SCANDAL AND SECRECY IN THE HISTORY OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT. For historians of empire, scandals provide a useful entry point for investigating how the operations of imperial power were contested and re-worked in moments of crisis. Yet, existing scholarship on imperial scandal consists mostly of case studies which do not always reflect on the larger trend of which they are a part. This essay draws on six accounts of imperial scandals to produce a general picture of the characteristics and functions of scandals in the historiography of the nineteenth-century British empire. What this comparison suggests is that imperial scandals possessed distinctive stakes and seem, as a result, to have represented periodic ruptures in longer-term patterns of local silence and complicity. Scandals, if used cautiously, can therefore provide evidence to support ongoing discussions about the logic of colonial concealment. At the same time, scandals also remind us that publicity is not a simple cure-all. By including a wider range of actors and non-governmental sources, future studies of scandal might elucidate the political limits of transparency, as well as exploring how imperial subjects negotiated gendered and racialized access to public and political platforms.

Scandal is one of those rare subjects which graces the covers of tabloids as well as the pages of academic journals. Probably best defined as publicized transgression (though the nature and scale of the public involved might vary), scandal is synonymous with disgrace, discredit and damaged reputations.[1] From a non-participant's perspective, scandal partakes of the guilty pleasures of gossip, furnishing audiences with titillating details of individual wrongdoing. Yet, scandals also touch directly on some of the central questions and concerns of the social sciences. Scandals provoke

[1] For this definition, see Ari Adut, *On scandal: moral disturbances in society, politics, and art* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 11.

conversations about community, identity, and social norms which have long engaged anthropologists and sociologists.[2] For political scientists writing in the shadow of Watergate, scandals raise fundamental questions about media, publicity, and representative democracy.[3]

Historians, too, have not been immune to scandal's allure. Scandals intimately affect individuals, but they can also have wider social and political ramifications. By promising to bridge the gap between personal experiences and large-scale transformations, scandals invite historians to make ambitious arguments about structure, agency, continuity, and change. Because scandals involve transgressions of social norms, they suggest not only what some of these norms might have been, but how they were actively constructed and contested by historical agents. Since these moral transgressions frequently involve the inappropriate commingling of 'public' and 'private' roles, scandals are useful for historians interested in exploring the intersections between the shifting domains of 'public' and 'private' life, particularly historians of sexuality, gender, and the family.[4] Finally, the attraction of scandals is surely owing, to some extent, to how well-documented they tend to be. Print media has historically played a vital role in creating and propagating scandals, meaning that scandals feature heavily in newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and satirical images.[5] This proliferation of discussion and debate led some people to articulate opinions in printed and manuscript form which might otherwise have remained unsaid. In cases where scandals are the subject of government investigation or form the basis of legal proceedings, they produce voluminous records documenting their every twist and turn. Whether for prurient, intellectual, or pragmatic reasons, then, scandals are tantalizing topics of historical enquiry.

Historians of empire have been particularly seduced by the study of scandals, and the following review focuses on the analytical function of scandals within the historiography of the British empire. For one thing, scandals provide compelling demonstrations of the violence and

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[2] Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and scandal', *Current Anthropology*, 4 (1963), pp. 307-316. For a review of the place of scandal within anthropological theory, see Sally Engle Merry, 'Rethinking gossip and scandal', in Donald Black, ed., *Toward a general theory of social control* (2 vols., London 1984), I, pp. 271-302.
[3] Michael Schudson, 'Notes on scandal and the Watergate legacy', *American Behavioral Scientist,* 47 (2004), pp. 1231-1238.
[4] Anna Clark, *Scandal: the sexual politics of the British constitution* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), pp. 1-2.
[5] On 'mediated scandals', see John B. Thompson, *Political scandal: power and visibility in the media age* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 31.

misgovernment at the heart of empire, helping to dispel the rosy glow of imperial nostalgia.[6] Because scandals foisted distant places and events on domestic attention, they have also come to represent a popular mechanism for evaluating how the British public viewed empire in the past, contributing to longstanding debates about the impact of empire within Britain itself.[7] Finally, by tracing how scandal in the colonies surfaced in the metropole, historians can map how people and information travelled between places and assess the 'geographies of connection' (to borrow historical geographer Alan Lester's phrase) which constituted empire.[8] Since these represent some of the central concerns of recent scholarship on the British empire, it is no surprise that studies of scandal have become so popular.[9]

Despite these attractions, much of the potential of this strain of literature remains untapped. Studies of scandals often take the form of case-studies or regionally focused accounts, which do not build on one another or reflect on the larger trend of which they are a part. Many of these historical examples remain divorced from the social theory of scandal, meaning that the concepts underpinning their analysis are sometimes only minimally developed. A review of the scholarship on scandal, which would identify overarching patterns and put them into dialogue with interdisciplinary approaches, is long overdue. Such a review must ask why we continue to study scandal, and what we hope to learn from it. How might we expand on the findings of existing histories of scandal, rather than simply adding case studies which replicate and provide further support for their findings? The objective of this review is to suggest the potential usefulness of a systematic comparison of imperial scandals during this period.

This essay reviews six accounts of imperial scandals published over the last decade, with the aim of producing a general picture of the characteristics and functions of scandals in the

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[6] Oliver Turner, 'Global Britain and the narrative of empire', *The Political Quarterly*, 90 (2019), p. 727.
[7] John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and empire: the manipulation of* B*ritish public opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984); Bernard Porter, *The absent-minded imperialists: empire, society, and culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *At home with the empire: metropolitan culture and the imperial world* (Cambridge, 2006).
[8] Alan Lester, *Imperial networks: creating identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001), p. 5. For more on the idea of imperial networks, see Alan Lester, 'Imperial circuits and networks: geographies of the British empire', *History Compass*, 4 (2006), pp. 124-141.
[9] Tony Ballantyne, 'The changing shape of the modern British empire and its historiography', *The Historical Journal*, 523 (2010), p. 451.

historiography of the nineteenth-century British empire. The first section summarizes different scholarly perspectives on scandal's role as a catalyst of change during a period of imperial expansion and reform at the turn of the nineteenth century. The second section identifies common patterns as revealed by these case studies and determines what traits are uniquely or distinctively associated with imperial scandals. Based on these shared attributes, the essay concludes with a reflection of what we might learn through a systematic comparison of imperial scandals during this period. At a time when the discovery of a 'migrated archive' of imperial records in Buckinghamshire has renewed scholarly interest in archival silences and omissions, scandals represent one possible entry point for thinking about aspects of imperial history which might have gone unrecorded. At the same time, scandals can also offer an effective counterbalance to this interest in secrecy by reminding us that openness and transparency are not political cure-alls. Through a systematic comparison of scandals, we might better understand the conditions in which exposure does or does not provoke change and identify the extent to which colonised subjects were able to exploit scandal's subversive potential. By taking this synthetic, comparative approach, historians might contribute to ongoing interdisciplinary debates on the effects of secrecy and transparency in political life, as well as continuing to elucidate the role of individual agency in historical change.

I

Sociologist Ari Adut has identified two discrete approaches to the study of scandal. The first, 'objectivist' approach treats scandal as a window onto underlying structures; to use Adut's metaphor, scandal is the tip of the iceberg alerting the historian to a larger phenomenon. The second, so-called 'constructivist' approach treats scandals as socially constructed phenomena which reflect and contribute to cultural divisions. According to this view, scandals are most illuminating for how they simultaneously express and inform changing values and social conventions.[10] This second approach parallels, to some extent, the use which cultural historians have made of moments of crisis or

[10] Adut, *On scandal*, p. 9.

exception – a cat massacre, for example – to delineate the imaginative universe of historical actors.[11] Where current approaches to scandal differ, however, is in the performative power which they accord to scandals themselves. For, as historians and social scientists have increasingly come to recognize, controversies are not simply 'lenses' onto a deeper socio-historical reality but are instead constitutive of that reality. Scandals, to put it another way, are best conceptualized as processes; they develop their own internal dynamics and unfold in unanticipated ways, with unexpected effects.[12]

Though distinct, historians tend to employ 'objectivist' and 'constructivist' approaches in combination, using scandals to expose both material realities and *mentalités.* While it is not always possible to verify the intimate details at the heart of a scandal (particularly where sex is concerned), studies of scandal normally attempt to shed light on key features of contemporary society. To varying degrees, historians have used scandal to understand: first, how imperial power operated in practical terms; second, the norms and conventions which framed its implementation; and third, how these frameworks were contested and re-worked in moments of crisis. Scandal, in other words, reveals both the misdeeds of imperial officials, and the ways in which policymakers, legislators and the public at large grappled with the practical and ethical dilemmas unleashed by these incidents.

