

Degenerate or Victim? Fallen Women, Disease, and the Moral Strength of the British Empire

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May we find, as ages run,
The mother featured in the son;
And may yours for ever be
That old strength and constancy
Which has made your fathers great
In our ancient island State,
And wherever her flag fly,
Glorying between sea and sky,
Makes the might of Britain known;
Britons, hold your own!

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Opening of the Indian and
Colonial Exhibition by the Queen")

*T*ennyson's patriotic poem refraining "Britons, hold your own!" subtly reveals the important role of women in the British Empire. "May we find, as ages run," the speaker begins, "The mother featured in the son" (11-12). The sons of Empire, so crucial to the maintenance of Britain's international power, carry the legacy of their mothers. If these women fall, refuse motherhood, or pass on diseases to their offspring, they place those men, "the might of Britain," at risk (19). In this essay, I show how the British worked to maintain their sense of superiority, a foundational belief of imperialism, through the regulation of female bodies in the late nineteenth

century, and the ways that Josephine Butler depicted women as innocent victims of morally corrupt men who threatened the Empire's "strength and constancy" (14). These competing narratives, those that describe the fallen woman as site of contagion and those that describe the fallen woman as betrayed victim, illustrate the ways that the female body became a point of contention not only in domestic gender politics but also in the maintenance of imperial power. As I show, debates over whether the fallen body should be regulated frequently hinged on one's evaluation of the woman as victim of male power or as malicious propagator of disease and degeneration. While Butler has long been recognized as a crucial figure in the women's movement, I show that her rhetoric regarding male hypocrisy not only explicitly exposes a harmful double standard but also implicitly undermines the notion of British exceptionalism so pivotal to imperial ideology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Public discussion of fallen women, sex, and empire ballooned with the passage and enforcement of the Contagious Diseases Acts (CD Acts), which initially were designed to limit the spread of venereal disease among the British military and then expanded to become significant pieces of social regulation affecting a broader swath of the population.¹ The contentious debates regarding these laws aptly depict the moral panic surrounding deviant female sexuality, and they reveal the ironic role the fallen woman played in imperial ideology as she was both a threat to empire and, based on the logic of the laws, necessary for its maintenance. Furthermore, they show how many Britons coupled sexual morality with national strength, and understood how deviant sexuality was both a natural part of the imperial project and a risk factor that endangered Britain's dominance. Sexual deviancy was a "natural" part of imperialism in male-dominated colonies where the presence of British women was extremely limited. In these environments, prostitution and concubinage could become a norm not tolerated in polite English society. Sexual relationships with native women, however, put the empire at risk because the production of mixed-race children mocked the supposed racial divisions between colonizer and colonized. Similarly, in England,

sexual deviancy was natural in military stations where prostitution, as I will discuss later, was considered by many a necessary evil. This deviancy, like sexual relationships with native women in the colony, however, also put the empire at risk by threatening men with disease. While this does not make British fallen women and native women equal, it does mean that they occupied the same cultural position – an inherently ambivalent position since the two groups of women were both desired and feared.

Regulation of sex in the British Empire varied based on location, rates of disease, and the conditions of interaction with native peoples, but the CD Acts implemented in Great Britain were more uniform. The first piece of legislation was a sanitary measure focused on the military, their infection rates, and their subsequent “loss of man-hours” (Walkowitz 72). Most soldiers and sailors were restricted or discouraged from marrying, so disease rates were higher in this population than in the general public. This fact brings into focus the relationship between the security of patriarchal institutions and empire since the unique life of soldiers and sailors in the service of empire threatened imperial strength and their very lives. High rates meant that venereal diseases among the army and navy were not only a health issue but a fiscal one as well since treatment was costly and frequently ineffective, thus necessitating long hospital stays or return visits. A cure for syphilis was yet to be found, and the prevailing wisdom was to use mercury in treatment. Periods of good health while still carrying the disease also made syphilis difficult to successfully eradicate or treat. Additionally, “the very diverse array of conditions” caused by the late stages of syphilis meant that illnesses were not necessarily attributed to an earlier infection of this venereal disease (Hall 481). The condition of the nation’s standing army and navy was of serious concern in an age of global interaction, expansion, and conflict. Harriet Martineau, an opponent of the 1864 law, admitted that “all thoughtful and patriotic people must feel the deepest concern and alarm about the present state and future prospects of the public health and morals” (77).² These diseases threatened the wellbeing of thousands of men on whom Britain relied for protection.

