Exploring the Religious Divide

Abstract: This chapter seeks to demonstrate an enduring, global pattern of Catholic colonizers mixing with local communities compared to Protestant colonizers. After all, before a pattern can be explained, it must first be affirmed. To do so, I move across world regions, starting with Southeast Asia and moving on to East Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. While noting some exceptions, this chapter shows that Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Belgian colonizers often took local wives, sometimes with official support, while the Dutch, English, Germans, and Americans worked to limit contact and police racial boundaries. Colonial reality is of course complex, but there exists a strong pattern of Catholic mixing and Protestant reluctance, one that is found around the world and over time.

Keywords: amalgamation; apartheid; mestizo, Metis; one-drop rule; segregation

Before one can explain a given pattern, one must first reasonably demonstrate that it holds true. In an effort to show that Catholic colonizers consistently mixed more than Protestants across time and geography, this section provides an overview of colonial sexual relations by world region. It seeks to show distinct attitudes towards race and sex in Catholic and Protestant colonial powers, but also takes seriously several important exceptions to these broad global patterns. I begin in Southeast Asia, and then shift to East Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia provides a useful starting point for this project, home to some of the most sustained, varied forms of colonial rule. From 1511 (Malacca) through 1984 (Brunei), European colonizers included the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English, French, and Americans. Southeast Asia provides a useful starting point because many colonial possessions were ruled by multiple, successive colonizers, allowing for comparison over time. In addition, the region is home to some crucial cases, as the Dutch Indies provide a serious challenge to my observations. Some of the most important research on colonial intimacy, most notably Stoler’s work, focuses on the Dutch East Indies. For this reason, I provide slightly more detail here than in other regions, including some field and archival work in Sumatran Missions. Southeast Asia is also an important region to begin with because French Indochina provides a case of late Catholic colonialism, mitigating claims that changes in sexual activities over time are greater than across faith. In Figure 2.1,¹ I have provided a basic map to help the reader navigate this complex region.

In 1511, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in Southeast Asia. They provide an extreme case of intermixing. In the seventeenth century, William Dampier (1651–1715) declared that the Portuguese “made use of the Native Women at their pleasure, whether Virgins or Married Women; such as they liked they took without control: and it is probable, they as little restrained their lust in other places; for the Breed of them is scattered all over.”² Not only did the Portuguese take local partners and produce mixed offspring, their children developed self-identified communities and creole languages that remain today. Portuguese traders left Eurasian populations throughout Southeast Asia, including Makassar, Bantam, Tonkin, Siam, and as noted,