Perhaps the most widely cited book on scandal for this period is Nicholas Dirks's *The scandal of empire: India and the creation of imperial Britain* (2006).[13] The book begins in the late eighteenth century, when the East India Company's assumption of territorial control in Bengal created new opportunities for profit. Dirks's concern is to trace the process whereby the reputation for violence and corruption which attached to the Company in the eighteenth century was displaced onto the population of India in the nineteenth, as British condemnations of Company malfeasance gave way to a fixation on perceived Indian misdeeds such as *sati, thagi,* and hook-swinging. As Dirks put it, '[w]here once scandal referred to the exploits of the colonizers, scandal now began to refer to the lives of the colonized.'[14] For Dirks, the impeachment trial of governor-general Warren Hastings marks the

[11] Robert Darnton, *The great cat massacre and other episodes in French cultural history* (New York, NY, 1984). For more on the use of incidents as 'social texts', see Sarah Maza, 'Stories in history: cultural narratives in recent works in European history', *American Historical Review,* 101 (1996), p. 1498.
[12] Cyril Lemieux, 'A quoi sert l'analyse des controverses', *Mil neuf cent* 25 (2007), pp. 2-3.
[13] Nicholas Dirks, *The scandal of empire: India and the creation of imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).
[14] Ibid., p. 297.

turning point in this process, the moment at which, through their prosecution of Hastings, the British public congratulated themselves on effectively cleansing their empire of scandal, forgetting that scandal was inherent to empire itself. As Dirks sees it, the scandal of empire lies not simply in imperial misdeeds committed by the East India Company. Importantly, it also encompasses the act of forgetting which was made possible through British control over the narrative of Indian history in the nineteenth century, according to which the impetus for imperial expansion was not British greed and ambition but Indian depravity. To quote Dirks, '[t]he burden of empire was placed squarely on the shoulders of the colonized. The shrouding of this fact is the scandal that should not be allowed to repeat itself.'[15] Perhaps the most significant insight which historians have gleaned from Dirks's analysis is the idea that scandal, rather than provoking change, can in fact obscure the need for change in the long term by disguising systemic problems as individual aberrations. Thus, the scandals of the British empire in India in fact paved the way, in Dirks's view, for a more lasting system of imperial exploitation.

Dirks's vision of imperial scandal exemplifies to some extent anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of 'social drama'. According to Turner, crises caused by non-fulfilment or breach of social norms are worked out through informal or institutionalized processes which allow people to come to terms with them; these processes involve convincing performances of confrontation and resolution which reassure audiences that the issues at stake have been satisfactorily addressed.[16] As social historian Sarah Maza interprets it, '[a]t the heart of the social drama, the phase of ritual or juridical 'redress' usually involves passage through a "liminal" stage, in which normal rules are suspended and transgression occurs, clarifying social norms and making way for the reintegration of social values.'[17] In Turner's view, social dramas are characterized by continuity as much as change; despite alterations in the political field, crucial norms and relationships persist.[18] While the world might temporarily be turned upside down, ultimately this period of reversal serves to reaffirm the status quo. To quote

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[15] Ibid., p. 336.
[16] Victor Turner, *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human society* (Ithaca, NY, 1974), pp. 37-41.
[17] Maza, 'Stories in history', p. 1498.
[18] Turner, *Dramas, fields, and metaphors,* p. 43.

Dirks, 'public scandals become ritual moments in which the sacrifice of the reputation of one or more individuals allows many more to continue in their scandalous ways'.[19] Though Dirks concedes that such scandals might produce 'minimal safeguards and protocols', he is pessimistic about the degree to which the eruption of scandal prevents similar misdeeds from taking place in future.[20]

In Kirsten McKenzie's *Scandal in the colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820-1850* (2004), to the contrary, scandal is presented as an active force shaping social and political change in the colonies during this period. According to McKenzie's account, scandal was important to the history of the settler colonies in two ways. At the level of the individual, scandals provided a means for men and women to compete for status, thereby helping to define the boundaries of the burgeoning middle class. At the national level, the language of scandal was an obstacle for settler communities which had to be appropriated or overturned if these communities were to assert themselves as forming a creditable part of the larger British world. As McKenzie puts it, '[b]y their defences against scandal, the imperial bourgeoisie not only laid down what it meant to be a decent woman or man, they also claimed the colonial world as a proper realm for the self-respecting'. [21] Beginning with a case study centring on the rumoured pregnancy by incest of Jane Elizabeth Wylde, daughter of the Cape colony's Chief Justice Sir John Wylde, McKenzie introduces the central themes of the book regarding how personal reputations became linked to questions of social change. In successive chapters, she demonstrates how men and women defended their reputations in genteel society and in the law courts, with particular emphasis on the contests surrounding male commercial credit and female sexual virtue. She then considers how scandals relating to slavery and convict transportation affected the relationship between colony and metropole, and ultimately, how settler colonies adapted the language of moral reform to their own purposes to erase the stain of unfree labour. McKenzie shows how reputation 'had a crucial influence not only on the chances in life of individual men and women but also on the direction of imperial policy and development.'[22] Cumulatively, scandals in the colonies had a creative force which helped to transform Australia and South Africa in the nineteenth century.

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[19] Dirks, *Scandal of empire*, p. 30.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal in the colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820-1850* (Carlton, 2004), p. 45.
[22] Ibid., p. 180.

McKenzie recently returned to the theme of scandal in *Imperial underworld: an escaped convict and the transformation of the British colonial order* (2015). Here, she produces a detailed case study of a man at the centre of a series of overlapping scandals, an individual variously known as Alexander Loe Kay or William Edwards. This Englishman, originally transported to the Antipodes for horse theft, would become a notary and a considerable thorn in the side of the governor of the Cape, Charles Somerset. Ultimately Edwards would be transported again for seditious libel and would take his own life while confined as a political prisoner on tiny, isolated Norfolk Island. The ups and downs of Edwards's life in the colonies are used as a window onto a period of political ferment, as commissions of enquiry at the Cape and in Australia probed the inner workings of colonial governments, looking for the truth behind allegations of corruption and petty despotism. Through the controversies that Edwards set in motion, McKenzie considers how problems which arose in the colonies were handled in the colonial office in London at a time when covert sources of information were coming increasingly under fire. She provides a detailed account of the prize slave scandal, wherein Edwards played a vital part in bringing to light the corruption underpinning the system of assigning 'liberated' Africans to Cape Town employers. This is followed by an investigation of the charges of seditious libel which were brought against Edwards after he sent two insulting letters to the governor, Charles Somerset. McKenzie concludes by narrating Edwards's transportation to New South Wales, his attempted escape, and his ignominious end.

Edwards was an enigmatic figure whose motives are difficult to parse; as McKenzie points out, many of his contemporaries doubted his sanity, or dismissed him as a troublemaker.[23] Yet, the Edwards' trial had a significant influence on the commission of inquiry at the Cape, which in turn secured the removal of Governor Charles Somerset and the introduction of British law into a formerly Dutch colony. McKenzie's goal is thus to recover 'adventurers' like Edwards from the margins of history, showing how individuals who were neither colonial officials nor humanitarian activists nevertheless had an impact in a period of legal and constitutional transition when accusations made against powerful officials were taken very seriously indeed. As McKenzie phrased it, '[o]stensibly

[23]Kirsten McKenzie, *Imperial underworld: an escaped convict and the transformation of the British colonial order* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 12-15.

localised scandals about particular individuals could provide powerful traction and exert tactical influence in much wider and interlinked battles over imperial policy and metropolitan politics across distinct geographic locations.'[24] Approaching imperial reform in this way produces a rather different picture wherein personal squabbles and self-interested and unpredictable motives played just as much a part in bringing about change as liberal ideals.

Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford's *Rage for order: the British empire and the origins of international law, 1800-1850* (2016) is also about legal reforms in the nineteenth century, though this book focuses more on the formative influence of these imperial developments for the history of international law than on scandal per se.[25] Much of the book is dedicated to contexts where imperial and international order, and 'inside' (municipal) and 'outside' (international or interimperial) law, intersected. For example, Benton and Ford trace how the language of protection laid the foundation for the extension of British jurisdiction into the Sri Lankan interior and the Ionian Islands; examine the empire's patchy and partial attempts to regulate slave trading in the Atlantic and piracy in Southeast Asia; and chart the creation of regional orders through the sponsorship of nascent state sovereignties in the Pacific Islands and Rio de la Plata. Yet, scandal plays an important part in this vision of an ad hoc and incomplete project of legal reform, since Benton and Ford see imperial scandals, and the 'despotism talk' associated with them, as the provocation behind this rash of reforming activity.[26]

To substantiate this point, Benton and Ford provide two case studies which, they argue, illustrate the generative role that scandal could play in imperial settings. The first case study recounts the story of a coup in New South Wales in which Governor William Bligh was arrested then expelled from the colony based on his disregard for local property rights and his interference in the administration of law. The fact that the leader of the coup was cashiered rather than executed, Benton and Ford argue, suggests the willingness of the British government to listen to this kind of 'despotism talk'. In their words, 'the discussion of despotism in the court-martial of rebel Lieutenant George

[24] Ibid., p. 284.
[25] Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for order: the British empire and the origins of international law, 1800-1850* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).
[26] Ibid., p. 14.

Johnston in 1811 comprises one of the most detailed public articulations of colonial expectations of good governance and subjecthood in the empire', and laid the foundations for the reconstitution of courts in New South Wales in 1823.[27] The second case study centres on the brutality of slaveowners in the Leeward Isles, beginning with an incident in Nevis where thirty-two enslaved men and women were flogged in the public marketplace at the command of Edward Huggins and his sons. Huggins's acquittal sparked controversy in Britain and was perceived as a failure on the part of the magistracy, the jury, and the courts in the Caribbean to control the excesses of slavery. The subsequent execution of slaveowner Arthur Hodges in Tortola the following year, on similar charges, did little to comfort contemporaries given Hodges's history of past abuses. These twin scandals consequently inspired a wide-ranging inquiry into legal practice in the Caribbean.[28]

Having laid out these two examples of imperial scandal, Benton and Ford examine the responses which these and other scandals inspired, namely, the commissions of inquiry which were designed to 'cut through the dysfunction of multistranded imperial communication networks' and investigate the state of affairs on the ground in Britain's colonies.[29] Benton and Ford focus on Bigge's commissions to New South Wales and the Cape to demonstrate the extent to which commissioners could become implicated in and influenced by local scandals; as they phrase it, '[r]umors of corruption, spying, homosexuality, and torture were plucked from dinner table gossip and seditious pamphlets and projected into sober cases for imperial reform.'[30] Benton and Ford then use the commissions of inquiry in the West Indies to demonstrate how contingent and messy the attempt at legal reforms could be in practice, resulting in deepening beliefs about the inevitability of legal diversity across the empire and the corresponding need for strong Crown authority.[31] Benton and Ford, like McKenzie, therefore see scandal as having significant consequences for constitutional thought and legal practice in the nineteenth century.

[27] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[28] Ibid., p. 49.
[29] Ibid., p. 60.
[30] Ibid., p. 70.
[31] Ibid., p. 79.

In their book, Benton and Ford also allude to the scandal surrounding the first British governor of Trinidad, Thomas Picton, the case study which lies at the heart of James Epstein's *Scandal of colonial rule: power and subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution* (2012). [32] Epstein's point of departure is Picton's 1806 trial for the judicial torture of a woman of colour named Louisa Calderon, a *cause célèbre* which, Epstein argues, sheds light on central features of British imperialism in the Atlantic world. Beginning with an overview of the trial and its cultural resonances in Britain, Epstein proceeds to use the biography of William Fullarton, Picton's opponent, to illustrate the dynamics of 'imperial careering'; in the process, he shows how the mobility of imperial officials shaped imperial ideas and practice in meaningful ways, setting the conditions for Fullarton's opposition to Picton's authoritarian style of rule. Epstein then describes the operation of Picton's regime in Trinidad, situating his use of violence within contemporary ambiguity about zones of conquest and legitimate modes of colonial governance. This is followed by an account of the mechanisms through which Picton's actions were brought home to Britain, as Epstein examines how the opposing sides in the scandal produced competing narratives based on differential access to colonial records, as well as highlighting the role of the 'radical imperial underworld' (in the form of journalist Pierre Franc McCallum) in bringing these grievances to metropolitan attention. Epstein ends by moving away from the Picton scandal to think about Trinidad's significance within the British empire as an experimental space for replacing slavery with free labour, as well as tracing the legacy of the Picton scandal in repressing a rumoured slave uprising, the so-called Christmas conspiracy, a few years later. Like Hastings, Picton was ultimately exonerated, while his accuser, William Fullarton, died under suspicious circumstances; Louisa Calderon, for her part, returned to Trinidad to die in poverty.[33] Meanwhile, the scandal of empire persisted as slavery was replaced by other forms of indentured labour which were not, as contemporaries themselves recognized, unambiguously free. While Epstein sees the Picton trial as evidence that empire was 'bound to come home', he nevertheless doubts the extent to which scandals brought about real change. As he puts it, 'empire's

[32] James Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule: power and subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2012). For Benton and Ford's interpretation of the Picton scandal, see Benton and Ford, *Rage for order,* pp. 28-29.
[33] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* pp. 267-70, p. 42.

"return home" in scandal's guise registered a sense of dislocation within metropolitan culture: an anxiety that was neither simply subversive nor supportive of the imperial project but that sought resolution, inviting a reconfirmation of colonial will.'[34]

Finally, a recent book on sexual abuse allegations in the Pacific takes the literature on scandal in a different direction, using a case study to reflect, not just on patterns of sexual abuse and its disclosure, but also on historical methodology and the relationship between the historian and her subjects. *Gender, power and sexual abuse in the Pacific: Rev. Simpson's 'improper liberties'* (2018), Emily Manktelow's new book, recounts the story of the Reverend Edward Simpson, superintendent of the South Seas Academy school for missionary children on the island of Eimeo offshore of Tahiti, who was charged with sexually abusing his female pupils.[35] Long-circulating rumours about Simpson's conduct eventually reached the Mission Committee in London, who dispatched a representative to investigate. A committee of examination, comprised of local missionaries, was convened to hear testimony and devise a plan of action. The committee determined that Simpson's guilt had not been sufficiently established but warned that his future conduct would be scrutinized; Reverend Simpson was later ordered to leave the island as a result of drunken and disorderly behaviour. For Manktelow, the scandal serves to 'open a window onto a past world structured around the hypocrisies of moral authority, and the supposed superiority of white, middle-class men.'[36] The members of the Committee were explicit that Simpson was to be given the benefit of the doubt, whereas the moral and sexual characters of his accusers were put under a microscope. For Manktelow, this is a story of troubling continuities, reflecting how sexual abuses in the present are perpetrated by those with authority and systematically ignored or concealed by institutions.[37] In her words, '[t]his book's mission is to give voice to the 'young ladies' in this case – to allow them, and their perspective, to shape the truth of their experience, if only in this historical moment.'[38] While Manktelow is committed to this position, she is nevertheless reflective of the problems involved in

[34] Ibid., p. 4.
[35] Emily Manktelow, *Gender, power, and sexual abuse in the Pacific: Rev. Simpson's 'improper liberties'* (London, 2018).
[36] Ibid., p. 7.
[37] Ibid., p. 33.
[38] Ibid., p. 5.