Accordingly, these final enforcers needed to be strong and reliable rather than diminished by disease.

Since syphilis was difficult to identify and combat after exposure, military leaders and health experts turned their attention to prevention. Rather than limit or challenge the behavior of military men, however, leaders began to craft policies that would regulate the behavior of women. The first two acts, those of 1864 and 1866, were specific to a selection of military towns and targeted women as carriers of venereal diseases and ignored the disease-spreading ability of men in that the laws applied to women exclusively. The 1869 law also extended “the jurisdiction of the Acts to a ten-mile radius of the districts in which they operated; enforced fortnightly examinations upon all known prostitutes [...] required the detention of women who were unfit for examination (menstruating) [...] provided for the moral and religious instruction of the women confined [...] and] made the acts effective for an indefinite period” (Bell 57, Walkowitz 86). Ironically, by the time the laws were enacted and the topic of state-sanctioned prostitution was in the public eye, syphilis rates were actually declining (Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics* 5, Weeks 85). The acts, though seemingly passed in response to a medical and fiscal need, should accordingly be considered as a response to a *perceived* threat of women whose sexual deviance polluted and undermined civilized society. Even though fallenness and prostitution were seen as major problems across the country, this desire to protect military men first and foremost illustrates a keen interest in protecting the imperial system.

The manner in which these laws were enforced highlights the cultural imperative to discipline fallen women when the status of men and the power of empire become threatened. The enforcement of these laws was an enormous undertaking since it required a host of new offices and bureaucracies to handle identifying, examining, quarantining, and reforming sex workers. In this sense, the CD Acts were unique among Victorian reforms since they did not prohibit a particular activity or institution like child labor or debtor’s prisons. Rather, they regulated a trade called by many the “great social evil.” This expansion of government

in the name of public health illustrates the intense desire and dedication on the part of supporters to solve the issue of military strength, prostitution, and disease. Importantly, it also shows how imperial concerns required a different set of governing principles. While progressive reforms might serve as a point of moral superiority to other nations – a sign of reflection, regret, and devotion to a more humane way of life – policies regarding British power abroad did not embody this kind of progressivism – a disconnect stemming primarily from the racist ideology at the heart of the imperial project. Progressive reforms might be embraced at home, but entrenchment might be needed abroad in order to delineate clearly between the colonizer and the colonized. The passage of the CD Acts also shows how this entrenched ideology spread into English society at points when Britain's imperial power seemed threatened.

British imperialism in the late nineteenth century relied increasingly on an ideology of racial and moral superiority. While a sense of European authority certainly fueled colonialism from its start, the rationalization for British imperialism took on a more deeply entrenched racial and moral perspective following the Indian Revolt or Mutiny of 1857. Following reports of massacres in India, the British Empire could define itself against the immorality and duplicity of Indian men who took up arms against their British commanders, and this self-defining process took place in the colony and the capital. The British, from this perspective, were morally superior, benevolent rulers whose presence overseas signaled progress and the possibilities of prosperity. The development of this ideology not only affected colonial sites across the globe, but it also created a framework for how seemingly disparate aspects of British society supported the aims of empire building. "Woman," according to Lynda Nead, "was believed to play a central role in the formation of public morality; she was responsible for the purity of the home, and private morality was the source and index of public morality. The moral condition of the nation, therefore, was believed to derive from the moral standards of woman" (92). Fallen women who did not live up to the moral standard, especially those during this period who were perceived to be dangerous carriers of disease,

threatened the future of their “dominant” race and weakened soldiers and sailors infected by their sexual acts. A population debilitated by venereal disease did not embody the kind of moral superiority required to uphold doctrines of global eminence. As Levine writes, “Unrestrained sexuality was an unending threat to Empire; it undermined notions of British moderation and rationality, it produced inter racial liaisons and sometimes offspring; it encouraged and facilitated unauthorized sexual behaviors considered dangerous or unseemly” (Levine, “Sexuality, Gender, and Empire” 134-35). While I agree with Levine that “unrestrained sexuality was an unending threat to Empire,” it is important to note that the CD Acts worked to mitigate this threat by targeting only women. The acts, while sweeping pieces of legislation, were not comprehensive restraints on deviant sexual behavior because those kinds of restrictions would have limited men. The government’s response to the threat of deviant sex and disease was not to eradicate vice but to regulate it – an ironic response to this issue since legislation restraining the sex industry, while punitive, also acts to support and maintain it by sanctioning its role in society. This again highlights how the preservation of imperial power required a different and hypocritical set of governing principles. Although the sexual acts of both men and women “threatened the bulwarks of Empire,” women’s bodies became the principal regulatory site.

