

Gender and imperialism

EDITED BY CLARE MIDGLEY



STUDIES IN IMPERIALISM

General editor John M. MacKenzie

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Gender and imperialism

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edited by Clare Midgley

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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Imperialism, as several of the contributors to this volume point out, seemed to be a highly gendered phenomenon. Words like 'manly' and 'effeminate', each of them normatively loaded, were seldom far from the lips of imperial rulers and others involved in the colonial complex. Some shafts of light were cast upon my own dim realisation of this when I surveyed children's literature, plays, exhibition displays and other aspects of popular culture in researching my work *Propaganda and Empire* in the early 1980s. The genderisation of imperialism became even more apparent when I examined the literature of travel and hunting for *The Empire of Nature* a few years later. Social Darwinism seemed to infuse all of these gendered processes: the related activities of hunting and war supposedly defined more highly evolved masculinities, marking off northern Europeans from southern, white from black, male from female, people of the 'manly' mountains from those of the 'effeminate' plains, hardened protein-eating pastoral warriors from the 'softer' carbohydrate-consuming agriculturalists.

It was no accident that pastoral modes tended to emphasise differentiation in gender roles much more than the agricultural. Processes of conquest and domination, including an alleged capacity to penetrate and mould the environment to the will of the 'manly' conqueror, highlighted these gender divisions yet further. Imperial cultures were replete with such social stereotypes, particularly in the socialisation of the young. The atavisms of empire were beautifully conveyed through the privileging of frontier lifestyles to inhabitants of an urban industrialised society, for example through Baden-Powell's creation, the Boy Scouts – and indeed its female response, the Girl Guides.

In unveiling such dominant masculinities, it was all too easy to portray European women as either the victims of or accomplices in the imperial programme, while indigenous women were equally essentialised as objects either of lust or of moral crusades, 'saving brown and black women from brown and black men'. Such crude dichotomies, which have in common the objectivisation of women, have now been banished from serious historical study. A remarkably productive and stimulating wave of women's and gender studies has served to separate propaganda from perceived actuality, the social theory of empire from its practice. Gender relations, interactive and intertwining, responsive and mutually transformatory, have become much clearer in both imperial and indigenous societies. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the cultural and intellectual dimensions of empires, with their capacity both to reinforce and to weaken, and in the economic roles and powers of resistance of peoples around the world.

This volume makes a major contribution to this new historiography, both in theoretical and empirical forms. By adopting both chronological

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

depth, from the late eighteenth to the mid twentieth centuries, and geographical breadth – including India, Ireland, Australia, the Caribbean and Africa, as well as the so-called metropolitan society – it offers major challenges and profound insights for gender studies. Above all, it reveals the sterility of the monolithic approach. These important essays demonstrate the complex multi-voicing of women in all aspects of the imperial condition.

John M. MacKenzie

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Clare Midgley

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCL	British Commonwealth League
CAS	Colonial African Service
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
IAFA	International Association of the Friends of Abyssinia
IASB	International Africa Service Bureau for the Defence of Africans and Peoples of African Descent
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LCP	League of Coloured Peoples
LGAA	London Group on African Affairs
LMS	London Missionary Society
SPFEE	Society for the Propagation of Female Education in the East
WEA	Workers' Educational Association

INTRODUCTION

Gender and imperialism: mapping the connections

Clare Midgley

This book brings together two traditionally separate areas of historical literature: writings on women and gender on the one hand, and scholarship on British imperialism and colonialism on the other. The result is not a comfortable marriage, but it is, I believe, a productive one. This introduction traces the course of the engagement between the two fields. It begins by highlighting the separate origins and differing preoccupations of women's/gender history and traditional British Imperial History, and then proceeds to discuss the challenges to traditional Imperial History posed by new 'post-colonial' histories of imperialism. This section provides a background for the survey which follows of existing scholarship on gender and imperialism, which leads in turn to an outline of the arrangement and contents of this new collection of essays.