'giving voice'. These problems of representation are particularly acute in this instance, where the young ladies themselves might have preferred not to be remembered as victims of Simpson's abuse, and where the truth of these charges is impossible to ascertain given that Simpson maintained his innocence to the very last. Throughout, Manktelow is concerned with the power of historians to construct narratives, and the implications that this has for our understanding of the past. The issue of narrative is one which historians have grappled with for decades, but the problem is intensified when analysing scandals, where individuals can all too easily slip into the categories of victim and villain, innocent and guilty.[39]

Taken together, these disparate accounts of imperial scandals at the turn of the nineteenth century paint a picture of a world in flux. Through scandal, we see the practical problems produced by a rapidly expanding empire, and the anxieties and uncertainties which coalesced around these issues. By the close of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Britain's empire was made up of a plural, imperfectly integrated patchwork of territories across which British merchants, missionaries, settlers, soldiers, and officials were dispersing in ever greater numbers. This widening sphere of activity produced new social and economic opportunities, but it was also the scene of abuse and exploitation. Yet is there anything specifically imperial about this kind of misconduct? Did it matter that Reverend Simpson's sexual harassment of his female students took place on an island in the Pacific instead of in England? The following section compares domestic and imperial scandals and identifies the traits which made imperial scandals distinctive.

II

One conspicuous feature of imperial scandals is the prevalence of violence. Although viewed largely in terms of the constitutional debates that it generated, in Benton and Ford's analysis the savagery of slaveowners looms large: the brutal floggings ordered by Edward Huggins and his sons, the torture and murder of enslaved people perpetrated by Arthur Hodges. Meanwhile, the piquet sits right at the heart of Epstein's story; Picton was indicted for ordering Louisa Calderon to balance on a wooden peg with her wrist suspended from the ceiling by a rope. Moving outwards from this single

[39] Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, MD, 1973).

act, Epstein demonstrates that Calderon's torture was symptomatic of a regime of terror characterized by the liberal use of floggings and summary executions: '[t]he figure of the gallows looms prominently in contemporary accounts of his rule', Epstein writes, 'a constant reminder of his supreme authority.'[40] Epstein emphasizes that the context for Picton's coercive style of government was the broader military and ideological threat of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, as well as the exposed and unsettled nature of Trinidad itself, recently conquered from Spain and vulnerable to incursion from nearby Venezuela. Yet, Epstein also explains Picton's brutality in terms of a 'code of colonial permissibility'.[41] This view parallels recent work which foregrounds the violent character of Britain's empire in India.[42] Use of corporal punishment in the colonies contrasts noticeably with prevailing practices in Britain, where transportation and imprisonment were increasingly preferred to whipping, branding, and hanging.[43]

At the same time, the clearest pattern across these disparate scandals is that sex usually figures in one way or another, and this emphasis on sex is, in many ways, not specifically imperial. The recurrence of sex as a central theme reflects the place of gender and respectability in nineteenth-century political life. Rumours of unruly households carried troubling political implications; at a time when the household was commonly viewed as a microcosm for the larger community, men who could not maintain order within their own homes did not make promising candidates for positions of public responsibility. Epstein illustrates nicely how in the context of the Picton trial, the household arrangements of the two main protagonists, William Fullarton and Thomas Picton, played into their political contest; whereas Fullarton was said to be in the thrall of his wife, Marianne, Picton was accused of having an illicit relationship with his housekeeper Rosette Smith, a woman of colour who allegedly used the dalliance to extract government perquisites.[44] Pierre Franc McCallum, the radical

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[40] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 110.
[41] Ibid., p. 90.
[42] Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (Cambridge, 2010); Jordanna Bailkin, 'The Boot and the Spleen: When Was Murder Possible in British India?' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 2 (2006), pp. 462-493; Martin Wiener, *An Empire on Trial: Race, Murder, and Justice under British Rule, 1870-1935* (Cambridge, 2008); Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (Abingdon, 2010).
[43] J. A. Sharpe, *Judicial punishment in England* (London, 1990), p. 47; V.A.C. Gatrell, *The hanging tree: execution and the English people 1770-1868* (Oxford, 1994), p. 328; Michael Ignatieff, *A just measure of pain: the penitentiary in the industrial revolution, 1750-1850* (London, 1978), p. 210.
[44] Ibid., p. 148, 152-154.

journalist, saw in Picton's 'moral decadence' a political failing: '[i]n his portrayal of Picton's appetite for forbidden fruit, the governor's life of moral depravity was brought to bear on his regime of public despotism.'[45] The interpenetration of private and public reputations was characteristic of a political world wherein gentlemanly conduct in private life was equated with political integrity in the public arena.

Because the personal and the political were conceptually intertwined, a person's sex life could be instrumentalized to great effect. Anna Clark famously identified sex scandals as a major feature of political life in Britain during this period. At a time when the powers of the Crown and aristocracy were being renegotiated, the indecency of the elite was used as an argument against the operations of patronage and personal influence; sex scandals served the purpose of reformers who argued in favour of more transparent and democratic forms of government.[46] Similarly, the domestic transgressions of colonial governors could be used to illustrate a pattern of misconduct which could easily carry over into public life if appropriate mechanisms of accountability and control were not put into place.

As this suggests, scandals in Britain and the colonies served similar functions as tools of political opposition. For most of the scandals under discussion here, the act of exposure was purposeful and strategic, in line with J.B. Thompson's social theory of scandal. According to Thompson, 'scandals are struggles over symbolic power in which reputation and trust are at stake.'[47] Scandal provides an opportunity for participants to attack or undermine the legitimacy of their opponents. Within these case studies, tensions often occurred along class lines; for example, according to Epstein's portrayal Picton's primary opponents were merchants and shopkeepers, while he enjoyed the sympathies of elite French planters. [48] Similarly, McKenzie locates antipathies to Governor Charles Somerset in the Cape in his aristocratic tendencies and his preference for Dutch elites over British men of commerce.[49] Personal vendettas could also produce dramatic social and political consequences; Benton and Ford suggest that Arthur Hodge's torture and murder of his slaves

[45] Ibid., p. 172.
[46] Clark, *Scandal,* pp. 4-5.
[47] Thompson, *Political scandal,* p. 245.
[48] Ibid., p. 127.
[49] McKenzie, *Imperial underworld,* p. 41.

on the island of Tortola were likely reported because he had enemies among Tortola's elite.[50] Likewise, Benton and Ford emphasize how through the conflict between Doctors Bowman and Redfern (and their respective patrons, Commissioner Bigge and Governor Lachlan Macquarie), 'a cycle of pettiness spiralled into transformative policy.'[51] Whatever the nature of the dispute, scandal was used tactically to shape changing social and political configurations in the colonies.

Thompson's is not the only theory about why and how scandals break. For sociologist Ari Adut, scandals erupt at the point where transgressive acts are not simply widely known but become impossible to avoid or disavow. Adut emphasizes this distinction between 'awareness' and 'publicity', arguing that once transgressions become public, they must be recognized and confronted in some fashion if their 'contaminating' qualities are to be contained. Using the example of Oscar Wilde, Adut argued that Victorian authorities avoided sanctioning known homosexuals for acts committed in private, preferring not to throw on a spotlight on behaviour viewed as taboo. Once Wilde's personal life was exposed during his legal troubles, however, the risk of being seen to condone this behaviour impelled authorities to resort to brutal measures. The more high-status the individuals and institutions implicated, the more potentially subversive the scandal could be, and the more urgently it needed to be resolved in some fashion.[52]

The experiences of Reverend Simpson, as described by Manktelow, seem to exemplify this model. Senior figures within the missionary community did not want to believe that Simpson was capable of the abuse of which he was accused. Although the committee of examination felt able to give Simpson the benefit of the doubt when his word was being weighed against the testimony of his young, female students, however, it was less possible to do so when Simpson was engaged in drunk and disorderly behaviour in full view of the broader public. Acts occurring behind closed doors could be denied or doubted; misconduct in the full light of day was less easy to disavow. By appearing to tolerate Simpson's actions, missionaries would have been tainted in the eyes of the very public that

[50] Benton and Ford, *Rage for order,* p. 48.
[51] Ibid., p. 64.
[52] Ari Adut, 'A theory of scandal: Victorians, homosexuality, and the fall of Oscar Wilde', *American Journal of Sociology,* 111 (2005), p. 218.

they wished to convert.[53] Much like in the Oscar Wilde example, senior figures within the missionary community seem to have felt that they had no choice but to act, and to act with vigour.