One way in which this hypocrisy was exposed in the late nineteenth century was through the speeches and writings of opponents of the CD Acts. From their initial passing, these laws were controversial, and the challenges to them were manifold. Not only did the CD Acts ignore the culpability of men in spreading disease, they also placed serious limits on individual liberty and could be abused easily. The law’s reliance on police testimony without corroboration from other sources or evaluation by a jury became a sticking point for many opponents. During a meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences in 1869, W.P. Swaine presented a paper in which he argued against the extension of the CD Acts to the civilian population of Britain. He claims that allowing a police officer to administer these laws meant giving him “the attributes of

prosecutor, judge, and jailer, and opens the door wide to great abuse of police power" (440). Charles Taylor, another speaker at this meeting, took up a similar position, contending that

no one can look over the Contagious Diseases Act without at once recognising in it the most cruel, unjust, and despotic measure that has ever been proposed to a British Parliament. There is actually no definition of prostitution in the Act, and no proof of offence is required; positively the whole of the women of this country are placed at the mercy of a policeman's suspicions, a policeman's spite, jealousy, and revenge. Again, contrary to every principle of English law, the burden of proof is thrown not upon the *accuser*, but upon the accused, who may not only be innocent, but also penniless and friendless. (442)

He also points to the serious danger any accusation, reasonable or not, has on a woman in Victorian society since just the suggestion by a policeman that a woman is a prostitute "is sufficient to ruin her" (442). Taylor's claim underscores how a woman's reputation was as important as her actual behavior. Should a woman be perceived as fallen, she might as well be, and the laws' loose guidelines in terms of definition, reporting, and evidence placed a heavy burden on women to not only reform but to also fear unreasonable suspicion.

While these arguments about the legal basis for the CD Acts are intriguing and important, the rhetoric of prominent female opponents focused more often on the hypocrisy of the laws rather than the threat they posed to civil liberties, and the speeches and writings of these women pointedly illustrate how patriarchy could become destabilized. From the perspective of these Victorian feminists, the CD Acts were inherently hypocritical because they singled out women, especially poor women, rather than men, as carriers of disease. Their criticism of the laws thus focused on the culpability of men in spreading vice and disease. As I have outlined, the containment of deviant sexuality bolstered Britain's imperial ideology that claimed moral superiority over the peoples the empire

colonized. This means that challenges to the CD Acts that cited the immorality of men also questioned Britain's sense of superiority. Even if critics of the laws did not reference the British Empire explicitly, although some did, their commentary implicitly challenged an essential underpinning of colonialism: white men were superior to the sexually deviant men and women they colonized. In many colonial sites around the globe, British officials encountered societies with different customs regarding sex and family arrangement, and it "became a mainstay of colonial criticism" to disapprove "of the sexual behaviours of colonised peoples" (Levine, *The British Empire* 157-58). The narrative of British exceptionalism in this context promoted the idea that British men acted with restraint in their sexual relationships and that they treated women with more respect than colonized men did. Therefore, opponents of the CD Acts who emphasized the lack of restraint and hypocrisy of British men destabilized this powerful narrative and widely held assumption about the "natural" divisions between the colonizer and the colonized.

Many women and men worked to repeal these laws, but Josephine Butler was the "moral and charismatic leader of the crusade" (Walkowitz 93). Reformers like her challenged male privilege and the double standard inherent in the laws. At the heart of Butler's campaign was a charge against men and what she called "*the hypocrisy of their lives*" (Butler, "The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes" 124). Butler did not approve of prostitution, but she abhorred society's willingness to punish women exclusively for sexual acts involving both sexes.³ As leader of the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA), Butler wrote and spoke prolifically on the subject, and in a piece addressing the proposed extension of the laws in 1870, she acknowledges the constitutional issues with the acts and then goes on to highlight their hypocrisy:

It resembles the Spanish Inquisition in its system of paid spies, and the admission of anonymous whispers as evidence not to be rebutted. Contrary to the entire spirit of English Law, the whole burden of proof is thrown not

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upon the accuser, but upon the accused; there is a complete absence of all fair and open court – to say nothing of jury; and the accused, in this case, are the weakest, the most helpless, and most friendless of the community.