Gender history and Imperial History: separate developments

In British academia gender history and traditional Imperial History have developed very separately. Gender history has tended to follow the somewhat parochial perspective of much British social history, exploring the interaction of gender and class but ignoring race and ethnicity, claiming to describe Britain while actually talking about England, and rarely attempting to place the history of men and women within Britain in the context of Britain's role as a leading imperial power.¹ Imperial History, on the other hand, has been written as the history of the exploits of male policy-makers, administrators, military commanders, explorers and missionaries, but with no attempt to assess the significance of their masculine gender. The history of women and imperialism has been seen as of marginal significance, as a special

interest area which can be safely left to female historians. A similar lack of attention has been granted to the gender metaphors which are so central to imperial discourse: to the descriptions of colonial exploration and conquest as the penetration of virgin lands, and to the feminised representations of colonised men – to what Joan Scott describes as the use of gender as ‘a primary way of signifying relationships of power’.² Even when new topics are tackled, as in Ronald Hyam’s study of sexuality and empire, there is resistance to drawing on insights from feminist historians concerning issues of gender and power.³

This separation between gender history and Imperial History has its roots in the very contrasting origins of the two sets of scholarship. Gender history has radical, anti-establishment roots in women’s history. In Britain, this developed from the early 1970s in response to feminist discontent at the marginalisation of women, and the preoccupation with class to the exclusion of gender, in the writings of labour and social historians. Feminist historians pointed out that one half of the human race was being excluded from accounts which purported to move away from the study of political elites and write the experiences of ‘ordinary’ people into history.⁴ Gender history, however, is more than the recovery of women’s pasts and inclusion of female experiences into history. First, it incorporates the study of men as gendered beings – a study of masculinity which has roots in the men’s movement and gay politics as well as feminism.⁵ Second, as Joan Scott has pointed out, usage of the term ‘gender’ among British and American feminists developed for three purposes: to stress the social construction, rather than biological determination, of distinctions based on sex; to emphasise the need to study the relationships between men and women rather than simply constructing a separate women’s history; and to suggest that the study of women does not simply add new subject matter to history but also involves a rethinking of traditional historical paradigms.⁶ Until very recently, however, gender historians have been preoccupied with the rewriting of social history, and have hesitated to challenge the paradigms of Imperial History.

These paradigms derive from Imperial History’s roots in the ‘high imperial’ period of the 1880s to 1914. From the 1880s to the 1940s the desire among leading academic historians to increase scholarly knowledge of the British Empire was closely associated with their desire to foster popular enthusiasm for Britain’s role as an imperial nation. University lecture series in Imperial History provided the basis for bestsellers such as Sir John Seeley’s *The Expansion of England* (1883), and academics became involved in the production of school textbooks and the provision of adult education in history with a pro-Empire bias.

INTRODUCTION

Imperial History was also closely tied to the practice of imperial rule, with academics themselves acting as advisers on imperial policy and administration, providing education for future members of the Colonial Service, and fostering the development of imperial pressure groups such as the Imperial Federation League and the Round Table. The development of the academic study of Imperial History was encouraged by the financial endowments of the imperial expansionist Cecil Rhodes, who endowed professorial chairs in the field and provided the finance for Rhodes Scholarships, intended to educate potential leaders from the colonies.⁷ Such commitments to and involvement in the imperial enterprise affected not only the perspectives and interpretations of historians but also the focus of their study, which was overwhelmingly on colonial policy and administration.

