

## GENDER AND COLONIALISM: EXPANSION OR MARGINALIZATION?\*

DURBA GHOSH

*Mount Holyoke College*

**ABSTRACT.** *Hardly two decades old, historians of gender and colonialism might well claim to have invented a whole new field of scholarship: gender and colonialism specialists draw as much of their intellectual inspiration from each other as they do from the nation- or region-bound fields in which they research and teach. As the field of gender and colonialism has developed and expanded, it has been faced with two significant challenges. One is whether the concerns of gender and colonial history have affected the concerns of older fields in history, such as economic, political, labour, and military histories; recent assessments of imperial history suggest that gender is considered a marginal category of analysis. Another challenge is how to define and study gender and colonialism so that it does not replicate the inequalities and hierarchies of colonialism, so that we study colonizing and colonized societies in equal measure.*

---

### I

A relatively recent upstart in the field of imperial history, the subspecialty of gender and colonialism has enlarged studies of European imperialisms and colonialisms by producing a large body of scholarship on women (European and non-European) and gender. Once associated with the narrow definition of white women in the colonies, gender and colonialism now encompasses a much wider framework, concerned with the ways in which colonialism restructured gender dynamics of both colonizing and colonized societies. These contributions have engaged with well-established historiographies in social reform movements, colonial governance, and national cultures by integrating concerns of race, class, religion, and sexuality. Indeed, one might argue that few topics in the presumptive category of the ‘old imperial history’ have been left untouched by historians of gender and colonialism. Many do not adhere to disciplinary boundaries, drawing from a range of academic disciplines, including (but not limited to) post-colonial literary criticism, anthropology, art history, women’s and gender studies, geography, and sociology.

While much of the scholarship of the 1980s and early 1990s on gender and colonialism emerged out of British imperial histories of Asia and Africa in the long nineteenth century, scholarship dating from 1995 onward includes French, German, Dutch, Belgian, and American colonialisms. A sign of the growing importance of colonial histories to women’s and gender history was demonstrated at the most recent Berkshire Conference on the History of Women in the United States (which draws from histories of all regions of the

\* The author would like to acknowledge the generous and critical readings offered by Susan Pedersen and Philippa Levine. All mistakes and oversights are my own.

world and all time periods) in which there was a 50 per cent increase in the number of panels that included empire, colonialism, or imperialism in their title.<sup>1</sup> Alongside panels on British colonialism in Canada and the Caribbean were studies on the empires of Rome and Russia. In the past several years, articles and book prizes of the Berkshire Conference have been given to works on gender and colonialism.<sup>2</sup> These trends are perhaps one sign of the globalization (and feminization) of imperial history and the unsettling of national histories as the central way of organizing historical work.<sup>3</sup>

As the field of gender and colonialism has developed and expanded, it has been faced with two significant challenges. One is whether the concerns of gender and colonial history have affected the concerns of older fields in history, such as economic, political, labour, and military histories. Another challenge is how to define and study gender and colonialism so that it does not replicate the inequalities and hierarchies of colonialism.

## II

When the field of gender and colonialism was in its infancy almost two decades ago, it was synonymous with studies of European women in the colonies. The often-cited, ground-breaking volume of essays, *Western women and imperialism*<sup>4</sup> brought attention to the contradictions faced by European women in the colonies. Seen to be in diminished capacity because they were members of the 'weaker sex', white women benefited from being members of the 'superior races', and were charged with the responsibilities of upholding the cultural and moral values of empire. In challenging Kipling's image of the vain, shallow, and inconsequential *memsahib*, the essays in this volume showed that historical narratives of white women in the empire had been too narrow: white women were travellers, missionaries, nurses, journalists, teachers, as well as wives and companions. Several of the most influential essays in this volume showed that European women did not always hold feminist aspirations or interests, particularly when it came to their Asian or African counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

Studies of European women in the colonies are now a staple of gender and colonialism history; these studies have intersected in creative and innovative ways with a growing scholarly interest in travel narratives, social movements, histories of sexuality, nationalism,

<sup>1</sup> In 2002, out of 192 panels and roundtables, 21 (or about 11 per cent) were explicitly about empire; this is up significantly from the last conference in 1999 when 11 panels out of 140 (or 7 per cent) were about empire.

<sup>2</sup> The 1999 articles prize was given to Lisa A. Lindsay, 'Domesticity and difference: male breadwinners, working women, and colonial citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian general strike', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), pp. 783–812, and the 2000 book prize was awarded to Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial citizens: republican rights, paternal privilege, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See A. G. Hopkins, 'Back to the future: from national to imperial history', *Past and Present*, 164 (1999), pp. 198–243.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Strobel and Nupur Chaudhuri, eds., *Western women and imperialism: complicity and resistance* (Bloomington, IN, 1992); see also Margaret Strobel, *European women and the second British empire* (Bloomington, IN, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Helen Callaway and Dorothy O. Helly, 'Crusader for empire: Flora Shaw/Lady Lugard', and Barbara N. Ramusack, 'Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies: British women activists in India, 1865–1945', in Strobel and Chaudhuri, eds., *Western women and imperialism*.

and citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Histories of European women in the colonies have complicated conventional understandings of white women as powerless, sheltered, and lazy, by showing that white women contributed necessary labour – domestic, moral, educational, and medical – to imperial enterprises.

Helen Callaway's book on nurses in Nigeria showed how the work of white women was central to running an empire.<sup>7</sup> While Callaway's monograph focused on colonial Nigeria in the twentieth century, another book that appeared in the same year, Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, beaches, and bases*, is expansive, making links between foreign policy, multinational commerce, and the global exploitation of women's labour, as sex workers, as diplomatic wives, as Hollywood images, as factory labour.<sup>8</sup> Callaway's work has been inspiring to a generation of historians and anthropologists for its methodology and sensitivity. Enloe's book is influential because it stands as a battle cry for modern-day transnational feminists who are making more visible the links between capital, gender inequalities, militarism, and labour use.

Mary Procida's *Married to the empire*, which is a recent contribution to studies of European women in the colonies, has taken the critique of the image of the lazy memsahib a step further and shown the ways in which being the wife of a British official made demands on women that were unlike what they experienced at home.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the nurturing and reproductive capacities required of imperial mothers, as Anna Davin's important article suggested some twenty years ago, Procida argues that imperial wives were expected to put their husbands and the empire ahead of their offspring, often leaving their children for long periods of time.<sup>10</sup> Challenging the idea that the bodily protection of white women produced women as defenceless victims, Procida shows that colonial wives handled guns, stood strong against rebels and terrorists, and thought of themselves not as sheltered flowers secluded in the private sphere of the bungalow, but rather as servants of the Raj and agents of history.<sup>11</sup> Procida's image of the gun-toting wife is compelling, particularly since it shows women exercising some control over their physical safety in the putatively dangerous sites of the tropics, but this image raises questions about whether women with guns ever successfully destabilized colonial anxieties about black men sexually assaulting white women. As Jenny Sharpe and Nancy Paxton have persuasively argued, keeping white women safe from sexual violence in the aftermath of the 1857 mutiny justified British repression against Indians after the 1857 mutiny and beyond.<sup>12</sup> Although the anxieties were wildly exaggerated, the discourse of the sexually violated white woman, and the putative

<sup>6</sup> Beyond Britain and its colonies, see Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Women and the colonial state: essays on gender and modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942* (Amsterdam, 2000); Lora Wildenthal, *German women for empire: 1882–1945* (Durham, NC, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Helen Callaway, *Gender, culture, and empire: European women in colonial Nigeria* (Urbana, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, beaches, and bases: making feminist sense of international politics* (Berkeley, 1988; rev. edn 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Mary Procida, *Married to the empire: gender, politics and imperialism in India, 1883–1947* (Manchester, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and motherhood', in Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley, 1997); Procida, *Married to the empire*, pp. 46–7.

