

"Degraded and Benighted": Gendered Constructions of Wales in the Empire, ca. 1847

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During the 18th century Wales was repeatedly described as a romantic, barely populated wilderness providing beautiful landscapes for English and European tourists to visit. Implicit in that discourse was the pacified submission of an ancient, "peculiar," pre-modern, and pastoral Welsh population that avoided spoiling the views of said tourists.¹ By the mid-19th century such depictions of a pacified pastoral population of harpists and druids happy to remain in traditional "Wild Wales" were no longer tenable.² The industrial economy concentrated large numbers of Welsh-speaking, nonconformist laborers in the coal and slate mining valleys of Wales. The Merthyr Rising of 1831, the Chartist risings of 1839 and the Rebecca Riots between 1839-1843 jarred British elites out of their complacency.³ Parliament, deeming the poor educational system and prevalence of the Welsh language as the primary cause of the increased agitation and lack of assimilation into British society, commissioned an inquiry into the educational and linguistic situation in Wales. The reports of the Commissioners, were published the following year.⁴

The Blue Book Reports of 1847 on the State of Education in Wales reveal the underlying imperial tensions within a seemingly homogenous British identity.⁵ The

¹ Prys Morgan, "Keeping the Legends Alive" in Tony Curtis ed., Wales the Imagined Nation: Studies in Cultural and National Identity (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), 19-41; R. Merfyn Jones, "Wales and the English Imagination from the 18th to the 20th Centuries" in Gulliver 31: Britische Regionen oder: Wie einheitlich ist das Konigreich? German English Yearbook, Band 31 (1992): 41; For similar productions of Africa by travel writers see Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen" in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed. Race, Writing, and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Here also descriptions of the landscape minimize the human presence, with the author's narrative constructing Africa as a timeless land where the results of human settlement are evident, but not the population itself.

² Prys Morgan, "From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period" in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 (Reprint 1992), 78, 87, 92.

³ William Williams, A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord John Russell, On the Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of Education in Wales (London: James Ridgway, 1848); David J.V. Jones, The Last Rising: The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. Reprinted University of Wales Press, 1999), 200, 224-226.

⁴ Great Britain. Parliament, Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, Sessional Papers (Commons, 1847, Education General Wales, 1 July 1847): Volume 1, p. 1; See also Gareth Elwyn Jones, Modern Wales: A Concise History, 2nd. Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 211.

⁵ Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Colley argues that a "British" identity had been forged by 1837, culturally confirming and building upon the Union of 1707

descriptions of the moral, educational, intellectual, and physical condition of the Welsh people were implicitly and explicitly compared with the Irish and other cultures labeled uncivilized by the British. The Reverend James Denning informed the Commissioners that, "... from my experience of Ireland. . . there is a very great similarity between the lower orders of Welsh and Irish - both are dirty, indolent, bigoted and contented."⁶ William Williams, the Minister of Parliament who originally proposed the Commission, in a letter to Sir John Russell asserted that the Welsh were, "...both mentally and morally, the most degraded and benighted of Her Majesty's subjects."⁷ The Commissioners, Englishmen all, starkly contrasted their findings to their own modern, civilized, and industrial culture and society. The judgments of the English commissioners reflected as much about their ongoing construction of their own society as "civilized" as they did about their view of Wales.⁸ The reports reveal how the commissioners built upon an older discourse of the Welsh as outsiders and thus different in order to construct a newer, negative view of that difference. Their findings were used to justify the pacification and "civilization" of Wales through the creation of state-funded, English-language schools and the eradication of the Welsh language. The commissioners argued that the poor state of Welsh education and the prevalence of Nonconformity had resulted in an immoral, ignorant people who spoke a "barbaric" language.

The perceived barbarism of the Welsh people was highly gendered and sexualized. As evidence of this immorality they declared that "EIGHT out of every TEN of the women, above the age of sixteen, UNCHASTE and INSENSIBLE to female virtue." The Commissioners identified the women of Wales as the primary cause of Welsh immorality and deviance; their behavior was the most visible signpost of the need for Wales to be civilized by the English. However this colonizing discourse did not go uncontested. Nonconformists of all sects and Welsh culture enthusiasts united in an outraged counter-attack on this condemnation of Welsh morality, civilization, and culture, and argued that the Welsh people were actually more moral than the English. This discourse was also gendered. These middle-class, male, self-appointed defenders of Wales held up Welsh women as symbols of Welsh morality whose honor had been slandered by the English. While other historians have noted the imperial power relations reflected in the Blue Book reports, this paper will illustrate the highly gendered nature of this imperial debate and make some comparisons with the imperial discourses regarding Bengali women in India.⁹

between Scotland and England. Colley deliberately left Wales and Ireland out of her narrative, implicitly revealing the regional imperial prejudices of the period that continue to the present day.