Following the demise of the British Empire with the post-war process of decolonisation, Imperial History lost its original role in forwarding the imperial enterprise and faced challenges to its legitimacy from Britain's former imperial subjects. European historians' perspectives on colonised peoples were condemned as racist and paternalistic and new histories constructed from the viewpoint of the colonised emphasised the negative impact of imperialism on third world economic development, uncovered the rich histories of pre-colonial societies, and developed nationalist perspectives which gave historical legitimacy to newly independent nation states. As the leading Caribbean historian and politician Eric Williams pointed out, the historical field had become a 'battleground on which imperialist politics struggle against nationalist politics'.⁸ Liberal nationalist historiography, the dominant alternative to Imperial History, was in turn challenged from the left for remaining trapped in a reactive response to colonial historiography, for presenting a monolithic view of society and for an elitist focus on nationalist leaders.⁹ Since the 1980s alternative 'histories from below' have been produced: in India, for example, the Subaltern Studies group has published a series of studies which explore the relationship between mass movements such as peasant uprisings and the development of Indian nationalist politics.¹⁰

Within Britain itself the separation of Imperial History from the mainstream of British political, economic, social and cultural history has been questioned since the 1970s, and Seeley's assertion of the importance of colonies to the formation of the British nation has been readdressed from a post-colonial perspective.¹¹ Debates have been initiated over the need to incorporate a critical analysis of empire into the study of history in the national curriculum in schools.¹² Histories of black, Asian and Irish settlers in Britain have shown how the Empire affected the ethnic composition of the metropolis, while studies of the

politics of race, immigration and nationality have demonstrated the intersections between imperial and domestic concerns.¹³

Despite these post-war developments, however, Imperial History has succeeded in maintaining itself as a viable and dynamic field of study in Britain, modifying its name to Imperial and Commonwealth History and expanding its subject matter from an original focus on metropolitan policy-making and administration, to give greater attention to interaction with events on the 'periphery', to the economic, social and cultural aspects of empire, and to the impact of empire on British society itself.¹⁴ All these trends are visible in the new *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* edited by P. J. Marshall. The volume also provides a good example of how Imperial History attempts to diffuse radical challenges to its legitimacy: some space is accorded to non-Western perspectives; these are, however, relegated to the final section of the book – and indeed even within this section only Tapan Raychaudhuri's chapter on British rule in India offers a challenge to the dominant tone of the book. The final words are left to Marshall himself, who sums up this tone in his concluding judgement that 'given the likely alternatives, to have drawn the British ticket in the nineteenth-century lottery of empire may not, on balance, have been an altogether unhappy accident'.¹⁵

Is it possible, then, to get beyond the impasse of opposed 'first' and 'third' world perspectives on empire existing in parallel, with Imperial Historians acknowledging the existence of alternative viewpoints but relegating them to the margins of their standard accounts of the Empire and continuing to claim for themselves the virtues of greater objectivity and balance? Clearly this is not simply a battle of ideas conducted on a level ground in which the strongest intellectual argument will win. The continuing strength of Imperial History relates to its institutional strength: to its power bases in prestigious British universities and their associated publishing houses at the old heart of empire. There have, however, been important moves to get beyond the impasse at an intellectual level. Imperial History has been challenged not only by the construction of alternative national histories written from the perspective of the colonised, but also by post-colonial theory, developed mainly by literary scholars following in the wake of Edward Said's path-breaking study, *Orientalism* (1978).¹⁶ Post-colonial theory and colonial discourse analysis have been dismissed by many historians of empire as the latest fashionable preoccupations of 'politically correct' literary scholars, and ridiculed for their theoretical obscurantism. Even John MacKenzie, who is sympathetic both to Said's political stance and to his preoccupation with imperial culture, has concluded that his work – and

that of his followers and of other colonial discourse analysts – is of little value to historians because, despite claims to historicism, it fails to follow the basic procedures of sound historical scholarship: it does not embed ideas within their shifting economic and social contexts, and thus creates a falsely unidimensional and unchanging picture of Orientalism and the culture of imperialism.¹⁷