<sup>11</sup> Procida, *Married to the empire*, ch. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of empire: the figure of woman in the colonial text* (Minneapolis, 1993); Nancy Paxton, *Writing under the raj: gender, race, and rape in the British colonial imagination, 1830–1947* (New Brunswick, 1999), esp. chs. 3, 7; Vinay Lal, 'The incident of the "crawling lane": women in the Punjab disturbances of 1919', *Genders*, 16 (1993), pp. 35–60.

damage to her purity, chastity, and the embodiment of national honour that she stood for, were crucial to explaining why colonial regimes worked so hard to discipline white women into forms of domesticity (and whiteness) that required that they remain indoors, keeping their clothes and their bodies white, and supervising their servants from an appropriate distance.

On the popular front, there has also been a groundswell of books intended for general audiences that have uncritically applauded the contributions of European women in the colonies, appealing to readers who seek sustenance in imperial nostalgia.<sup>13</sup> To dismiss these 'popular' books as somehow inadequate is to forget that popular histories of gender and colonialism share some of the same interests as their more academic counterparts: they both tell narratives about female heroism amid the challenges of empire. These types of accounts often recreate a 'great woman in the outback' narrative without any larger context. Rather than seeing colonies as a site where European women were able to prove their mettle against the odds, it is crucial to see how the category of 'women', as wives, nurses, and so on was produced with explicitly political aims in mind.

Histories of white women travellers and the ways in which they experienced the linked processes of travelling, narrating their encounters with non-Europeans, and defining their selves differently from their male counterparts have proved exceptionally fertile ground for scholars of gender and colonialism.<sup>14</sup> Mary Louise Pratt's influential *Imperial eyes* identified 'contact zones', as the contested space that gives rise to travel narratives.<sup>15</sup> In her complex analysis of new world travel accounts, Pratt demonstrated how travel and cultural contact were crucial means of narrating cultural exchanges on axes of science and sentimentality. In negotiating between these two, travel narratives consolidated various types of social and sexual norms, particularly in texts that compared the primitive and putatively unbridled sexuality of native women with the more demure, and sexually restrained, European women.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars have focused on the ways that women expressed their encounters with colonial places, peoples, and things in ways that complicated older narratives by men, such as those by Columbus, Cortes, and de Casas. By bringing attention to writings by or about women, these scholars have created a new canon of literature that includes Lady Montagu's *Letters from Turkey*, Emily Eden's *Letters from India*, and *Harby house*.

The histories of European women in Asia, Africa, Australia, and Canada, have been part of a 'recovery project': by bringing women back into history and introducing their writings into colonial literatures, white women can now be counted as having participated

<sup>13</sup> Katie Hickman, *Daughters of Britannia: the lives and times of diplomatic wives* (London, 1999); Dea Birkett, *Spinsters abroad: Victorian lady explorers* (Oxford, 1989); Margaret Macmillan, *Women of the raj* (London, 1988); Marian Fowler, *Below the peacock fan: first ladies of the raj* (London, 1987); Joanna Trollope, *Britannia's daughters: women of the British empire* (London, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of difference: women's travel writing and colonialism* (London, 1991); Deirdre David, *Rule Britannia: women, empire, and Victorian writing* (Ithaca, NY, 1995); Susan Morgan, *Place matters: gendered geography in Victorian women's travel books about southeast Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1996); Inderpal Grewal, *Home and harem: nation, gender, empire, and the cultures of travel* (Durham, NC, 1996); Billie Melman, *Women's orients: Englishwomen and the Middle East, 1718–1918* (Ann Arbor, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (London, 1992), pp. 6–7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 5; see also Jennifer Morgan, "'Some could suckle over their shoulder': male travelers, female bodies and the gendering of racial ideology, 1500–1770", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1997), pp. 167–92; Kate Teltscher, *India inscribed: European and British writing on India, 1600–1800* (Delhi, 1995), chs. 1–2, esp. pp. 41–5; Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid zones: maternity, sexuality, and empire in eighteenth-century English narratives* (Baltimore, 1995).

in imperial activities.<sup>17</sup> But we must go beyond recuperating women in history: fewer and fewer of these titles are addressing how the participation of women might have affected the nature of colonial rule. For instance, Procida's book argues that imperial wives took up masculine activities. But, as Procida herself admits, in an era when women were prohibited from joining the imperial services,<sup>18</sup> what, if any, were the political consequences of unsettling gender categories? How do British colonial policies look different if we learn that women (and not just men) participated in recreational hunting? More broadly, now that we have recovered white women in imperial histories and literatures, are there more complex questions we can raise? Because of an ever-growing list of books and articles on the experiences and writings of European women in the colonies, it is both increasingly challenging and necessary to think new ways of making this material relevant and original.

### III

Moving away from the narrow definition of gender and colonialism as the study of white women in the colonies, another fruitful strand of scholarship on the relationship between gender and colonialism is scholarship that has made connections between metropolitan and colonial contexts. Putting Britain and its colonies in one field of analysis has been an explicit goal of the 'new imperial history',<sup>19</sup> which posits that metropole and colony are inextricably linked, mutually constitutive of the other and not easily isolated into domestic and colonial history. Crucially, the new imperial history explicitly puts cultural history and an emphasis on questions of race, gender, class, and sexuality at the centre of colonial history. Nonetheless, being 'new' can be counterproductive, and, as Antoinette Burton has noted, it may be more accurate to see these projects as always 'unfinished'.<sup>20</sup>

Studies on the emergence of feminism and women's associations have shown that European women occupied contradictory positions in relation to empire. By analysing the complex web of connections between social reform spearheaded in England and the uneven and unexpected effects of these movements in colonies, gender and colonialism historians have shown the ways in which feminism and women's activism, often assumed to be outside the circuits of imperial governance, were nonetheless bound up in the racial and class hierarchies of imperial rule.

Antoinette Burton's *Burdens of history* is an expansion of her earlier essay and demonstrates how British feminists became active and knowledgeable about imperial activities as a way of advertising their ability to be productive members of the nation – and thus ready for the vote. In questions involving those they imperiously referred to as their 'Indian sisters', British feminists sustained various campaigns that demonstrated that they were prepared to be involved in empire as a way of claiming their rights as citizens of Britain.

<sup>17</sup> For a consideration of the pitfalls of such a 'recovery project', see Jane Haggis, 'White women and colonialism: towards a non-recuperative history', in Claire Midgley, ed., *Gender and imperialism* (Manchester, 1998); and idem, 'Gendering colonialism or colonizing gender?: Recent women's studies approaches to white women and the history of British colonialism', *Women Studies International Forum*, 12 (1990), pp. 105–15.

<sup>18</sup> Procida, *Married to the empire*, p. 158.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, 'Between metropole and colony: rethinking a research agenda', in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire*; Sudipta Sen, *Domestic subversions: national imperialism and the origins of British India* (London, 2002), pp. xxiv–xxviii; Kathleen Wilson, ed. *The new imperial history, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction', in Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities* (London, 1999).