⁶ Parliamentary Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2. Page 59.

⁷ Williams, *A Letter*, 5.

⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

⁹ Although several scholars have noted that Welsh women and their character were targeted within the Commissioners' reports; See Dierdre Beddoe, "Images of Welsh Women" in Tony Curtis, ed. *Wales: The Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), 227-238; Sian Rhiannon Williams, "The True 'Cymraes': Images of Women in Women's Nineteenth-Century Welsh Periodicals" in Angela V. John, ed., *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 69-91; This paper treats the entire process and discourse as highly gendered, reflecting and constituting an imperial relationship. The most recent work that ignores the gendered nature of this imperial debate and relationship is Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

Significantly, neither the Commissioners, their informants, nor the Welsh intelligentsia responding to the Blue Books were representative of a cross-section of English or Welsh society. The Commissioners were all elite Anglican Englishmen educated at Oxford or Cambridge. None spoke Welsh. They were given letters of introduction to members of the Anglican clergy in Wales, and 80 percent of the witnesses providing evidence were also elite Anglicans. Thus these men operated from a position of class, gender and confessional privilege, as did their informants within Wales. The Welsh speaking, Nonconformist laboring classes, the majority of the population, were excluded from the inquiry from the very beginning except as passive, deviant subjects to be studied by outsiders. This deliberate distancing of investigator from subject was not only applied to Wales. Similar inquiries into the peculiarities of the condition of women in India throughout the 19th century depended on a silenced, homogenized Indian woman as a subject of investigation and index of civilization. Distance from the subject under investigation and ignorance of local languages was deemed an indicator of objectivity, as James Mill argued in defense of his 1817 *History of British India*.¹⁰ Mill argued that the status and treatment of women within a culture indicated its level of civilization, with British middle-class domestic ideology as the yardstick against which societies such as India and Wales were to be measured, not coincidentally justifying British imperial rule.¹¹ The very structure of such investigations and the creation of official discourses reflected and constructed imperial ideologies and asymmetrical power relationships between the investigators and subjects.

The similarities in these processes show how both Wales and India were located within a similar although not identical set of imperial relations. The results of the inquiry were prefigured and shaped by the instructions the Commissioners received from Parliament. Parliament charged the Commissioners to “form some estimate of the general state of intelligence and information of the poorer classes in Wales, and of the influence which an improved education might be expected to produce, on the general condition of society, and its moral and religious progress. . .”¹² These instructions implied that “all subjects professed to be taught” were in actuality not being taught; that the education available was itself in need of improvement; and that improved education was expected to have social results in areas such as moral and religious “progress.” Not only were the Commissioners expected to be experts in education, they were expected to make judgments about Welsh morality and religious progress at the same time. The Parliamentary committee no doubt had the best of intentions, with a sincere desire to remediate the lack of education in Wales. However their actions in all such inquiries and investigations reflected the imperial, exclusionary assumptions within which they operated, as well as reproducing and constructing ideologies and relations to meet the needs of an imperial state establishing its dominance within Britain and across the globe.¹³

¹⁰ Roberts, *Language of the Blue Books*, 48, 60.

¹¹ Uma Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past” in Sangari and Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 27-87; See Mrinilini Sinha, “Gender and Imperialism: Colonial Policy and the Ideology of Moral Imperialism in Late 19th century Bengal” in Michael S. Kimmel ed., *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987), 217-231.

¹² Parliamentary Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 1, pp. iii-iv.