Despite these broad similarities, imperial scandals carried distinctive stakes which could skew these dynamics of concealment and revelation in particular ways. One important factor was race. At the local level, the misconduct of prominent Europeans threatened to undermine the racial hierarchies upon which colonial society was predicated. As a white man of authority as well as a missionary, for example, Reverend Simpson's disorderliness was perceived to reflect badly on Britain as well as on the mission community. To quote Manktelow, 'Simpson's drunkenness exposed him, and thus the mission, his culture and his race, to foolishness, mockery and disgust.'[54] The subversive potential of the scandal was heightened because Simpson's behaviour as a white man brought the superiority of colonial institutions into question among the island populations that missionaries were seeking to convert.

The networked character of imperial spaces, and their particular relationship with the metropole, meant that Britons abroad were equally concerned about how their communities were represented internationally. The desire to appear civilized in the eyes of the wider British world meant that issues of gender and sexuality were additionally charged. To quote Epstein, '[t]he feud over political reputations illustrated how codes of elite masculinity and the ordering of domestic life were reconfigured within colonial settings, and the uncertainty involved in securing British identities abroad.'[55] As historian Kathleen Wilson has observed, in the eighteenth century character was considered to be contingent on shared language, laws, government, and social organisation. Because personalities and behaviours were believed to be intimately related to social and material context, contemporaries feared that Britons would deviate from British norms when uprooted from the British context.[56] Colonial scandals were therefore liable to be interpreted, by domestic audiences, as confirmation of the moral degeneration of colonial societies.

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[53] Manktelow, *Gender, power, and sexual abuse,* p. 168.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 10.
[56] Kathleen Wilson, *The island race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century* (London, 2003), p. 8.

For this reason, scandals could place colonial livelihoods under threat. The abolitionist cause was substantiated by news of violence and sexual abuse emanating from slaveholding societies; based on this abundance of evidence, it was easy to argue that the institution of slavery abetted scandalous acts. From journalist Pierre Franc McCallum's point of view, 'Picton's authoritarianism arose naturally within this climate of oppression and moral abandon'; his misdeeds were seen as a reflection of the larger community of which he was, at least temporarily, a part.[57] Similarly, McKenzie shows how '[s]candal became a propagandist tool to discredit the reputations of the colonies supported by unfree labour and to agitate for the abolition of slavery and transportation.'[58] In this reformist atmosphere, scandal became urgently important because entire ways of life were perceived to be at stake.

Given this wider context, there was a possibility that imperial scandals might have disruptive effects. Within an imperial setting, scandals provided a mechanism for punishing transgressions and ensuring compliance with social norms within local communities, but they also exposed colonial societies to the scrutiny and reformist ambitions of the metropole. For outsiders, these disruptive effects were precisely the point. Yet, for those rooted in a particular place, people with something to lose, the risks of exposure were great. What seems to have resulted were situations wherein abuses might be witnessed by or made known to a fairly extensive public, without any perceptible repercussions.

All six case studies suggest the many factors which had to come into play before scandals became scandals at all. In *Imperial underworld* it is the dispute between Lancelot Cooke and the Collector of Customs Charles Blair over a cook which leads to the exposure of corruption and misdealing in the assignment of prize slaves. Up until then, patronage and gentleman's agreements had foreclosed the possibility of scandal by ensuring that everyone was drawing a profit.[59] Even once these controversies were beginning to come to the fore, McKenzie shows how Bathurst and others at the Colonial Office worked to keep them from becoming a subject of scrutiny in the house of

[57] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 174.
[58] McKenzie, *Scandal in the colonies,* p. 184.
[59] McKenzie, *Imperial underworld,* p. 121.

commons, and, by extension, a rhetorical weapon in the hands of the Whig opposition.[60] Similarly, Epstein shows that Picton's trial was preceded by a period of silence in which his brutal punishments and summary executions make no appearance at all in his official correspondence; indeed, Picton was commended for his actions and promoted to brigadier-general. According to Epstein, 'the support the governor fostered among Trinidad's planter elite, the fears of retribution he instilled in his enemies, and the distance of the colonial frontier from metropolitan scrutiny protected Picton from censure.'[61] It was only with the arrival of Fullarton that stories begin to emerge, highlighting Fullarton's agency in bringing Picton to trial.[62] Benton and Ford similarly conclude, with respect to the execution of Arthur Hodges for the torture and murder of the enslaved man Prosper, that while '[t]he hanging of a prominent planter demonstrated the benefits of enhancing the power of governors over judicial proceedings in self-governing colonies', 'Hodges's long career of cruelty served to underscore the endemic failure of West Indian magistrates to exercise their limited powers over masters.'[63] For Manktelow, meanwhile, the question at the core of her book is precisely how Simpson's version of events was accepted as true, while his accusers were 'silenced, marginalized, or victimized'.[64] What emerges most clearly from the scandals under discussion here, in other words, is the sheer contingency of scandals breaking, and the strength of the forces which operated to keep abuses from being publicized.

Perhaps what historians should be studying is not so much the scandal itself, then, but the silence which so often engulfs it. This approach would seem to imbue studies of scandal with renewed importance given current preoccupations with absences in imperial records. Might a systematic comparison of scandals throw into clearer relief the aspects of imperial history which sometimes failed to make it into the official record? The following section explores the possibilities (and potential perils) of this approach, as well as suggesting other ways in which the systematic comparison of scandal might shed light on processes of political and social reform.

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[60] Ibid., p. 70.
[61] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 121.
[62] Ibid., p. 46.
[63] Benton and Ford, *Rage for order*, p. 49.
[64] Manktelow, *Gender, power, and sexual abuse,* p. 23.

III

Imperial scandal recently resurfaced in Britain with the exposure of a 'migrated archive' of colonial documents at a government facility in Hanslope Park, Buckinghamshire. The existence of this archive became public knowledge because of a High Court case brought by veterans of the Mau Mau rebellion seeking compensation for their treatment at the hands of Britain's colonial government in Kenya. These legal proceedings revealed what historians had long suspected based on cryptic references in colonial records: namely, that evidence of officially sanctioned acts of abuse and torture was secretly retained and transported to London following Kenyan independence, to be stored alongside records similarly obtained from decolonizing countries such as Malaya and Cyprus. After years of sitting uncomfortably in semi-obscurity, their existence known only within limited circles of government archivists, the bulk of these records are now available to be consulted by historians through the National Archives at Kew.[65]

Although this influx of documents provides new evidence to support historical investigation into the violence of decolonization, it has also renewed scholarly interest in questions of absence and concealment. For some, what the migrated archive embodies above all is a brazen attempt by government officials to mould difficult histories to fit a narrative of their choosing. According to Caroline Elkins, expert witness on the Mau Mau case, '[t]he information on document destruction and removal is, in my opinion, the most important new evidence found in the Hanslope Disclosure.'[66] For every record which survived, many more were thrust into raging bonfires or cast into the sea in weighted crates. Conscious of this process, historians of decolonization have used the records that do survive to understand the logic (or lack thereof) which underpinned decisions to retain or destroy, as well as the conditions in which these choices were made.[67] Identifying patterns in the retention or

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[65] This account is based on David M. Anderson, 'Guilty secrets: deceit, denial, and the discovery of Kenya's "migrated archive"', *History Workshop Journal* 80, no. 1 (2015).
[66] Caroline Elkins, 'Looking beyond Mau Mau: archiving violence in the era of decolonization', *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015), p. 860.
[67] Mandy Banton, 'Destroy? "Migrate"? Conceal? British strategies for the disposal of sensitive records of colonial administrations at independence', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 2 (2012), pp. 321-335; Gregory Rawlings, 'Lost files, forgotten papers and colonial disclosures: the "migrated archives" and the Pacific, 1963-2013', *Journal of Pacific History* 50, no. 2 (2015), pp. 189-212; Shohei Sato, '"Operation Legacy:": Britain's destruction and concealment of colonial records worldwide', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 4 (2017), pp. 697-719.

destruction of records might enable historians to approach surviving archives with a clearer sense of what is missing, what remains, and why. Destroyed records can never be recovered, but by trying to understand the broad contours of what has been lost, we can at least acknowledge the gaps in what we know.