Ironically, in the name of progress for women, in Burton's account English women themselves generated gender ideologies that limited the political gains and voices of native women.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Julia Bush's monograph *Edwardian ladies and imperial power*, which is an institutional history, focused on several associations that promoted activities in the empire, argues that Edwardian upper-class women were deeply invested in perpetuating their social privilege through their involvement in imperial organizations.<sup>22</sup> 'Ladies' in the narrowest sense of the word, Bush's female subjects show themselves to be concerned with consolidating the networks of race and class superiority, while relying on men and their political networks to carry out a 'ladies'' brand of volunteerism and philanthropy.

Mrinalini Sinha's recent work on Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, has also shown how deeply complicated and entrenched were the connections between British, American, and Indian feminisms. Sinha makes a persuasive argument that these different forms of nationally affiliated, imperial feminisms occasionally worked against each other, even though they were putatively allied in promoting the rights of women.<sup>23</sup> Claire Midgley's *Women against slavery* showed the ways in which early campaigns against abolition brought English women into political debates through extra-parliamentary campaigns. Complicating the standard narrative that English women's participation in anti-slavery campaigns was a clear precursor to the suffragette movement, Ferguson has compared the British abolitionist movement with the American one and carefully shown how British women saw their activism as a human issue, part of their moral duty as women and Christians, while American women saw a much closer relationship between demanding freedom for slaves and rights for women.<sup>24</sup>

These studies by Burton, Bush, Sinha, and Midgley on the histories of feminism and femininity show that women as a category rarely had unified interests, politically or culturally. Careful to specify the ways in which women were constructed by various disciplinary regimes, these studies have highlighted the multiple entanglements between feminism, feminist and social reform movements and imperial practices.

Histories of colonial sexuality have also integrated metropolitan and colonial anxieties in a field of analysis. Once represented by a single volume, Ronald Hyam's *Empire and sexual opportunity*, studies on sexuality and the body have come into deeper dialogue with feminist scholarship on race and class.<sup>25</sup> Anne McClintock's *Imperial leather* and two books by Ann Stoler, *Race and the education of desire* and *Carnal knowledge and imperial power* have drawn explicit links between the colonial categorization of racial differences with questions of metropolitan class distinctions and sexual anxieties. Theoretically sophisticated, both authors draw on a wide canvas to demonstrate that European colonizers were as much concerned about maintaining class and gender distinctions between themselves as they were in constructing their racial superiority over those they colonized.

<sup>21</sup> Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of history: British feminists, Indian women and imperial culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Julia Bush, *Edwardian ladies and imperial power* (Leicester, 2000), see especially, pp. 5–6, ch. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, ed. Mrinalini Sinha (Ann Arbor, 1999); Mrinalini Sinha, 'Refashioning Mother India: feminism and nationalism in late-colonial India', *Feminist Studies*, 26 (2000), pp. 623–44; idem, 'The lineage of the "Indian" modern: rhetoric, agency and the Sarda Act in late colonial India', in Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities*; idem, 'Reading Mother India: empire, nation, and the female voice', *Journal of Women's History*, 6 (1994), pp. 6–44.

<sup>24</sup> Claire Midgley, *Women against slavery: the British campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1995), chs. 5, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Empire and sexual opportunity* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 16–18, for his criticism of feminist approaches to sexuality.

Anne McClintock's work draws together the racialization of class in Victorian England with the classification of race in colonial South Africa. By juxtaposing these two fields, McClintock links the ways in which metaphors of sexuality and family were mapped on to material practices, such as the appropriation of middle-class women's labour in England simultaneous to the colonial dependence on African labour under colonial rule.<sup>26</sup> In her earlier book, Ann Stoler revisited Michel Foucault's works on sexuality and situated Europe's emergence into modernity as coeval with colonialism.<sup>27</sup> In order to understand the ways that bourgeois bodies are disciplined, Stoler's recent book focuses further attention on the colonial family and household as a crucial site for regulating sexual and social intimacy between black and white, and creating class norms.<sup>28</sup> Both Stoler and McClintock have built on the works of Foucault, as well as Marx and Freud, to show the ways in which readings of social theory are enhanced by accounting for the sexual and racial politics of empire.

Elizabeth Collingham's *Imperial bodies*, although not primarily about gender, complements some of the themes presented by Stoler and McClintock and focuses on British India as a specific site for the production and regulation of highly racialized, 'indianized', and 'anglicized' bodies.<sup>29</sup> In a very readable account that is nonetheless theoretically rich (she draws on Mary Douglas, Norbert Elias, and others), Collingham shows the ways in which political insecurities about the legitimacy of British rule gave rise to a regime of bodily regulation that created the anglicized body as one that 'became an instrument of colonial rule'. The regulation of the body, particularly that of the prostitute, is the focus of Philippa Levine's ambitious study on the promulgation of the Contagious Diseases Acts in four British colonies throughout the late nineteenth century. Bringing together political, social, military, and cultural history, Levine shows that regulating prostitution was a transnational problem, central to the ways in which the British government at home and abroad managed the sexual demands of British soldiers without exacerbating the 'problem' of venereal diseases, which was imagined to emanate from native sex workers.<sup>30</sup>

One of the crucial points of tension between these works is who or what (if anyone) generates racial, sexual, and class anxieties? This is, perhaps, an overly simplistic question: by now, historians should know that historical changes are not easily linked to particular catalysts. The arguments of these authors do not radically disagree but are positioned on a continuum. On one end, there is Philippa Levine's work in which the state was the primary

<sup>26</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (New York, 1995), see especially pp. 160–5, 167–9, 223, 252–3.

<sup>27</sup> Ann L. Stoler, *Race and the education of desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Ann L. Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley, 2002). See also Frances Gouda, *Dutch culture overseas: colonial practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942* (Amsterdam, 1995); Jean Gelman Taylor, *The social world of Batavia* (Madison, WI, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Collingham, *Imperial bodies: the physical experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (London, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, race & politics: policing venereal disease in the British empire* (New York, 2003); see also Philippa Levine, 'Venereal disease, prostitution, and the politics of empire: the case of British India', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4 (1994), pp. 579–602; idem, 'Rereading the 1890s: venereal disease as "constitutional crisis" in Britain and British India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55 (1996), pp. 585–612; idem, 'Battle colors: race, sex, and colonial soldiery in World War I', *Journal of Women's History*, 9 (1998), pp. 104–30; idem, 'Modernity, medicine and colonialism: the contagious diseases ordinances in Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements', in Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities*; Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian society* (New York, 1980).



source of socio-sexual regulation for native female sex workers and their male European clients. This argument shades into Stoler's claims that various institutions of governance (home, school, courts) generated and reproduced boundaries and normative behaviours necessary to imperial rule and authority. At another end of the spectrum, McClintock's and Collingham's arguments are much more decentred, relying on a sense that unnamed forces transformed colonial societies to become more conscious of race and class characteristics in the ways that bodies performed gender and were represented. This is not a tension that requires resolution, but it raises the question whether if the British (or the Dutch) had not been so racist in their attitudes about miscegenation and interracial sex, colonial societies might have been less conflict-ridden. One might well ask whether Africans and Asians were similarly anxious about intimacy with European colonials and whether by focusing on European bodily disciplines and social anxieties, colonial discourses of the body may be given too much credit as the primary vehicle of introducing bourgeois disciplines in sexual health, hygiene, and appropriate domestic behaviour.