¹³ F. Smith, “A New Document Bearing on the Welsh Education Commission of 1846-7,” *Aberystwyth Studies*, Vol. 4., 1922: 173-178; Attempts to lay blame for the biases and actions of the Commission were

The 1847 inquiry regarding Wales advanced and shaped the imperial project. The Commissioners built upon established constructions of Welsh difference and the "Other" when describing Welsh society and culture.¹⁴ However those constructions were ambivalent and changed during the 19th century. The strength of Nonconformity in Wales had always been of great concern to British elites, but the religious fervor and devotion indicated by the building of and attendance in Welsh chapels was deemed a positive quality during the early 19th century. However, the "theological bent of mind" created by the isolation of the Welsh landscape and the "timeless" nature of Welsh culture was transformed through the Commissioners' reports of the 1840s into a negative, backward, uncivilized cultural characteristic. Commissioner Lingen argued that:

Poetical and enthusiastic warmth of religious feeling, careful attendance upon religious services, zealous interest in religious knowledge, the comparative absence of crime, are found side by side with the most unreasoning prejudices or impulses; an utter want of method in thinking and acting; and (what is far worse), with a wide-spread disregard of temperance, whenever there are the means of excess, of chastity, of veracity, and of fair dealing.¹⁵

This discourse too was profoundly gendered. The Commissioners and their elite, Anglican informants described the Welsh in general with implicitly feminized qualities of irrationality, emotionality, excess, impulsiveness and lack of control. As Davidoff and Hall have argued, such emotion was a major element of Evangelical manhood, but unacceptable in the other areas of rational, middle-class idealized culture that emphasized masculine control in opposition to uncontrolled, irrational femininity.¹⁶ By labeling Welsh culture as more feminine than English culture, the Commissioners and their collaborators mobilized a paternalistic discourse to justify their continued and increased domination within Wales, much as imperial authorities in India justified their continued rule in India upon the effeminacy of certain groups of Indian males and the need for continued moral education.¹⁷

being debated as late as 1913 and 1922. Smith argued that James Kay-Shuttleworth, first Secretary of the Committee of Council on Education clearly foresaw the pitfalls connected with the inquiry and strove to avoid them. Smith attempts to lay the blame for the biased Commission on the Home Secretary, whose orders the Commissioners and Shuttleworth were obliged to follow. Actual practice did not live up to the ideal goals outlined in Shuttleworth's early drafts of his instructions to the Commissioners and this demonstrates the tensions within the changing discourse about Welsh culture at mid-century. Other European nations also used educational systems to establish and centralize state control and national identities throughout a fairly heterogeneous population. See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: University of California Press, 1976); Education of local elites played a large role in the divide and rule strategy of the British in India and elsewhere, while the education of women to provide wives for the members of the Indian Civil Service and raise Anglicized children played a major role in feminist and imperial discourse within Britain and in India.

¹⁴ See Said, *Orientalism*; Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Joanna De Groot, "'Sex' and 'Race': the Construction of Language and Image in the 19th century," in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall, eds., *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies in Gender in the 19th Century* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 89-128; See Sinha, "Gender and Imperialism" for discussion of the 'Other' built upon gendered divisions of class, race, gender and culture.

¹⁵ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 1, p. 6.

¹⁶ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 109-113.

¹⁷ Sinha, "Gender and Imperialism," 217-231. Sinha argues that certain groups within India, especially Bengali males were viewed as effeminate and thus incapable of self rule.

Other comparisons with English culture were much more direct, yet just as gendered. The Reverend R. Harrison testified that, "The Welsh are more deceitful than the English; though they are full of expression, I cannot rely on them as I should on the English."¹⁸ Commissioner Symons argued that "the Welsh are peculiarly exempt from the guilt of great crimes. . . yet there are few countries where the standard of minor morals is lower." He then asserted, "Petty thefts, lying, cozening, every species of chicanery, drunkenness . . . and idleness prevail. . . among the least educated part of the community, who scarcely regard them in the light of sins."¹⁹ Here crime in Wales was deemed petty and feminized, rooted in lower morals and a lack of control over impulses and actions, in comparison to the great, more rational and controlled crimes seemingly found elsewhere in Europe. Welsh society did not measure up to British and European levels of civilization even in the area of criminality.