These recent efforts on the part of historians of decolonization fit within a longer conversation about the distortions inherent in imperial records. Every archive is by its nature partial and incomplete; record-keeping is a selective process, and the decisions made about what to keep and what to destroy are both reflective and constitutive of an unequal world wherein some voices are amplified at the expense of others.[68] The importance of record-keeping to state-formation in particular means that archives should be understood not as neutral repositories of information but as instruments whereby political power is exercised.[69] These traits are evident in imperial archives, too; nevertheless, imperial archives possess unique features which make them particularly suspect as windows onto the past. For the most part, imperial records represent an outsiders' point of view, with the testimony of indigenous populations filtered through the prism of a colonial official's interpretation and recorded and preserved according to his priorities. The contents of imperial archives also served distinctive ideological purposes. These records were used to construct and justify inequality along racial lines as well as to give substance to the fantasy of an all-knowing colonial administration which, historians argue, dramatically misrepresents officials' real grasp of realities on the ground.[70] Rather than seeing extensive collections of records as a mark of imperial confidence, historians like H.V. Bowen and Ann Laura Stoler have described the archive as a repository of knowledge riven with silences and omissions, always in the process of catching up to realities on the ground.[71]

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[68] Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, records, and power: the making of modern memory', *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002), pp. 1-19.
[69] Peter Burke, *A social history of knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 116-135.
[70] Tony Ballantyne, 'Archive, discipline, state: power and knowledge in South Asian historiography', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001), pp. 89-90; Thomas Richards, *The imperial archive: knowledge and the fantasy of empire* (London, 1993), p. 6.
[71] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the archival grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton, NJ, 2009), p. 4; H. V. Bowen, *The business of empire: the East India Company and imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 180.

Considering the particularities of these records, historians of empire employ different tactics for using them. Some historians have attempted to read imperial archives against the grain, using them contrary to their intended purpose to glean evidence unintentionally transmitted to posterity. Others, however, have made imperial biases themselves the focus of attention. Ann Stoler famously argued that it was impossible to read imperial records against the grain without first understanding the assumptions and 'writerly forms' which produced and informed these accounts.[72] By attending to 'the principles and practices of governance lodged in particular archival forms', in other words, by reading *along* the grain instead of against it, Stoler argues that we can begin to discern the broad lineaments of colonial common sense. Yet, although Stoler emphasizes the distinctions that might be drawn between 'what was "unwritten" because it could go without saying and "everyone knew it," what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and what was unwritten because it could not be said,' the problem of how to explain or understand an absence in this way remains unresolved.[73]

The documentation produced by imperial scandals could provide a useful entry point for trying to disentangle the different kinds of omissions which Stoler identifies. Scandals are, after all, narratives of secrecy and revelation; in these stories, misdeeds are committed, covered up, and then dramatically exposed. Through a systematic comparison of imperial scandals, we might be able to identify patterns in the logic of concealment, in other words, the kinds of activities which were likely to be kept purposefully under wraps. Equally, we can try to identify who knew about these misdeeds, and why they might have chosen to speak out or remain silent.

This is not to suggest that scandals represent a simple or straightforward remedy to a complex methodological problem. Given that scandals often emerged in situations of social and political conflict, there is always the distinct possibility that the allegations had no basis in truth. Sometimes the accusations in question can be corroborated by other evidence, but often, by their very nature as secret and scurrilous acts, they cannot. We cannot, therefore, uncritically accept the charges levelled

[72] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial archives and the arts of governance', *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002), pp. 99-100.
[73] Stoler, *Along the archival grain*, p. 3.

against imperial governors and must remain cautious of assuming at the outset that scandals provide clear evidence of abuses which have been kept quiet.

Moreover, while existing scholarship on scandal suggests the existence of cultures of silence, the causes are not always apparent. It is often easier to understand why perpetrators might have covered up their misdeeds than it is to identify why other implicated parties did not speak up. Sometimes it seems that common interests, or feelings of group solidarity, operated to keep abuses under wraps. As the case study of Reverend Simpson demonstrates, inequalities within communities could shield abusers from their accusers, who might enjoy less social or cultural capital for reasons of class or gender.[74] Yet, it also seems possible that in some cases the decision to keep quiet might have been less than conscious, or at least more complicated than this pragmatic model would suggest. Recent scholarship on secrecy and transparency has questioned the strict demarcation between knowing and not-knowing, suggesting that this distinction breaks down in practice. Contrary to secrecy's associations with obscurity and concealment, anthropologists like Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Taussig have proposed the concept of 'open' or 'public' secrets to encompass, in Taussig's words, 'that which is generally known but cannot be articulated'.[75] As Erik Linstrum has pointed out, the history of attitudes to empire needs to leave more room for the recognition of emotional and epistemological grey areas. [76] This takes the historian into methodologically treacherous terrain – how to access the unconscious? How to prove an absence? – yet it can be a helpful reminder to look beyond vested interests and recognise the messiness of human incentives.[77]

Whatever the motives, the prevalence of complacency, complicity, and denial within these case studies raises the question of how transformative transparency really is. As media studies scholar Jack Bratich notes, 'the nature of public secrecy undermines a fundamental assumption among oppositional forces, namely, the belief that revelation of secrets is inherently a progressive force.'[78]

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[74] Ibid., p. 16.
[75] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1987), p. 171; Michael Taussig, *Defacement* (Stanford, CA, 1999), pp. 5-6.
[76] Erik Linstrum, 'Facts about atrocity: reporting colonial violence in postwar Britain', *History Workshop Journal,* 84 (2017), p. 109.
[77] For thoughts on how historians might think and write about denial, see Catherine Hall and Daniel Pick, 'Thinking about denial', *History Workshop Journal,* 84 (2017), pp. 1-23.
[78] Jack Z. Bratich, 'Public secrecy and immanent security', *Cultural Studies,* 20 (2006), p. 502.

Despite growing public demands for openness and transparency, recent scholarship expresses a degree of cynicism about its effects. Reform depends not simply on the revelation of wrongdoing, but the willingness or ability to act on these revelations. As media studies scholar Clare Birchall has observed, the growing emphasis on transparency raises questions about where the lines of responsibility should be drawn in a context where the public has access to information about abuses abroad 'but chooses to continue *as if* such information were secret.'[79] Nor is the dissemination of information always made in good faith. Revelations are necessarily partial, and can conceal, distract, misdirect, and misinform.[80] A surfeit of information can stifle and confuse and is arguably just as problematic as a paucity of facts.[81] Transparency and secrecy are terms laden with positive and negative connotations, respectively, but these valuations have increasingly been brought into question.[82] Instead, scholars focus on their 'polemological dimensions', the ways in which they are employed tactically as instruments in struggles over symbolic power.[83] Alasdair Roberts has reminded us that 'openness rules developed in Western democracies were crafted to deal with problems of control and legitimacy as modern states emerged and consolidated their power.'[84] Revelation, in short, can be just as much a strategy as concealment.

