empire, and anticolonial resistance.

The first part of this book is organized around a number of key twentieth-century developments that had important implications for the ways in which interracial sexuality was managed in colonial Ghana. Chapter 1 offers a brief overview of shifting practices and perceptions of interracial relationships from precolonial times to the onset of formal British colonial rule. The 1907 and 1909 anticoncubinage circulars, and the spate of cases they spawned, are the subjects of chapters 2, 3, and 4.

My reconstruction and analyses of these cases are grounded in wide-ranging documentation found in official correspondence between the Gold Coast government and the Colonial Office. These files often contain sizable enclosures of supporting materials, including official inquiry reports, internal correspondence between different local government branches, exculpatory statements and other official letters written by accused men, eyewitness accounts, and court proceedings. These sources more easily yield official perspectives, but such perspectives were shaped by the actions of Gold Coasters who initiated sexual misconduct cases or who influenced how such cases unfolded. By attending to the motivations and actions of Gold Coasters and raising questions about how their varied involvements in these relationships could act as levers in their interactions with European officers, these chapters provide a more balanced set of perspectives than my sources, if read only along the archival grain, tend to reveal.⁷⁰ Apart from reading along and against the archival grain, I employ a third methodology that I call “reading along the seam,” by which I mean carefully and critically examining those places where archival accounts with disparate intentions agree on certain fundamentals. Locating instances when adversarial accounts meet up proved to be a particularly indispensable method for reconstructing the actions of those rendered voiceless in the archive and speculating about their intentions.

The African actors involved in these cases represent a cross section of society—fathers and uncles, literate government officers and clerks, chiefs, headmen, female load carriers, migrant women, mothers and daughters—and thus provide insights into how differently positioned Gold Coasters could at times challenge European officers in the often surprising ways that ultimately led, in part, to the Colonial Office’s decision to stop distributing its 1909 circular in 1934. Part 1 concludes with a fifth chapter that looks at a brief moment of reignited debate in 1945 among colonial administrators about whether Lord Crewe’s antinconcubinage circular should be revived in the wake of the four interracial marriages mentioned in the opening pages of this introduction. Set against the backdrop of World War II and the rampant interracial prostitution occasioned by the deployment of thousands of European and white American military personnel to the Gold Coast, which administrators were slow to address, the panic over the four interracial marriages underscores that the most dangerous form of heterosexual interracial sexuality was publicly legitimized intermarriage.⁷¹ In order to provide a sense of the long-term trajectory of the four interracial couples whose marriages were at the center of this firestorm, chapter 5 includes brief biographical sketches of each family, as well as a biography of Hans and

Mercy “Kwadua” Roth, who, after a long courtship and a customary marriage, were married in a civil ceremony on the eve of independence. The Roth’s history sheds light on intimate relations between privately employed European men and African women in the Gold Coast.

Part 2 begins by moving across the Atlantic to the British ports at the end of World War I to reveal how the raced and gendered systems of sexual access in the Gold Coast and Britain collided in ways that vivify, in the words of Antoinette Burton, “how imperial power was staged at home and how it was contested by colonial ‘natives’ at the heart of the empire itself.”⁷² After being subjected to unprecedented forms of racial violence during the riots that swept the British seaports in 1919, black men were targeted for repatriation to the colonies. While some men were willing to return home, they insisted that their white wives go with them. Chapter 6 unearths the sustained but failed attempts of these interracial couples to settle in West Africa and provides vivid insights into the vexed position of white women in the colonies and in the colonial imagination. Thwarted by colonial policies designed to preserve white prestige by keeping the white wives of working-class Africans out of the colonies, these men could be repatriated only if they agreed to leave their wives and multiracial children behind. In this instance colonial concerns shaped metropolitan policy making with often-tragic consequences for interracial couples in Europe. Drawing on interviews, petitions, and official colonial correspondence, the human toll of these policies is dramatically illustrated through the story of the Annans, an Afro-German family that fought for over a decade to settle in the Gold Coast.

Chapter 7 returns to the Gold Coast to explore how the 1919 race riots in Britain triggered public condemnation in the colony’s African-owned press of the perceived double standard that allowed white men to have their way with African women in the colonies, while black men were beaten for marrying or cohabiting with white women in Britain. It was not long before Gold Coast commentators took European men to task for sexually exploiting the colony’s young women. While unseemly relationships between white men and African women became a focal point of anticolonial agitation, chapter 8 argues that the relationships many leading figures of African independence formed with white women during their sojourns in Britain were central to the struggle against colonialism, even as they complicated it. These deeply intertwined Black Atlantic histories illuminate the profound, yet little-known connection between interracial sexual relations and anticolonial nationalism among West Africans—a fitting historical note on which to end a book about interracial sexual relationships during the colonial period in Ghana.

In charting the continuities and changes that shaped interracial sexual relationships in the Gold Coast, *Crossing the Color Line* demonstrates that these relationships were subject to increasing colonial control and the raced and gendered conventions of their time. But they also emerged as a key space in which these conventions were both accommodated and challenged—in small and big ways—by Gold Coasters who saw in them all of the contradictions, inconsistencies, inequalities, and, at times, opportunities that characterized colonialism. Thus the tale that unfolds across these pages joins together an analysis of the carnal politics of imperial rule in the Gold Coast and Britain with an analysis of how Africans interpreted these relationships and attempted to assert control over them. Race and sex often intersected in combustible ways precisely because racial and sexual boundaries were charged with regulating colonial life even as they were continually crossed. In the process of illuminating the convergence of these competing realities, I hope to tell a layered story about the complex nature of everyday race relations in the Gold Coast, which neither mirrored the extreme form of racial segregation that existed in the settler colonies nor was free of the culture of racial privilege and hierarchy that underpinned it. But like the settler colonies, sexuality was a dense transfer point for relations of (racial) power in the Gold Coast, to borrow from Foucault, and thus became an active locus of contestation.