Parliament and the Commission felt that state education was the remedy for all such problems. The Commission argued that "the Welsh children require [moral training] . . . more than any other children in the kingdom; and are destitute of it."²⁰ Nonconformist chapels and Sunday Schools were not providing the correct education, nor keeping the two sexes separated from each other. Instead they were now identified as sites of gender and sexual license and deviancy. Where the high degree of chapel attendance had once been admired as a sign of religious devotion, nightly prayer meetings were now identified as events leading to "bad results" as "they are places at which lovers agree to meet, and from which they return at late hours." Sunday schools were places where "young persons of both sexes are congregated together in great numbers and in close contact."²¹ Not only did chapels allow and facilitate contact between the sexes, they were judged as having also failed to teach the proper moral separation and controls lacking in Welsh secular society. Traditions such as bundling, or *caru yn y gwely*, once viewed as a quaint folk custom, were transformed into "peculiarly" Welsh indicators of immorality and backwardness.²² Farm servants were deemed especially open to corruption through forced contact with the other sex due to "imperfect arrangements in the older farmhouses, which leave the sexes too much together, and this even at night."²³ This "revolting habit of herding married and unmarried people of both sexes, often unconnected by relationship, in the same sleeping-rooms, and often in adjoining beds without partition or curtain," was seen as suppressing the "natural modesty" and the "instinctive delicacy alike in men and women."²⁴ The Commissioners argued that Welsh male nonconformists failed to organize and police their society along the correct moral and physical guidelines of civilized, patriarchal, middle class and Victorian British society. Such assertions implied that Welsh men were not in control of Welsh women, and it was the duty of the British state to educate and civilize them.

Despite the Commissioners' aforementioned concern with the "natural modesty" and "instinctive delicacy" of men as well as women, only women were labeled unchaste.

¹⁸ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2, p. 57.

¹⁹ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2, p. 57.

²⁰ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2, p. 26.

²¹ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 1, p. 21.

²² Roberts, *Language of the Blue Books*, 164-167; Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2, p. 57.

²³ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 1, p. 217.

²⁴ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2, p. 57.

Women were deemed the ones responsible for immoral relationships, an ancient trope. If "unmarried men-servants in the farms range the country at night, it is a known and tolerated practice that they are admitted by the women-servants at the houses to which they come." Women did the admitting, were deemed responsible for accepting proposals of an immoral nature, and dared to "ask leave to go out in the evening," where the men met them at the public houses. What concerned the Commissioners was that Nonconformist men, parents, and employers permitted such practices. Commissioner Lingen argued:

Such are some of the circumstances under which the early life of a Welsh peasant-girl is passed? So far from wondering at what is said of them, that they are almost universally unchaste, the wonder would be if they were otherwise. Their offences, however, arise rather from the absence of all checks than from the deliberate infringement of them, and betoken therefore much less depravity than the same conduct in persons more favourably situated.²⁵

According to Lingen, Welsh peasant-girls did not deliberately strive to be immoral and unchaste. Indeed, he argued that Welsh peasant-girls were less depraved than girls of higher class status because they did not know any better. In his view, Nonconformist culture and the fathers of Wales failed to control their daughter's sexuality and provide good moral training. The Commissioners used this evidence of Welsh women's unknowing, uncontrolled sexuality to criticize the masculinity of Welsh men. Welsh men were implicitly judged as less civilized in not living up to the ideals of English domestic ideology, both on class and gender lines. Similar criticisms were made against Bengali males in India during the second half of the 19th century. In both cases, the perceived lack of native masculine control over native women was used to justify increased imperial control and state intervention.²⁶ Despite the focus on the lack of patriarchal control over women's actions, in the end the blame for Welsh backwardness, immorality, and deviance was laid firmly on the shoulders of Welsh women. In the words of the Commissioners:

the want of chastity in the women. . . is sufficient to account for all other immoralities, for each generation will derive its moral tone in a great degree from the influences imparted by the mothers who reared them. Where these influences are corrupted at their very source, it is vain to expect virtues in the offspring.²⁷

Commissioners Lingen, Symons, and Vaughan-Johnson deemed Welsh women's behavior and uncontrolled sexuality the primary indicators and causes of Welsh immorality. The lower classes acted as "lower animals" with "almost bestial indelicacy" due to the failure of the Welsh nonconformist middle classes to lead them. According to the Commissioners, it was the duty of England to educate and civilize the Welsh into exhibiting correct, moral British behavior.

²⁵ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 1, p. 21.

²⁶ Sinha, "Gender and Imperialism," 217-231.