Mindful of the arguments presented by Joan Scott about the mistake in equating gender with women, many gender and colonialism scholars have examined the creation of particular types of feminine and masculine cultures in colonial contexts, addressing the political consequences of these forms of gendering both at home and abroad.<sup>31</sup>

In making clear that masculinity is often constructed, and neither organic nor natural to colonial societies, several books in Manchester University Press's series, *Studies in Imperialism*, edited by John Mackenzie, have taken up this question with scholarly vigour and theoretical innovation.<sup>32</sup> Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial masculinity* remains a model for understanding the ways in which masculinities interact to produce different kinds of hierarchies based on race and class. Using the idea of an 'imperial social formation', which puts British and Indian social history within the same framework, Sinha showed how constructions of the 'manly Englishman' were contiguous with the images of the 'effeminate Bengali'. Training men into particular masculine forms has become a strong theme in the work on colonial masculinities. John Mackenzie's work on hunting and spoils of the hunt were central to understanding how sport gave rise to particular types of masculinized identities.<sup>33</sup> John Mangan's work on public schools in Britain and the ways they trained school-aged boys to become imperial officers demonstrates that patriotism and imperial citizenship were concerns from an early age.<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Castle's methodologically creative monograph analysing children's books shows how boys and girls were raised on particular narratives that suited British imperial triumphalism.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Joan Scott, *Gender and the politics of history* (New York, 1988; rev. edn 1999), pp. 15–50.

<sup>32</sup> For persuasive arguments as to why masculinity matters, see John Tosh, 'What should historians do with masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), pp. 179–202; and Mrinalini Sinha, 'Giving masculinity a history: some contributions from the historiography of colonial India', *Gender and History*, 11 (1999), pp. 445–60.

<sup>33</sup> John Mackenzie, *The empire of hunting: hunting, conservation, and British imperialism* (Manchester, 1988); see also idem, 'The imperial pioneer and hunter and the British masculine stereotype in late Victorian and Edwardian times', in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and morality: middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Mangan, *The games ethic and imperialism* (New York, 1986); see also J. A. Mangan, "'The grit of our forefathers": invented traditions, propaganda and imperialism', and Allen Warren, 'Citizens of the empire: Baden-Powell, scouts and guides and an imperial ideal, 1900–1940', in John Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and popular culture* (Manchester, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's children: reading colonialism through children's books* (Manchester, 1996).



Building on the theme of gendered cultures and identities, some of the most ambitious and influential books have shown the ways in which masculine and feminine ideals and images are created in tension with changing social and political demands. By working through the ways in which cultures of gender, built on various types of racial, sexual, and class distinctions, enabled white men to justify their political authority over large numbers of colonized subjects, monographs published in the last decade by Kathleen Brown, Elizabeth Thompson, and Catherine Hall have made more explicit the links between colonial state formation, political authority, and gender.

Kathleen Brown's book about colonial Virginia, *Good wives, nasty wenches, and anxious patriarchs*, and Elizabeth Thompson's book about the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon between the wars have made compelling arguments that the establishment of white male authority within families and communities was constitutive of a larger process of state formation that allowed the privileging of certain racial groups over others.<sup>36</sup> Built on the work of Susan Dwyer Amussen, Lynn Hunt, Carole Pateman, and others, both Kathleen Brown and Elizabeth Thompson demonstrate how the family was the state writ small, in Europe and abroad.<sup>37</sup> The details of their arguments about vastly different geographical areas two centuries apart diverge in many respects. Thompson calls this process one of paternalism and Brown refers to male heads of households as patriarchs; nonetheless, their feminist methodology shares a commitment to showing how colonial state formation relied on the enforcement of gendered and racial differences from the most intimate of circumstances – within households and families – to the most public. As Brown has noted, establishing both familial and political authority over their plantation households enabled white men in colonial Virginia to justify their continued enslavement of African male and female bodies in order to avail themselves of much-needed slave labour. The 'anxious patriarchs' of her title may well be one of the most innovative arguments and adaptable to other contexts: she argues that as white men became more powerful on the plantation, they felt themselves to be vulnerable to revolts that threatened their hold on power and political legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> Thompson's work has shown through a study of various institutions, clinics, post offices, schools, train stations, that no matter how minor for the surveillance and intervention of the French colonial state, not even managing the very intimate and bodily practice of breast feeding among indigenous women.<sup>39</sup> As institutions of the state became involved in Arab men's and women's lives, discourses of citizenship and participation in civic institutions became structured predominantly by gender, drawing men and women into governmental processes in differentiated ways.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good wives, nasty wenches, and anxious patriarchs: gender, race, and power in colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial citizens: republican rights, paternal privilege, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An ordered society: gender and class in early modern England* (Oxford, 1988); Lynn Hunt, *The family romance of the French revolution* (Berkeley, 1992); Carole Pateman, *The sexual contract* (Stanford, CA, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *Good wives*, pp. 179–86.

<sup>39</sup> See also Nancy Rose Hunt, "'Le bebe in brousse': European women, African birth spacing, and colonial intervention in breast feeding in the Belgian Congo', in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire*.

<sup>40</sup> On gender and citizenship in colonial Latin America, see Hilda Sabato, 'On political citizenship in nineteenth-century Latin America', *American Historical Review*, 106 (2001), pp. 1290–311. See also Sarah Chambers, *From subjects to citizens: honor, gender, and politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780–1854* (University Park, PA, 1999); Steve J. Stern, *The secret history of gender: women, men, and power in late colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995).

Catherine Hall's volume with Leonore Davidoff, *Family fortunes*, has long been a classic in feminist histories of Britain, showing very persuasively the ways in which the industrial revolution and the concomitant ascension of the middle classes was built on changing household and familial norms of gendering in which economic decisions flowed away from women to men as families established their middle-class status and women worked hard to render their labour less visible.<sup>41</sup> Hall's most recent volume, *Civilizing subjects*, complements her earlier work, focusing on the ways in which the imperial and political commitments of the Birmingham middle classes changed between 1830 and 1867. Drawing together a history of Baptist missionary activity in Jamaica with the emergence of evangelical fervour in Birmingham, Hall demonstrates how as evangelicals became involved in imperial debates and colonial governance, their optimism about the equality of colonized Africans and blacks with colonizing whites waned in the period between the Reform Act and the Morant Bay uprisings. Shaped by the demands of respectability, evangelical fervour, and a sense that their attempts at salvation were misunderstood by Jamaicans demanding political liberation, middle-class men of mid-nineteenth-century Britain adapted themselves to the crises of empire with which they were faced by becoming less broad-minded.<sup>42</sup>

For gender and colonialism scholars, an advantage of studying nation and empire in one framework is that it allows the study and comparison of multiple colonies: from the first empire in the Atlantic and the new world, to the second empire in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. This strategy enables scholars to examine how European gender ideologies and practices travelled and transformed themselves when they came into contact with different colonies and populations. Kathleen Wilson's *The island race* demonstrates the ways in which imperial contact and the gendered performances they produced allowed British national identity to be formed and consolidated throughout the eighteenth century as Britons came into contact with populations in the South Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Caribbean.<sup>43</sup> She relies on various types of sources, literature, prints and paintings, theatre, and travel narratives, to show how the Hanoverian and early Georgian nation-state came into being through imperial activity that was reflective of a popular sense of imperial ambition.