Viewed in this light, transparency raises just as many questions as secrecy. Cumulatively, what effect did recurring imperial scandals have on public opinion? How effective was scandal as a catalyst for change? As it now stands, existing scholarship does not provide a clear answer to this question. For Dirks, the scandal surrounding Warren Hastings, far from inaugurating a new era of reformed government abroad, instead obfuscated the need for change by suggesting that scandal was a product of individual behaviour rather than inherent to empire itself. Epstein and Manktelow do not go so far as to argue that scandal actively precluded change, but they share Dirks's cynicism about scandal's transformative effects. While Epstein sees the Picton scandal as a case of empire returning

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[79] Clare Birchall, 'Secrecy and transparency: the politics of opacity and openness', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 28 (2011), p. 19.
[80] Brian Rappert, *How to look good in a war: justifying and challenging state violence* (London, 2012), pp. 4-5.
[81] David Shenk, *Data smog: surviving the information glut* (London, 1997).
[82] Sissela Bok, *Secrets: on the ethics of concealment and revelation* (New York, NY, 1982), p. 8.
[83] Jack Z. Bratich, 'Adventures in the public secret sphere: police sovereign networks and communications warfare', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies,* 14 (2014), p. 11.
[84] Alasdair Roberts, *Blacked out: government secrecy in the Information Age* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 20.

home, one which for him demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining the distinction between empire and metropole, in the end the scandal in question nevertheless peters out, without dramatically upending the colonial order or seriously reversing the fortunes of its major actors. For Manktelow, the story of Reverend Simpson's improper liberties is significant precisely because of its resonance with patterns of sexual abuse in the present, an observation which would seem to suggest more continuity than change. McKenzie, by contrast, emphasizes scandal's practical effects, first, by demonstrating how scandal was used as a resource to be leveraged for individual and national purposes, and second, in her most recent book, by suggesting that even the most extreme outlier could provoke significant reforms by way of imperial scandals. Benton and Ford take a similar view, identifying scandal as the key driver behind an era of reform with fundamental consequences for the shape of modern international law.

How can these differences be reconciled? On a fundamental level, differing interpretations of the efficacy of scandal as catalyst for change are inevitable given that the historians in question define change differently. Although Hastings was acquitted, his very public impeachment trial, and the trial of other East India Company servants like him, seems to have motivated the Company to reform itself by eliminating perquisites, introducing higher salaries, and creating institutions in Calcutta and Hertfordshire to educate its future civil servants.[85] McKenzie, Benton, and Ford, based on their analyses, would certainly describe this as change. Yet for Dirks, these reforms are no more than window dressing obscuring the persistence of the real scandal at the heart of his story, namely, empire itself. For Epstein, too, the dilemmas at the core of the Picton scandal could never fully be resolved, since the desire for rule of law was fundamentally incompatible with the racial hierarchies upon which the nineteenth-century British empire was predicated.[86] To some extent, then, what we are left with is a difference of emphasis; for McKenzie, Benton, and Ford, shifts in the governance of empire are significant even while the fundamentally asymmetrical character of empire remains, whereas for Epstein and Dirks, it is the violent continuities which loom largest.

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[85] H.V. Bowen, *The business of empire: the East India Company and imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 113-114.
[86] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 271.

At the same time, these contrasting interpretations also reflect the fact that not all scandals are the same. The efficacy of scandal in stimulating change seems to be dependent partly on circumstance, partly on the nature of the scandal in question. Scandals acquire traction in contexts where they resonate with more widely held concerns. For example, many of the scandals under consideration here relate to legal and constitutional issues. One of the major conundrums confronting the expanding British empire following the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars was the legal pluralism characterizing its medley of newly acquired territories. The persistence of pre-conquest legal regimes, be they Dutch, Spanish, or French, was widely interpreted as a threat to British liberties at a time when waves of settlers were spreading around the world in relatively unprecedented numbers, with the expectation that their perceived rights as British subjects would be honoured overseas.[87] Scandals which appeared to substantiate contemporary fears of despotism in the colonies were therefore taken very seriously. McKenzie, Benton, and Ford's synthetic view of legal and constitutional scandals illuminates the significance of this issue across the early nineteenth-century British empire. Yet, comparing different kinds of scandals might usefully shed light on abuses which were taken seriously, versus those which were swept under the rug. Epstein and Manktelow's studies, which centre on the mistreatment of women and, in particular, women of colour, both depict scandals with rather more anticlimactic ends. Meanwhile, Dirks's more pessimistic portrait of imperial scandal might be attributed in part to his focus on India, in contrast to McKenzie, Ford, and Benton's study of white settler colonies. By comparing different kinds of scandal, with different actors at their heart, future historians might elucidate the factors which influenced a scandal's long-term impact, and, in the process, identify where the limits of public empathy might lie and whether these limits changed over time.

Future studies of scandal might also contribute to existing scholarship on transnational connections by drawing attention to disconnections, namely, racialized and gendered access to imperial networks. Although information about imperial misdeeds had the potential to travel vast distances given the networked character of these spaces, these distances were most easily traversed by

[87] Lisa Ford, *Settler sovereignty: jurisdiction and indigenous people in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); McKenzie, *Imperial underworld*, p. 164.

elites with social and political connections. As anthropologist Sally Engle Merry has pointed out, '[t]he spread of slander and gossip depends in part on the size and strength of each party's social network and its willingness to communicate his or her version of events. The more powerful person may achieve consensus behind his or her own perspective simply because of more extensive social connections through kinsmen, friends, patrons, and clients.'[88] This interpenetration of public and private networks of correspondence was not entirely uncontested. As Benton and Ford remind us, the very purpose of the commissions of enquiry was to disentangle overlapping lines of communication and find the truth at the heart of competing accounts from different sources. The commissions occurred against the backdrop of growing suspicion of covert sources and concomitant demand for greater transparency and accountability, as McKenzie shows.[89] Within Epstein's narrative surveillance and counter-surveillance also play a role; as he writes, '[d]emocratic movements and ideas of revolution challenged the ancients regimes of Europe, producing a culture of suspicion and a pervasive language of conspiracy, betrayal, and intrigue.'[90] Yet, as Benton and Ford clearly illustrate, whatever their intentions the commissions of inquiry were still open to the gossip of the dinner table. At the colonial office, too, government officials read official reports alongside personal correspondence. Friends and relations could be mobilized, and informal networks used, to instigate imperial scandals; consequently, those with friends in high places were best positioned to set this process in motion. Access to official correspondence and government records provided additional support to help substantiate complaints. Well-informed officials in possession of classified correspondence were the most potentially dangerous sources of criticism and revelation. As Epstein observes in the Picton case, '[a]ccess to colonial archives proved crucial to legal actions and to narratives of colonial misrule and intrigue.'[91] Thus far, scholarship on scandal overlaps with wider interests in how imperial administrations, and the British elites who comprised them, benefited from their transnational connections.

[88] Engle Merry, 'Rethinking gossip and scandal', p. 285.
[89] McKenzie, *Imperial underworld,* p. 91.
[90] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 10.
[91] Ibid., p. 132.