²⁷ Parl. Papers, Education General Wales. 1 July 1847. Volume 2, p. 57.

Welsh nationalists of the intelligentsia immediately and indignantly responded to the publication of the Blue Book Reports with a counter-attack of pamphlets, debates in various periodicals and letters to the Commissioners.²⁸ Again the content of this discourse was highly gendered. While most Welsh people agreed that they were poorly educated due to an inadequate school system, they had "not expected to be told that they were drunken, dirty, superstitious, and sexually promiscuous liars and cheats."²⁹ Seizing the moral high ground, Nonconformist Owen Owen Roberts argued that the truly immoral members of Welsh society were the Anglican Clergy, who he accused of misappropriation of funds, and hostility to the extension of popular education in Wales.³⁰ According to Roberts, it was not the Welsh peasantry's fault if they were uneducated and living in immoral conditions. The responsibility, he argued, lay with the owners of houses and proprietors of estates who made no provision for the separation of the sexes or other matters of common decency.³¹ As a result, the "ill-contrived internal arrangements of the houses and cottages" destroyed "female delicacy" and thus "facilitated and encouraged prostitution." As the last statement indicated, even in the eyes of leading Nonconformist Welshmen, women were the focus of the acknowledged immorality of Welsh society. Again, women were depicted as choosing to become prostitutes, or choosing to accept immoral advances and have illegitimate children. Roberts cited a number of bastardy cases from Bangor and the Vale of Conwy in which such arrangements were responsible. While Roberts accepted the judgements of the Commissioners, he contested the cause. Referring to one case of bastardy, Roberts noted that, "... the servant girl had to sleep in the same room as that in which was a bed constantly occupied by a male inmate." Based on this example he argued that, "When such things are allowed to exist, it requires the assistance of a priest to palm upon the credulity of any great landed proprietor the notion that the immoralities of the peasantry of Wales are to be ascribed to the prevalence of Dissent."³² He openly accused Anglican elites of frustrating the attempts of Nonconformist elites to create a moral, patriarchal society of good British citizens. Throughout these debates, Welsh women were identified by both English and Welsh, Anglican and Dissenting middle class men as a source of immorality to be restrained and controlled.

While the Commissioners and Roberts agreed on women's undisciplined and uncontrolled sexuality and its responsibility for the immorality of the Welsh population,

²⁸ See Owen Owen Roberts, A Letter Addressed to H. Vaughan Johnson, Esq. One of Her Majesty's Commissioners for enquiring into the State of Education in the Principality of Wales. (Carnarvon: James Rees, Herald Office, 1847); Evan Jones, The Dissent and Morality of Wales: with Two Letters to the Right Hon. Lord John Russell, on the Minutes of Council in their Bearing On Wales. (London: B.L. Green, 1847); Jones's tract included a reprinting of four letters to the editor from the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian and the periodical John Bull in response to a number of letters published in support of the Blue Books by a clergyman using the pen name Cambro Sacerdo. See list of other Welsh periodicals in Roberts, Language of the Blue Books, 211-215; Evan Jones cites evidence from Mr. Moir Crane, of Ystradgynlais that at a meeting of his workmen convened for the purpose of considering his evidence, that it was not a fair exposition of their social and moral condition, in Evan Jones, Facts, Figures, and Statements, in Illustration of the Dissent and Morality of Wales: An Appeal to the English People (London: Benjamin L. Green, 1849), 29.

²⁹ Roberts, Language of the Blue Books, 210-211.

³⁰ See Owen Owen Roberts, Letter Addressed to H. Vaughan Johnson, 3,5-9; Roberts argued that the Anglican Clergy only wanted to spread the dogma of the Established Church in Wales, rather than educate the poor.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³² *Ibid.*, 27.

Evan Jones "Ieuan Gwynedd," a leading Nonconformist minister and fervent supporter of Voluntary schools from Tredegar, felt that they had insulted the "Women of Wales."³³ Jones challenged one leading Anglican clergyman defender of the Blue Books to a public debate, calling him "the insulter of the women of Wales," an "infamous traitor of his fatherland and the heartless defamer of his countrywomen."³⁴ Jones attacked the evidence cited by the Commissioners and his opponent, that 80 percent of women over age sixteen were unchaste. Using facts and figures from the Blue Books themselves, he accounted for the growing number of illegitimate births by asking if the rate of bastardy had increased in an equal ratio to the increase of the population. Yet at the same time, he implicitly accepted the truth of the accusations regarding illegitimacy in Wales, arguing that it was more acceptable than the "open and systematic prostitution of England."³⁵ Both Jones and Roberts thus accepted the analytical standard of English domestic ideology and rates of illegitimacy as valid measurements of "civilization" and morality.