In the case of Britain, scholarship that has put empire and colony in one field has been an especially productive way of rewriting Britain's 'island narrative'. Studies on women's movements, sexuality, masculinity, and governance as questions involving empire have changed how British history is written. For Europe generally, by integrating Europe's relationship with its colonies, scholars have transformed what used to be a standard narrative of European expansion to a narrative of exchange and negotiation, albeit one that was structured by inequalities in power. While many scholars agree that making the metropole less central in studies of imperialism is a positive development, the (perhaps unintended) effect of some of this scholarship is to recentre and consolidate Europe as the place in which and from which historical transformations were generated. To reinstate the nation as the focus of historical scholarship is surely not the point of the 'new imperial

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilizing subjects: metropolis and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago, 2002); see also Catherine Hall, *White, male, and middle class* (London, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *The island race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century* (London, 2003). See also Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing imperial power: colonial subjects in eighteenth-century British painting* (Durham, NC, 1999); and Roxann Wheeler, *The complexion of race: categories of difference in eighteenth-century British culture* (Philadelphia, 2000) for close examinations of paintings and texts, respectively.

history' and most scholars are careful to say as much. In spite of this pitfall, what this scholarship is very successful at is showing the ways in which gender, race, class, and sexuality were central to creating and managing imperial structures and maintaining national identities. This goes a long way towards explaining how a relatively small number of European men and women constructed themselves as suitable and able enough to colonize large parts of the world.

#### IV

As a form of publication, edited volumes in the past decade have been especially productive in bringing together different colonial experiences in terms of colonies and colonizing powers under the broad umbrella of gender and colonialism. Although the individual essays are often more useful to students and researchers than the volumes as a whole, these volumes have been especially effective at putting historians of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Ireland, Britain, France, north America, Australia, etc., into dialogue with one another, destabilizing the metropole and colony axis as the focus of study and comparing colonies with colonies and colonizers with colonizers. Moreover, these volumes have had a democratizing effect on the field: they bring together essays by well-known, established scholars with scholarship by younger scholars, graduate students, and junior professors, making it clear that the field of gender and colonialism has an established history and a very promising future.

In volumes focused on Britain, Catherine Hall's recent reader, *Cultures of empire*, which has reprinted among the most influential articles of the last decade, is perhaps the most useful survey of work on gender and colonialism. Starting with a sophisticated and wide-ranging introduction by Hall, the volume is foregrounded in part one by several important theoretical frameworks: race, class, sexuality, and subaltern studies by eminent scholars in the field. The essays range from questions that are now staples in this field – travel, masculinity and hunting, citizenship, and discourses about otherness – and these essays are themselves staples, published several times and often cited.<sup>44</sup>

Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda's *Domesticating the empire* has implicitly redressed the dominance of Britain in the field of gender and colonialism and has examined French and Dutch colonialisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Uniting literary discourses and metaphors about the family with historical accounts about colonization, essays in this volume have shown the ways in which particular forms of gendering and domesticity were required to uphold the superiority of Europeans.<sup>45</sup> Among the most intriguing essays are those about the question of citizenship and the ways in which interracial marriages in the colonies produced legal crises for the state. The right to have a father's national status inherited by his offspring was assumed as 'natural' although this right was also one that was detrimental to keeping persons (in this case mixed-race offspring) who were not racially purely European from identifying themselves as 'European'. In addressing the ways in which colonial states balanced their own interests by keeping colonial ruling elites racially white while protecting men's paternal rights, we see how interracial sex and families

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of empire: colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Manchester, 2000). See also Midgley, ed., *Gender and imperialism*.

<sup>45</sup> Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the empire: race, gender, and family life in French and Dutch colonialism* (Charlottesville, 1998).

disrupted the social and racial fabric of colonialism and complicated the state's claims as a protector of paternal rights.<sup>46</sup>

Essays by Yael Simpson Fletcher and Frances Gouda in *Domesticating the empire* raise important questions about the ways in which metaphors of the family stood in for a model of the state, with a paternalistic (white) father ruling over a mass of unruly (brown) children. This metaphor was crucial to colonial rulers in securing their authority, making colonial rule seem familial and relatively benign; counterintuitively, this metaphor was also used by anti-colonial and putatively democratic nationalists in both Algeria and Indonesia, respectively, to incorporate Algerians and Indonesians into the national family. By showing the ways in which colonial and post-colonial rule were coterminous in creating certain types of gendered order, both Fletcher's and Gouda's essays link the political strategies of European imperialists and indigenous nationalists in ways that suggest that colonial governance and post-colonial governance shared similar aims by establishing ruling patriarchal models.<sup>47</sup>

In another volume on gender and colonialism, *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities*, Frances Gouda supplements her essay from *Domesticating the empire* and shows how Indonesian nationalists adapted and extended the metaphor of family and nation in contesting Dutch colonial presence during the Second World War. Yael Simpson Fletcher's essay on Marseilles reminds readers that the consequences of imperial contact occurred at home, in this case how to order a large population of Algerian immigrants.<sup>48</sup>

Order, in particular domestic and household order, proved to be an enduring domain for reform in colonized sites. Essays by Nayan Shah and Mary Hancock show the ways in which domestic hygiene and the urgency with which Asian women were exposed to appropriate household and child management technologies was a way of managing their sexual disorder and making them 'modern'.<sup>49</sup> Chinese mothers in San Francisco's Chinatown experienced comparable processes of learning domesticity as did Indian women learning 'home science' in colonial India. Similarly, scholarship on colonial Africa has shown the civilizing process as a deeply sophisticated programme of domesticating home life, restructuring family labour patterns so that women were encouraged to stay indoors and tend to their homes and children.<sup>50</sup> Recreating European notions of household economy and sexual discipline in their colonies, colonial regimes gave rise to an obsessive concern with soap and cleanliness, creating desires among colonized subjects for cultural

<sup>46</sup> Jean Elisabeth Peterson, "'Special customs': paternity suits and citizenship in France and the colonies, 1870–1912', and Alice L. Conklin, 'Redefining "Frenchness": citizenship, race regeneration, and imperial motherhood in France and West Africa, 1914–40', in Clancy-Smith and Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the empire*. See also Lora Wildenthal, 'Race, gender, and citizenship in the German colonial empire', in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire*.

<sup>47</sup> Yael Simpson Fletcher, 'Gendered representations of colonial Algeria around 1930', and Frances Gouda, 'Good mothers, Medeas, or Jezebels: feminine imagery in colonial and anticolonial rhetoric in the Dutch East Indies, 1900–1942', in Clancy-Smith and Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the empire*.

<sup>48</sup> Yael Simpson Fletcher, 'Unsettling settlers: colonial migrants and racialised sexuality in interwar Marseilles', and Frances Gouda, 'Gender and "hyper-masculinity" as post-colonial modernity during Indonesia's struggle for independence, 1945 to 1949', in Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities*.

<sup>49</sup> Nayan Shah, 'Cleansing motherhood: hygiene and the culture of domesticity in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1875–1900', and Mary Hancock, 'Gendering the modern: women and home science in British India', in Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and modernities*.