By this law a crime has been *created* in order that it may be severely punished; but observe, that has been ruled to be a crime in women which is not to be considered a crime in men. There are profligate men who are spreading disease everywhere, but the law does not take effect on *these*. ("An Appeal to the People" 113)

Butler uses foundational principles of English law to expose the double standard expressed in the CD Acts, and her criticism reveals the instability of Britain's exceptional identity. In imperial ideology, the laws of British society were superior to those of "primitive" colonized societies. If Britain's legal foundations did not live up to or embody this superiority, however, this argument of exceptionalism would crumble. As she does in much of her writing, she notes the uneven standing of men and women, emphasizing that women working as prostitutes do so out of poverty and desperation while the men purchasing sex are simply profligates. At the center of this argument is a claim about the power men have over women. For Butler, women are driven to prostitution by need while men degrade themselves because they are free to do so. She writes in a "Letter to my Countrywomen, Dwelling in the Farmsteads and Cottages of England" that "you must understand that very few ever begin to lead a bad life from choice. Thousands of the miserable creatures whom we call *fallen* have really not fallen at all, for they never stood upon any height of virtue or knowledge from which it was possible for them to descend" (151). While Butler views prostitution as a sin and a horrible aspect of society, she primarily blames men for its ubiquity in Britain because men have the power to choose whether or not to engage in criminal behavior for their pleasure. Annie Besant would later describe this difference between men and women succinctly: "Men are immoral for their amusement; women are immoral for bread" (98).

In addition to highlighting the Acts' incongruity with English law and the oppressed status of women, Butler also utilizes the notion of English exceptionalism to show how the acts do not fit within English society. In her "An Appeal to the People of England on the Recognition and Superintendence of Prostitution by Governments," she asks, "Is this a law to be made in a country where individual liberty has been so carefully guarded? Nay it is a law for a country of slaves" (115). Butler's question clearly aligns the law with one that may be upheld in a "primitive" society, and, in doing so, she again reveals hypocrisy in the "civilizing" force of imperialism. Later in the piece she goes on to describe the right that women have to speak up against the CD Acts, and she again contrasts England with other places around the globe:

Surely on a question which *directly strikes* at the physical and moral life of tens of thousands of women, and profoundly affects the morality of the whole population, which threatens the purity and stability of our homes, which stabs at the very heart of pure affection, which degrades all womanhood through foul associations of thought and feeling, and which murders chivalry and generosity towards women in the hearts of our sons and brothers, surely on such a question as this the voice of the women of England should be heard; and undoubtedly it will be heard; for we live under no Imperialism in England, and to a Parliament – a future if not a present one – fairly and truly representing the people, we shall fearlessly appeal. (128)

Butler's statement is significant for a number of reasons. First, she makes a convincing case for the increased involvement of women in politics since she argues that they should have a seat at the table when legislation affects women's bodies – an argument that will continue long after her day. Second, she acknowledges that the CD Acts affect "the morality of the whole population" and endanger "the purity and stability of our homes," which, as I discussed earlier, aligns her with the laws' proponents who

believe the legislation will affect the morality of the entire nation. Third, she detaches British women from colonized subjects, claiming that British women have a parliament that will hear their appeals unlike native women living in a colony.