In his repudiation of the Commissioners' Reports, Jones attempted to use the same categories of analysis and standards of morality to criticize the English. William Williams, the former M.P. who had started the entire process, defended the Blue Book Reports and argued that the Welsh "must inevitably continue as . . . the most degraded and benighted of Her Majesty's subjects. . . unless they are rescued by the fostering hand of Government."³⁶ Evan Jones responded to Williams's plea to "wipe out without delay, this national stain" by publishing a number of tracts and letters in which he argued that the Welsh were actually more moral than the English and thus there was no reason for Parliament to pass a special measure in regard to Wales. Jones asserted that the laboring population of Wales are much more intelligent and moral than the same class in England-and that "...the daughters of Cambria need not blush, when their reputation is measured with that of their Anglo-Saxon sisters."³⁷ Jones used evidence from the Blue Book Appendices and the Sixth Annual Report of the Registrar General to argue,

"... that we find evident proof, that the number of illegitimate children in England are understated, and that prostitution is carried on in the Metropolis and other large towns to a fearful extent....we are forced to the conclusion that Wales is superior – far superior – to England in regard to female virtue. If these remarks are not conclusive, we must advance another proof in favour of our country-women. In 1830, the proportion of illegitimate births in England was as one to twenty, whilst the proportion in Wales was as one to thirteen. Thus in the course of twelve years we find that illegitimacy had increased two per cent in England, and decreased one percent in Wales."³⁸

Here too, women's bodies, "virtue" and especially prostitution rates were the English commissioners' objects of comparison and yardsticks of "morality" that Jones used to

³³ Evan Jones, *The Dissent and Morality of Wales*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶ William Williams, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord John Russell*, 5.

³⁷ Evan Jones, *A Vindication of the Educational and Moral Condition of Wales. In Reply to William Williams, Esq. Late M.P. For Coventry* (Llandovery: William Rees; London: Longman & Co., 1848): 2, 9.

³⁸ "Letter to the Editor" Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian. 7 March 1848. Clipping in National Library of Wales. NLW MS 2724B.

counter-attack on the basis of national honor. Thus Jones implicitly accepted those criteria of judging and ranking cultures. He argued in several tracts that the "most Anglicized districts in Wales have the greatest number of illegitimate children born in them," and that "As the *Welsh language and national feeling recedes, immorality increases.*"³⁹ According to Jones, not only were the English more immoral than the Welsh, but they were also responsible for spreading immorality throughout Wales. Thus, the Welsh were capable of educating themselves through voluntary schools, and saw no need for English schools to civilize and educate the Nonconformist Welsh population. Jones and other Welsh nationalists thus sought to direct the "Othering" discourse against the hegemonic culture of the English. Yet in doing so, Jones whose writing desk bore the inscription, *Y Gwir yn Derbyn y Byd. Anrheg Merched Tredegar I Ieuan Gwynedd am ei Amdiffyniad o Ddiweirdeb Merched Cymru, Ionawr 10, 1848*, [The Truth Against the World. Presented by the Women of Tredegar to Ieuan Gwynedd for his defense of Welsh womens' chastity, January 10, 1848]⁴⁰, accepted the validity of English definitions and measurements of "civilization." The 'staunchest defender of the Women of Wales' never questioned the right to measure a society by the behavior of its women, but rather questioned which society should be so judged and found wanting. Indeed, he spent the last years of his life publishing the first Welsh-language periodical aimed solely at Welsh women, *Y Gymraes* (The Welshwoman), which emphasized the importance of self-restraint, control, and correct behavior for Welsh women.⁴¹

Welsh women were doubly marginalized within this imperial discourse. The Commissioners and their assistants gathered descriptions of women's behavior from an Anglican Welsh elite based upon second-hand accounts and hearsay. Few had any acquaintance with working-class life in Wales. None actually asked women about what they wanted for their children, how they felt about the crowded living conditions or what they thought about traditions such as bundling. Although "feminine virtue" and female chastity were the most frequently condemned element of Welsh society, not one Commissioner actually cited or quoted a female voice in his Report.