<sup>50</sup> See Karen Tranberg Hansen, ed., *African encounters with domesticity* (New Brunswick, 1992).

and racial whiteness that was achieved through the consumption of European products.<sup>51</sup> The notion of modernity, often equated with gender equality and progress, was often claimed by colonizing regimes as a way of lifting women out of the bonds of local customary practices or tradition; in the process of making African and Asian women 'modern', several scholars have persuasively shown the ways that colonizing modernities proved to be restrictive for native and indigenous women, moving them away from meaningful participation in political and familial affairs, such as decisions about family property and labour.<sup>52</sup>

Several recent volumes expanded the definitions of 'colonial' to include areas and historical periods beyond the second British empire and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri's *Nation, empire, colony*, is an excellent collection, bringing nation and colony into one framework to show the ways in which the development of imperial and national identities and state formation occurred in relation with one another. Spanning from British West Africa to 'comfort women' in Japan, essays in this book demonstrate the ways that gendered ideologies were produced under different colonialisms and had significant impact on how they were reproduced within the terms of anti-colonial nationalisms.<sup>53</sup>

Tamara Hunt and Micheline Lessard's *Women and the colonial gaze* is perhaps the most ambitious in scope, spanning temporally and geographically beyond Europe and the modern period.<sup>54</sup> Many of the essays in this collection bring attention to areas that are not conventionally studied by historians of gender and colonialism. Katherine Fleming's essay revisits British travel narratives and adds a new twist: she explores the ways that British Philhellenes, lovers of Greek culture, wrote narratives that tied Europe to Greece's ancient past while constructing the degraded image of the Greek woman as an object for rescue. In creating a gendered language for explaining Greece's 'imprisonment' under Ottoman rule, travel narratives created an imagined colonialism for British writers, one that did not amount to territorial, but symbolic, conquest.<sup>55</sup> Jiweon Shin's essay shows how the idealized image of the educated, modern 'new woman' in Japan-occupied Korea in the 1910s and 1920s was replaced by images of motherhood as the only ideal possible for Korean women in the 1930s.<sup>56</sup>

Two important essays, those by Ruth Wallis Herndon and Veronica Vazquez Garcia, address the question of native American women's land rights in Rhode Island, Mexico,

<sup>51</sup> Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy men and Lux women: commodification, consumption, and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, NC, 1996); see also Timothy Burke, "'Fork up and smile": marketing, colonial knowledge and the female subject in Zimbabwe', in Nancy Rose Hunt, Tessie Liu, and Jean Quataert, eds., *Gendered colonialisms in African history* (Oxford, 1997); McClintock, *Imperial leather*, ch. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The difference-deferral of a colonial modernity: public debates on domesticity in British Bengal', in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire*; Rita Smith Kipp, 'Emancipating each other: Dutch colonial missionaries' encounter with Karo women in Sumatra, 1900–1942', in Clancy-Smith and Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the empire*.

<sup>53</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, empire, colony: historicizing gender and race* (Bloomington, IN, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Tamara L. Hunt and Micheline R. Lessard, eds., *Women and the colonial gaze* (London, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> Katherine E. Fleming, 'Greece in chains: philhellenism to the rescue of the damsel in distress', in Hunt and Lessard, eds., *Women and the colonial gaze*.

<sup>56</sup> Jiweon Shin, 'Social construction of idealized images of women in colonial Korea: the "new woman" versus "motherhood"', in Hunt and Lessard, eds., *Women and the colonial gaze*.

and Canada.<sup>57</sup> Herndon shows that Narangansett women, who typically did not marry but enjoyed temporary marriages, were marginalized as ‘disordered’ women by Puritan officials when they were not attached to men; poor laws that were meant to aid women often punished them for their sexual practices and categorized their children as ‘bastards’, subject to forced indenture. Garcia, on the other hand, demonstrates that native American women in Mexico under Spanish rule, and native Americans in Canada under French and British rule, experienced comparable patterns of being legally disenfranchised of their land. These two essays intersect and supplement the recently emerging work on colonial legal regimes in the north American colonies and the ways in which political regimes restructured familial relationships so that indigenous women were made more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the respective emerging colonial states.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most crucial contributions of volumes has been that they have united scholars of colonizing nations with scholars of colonized and post-colonial regions of the world. It is exciting to see scholars of Maoris and Aborigines in dialogue with Australianists.<sup>59</sup> But most important, perhaps, is that volumes have fruitfully unsettled the metropole–colony distinction by bringing in work by promoting scholars who work on diasporic populations: Angela Woollacott’s essay on Australian women in London alongside Enakshi Dua’s work on the immigration policies of the Canadian government vis-à-vis Indian women is only one combination that comes to mind.<sup>60</sup> Drawing on the expertise of scholars of different areas and subfields, edited volumes have been an important format for expanding how we define the field of gender and colonialism and has realigned its constitutive parts in new and interesting ways.

## V

For many historians, particularly those working on areas that were once colonized, the category of gender and colonialism is best defined as the effects that colonial enterprises had on gender relations and the status of women in local societies. The historiography is most dense for Africa and the Indian subcontinent, some of the largest contiguous land masses to be colonized by European powers. Negotiations over political authority occurred over how to define, reinvent, and consolidate notions of tradition in ways that were ultimately mapped on to women’s bodies. Lata Mani’s influential article, now published in book form, has demonstrated the ways in which the practice of becoming a *sati* (the immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands) became a political

<sup>57</sup> Ruth Wallis Herndon, ‘Women as symbols of disorder in early Rhode Island’, and Veronica Vazquez Garcia, ‘Native women and state legislation in Mexico and Canada: the Agrarian Law and the Indian Act’, in Hunt and Lessard, eds., *Women and the colonial gaze*.

<sup>58</sup> Brown, *Good wives*; Ann Marie Plane, *Colonial intimacies: Indian marriage in early New England* (Ithaca, NY, 2000); Cornelia Dayton, *Women before the bar: gender, law, and society in Connecticut, 1639–1789* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, ‘Maori agriculturalists and aborigine hunter-gatherers’, and Marilyn Lake, ‘Frontier feminism and the marauding white man: Australia, 1890s to 1940s’, in Pierson and Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, empire, colony*.

<sup>60</sup> Angela Woollacott, ‘White colonialism and sexual modernity: Australian women in the early twentieth century metropolis’, and Enakshi Dua, ‘Racialising imperial Canada: Indian women and the making of ethnic communities’, in Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities*. See also Angela Woollacott, *To try her fortune in London: Australian women, colonialism, and modernity* (New York, 2001).

volleyball between British men and their native elite counterparts in the early nineteenth century. Although the issue was putatively about women, in debating whether the right to commit *sati* should be allowed by the colonial state, women's bodies were the sites on which 'tradition' was measured and charted.<sup>61</sup> Parallel to later debates in Africa over clitoridectomy, some British administrators and parliamentarians showed themselves to be nervous about intervening too far in native affairs and culture while countering criticisms that they had allowed inhumane acts in their colonies.<sup>62</sup> As Mani has pointed out, these debates occluded the participation or voices of women, denying them any say in articulating what their positions on *sati* were. In contrast, Lynn Thomas's essay suggests that some Kenyan women defended their rights to commit clitoridectomy as a way of resisting the interventions of colonial and community authorities.<sup>63</sup>

Definitions of 'custom' and 'tradition', as it was practised in familial, community, and so-called private domains, became a matter of public concern for colonial states, particularly in matters of establishing legal regimes.<sup>64</sup> Studies on early colonial India have shown that local women's status as it was understood within the context of household relationships was transformed under British rule of law.<sup>65</sup> Flavia Agnes's work has been at the forefront of critiquing the reliance on customary law, as it was generated in the colonial era, as a way of reproducing and legalizing the rights of men over women in colonial and post-colonial states.<sup>66</sup> Studies on family inheritance and the transformation of property law under colonial rule have been central to demonstrating how native women were slowly but surely disenfranchised of their wealth, disciplined into long-term heterosexual monogamy, and made into gendered legal subjects in order to favour the property rights of native men.<sup>67</sup>

If custom and tradition were key domains for articulating the ways in which the ideal woman behaved, nationalism has been a crucial site for articulating the place of women in colonial and post-colonial societies. Partha Chatterjee's early article, often cited and critiqued, has been an important contribution on the ways in which Indian women, educated and modern, were assigned to defend the 'spiritual' domain of the household and family against the 'material' incursions of colonialism and its effects, such as the

<sup>61</sup> Lata Mani, 'Contentious traditions: the debate on sati in colonial India', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting women: essays in Indian colonial history* (New Brunswick, 1988); and idem, *Contentious traditions: the debate on sati in colonial India* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>62</sup> Susan Pedersen, 'National bodies, unspeakable acts: the sexual politics of colonial policy-making', *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991), pp. 647–80.