This pattern to some extent runs counter to older assumptions about scandal. Because scandals are typically most threatening to people with political or socioeconomic privileges (in other words, those with something to lose), they are often assumed to be an ideal weapon for subaltern actors to deploy. For anthropologist James Scott, gossip as a form of symbolic sanction constituted one of the 'weapons of the weak': 'gossip is a kind of democratic "voice" in conditions where power and possible repression make open acts of disrespect dangerous.'[92] Inspired by these insights, for Manktelow the Reverend Simpson case reveals how missionary women formed part of a 'potentially powerful, if informal, social and gossip network which encircled the islands, exerting its own influence, power and sanction on a community strongly invested in its own successful replication.'[93] It was through the gossip of women that word of Simpson's drinking and womanizing began to circulate throughout the islands, eventually reaching the Directors in London.[94]

Yet, the case studies under discussion here do not provide clear evidence to suggest that scandal was an effective instrument for subaltern actors to undermine the existing colonial order. Benton and Ford argue that 'disaffected people across the empire – whether merchants, sailors, slaves, colonists, soldiers, convicts, religious minorities, or activists – used allegations of petty despotism to advocate the consolidation of power at the top in order to reform, and then expand, the jurisdiction of the middle reaches of colonial legal hierarchies.'[95] McKenzie's first book provides the clearest example of this in the form of the contest between the enslaved woman Salia and her master Michiel van Breda. In 1832, at the age of twenty-one, Salia appeared before the Protector of Slaves in Cape Town to claim her freedom, arguing that van Breda was the father of her young daughter Fytje.[96] According to McKenzie, '[a]lthough the confrontation between Salia and Michiel van Breda was unequal, gossip, scandal and ridicule are potent weapons for the powerless to employ against the powerful.'[97] Yet, as McKenzie notes, not only did Salia fail to gain freedom for herself and her

[92] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1987), p. 25.
[93] Manktelow, *Gender, power, and sexual abuse,* p. 144.
[94] Ibid., p. 148.
[95] Benton and Ford, *Rage for order,* p. 29.
[96] McKenzie, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 127.
[97] Ibid., p. 122.

daughter, but relatively few women gained freedom for themselves and their children in this way.[98] Meanwhile, the experiences of the young ladies who levelled accusations against Reverend Simpson suggest the risks that individuals took when bringing charges against men with greater social or cultural capital than themselves, demonstrating that the odds in these cases were heavily stacked against them. Not only were their accounts doubted or disregarded, but, as Manktelow points out, they were 'actively *blamed* for what happened to them', 'labelled as seducers, as sexually experienced, as predators with Simpson as their prey.'[99] The likelihood of gaining redress seems to have been minimal; to the contrary, whistle-blowers and accusers might stand to lose more than they could hope to gain.

While scandals might seem to offer the promise of enabling us to view historical events from the perspective of those normally excluded from the political realm, it is worth questioning to what extent this promise is fulfilled. Though subaltern actors might play a key role in bringing abuses to light, in practice these accounts are monopolized by the attitudes and actions of the elites that they expose. This is an endemic problem facing historians interested in recovering the experiences of subaltern actors, but when it comes to imperial scandal, the dilemma can feel particularly acute, since the recounting of these stories often involves reiterating the cruelty to which subalterns were subject. As Saidiya Hartman puts it, these stories 'are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives', leading her to ask, 'how does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?'.[100] This is something that Emily Manktelow wrestled with in her account of Reverend Simpson's improper liberties. As she notes with regards to the 'young ladies' involved in the case, '[w]e have very little information about these women. Their stories, like many female stories, are obscure(d) in the archive due to their gender, age, and lack of professional status.'[101] Epstein can tell us even less about the apparently central figure in his case study, Louisa Calderon; as Epstein laments, 'the silence of the archive frustrates our desire to

[98] Ibid., pp. 133-134.
[99] Manktelow, *Gender, power, and sexual abuse,* p. 114.
[100] Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in two acts', *Small Axe,* 12 (2008), p. 2, 4.
[101] Manktelow, *Gender, power, and sexual abuse,* p. 11

know or give full narrative shape to her life'.[102] Scandal, it seems, often reveals little about the experiences of subaltern actors apart from the persecution that they were, almost by definition, vulnerable to.

It is possible, however, that future studies of scandals might tell a different story. In response to scholarship which locates the strength and resilience of imperial administrations in their networked character, historians like Tracey Banivanua Mar have drawn attention to the existence of shadow or counter networks which emerged alongside or in opposition to official imperial networks.[103] Both McKenzie and Epstein point to the existence of one such network, 'the radical imperial underworld' which bound together metropolitan radicals, sailors, slaves, and displaced workers.[104] Future studies of scandal, focused on a different set of actors and using sources in other languages, might uncover other geographies of connection, showing scandals moving in different and perhaps unexpected directions, with different consequences. The study of scandal could therefore benefit from taking seriously Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton's critique of transnational histories in which 'mobility becomes the property of colonizers, and stasis the preternatural condition of the indigene.'[105] Zoe Laidlaw has drawn attention to the engagement of indigenous activists with transnational humanitarian networks.[106] How, if at all, was scandal mobilized by these actors? To capture their experiences, future studies of scandal might examine how information circulated through non-governmental channels, moving away from the current focus on the official and unofficial correspondence of colonial administrators.

In sum, there are still many unanswered questions regarding the place of scandal in history which only a more synthetic approach might resolve. For one, such an approach does promise to

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[102] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 45.
[103] Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Shadowing imperial networks: indigenous mobility and Australia's Pacific past,' *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 3 (2015), pp. 340-44; Tracey Baniovanua Mar and Nadi Rhook, 'Counter networks of empires: reading unexpected people in unexpected places', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 19, no. 2 (2018); Rachel Standfield, ed., *Indigenous mobilities: across and beyond the antipodes* (Acton, 2018).
[104] Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule,* p. 156. See also Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The many-headed hydra: sailors, slaves, commoners, and the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA, 2000).
[105] Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in contact: rethinking colonial encounters in world history* (Durham, NC, 2005), p. 5.
[106] Zoe Laidlaw, 'Indigenous interlocutors: networks of imperial protest and humanitarianism in the mid-nineteenth century', in *Indigenous networks: mobility, connections and exchange,* eds. Jane Carey and Jane Lydon (New York, NY, 2014), p. 134.

yield important clues about aspects of imperial life which might not usually figure in the official record, so long as this evidence is used cautiously and sensitively. Yet, a comparative approach might equally suggest why misconduct, once exposed, is not more aggressively rooted out. By focusing on women and non-Europeans as actors within these dramas, we could learn more about how factors such as race and gender might have limited a scandal's political traction. Equally, we might explore how imperial subjects deployed their own, alternative networks alongside, or in opposition to, official channels of complaint and redress. By considering a broader array of scandals and including a wider range of different actors based on evidence in different languages, a different picture of imperial resistance and reform might emerge.

IV

Though scandal might on the surface seem like mere tabloid fodder, scholarship across the humanities and social sciences has clearly demonstrated its analytical potential. For historians of the early nineteenth century scandal has opened up new perspectives on how people of different kinds grappled with Britain's newly ascendant status as an empire which encompassed much of the globe. While these imperial scandals share many features in common with scandals from other times and places, not least in terms of the prevalence of sex, they also possess distinctive traits. Across the empire, as in Britain, scandals were used as tools in political struggles; yet, in so doing, interested parties in the colonies threatened to disrupt the status quo on which white political, social, and economic privilege was predicated. Much was at stake in these political contests, and the result seems to have been a culture of silence whereby misconduct could persist so long as the risks of exposing it outweighed the rewards.

Systematic comparison of scandals might shed further light on the logic of concealment which kept certain misdeeds, at least temporarily, from figuring in the official record. Used for this purpose, studies of scandal might make a valuable contribution to ongoing conversations about the nature and extent of absence in the imperial archive. Yet, the documentation produced by scandals must be used with caution; scandal's role in factional struggles must not be overlooked, while analyses of silence and complicity must leave room for epistemological grey areas. Moreover, the

focus on secrecy should not overshadow the fact that openness and transparency was not a straightforward remedy for imperial misconduct. Systematic comparison of scandals could also help us understand why awareness of imperial misdeeds did, or did not, have lasting effects, especially if this comparison encompassed different kinds of scandals, with different actors at their centre. Whereas existing studies of scandal do not present a convincing case for scandal's role as a 'weapon of the weak', future studies of scandal might consider the different shadow or counter networks through which scandal circulated, and how subaltern actors deployed them. Scandal thus remains a valuable but underexploited avenue for thinking about the role of individual agency in bringing about historical change. Equally, engaging with scandal would seem to offer a promising means for historians to contribute to broader discussions in the social sciences, and to speak to public concerns by tracing the historical antecedents of modern debates on the role of secrecy and transparency in political life.