The men on the Welsh side of the debate were no better. They too made women and their behavior central to their arguments against the condemnations of the English. However they too never cited or consulted any women. Responding to the Blue Books, the periodicals *Yr Amserau* and *Principality*, the latter under the editorship of Reverend Evan Jones "Ieuan Gwynedd," organized a Memorial to the Queen which stated,

That, among the many injurious and slanderous allegations made against the Welsh people by the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, your Majesty's memorialists, as husbands, as fathers, as sons, and as brothers, would first most respectfully complain of the imputation so rashly cast upon the general moral character of the women of Wales, in defiance at once of history, of official statistics, and of that deeply felt domestic testimony which your Majesty's memorialists, urged alike by a sense of

³⁹ Ibid, 13; See also Evan Jones, *Facts, Figures, and Statements*.

⁴⁰ National Library of Wales. NLW Rolls 287.

⁴¹ Jane Aaron, "Finding a Voice in Two Tongues: Gender and Colonization" in Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees et al, *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 186-188; For a more detailed discussion see, Sian Rhiannon Williams, "The True 'Cymraes,'" 69-91.

justice, of duty, and of true respect for those exemplary virtues which hallow and gladden their homes, would herein spontaneously and most heartily offer, and your Majesty's memorialists (whom the Commissioners themselves admit to be nationally "exempt from great crimes," to be "free from seditious tendencies," and also to be "warm-hearted, kindly and loyal") would gratefully acknowledge that they owe all their best and noblest principles to the precepts, example, and influence of the virtuous, though calumniated, women of Wales.⁴²

Here too the women of Wales remained voiceless symbols. As Jones stated on the request for signatures, "It was suggested at first that the memorial be signed by women, but upon further consideration it has been thought advisable to confine it to men." Thus he sought 200,000 honest Welshmen, "...to affix their signatures to this noble and patriotic protest against the wrong done to their wives, mothers and sisters..."⁴³ Elsewhere Evan Jones speculated that "We may fancy that the female parishioners of Aberdar are not over grateful for the compliment that some 2,500 of their number are no better than prostitutes."⁴⁴ However he never asked one of them if that were true. In examining and refuting the accusations of unchastity and insensibility to female virtue Jones asked, "With what feelings can this atrocious assertion be perused by the fathers, brothers, and husbands of Wales. . .?"⁴⁵ In Jones's view it was not actually the women of Wales who were insulted, but the honor of the men and the Welsh nation. Women figured in these debates only as idealized symbols of tarnished male and national honor, and yardsticks of civilization. Welsh women and their femininity were central to this imperial discourse, but women were never allowed to participate as women, or as members of the Welsh nation.

While Welsh men such as Evan Jones or Owen Owen Roberts may not have asked the women of Wales what they thought about the Reports of the Commissioners, this did not prevent two women from speaking out against them. Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover, a prominent Welsh-culture enthusiast, responded to the Blue Books in a letter to her friend and fellow Welsh woman Jane Williams. On January 10, 1848, Lady Hall wrote,

My dear Miss Williams, You are the person who of all others is most eminently calculated for the task you so cleverly have suggested as the best means of doing justice to Wales through the very means intended for her destruction: viz. by a careful review of the Reports, and exacting therefrom the glaring contradictions so as to prove that by their own words the people are all that is good or bad! consequently their report is not worth anything and the nation cannot be judged by it. I have ordered these vile calumnies to be sent you from London, and I earnestly hope you will put your wonderful brains to work to procure proofs (such as we require) to neutralize the

⁴² National Library of Wales. NLW 2724B. IEUAN GWYNEDD CLIPPINGS for announcement of memorial; See also, W. Gareth Evans, *Education and Female Emancipation: The Welsh Experience 1847-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 48.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Evan Jones, *Dissent and Morality of Wales*, 31.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

poison circulated by unprincipled Commrs. . .So dear Miss Wms set your mind to this work.⁴⁶