While I am sympathetic to this concern with historical particularity, I believe that MacKenzie's criticisms do not undermine the value of two crucial insights offered by post-colonial theory: that the production of dominant forms of knowledge about the colonised provided an important basis for the exercise of imperial power; and that Imperial History was – and to some extent remains – a key form of colonial discourse. Post-colonial critics have succeeded in exposing what Gyan Prakash has described as the 'leaden understanding of colonialism as History':¹⁸ the representation of European expansion as the motor of historical progress from savagery to civilisation, or of development from static 'traditional' to dynamic 'modern' societies, and of the colonised as passive subjects rather than active agents of historical change.¹⁹ This 'leaden understanding' can be seen manifested in the Whig interpretative framework of much Imperial History, a framework whereby British imperialists are presented as the agents of Britain's gift of freedom and democratic self-government to the peoples of the world: independence is thus represented as the end-result of imperialism rather than as the achievement of the colonised.²⁰ Imperial History provides the last place within the various sub-disciplines of history in Britain where the Whig approach continues to thrive. The reason for this, I would argue, is ideological: it provides a means of justifying British imperialism.

While post-colonial theory has effectively deconstructed Imperial History as a powerful form of colonial discourse, I would agree with MacKenzie that it has nevertheless provided few tools for reconstructing alternative histories of imperialism. As Dane Kennedy has pointed out, the problem is that post-colonial theorists tend to slide from a critique of Imperial History into hostility to the project of history writing as a whole, to doubts about the possibility of constructing non-Eurocentric historiography, and to assertions of the impossibility of retrieving the voices of the colonised.²¹ In challenging Imperial History's claims to scientific objectivity we need to avoid the defeatist trap of such extreme forms of post-modernism, in which history is viewed as no more than one form of fictional discourse. Rather, following the suggestions made by Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, we can construct new histories based on a redefined notion of objectivity 'as an interactive

relationship between the inquiring subject and an external object'.²² Avoiding the trap of relativism, which would allow Imperial History to survive as one legitimate viewpoint among many, we can aspire to tell the truth about the history of imperialism, and to demonstrate that our accounts are more true than the discourse of Imperial History.

New histories of British imperialism will only effectively displace the old Imperial History if we go beyond literary discourse analysis with its exclusive focus on culture to provide new historical perspectives on the economic, social, political, military and administrative facets of imperialism, if we combine the construction of a broad new picture with a sensitivity to regional specifics and chronological shifts, and if we place at the centre the experiences and viewpoints of the colonised. We also need to be wary of unthinking use of the binary categories of coloniser/colonised, recognising that neither were homogeneous groups. In the first place, there were regional complexities: for example, as Marilyn Lake has highlighted, in white settler societies settlers were both coloniser (in relation to indigenous inhabitants) and colonised (in the sense of being under British imperial governance).²³ Second, there were variations within the same geographical area and time span, with gender among the crucial shapers and differentiators of colonial experiences. Feminist historians thus have a key role to play in reconstructing new histories of imperialism, ensuring that both coloniser and colonised are treated as gendered subjects, and that attention is paid to the ways in which imperial involvements and interactions were shaped by gender as well as by race and class.

Gender and imperialism: mapping the connections

This book contributes to this process of revision through building on the existing work in the field of gender and imperialism which has been produced since the 1980s, stimulated both by the growth of women's history and gender history and the development of new histories of imperialism. Increasing scholarly interest in the social and cultural impact of empire in both British and colonial contexts has offered more scope for a consideration of women than did earlier preoccupation with the almost exclusively male domains of policymaking and administration. At the same time the construction of alternative histories from the perspectives of the colonised has opened up possibilities for rendering visible the experiences of colonised women as well as men, while post-colonial theory provides powerful theoretical tools for deconstructing gendered colonial stereotypes of these 'others'.

What, then, of this existing literature in the field of gender and imperialism? What kinds of topics have been explored, what conceptual frameworks and research agendas have been laid down, and what are some of their strengths and their limitations? Broadly speaking, studies have sought to rectify the exclusion of women from standard histories of imperialism and the exclusion of imperialism from histories of women; they have introduced gender as an analytical concept into the study of empire; and they have drawn attention to the need to study the construction of imperialism as a masculine enterprise. More specifically, six broad areas of scholarship can be identified: white Western women and imperialism; the impact of empire on women in Britain; colonised women's experiences; masculinity and empire; sexuality and empire; and gender and colonial discourse. A brief survey of work in each of these areas will now be provided in order to give an overview of the existing state of scholarship on gender and imperialism.