This reference to imperialism is significant because it draws attention to the shared vocabulary of gender politics and imperial rule. Butler shows here that she recognizes the subordinated status of women, but she believes that in a country like England, women should be able to demand their rights. This argument has important ramifications for British governance since Butler indirectly questions the role of imperialism at a time when the common view was that British colonizers helped bring greater freedom to colonized women. As Levine notes, colonies often "came, quite early on, to be defined by the apparently vast number of ways in which women were degraded and brutalized [...]. The mistreatment of women came to be seen as definitive of primitive societies, and one of the many reasons justifying the need for colonial authority" (*The British Empire* 158). What did it mean then that Butler and others claimed that women were being mistreated in England? Did that mean the British Empire *was not* a source of women's liberation? Later, Butler would shift her rhetoric in order to campaign for the repeal of the CD Acts in India. In her support of *this* cause, she does not differentiate between British and Indian women; rather, she calls them "fellow-citizens and sisters" and emphasizes "the sacred cause of Justice and of Womanhood" ("From Mrs. Josephine E. Butler" vii). Her position assumes equality between British and Indian women although it is indisputable that white women had more power than colonized women in the Victorian period. Butler was not alone in advocating on "behalf" of colonized females. In fact, "British feminists have tended to portray women from the colonies as helpless and degraded, enslaved and in need of help rather than as partners in a broader enterprise aimed at equality" (Levine, *The British Empire* 176).

Although Butler attempts to equalize the experience of "woman" across cultures and colonial boundaries, it is worth noting that she describes the fallen women for whom she campaigns with the same terms

of desperation, enslavement, and helplessness. In one piece she describes the destitute woman as “a weak and prostrate figure lying at our door,” “a corpse [...] an outraged corpse, crushed with the heaped and pitiless weight of the sins of others and her own,” and women who have been “dedicated” to “profanest service” (“The Lovers of the Lost” 93, 94). In another work she borrows language of enslavement and darkness to illustrate the status of the fallen woman:

O my countrywomen, need I remind you of the fact, that the crusade we are engaged in is for the liberation of our fellow-women from the darkest, cruellest slavery the world has seen? Need I remind you how sad at all times is the lot of fallen woman, – how, in spite of the tenderness of Christ to the woman who was a sinner, society, professing His religion, has tacitly agreed to brand and outlaw her? And how, under this modern and inconceivably wicked system of the State supervision of harlotry for the protection of the *male* sinner, the fate of outcast woman becomes tenfold dark and more hopeless. (“The Duty of Women” 125)

Butler characterizes these poor British women, like the Indian women on whose “behalf” she later speaks, as in need of saving, desperate for help in escaping their profane existence. This does not dismiss Butler’s racial bias in the India campaign, but it does show that she used this language of helplessness in multiple ways for rhetorical effect. In order to challenge prevailing attitudes about male privilege, specifically men’s ability to purchase sex with impunity, she worked to dramatize the experience of the fallen woman, to make the figure pitiable so that her audience would demand legal action and social purity for men and women. Furthermore, by comparing the fallen woman to a dark slave, Butler pulls on existing images and tropes of colonialism – specifically the abolished slave industry – to convince her audience of the fallen woman’s status as victim.

While Butler’s criticism of imperialism in her campaign against the domestic CD Acts may have been implicit, her attacks on men and male

privilege were not. Her rhetoric shifted as needed to gain sympathy for her cause, but she never waived publicly in her opposition to state regulation of prostitution. She repeatedly makes her position clear, writing "It is not a law for Englishmen to endorse: it is a law worked out in secrecy, mystified by indefiniteness, upheld by violence" ("An Appeal to the People" 116). In a piece called *The Hour Before the Dawn: An Appeal to Men*, she takes the rhetoric of fallenness, of moral destitution and the possibility of redemption, and turns it on men. Instead of describing in vivid detail the horrible living conditions of fallen women in order to gain sympathy and zeal for reform from her audience, she utilizes her most colorful language to speak of men and *their* destitute nature. She writes,

My whole soul grows sick, my heart is faint, and my brain reels, I am haunted, I am stifled as by the smoke of Tophet, when men's sins rise up before me, the sins of my countrymen; yet, before God I declare it, I love you, my countrymen, my brothers. I love the grossest sinner that lives; in a certain sense I honour him. The poor coin, trampled down in the mire of the streets, still bears upon it the image and superscription of the king. I know when I look at the victim of sin – my brother, worn out, degraded, poisoned through his whole being – that God can, if he please, stretch forth the arm of his omnipotence and seize this leprous one proclaiming himself 'unclean, unclean,' purify him, transform him, and raise him up to sit in heavenly places among the sons of God and saints in light.