<sup>63</sup> Lynn M. Thomas, "'Ngaitana" (I will circumcise myself): the gender and generational politics of the 1956 ban on clitoridectomy in Meru, Kenya', in Hunt, Liu, and Quataert, eds., *Gendered colonialisms in African history*.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Chanock, *Law, custom and social order: the colonial experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>65</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, slavery and the law* (Delhi, 1999); Radhika Singha, *A despotism of law: crime and justice in early colonial India* (Delhi, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Flavia Agnes, *Law and gender inequality: the politics of women's rights in India* (Delhi, 1999). See also Nivedita Menon, 'Embodying the self: feminism, sexual violence and the law', in *Subaltern studies*, XI (New York, 2000). For a broad overview, see Janaki Nair, *Women and law in colonial India, a social history* (New Delhi, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Rachel Sturman, 'Family values: refashioning property and family in colonial Bombay presidency, 1818–1937' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2001); G. Arunima, 'A vindication of the rights of women: families and legal change in nineteenth-century Malabar', in Michael R. Anderson and Sumit Guha, eds., *Changing concepts of rights and justice in South Asia* (Delhi, 1998).



erosion of indigenous culture.<sup>68</sup> Chatterjee's argument has shaped a generation of scholars because it explains the ways in which nationalists, men of elite classes in India, allowed elite women to be educated, but contained their progress by asking them to become devoted mothers and homemakers in the service of the nation. Malathi de Alwis has drawn on Chatterjee's arguments for her study on Sri Lanka, Jiweon Shin on Korean women under the Japanese occupation.<sup>69</sup> Geraldine Heng, in her work on the post-colonial feminist movement in Singapore, has argued that the secluding of women in the inner domain in the colonial period has shown how the colonial discourse of indigeneity has been used to contain contemporary feminist movements in Singapore, where women activists have kept to 'traditional' campaigns rather than being branded insufficiently nationalist.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of South Asia specifically, much of the historiography of gender in South Asia has focused on the colonial period, implicitly marking the ways that colonialism affected indigenous social organization and restructured dynamics of gender. Tanika Sarkar's *Hindu wife, Hindu nation* is a nuanced and complex set of arguments organized around a crucial question: how did Bengali *bhadralok*, a group of elite, forward-thinking, cosmopolitan, educated subjects turn to cultural chauvinism, excluding women, lower castes, and Muslims from their vision of society?<sup>71</sup> Although Sarkar is somewhat sympathetic to Chatterjee's model of inner and outer domains, her chapter on the autobiography of an elite Bengali woman registers her unease with Chatterjee's paradigm that reinscribes the silence and absence of women.<sup>72</sup> She targets Chatterjee's assumptions about women's relative lack of importance: she argues that since Bengali men were kept from experiencing material success by colonial policies and prohibitions, 'it would be the new domestic woman who had to carry the image of class'.<sup>73</sup> Sarkar recounts Rashundari Debi's journey as a young wife in Faridpur to widowhood, an ordinary life, except that she defied her family's code against women learning to read and write. Her autobiography, which is largely a devotional text about her piety, constructed her as a *bhakti*, or devotee of Chaitanya, a Bengali saint figure, which shows her to be transgressive, both to the norms of her own family and to the expectations of liberal reformers who hoped that education would transform homebound women into secular subjects.

Sarkar is especially critical of the notion that colonialism produced a binary effect among colonized subjects: 'whether the local assented to or refused the structures of colonialism', and argues that various local literary and cultural products showed that anxieties about the appropriate image of the ideal woman in late nineteenth-century Bengal were produced from various sites, such as scandals, that are not easily attributed to British colonialism.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'The nationalist resolution of the woman question', in Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting women*.

<sup>69</sup> Malathi de Alwis, "'Respectability'", "modernity" and the policing of "culture" in colonial Ceylon', in Burton, ed., *Gender, sexuality, and colonial modernities*; Jiweon Shin, in Hunt and Lessard, eds., *Women and the colonial gaze*.

<sup>70</sup> Geraldine Heng, "'A great way to fly": nationalism, the state, and the varieties of third-world feminism', in Jacqui Alexander and Chandra T. Mohanty, eds., *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures* (New York, 1997), p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu wife, Hindu nation: community, religion, and cultural nationalism* (London, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 3; see also Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small speeches, subaltern gender: nationalist ideology and its historiography', in *Subaltern studies*, ix (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 85–90.

<sup>73</sup> Sarkar, *Hindu wife*, p. 44.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23, and chs. 2, 6.

Her arguments are provocative and convincing, drawn from folklore, novels, memoirs, theatre, that are largely in Bengali, a regional vernacular language.

Sarkar's book, which takes on two of the most dominant strands of history in South Asia – the centrality of colonialism and the question of gender – joins a chorus of critiques against the Subaltern Studies project. The question of gender, largely absent from the first few volumes, has made a strong showing in later volumes.<sup>75</sup> The newest volume of *Subaltern studies*, XI, subtitled *Community, gender, and violence*, is an effort to grapple with the relationships between colonialism, communalism, and gender in sustained ways, although none of the essays are by scholars who teach in history departments or identify themselves as historians.

Pradeep Jeganathan's essay on violence and masculinity in Sri Lanka is an exceptionally thoughtful contribution that engages anthropological studies on 'culture' and practices of violence that give rise to certain forms of male subjectivity. Writing against the image of Sri Lanka as essentially peaceful, Jeganathan's essay engages with the ways in which some acts of male violence are allowed or legitimized, becoming unexceptional events, illegible for anthropological observation, while other types of violence are legible because they are perceived to be a rupture in common practice.<sup>76</sup> Intersecting with questions of masculinity as they have been addressed in regions such as Africa and elsewhere, Jeganathan's arguments raise critical questions about the nature of masculine forms of violence as they are explained as cultural in colonial and post-colonial societies.<sup>77</sup>

Essays by Tejaswini Niranjana and Qadri Ismail revisit the relationship between gender and nationalism: Niranjana through several mainstream, Bombay-produced commercial films, and Ismail through several figures of the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka.<sup>78</sup> Ismail proposes that nationalism is always antithetical to feminist interests as she examines the subject positions of two Tamil women who experienced the 1983 riots, while Niranjana is more interested in the ways in which the category of 'woman' is produced and disseminated through popular cinematic characters and narratives. Going significantly beyond Chatterjee's formulations of the ways in which Indian women were made into homebound, domesticated, spiritual subjects within anti-colonial nationalist campaigns for independence, both Niranjana and Ismail show that women's subjectivity and subjection are reconstituted in new ways in post-colonial India and Sri Lanka as these nation-states cope with the problems posed by minority populations within their borders.