Studies of white Western women and imperialism focus on India and Africa in the period between the 1860s and the 1940s – from the period of 'high imperialism' characterised by the British Raj and by the 'scramble for Africa', to the beginnings of decolonisation. Work in this area adopts three main approaches. First, work in the 'recovery' mode, much of it aimed at a popular audience, seeks to restore women to Imperial History and demonstrate the scope of women's involvement in the Empire: as the wives of colonial administrators, settlers, explorers, missionaries and nurses.²⁴ Second, and closely related, are 'recuperative' works which aim to debunk myths of the 'destructive' female whose racial prejudice led to the disruption of 'good' relations between male colonial official and indigenous peoples, and to reassess women's imperial roles in a more positive light.²⁵ The problems with both the above approaches have been effectively exposed by Jane Haggis's critique of the women-centred approach to writing the history of colonising women. This, she argues, tends to represent white women either as patriarchal victims or as plucky feminist heroines, in both cases ignoring their racial privileges in colonial society, and to render white women visible at the expense of rendering the colonised invisible.²⁶ Her criticisms are partly met by recent works, which adopt a more critical approach to analysing women's role in shaping colonial societies and the nature of their relationships with indigenous women, and identify female involvement in imperialism ranging from 'complicity' to 'resistance'.²⁷

The second major category of works on gender and imperialism are those which explore the impact of imperialism on women within Britain, contributing a gender perspective to the project of bringing

together British social and cultural history with Imperial History. These works include studies of women's involvement in the anti-slavery movement,²⁸ of the relationships between feminism, racism and imperialism,²⁹ of female colonial emigration,³⁰ of the impact of state policies focusing on women's roles as mothers of the imperial race,³¹ and of the history of black, Asian and Irish women in Britain.³² Such work is in its early stages but is characterised by a desire to bring a critical consideration of imperial and racial issues into British women's history. But while women's history is certainly being enriched, there is a danger that women will simply become an add-on special interest area whose historical presence fails to disrupt the frameworks of traditional Imperial History unless such scholarship makes explicit the ways in which gender structured the forms of British involvement in empire.

The third key area of research has been into colonised women's experiences. In terms of numbers of women affected, and their immense variety of cultural and social backgrounds, this is a much wider topic than either of the above, and the quantity of research is uneven, reflecting the differential access to resources for research and publication which is one of the legacies of British imperialism. There is a considerable body of literature on women settlers in the 'white settler' colonies but less on the indigenous women whom these colonisers displaced.³³ In the case of India, research has focused on the impact of the British Empire on the dominant Hindu community and on middle-class women, and Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid point out that 'no anthology or even generalisation about Indian women could hope to be representative'.³⁴ The impossibility of generalisation is even more true of Africa, and Zenebeworke Tadesse has highlighted both 'the vast potential for the emergence and institutionalisation of women's history in Africa' and the daunting constraints, which are 'not limited to women's history but to African historiography as a whole' and have led to 'the conspicuous absence of the writings of African women from most published and widely circulated materials'.³⁵

Despite the large amount of research which remains to be done, an impressively wide variety of topics have begun to be explored. These include: the differential impact of colonialism on men and women; women and resistance, including the involvement of women in nationalist and independence movements, the development of feminisms and women's resistance to colonial slavery; contests over British imperial social reform aimed at women and the impact of such reforms on women; the impact of colonialism on the sexual division of labour and on women's land rights and socio-economic position.³⁶ Debates have been generated concerning the question of female agency, the relative importance of the pre-colonial and colonial roots of the

continuing subordinate status of women in the post-colonial era, and the value of Gramsci's concept of hegemony for an understanding of the balance between coercion and consent in colonial rule.³⁷ All such scholarship involves an ongoing struggle both against the marginalisation of women in male nationalist historiography and against Western feminist stereotypes of a homogeneous 'third world woman' who is totally subordinated and oppressed.³⁸