I know that you are lost men; that you can never become what you were, – never what you were. Yet hear me tell you, in Christ's name, that although you can never undo the past, nor return to innocence, you may through a mighty regenerating power become something better than what you were in guileless childhood. (246, 248)

The language Butler uses should seem familiar – gross, trampled, poor, lost, impure – these are the adjectives typically used to describe fallen

women, but Butler uses them to describe men who are sexually sinful. She even borrows from the lexicon of fallenness and the civilizing mission when she writes that these men “can never become” what they once were. Like Emily and Martha in *David Copperfield* and Hetty in *Adam Bede*, they never can be whole or pure again. They never can regain what they have lost. Butler’s description confronts the notion of woman as the source of social purity. For Butler, the argument that a primary part of a wife’s familial and societal role is to remain pure while her husband may indulge in profligacy does not benefit families or society – it certainly does not benefit women. Butler wants purity for both sexes and while this seems simple, it challenges the foundations of patriarchal power. One of the reasons a patriarchal structure dominates is that it seems natural, without question, and historical to many who live by its discipline. Butler’s rich depiction of male wretchedness questions that natural ability and right to rule since she portrays the sinful man as a victim – too weak to resist worldly pleasures – and as wholly poisoned – too sick to generate good in the larger community.

As I outlined earlier, critiques of male privilege inherently question the underpinnings of colonial power, which is also built upon a perceived sense of its natural rule, unquestionable leadership, and historical precedence. Butler’s vivid rhetoric was crucial in repealing the CD Acts, and the controversy she stoked was due not only to the fact that she was an outspoken critic with good connections and linguistic prowess, but also to the fact that her criticism challenged much more than legislators’ voting records and principles. Her works on the laws challenged male privilege and hypocrisy, government surveillance, medical ethics, and separate spheres ideology. Each of these conventions played a critical part in maintaining imperial power, so Butler’s questioning of these practices, and her argument that women should not be treated like colonized subjects, was destabilizing to the interdependent patriarchal and imperial systems. Of course, regulating venereal disease had a much longer lifespan in Britain’s colonies than it did in British towns in large part because of racist ideology and “the constant work required” to retain power in their

colonies (Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics* 3). Thus, while women in Britain increasingly gained more rights, it took much longer for colonized peoples across the globe. Furthermore, while Butler's speeches and publications challenge the empire's assumption of moral supremacy by highlighting male hypocrisy, her works also reinforce empire, to a degree, by the fact that she utilizes conceptions of English exceptionalism. Butler's demands, while direct, are complicated in that she advocates for women's rights but does not promote an alternative femininity that does not depend upon sexual purity; rather, she demands that men be held to the same standard of purity as women. Despite these complications, her work deserves closer scrutiny in the canon of imperial prose as we continue to honor her contributions to the feminist movement in England.

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Notes

¹ I follow historian Philippa Levine in using the "older term *venereal disease*, or *venereal diseases* rather than the contemporary term, *sexually transmissible diseases* [...] since this is the historically specific term used at the time" (*Prostitution, Race, and Politics* 331).

² Martineau goes on to argue in this piece that rather than pass this law and begin to quarantine citizens at the expense of the state, the military would be better off working to prevent "the vice and the disease" by giving enlisted men more to do. She writes, "Our young soldiers have not enough to do; and what they have to do is irksome [...] no provision made for the rational and profitable occupation and pleasant recreation of the soldiers, the whole world of licence is thrown open to men wearied with idleness, desperate with dullness, and craving the relief and luxury of jollity" (80, 81). She also argues for the suppression of brothels and punishment of its "abbettors" (81).

³ Butler's work, in many ways, acts as a precursor to the social purity feminism of Sarah Grand, who challenged sexual inequality while "underwriting traditional assumptions about women's nature and duties" (Heilmann and Forward 3). The social purity movement was an important "feminist attack on modern masculinity," but it was also "conducted

through the patriarchal rhetoric of imperialist eugenics, an ideology which defined women as vessels for the reproduction of male power” (3). While the social purity movement critiqued male privilege, it also upheld notions of national morality and superiority (embodied in the woman) that align with imperial rhetoric. Social purity activists sought to hold men accountable, but they still focused on the female body as site of ideal purity since men would heal through women’s power to save them. In this scheme, women would challenge male privilege, but their bodies would still remain under scrutiny since their ability to save was predicated on their purity. Fallen women, then, would remain subordinated and would threaten national morality – a key notion in imperial ideology of superiority and exceptionalism.

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