The final essay in this volume of *Subaltern Studies* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak deconstructs 'the new subaltern', the somewhat monolithic woman-as-victim who is the constituted subject of justice under (the now-unrestricted) international capitalism.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See Visweswaran, 'Small speeches'; Ranajit Guha, 'Chandra's death', in *Subaltern Studies*, v (New Delhi, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> Pradeep Jeganathan, 'A space for violence: anthropology, politics, and the location of a Sinhala practice of masculinity', in *Subaltern studies*, xi.

<sup>77</sup> Luise White, 'Separating the men from the boys: constructions of gender, sexuality, and terrorism in central Kenya, 1939–1959', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23 (1990), pp. 1–25; essays in the special issue on 'Masculinities in Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24 (1998), pp. 605–30; Brian Keith Axel, *The nation's tortured body: violence, representation, and the foundation of a Sikh 'diaspora'* (Durham, NC, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Nationalism refigured: contemporary south Indian cinema and the subject of feminism', and Qadri Ismail, 'Constituting nation, contesting nationalism: the southern Tamil (woman) and separatist Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka', in *Subaltern studies*, xi.

<sup>79</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Discussion: an afterword on the new subaltern', in *Subaltern studies*, xi, p. 305.

In teasing out the ways in which the new subaltern is represented in the various essays of the volume, we start to see that what was once a widespread understanding in studies on gender and colonialism – that native women were at the bottom of a colonial hierarchy with white men at the top – is being complicated through studies of the particular and the local.

## VI

Gender as a category of analysis is quickly generating such a growing body of work in colonial studies that it is both becoming its own category and, increasingly, becoming a marginal category to more conventional national and imperial histories.

In spite of its successes, a certain brand of imperial history remains distant from the disciplinary and methodological innovations that gender historians of colonialism have promoted.<sup>80</sup> Reviews of the recently published, magisterial, five-volume *Oxford history of the British empire* suggest that gender was noticeably absent from the subject of the volumes.<sup>81</sup> Several critics noted that the question of gender received insufficient attention and was inadequately integrated into the larger narrative.<sup>82</sup> A statistically minded reader will notice that in five volumes (or over 3,000 pages), a mere thirty-three pages or slightly more than 1 per cent were devoted to gender. One reviewer noted that Diana Wylie's thirteen-page chapter titled 'Disease, diet, and gender', one of three contributions (out of forty-two) by a woman in the historiography volume, 'might seem on first glance like someone's unsubtly sexist joke'.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the opening lines of Rosalind O'Hanlon's essay in the twentieth-century volume, 'the British empire has recently become remarkably hospitable terrain for the study of women and gender', might be read as another bit of a joke given the paucity of discussions on gender in that volume.<sup>84</sup> That the term 'gentlemanly capitalism', about the making of a group of landed and commercial male elites who led Britain to its industrial and imperial heights, has never been exposed to sustained gender, class, or race analysis suggests that there is some room for expansion.<sup>85</sup> Although an *Oxford history of the British empire* volume devoted entirely to gender is now in press, one wonders whether a separate volume reinstates gender history's marginal relationship to British imperial history and its subspecialties, such as economic, military, political, labour, and diplomatic history, which are so well represented in the other five volumes.

There is a danger in treating gender and colonialism as marginal to European, imperial, South Asian, African, economic, political, military, and other historiographies. When

<sup>80</sup> The field also seems to have failed to integrate women scholars into the field: see Shula Marks, 'History, the nation and empire: sniping from the periphery', *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1990), p. 112 n. 7. See also Bonnie Smith, *The gender of history: men, women, and historical practice* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), esp. ch. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Wm Roger Louis, editor-in-chief, *Oxford history of the British empire (OHBE)* (5 vols., Oxford, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> R. Butlin, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28 (2002), pp. 118–24; Dane Kennedy, *International History Review*, 23 (2001), pp. 604–22; Stephen Howe, 'The slow deaths and strange rebirths of imperial history', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29 (2001), pp. 131–41; Antoinette Burton, *Victorian Studies*, 44 (2001), pp. 167–9.

<sup>83</sup> Howe, 'Slow deaths and strange rebirths', p. 138; Kennedy, in *International History Review*, 23 (2001), p. 619.

<sup>84</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Gender in the British Empire', in *OHBE*, IV, pp. 379–97.

<sup>85</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins acknowledge that the issue of gender might have enlarged their understanding of 'gentlemanly', but conclude that it would not 'disturb our main findings'. *British imperialism, 1688–2000* (London, 2002), pp. 12–13.

Robin Winks says, 'The impact of women's studies in British imperial history has not yet transformed the broader field, for these debates appear to be taking place in a side arena',<sup>86</sup> he radically misreads gender and colonialism as being limited only to histories of gender and women in colonial societies. Given the work of, for example, Kathleen Brown, who in addition to gender, addresses state formation, slavery, labour, and legal regimes, or Tanika Sarkar, who deals with class, intellectual history, and religious orthopraxy, or Philippa Levine, who has shown how central the regulation of sex workers was to military strength and success, it is hard to maintain that this scholarship is in a 'side arena', isolated from the concerns that animate the broader field of imperial history.

Perhaps we (who work on gender and colonialism) are getting too big for our breeches and our punishment has been to be cast out of the well-established guilds of historians. A more positive spin on this might be that there is a new guild in formation, one that eschews national histories and narratives, promotes transnational and interdisciplinary work, and challenges the bounded fields with which historians conventionally identify. Given the explosive growth of this field across disciplines and the subdisciplines of history, historians of gender and colonialism might productively focus on the risks and pitfalls of interdisciplinarity.

Historians still need to know more, particularly about women, children, lower classes, and populations that are otherwise understudied, but we need to recuperate carefully and resituate these histories in a political and historical context that shows how issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, custom, and religion became politicized at various colonial sites and moments. Political legitimacy was always crucial to keeping colonial states in power; we need to show how colonial states drew all members of colonial societies – white and native women, native men, elites, lower classes – into their orbit, creating and reproducing hierarchies and hegemonies that buttressed colonial authority. For instance, it is no longer enough to say that white women have been misunderstood or undervalued; it is crucial to show how this was relational and mattered to the politics of the community, the nation, and the empire.

In the field of gender and colonialism, it is important that we do not reproduce imbalances of power and authority in studying gender between colonizing and colonized societies. A central purpose of engaged feminist criticism, as Chandra Mohanty has noted, is to decolonize and not recolonize the academy through the scholarship we produce and encourage: it is crucial to recognize the struggles, crises, and quotidian lives of Africans, Asians, native Americans, Aborigines, as more than a dormant part of Europe's narrative of imperial expansion.<sup>87</sup> As important as it is to ask how a large group of European men managed to rule over half of the world's men and women by the end of the nineteenth century, it is equally important not to treat the colonial state or imperial societies as the only force of change and transformation; this type of trend marks an unwelcome return to an older stereotype of unchanging African and Asian societies that were somehow pure, egalitarian, and pre-industrial before the arrival of Europeans. Studying metropolitan sites and colonial sites together is an important strategy in pushing back this trend, but we need to beware of reinstating the metropole as the primary focus of inquiry.

A relatively recent upstart, gender and colonialism history has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time. Now it is important to keep expanding without marginalizing.

<sup>86</sup> Robin Winks, 'The future of imperial history', in *OHBE*, v, p. 665.

<sup>87</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (Durham, NC, 2003), pp. 202–17.