The newest area of research is into masculinity and empire, and three examples are suggestive of the wide variety of approaches being adopted. Graham Dawson has explored the relationship between changing historical forms of imperial adventure narratives and 'the imagining of masculine subjectivities' in Britain and pinpointed the continuing psychic resonance of the imperial soldier hero as symbol of ideal British masculinity.³⁹ Catherine Hall has published the preliminary stages of a major project on imperial culture and the construction of Victorian British middle-class masculinity.⁴⁰ Mirilinha Sinha, bridging the divide between British and Indian historiography, has explored the simultaneous colonial construction of the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali'.⁴¹ In addition there is also a growing body of work, particularly relating to India, which explores interactions between indigenous and colonial patriarchal systems.⁴²

Work on patriarchy, together with studies of contests over prostitution and the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the Ilbert Bill in colonial India, also contribute to the fourth major category of scholarship: research into sexuality and empire.⁴³ From within the fold of Imperial History, Ronald Hyam has delineated the ways in which the Empire acted as an arena of sexual opportunity and adventure for white men. While assembling a mass of fascinating material, he refuses to engage directly with the question of unequal race and gender-based power relations which facilitated and shaped white men's sexual access to colonised peoples.⁴⁴ Such questions of power are central to recent analyses of imperialism and sexuality by Anne McClintock and Ann Stoler. McClintock seeks to explore the intersections of discourses of gender, race, class and sexuality within Britain and its Empire through bringing together the approaches of Freudian psychoanalysis and socio-economic history.⁴⁵ Anthropologist Ann Stoler connects the development of the European bourgeois order with the colonial management of sexuality through an engagement with Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, throwing new light on the relationship between colonial power and discourses of sexuality.⁴⁶

Foucault's work, as Stoler points out, has been widely influential in post-colonial studies, including the study of gender and colonial discourse. Sara Mills, for example, in her study of women travel writers,

is concerned to explore 'the way that Foucault's theories, colonial discourse and feminist theories can interact to produce an analytical framework'.⁴⁷ Another set of writings on gender and colonial discourse attempts to rectify the lack of a gender perspective in Edward Said's classic study of Orientalism.⁴⁸ Rana Kabbani has explored Western views of Eastern women, highlighting the centrality of images of women in the harem in Western constructions of the Orient.⁴⁹ Billie Melman and Reina Lewis respectively examine British women writers' and artists' views of the East, questioning Said's stress on the stability and homogeneity of Orientalism, and Lewis argues that theoretical models of colonial discourse should be reformulated to take into account the marked differences between women's and men's representations of the East. This difference is ascribed to the fact that European women did not have straightforward access to an implicitly male position of Western superiority. As a result they produced representations of the Orientalised 'other' which, while within an imperialist framework, were different from and often less denigrating than men's, and sometimes highlighted similarities rather than differences between themselves and non-Western women.⁵⁰ This tendency of British women to draw analogies between their own position and the position of colonised peoples is highlighted in Moira Ferguson's study of British women writers and colonial slavery.⁵¹

This book's agenda

The collection of essays in this volume builds on this wide-ranging scholarship on gender and imperialism. It discusses both colonising and colonised women and men, as well as women and men in Britain who were affected by empire. It is organised around the conceptual category of gender rather than the subject matter of women and, while the majority of chapters foreground women, all take gender roles and relations as central. Its contributors are academics based in history and sociology departments in Britain, Canada, Australia and the Caribbean, scholars whose own diverse backgrounds and descents reflect patterns of forced and voluntary migration which are part of the legacy of British imperialism, providing the reader with a variety of voices and perspectives.⁵²

No collection on the history of British imperialism can hope to be all-encompassing, and this is no exception. The book's chronological focus is on the modern period, between the late eighteenth century and the Second World War. Similarly, the geographical range is uneven and incomplete, but goes beyond the Indian-African axis of much existing

imperial history, not excepting work on women and gender, to include the Caribbean, Australia, Ireland and Britain itself.