Lady Hall felt that the Welsh nation and culture had been targeted and slandered by the Commissioners' Reports, and immediately commissioned a response. She clearly identified that the Commission itself was intended to destroy the Welsh language, which she identified as the primary element of Welsh culture and thus the Welsh nation. Jane Williams did proceed to write her response in March of that year, the pamphlet Artegall, or Remarks on the Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, and Lady Hall underwrote the costs of publication.⁴⁷ Williams challenged the Commissioners' use of evidence and choice of informants. She asserted that because of their instructions, and their lack of familiarity with Wales and the Welsh language, they had a very impressionistic and limited view of the situation in Wales. Williams argued that Lingen and the others chose the most negative evidence provided by people unfamiliar with the situations they were discussing, members of the Anglican clergy. She charged that where the providers of evidence were familiar with the area, their evidence was usually positive. For example, in answer to the question about, 'Position, character, and influence of females among them, and how far the duties of mothers and wives are adequately understood and fulfilled," T.W. Booker, Esq. informed the Commission:

Position kindly, tenderly, and respectfully regarded. Character, chaste, but confiding, honest and industrious. Influence, great, and on great emergencies powerfully exerted The duties of wife and mother, naturally and well understood and fulfilled.

Williams argued that positive answers such as these were left in the Appendices, while the negative opinions were unfairly emphasized in the Reports.⁴⁸ As the primary woman engaged in the debate over the Blue Book reports, Williams challenged the Commissioners and their informants' use of evidence and subjective view of conditions in Wales, not their treatment of Welsh women. Indeed, Jane Williams wrote under pseudonym of Artegall, rather than her own name, despite the fact that she was a published author. These two women participated in these debates from a relatively silenced position, in which their gender was of no benefit to their argument, and something to be downplayed or masked. Their relative silence was necessary for the male Welsh nationalists, whose arguments were predicated on a silenced population of Welsh women representing the honor of the Welsh nation within an imperial relationship.

Imperial and nationalist debates and discourses surrounding the control of women's bodies and sexuality were not limited to either the metropole (London) or the periphery, (Wales or India) but were constructed in dialogue between both. Both in Britain, and in India the investigations into *sati* during the late 1820s and the resulting legislation banning such practices, the Contagious Diseases Acts and the efforts to repeal them, and the debates leading up to the Age of Consent Act of 1891 all occurred without the participation of the

⁴⁶ British Library 8365.bbb.48.(1) Cambrian Tractates and Letters. "Introductory Remarks" p. 3. 1855. attached to Artegall, or Remarks on the Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 8-15.

women whose bodies and welfare were to be protected.⁴⁹ The bodies of indigenous women became contested ground between two or more competing gender systems, in which constructions of masculinity and national identity were just as important, if not more, than the actual experiences of indigenous women. Indeed, such debates required the silencing of indigenous women, as Indian or Welsh nationalist elites on one hand, and British elites on the other, sought to extend their control and make claims to cultural superiority, identity and rights to leadership. All groups of elite men, as well as elite British women acknowledged indigenous women only as symbols to be manipulated to serve various agendas.⁵⁰ Indigenous women were doubly marginalized in all sites of these debates, by the indigenous men of their own societies, as well as the imperial efforts by Britain itself.

Although the imperial and colonial relationship between Wales and England has been discussed by many historians, it is important to remember that imperialism is a highly gendered set of power relationships and discourses. By looking at the gendered nature of the discourse surrounding the Blue Books and the responses to their publication, the changing imperial relationship between Wales and England within Britain becomes much more complicated and our understanding enriched. Even within the imperial metropole of Britain, indigenous Welsh women became central to both imperial and nationalist discourses. Comparisons with similar debates and discourses regarding India help place the asymmetrical relationships within Britain back into their imperial context and complicate notions of a homogenous British imperial identity.

⁴⁹ See Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?," 27-87; Dagmar Engels, The Age of Consent Act of 1891: Colonial Ideology in Bengal (South Asia Research 3 November 1983): 207-231; Sinha, "Gender and Imperialism," 217-231.

⁵⁰ Antoinette Burton, At the Heart of the Empire (Berkeley: University of California, 1998); Antoinette Burton, "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and The Indian Woman, 1865-1915," in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel eds., Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 137-157; And especially, Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture 1865-1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).