Contributors were specially commissioned to write on a series of themes. Rather than simply presenting summaries of the existing state of knowledge in the particular area, however, the essays draw on new research, offer new perspectives and make critical interventions into key debates. As a result, it is hoped that all the chapters will be of interest to, and accessible to, students and academics wishing to gain a picture of the current 'state of play' among historians in the field of gender and imperialism.

The book is arranged in three parts. The first two, dealing with 'Impositions and impacts' and 'Reactions and resistances' respectively, focus on colonial contexts, while the third, 'The Empire at home', concentrates on the impact of imperialism within Britain itself. Such a tripartite division may seem problematic, given telling recent critiques of the impact/response model of Imperial History and of the limitations of treating metropole and colony as separate analytic fields.⁵³ It is retained, however, because it conveniently highlights the differing dominant foci of particular chapters, though most contributors do adopt an interactive model of the relations between coloniser and colonised and between Britain and its Empire.

Part I of the book offers new perspectives on the nature of British imperial power through exploring the gender dimensions of the imposition of British control. Himani Bannerji's study of the age of consent debate contributes to the growing body of scholarship on contesting indigenous and colonial patriarchies in India. Bannerji reveals how the reorganisation of gender relations was central to the establishment of British imperial hegemony in India. This involved increasing interventions in the social and private lives of the colonised in the name of the rule of law and of social reform. Jane Haggis's focus is also on India. Having effectively critiqued earlier work on white women colonisers, Haggis here discusses her attempts to write a 'non-recuperative' history of white women and colonialism. She draws on post-structuralist, anthropological and post-colonial theory to find a way of writing about British women missionaries in India which avoids a simplistic dualism between condemning them as racists or recouping them as benevolent victims of imperialist patriarchy. Instead of creating a unitary account, she tries to bring three histories into relationship: her contemporary perspective on gender and imperialism; missionary women's own accounts of their endeavours; and the story of Indian women.

Part II explores the gender dimensions of a spectrum of reactions to British imperialism. Interestingly, while Haggis is critical of a 'woman-

centred' approach and finds in post-colonial theory fruitful insights for writing about *colonising* women, both Padma Anagol and Margaret Ward critique post-colonial theory for its tendency to deny agency to *colonised* women. Perhaps this difference relates to the need to respond to distinct historiographies: Haggis is concerned to decentre colonising women following the production of a number of recuperative books on their experiences, whereas Anagol and Ward wish to centre colonised women and stress their agency, so as to combat a tendency to stress the overwhelming power of colonial discourse and indigenous patriarchies to determine their lives. Anagol focuses on the Indian women who were the targets for conversion by the kind of British Christian missionary women discussed by Haggis. She stresses Maharashtrian women's agency in converting from Hinduism to Christianity, their woman-centred approach to religion, their critiques of both Hindu attitudes to women and European missionary racism, and the crystallisation of their feminist consciousness through a selective appropriation of dominant discourses. Ward explores the gendered nature of Irish nationalism, stressing the need to interrogate representations of Irish nationalism, by both discourse theorists and British feminists, as an exclusively masculinist tradition leading to a liberation from Britain which was of little benefit to women. She suggests that male nationalist discourse shifted over time and that some women interpreted nationalist myths in women-centred terms, and she shows that empirical historical work can expose women's efforts to become agents of change in their own right, providing instances of self-assertion as well as self-sacrifice.

The other two chapters in this part on 'Responses and resistances' also foreground female agency in a colonial context. Marilyn Lake argues that the outlook of white Australian feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was 'shaped by the context of an imperial frontier': their position in a pioneer society numerically dominated by the 'marauding white man', and their ascribed colonial role as agents of civilisation and custodians of the race, led them to develop a 'frontier feminism' which stressed the need to protect both white and aboriginal women from sexual exploitation and abuse by white men. Hilary Beckles's chapter moves back in time to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and shifts the focus from white colonising women to enslaved black women in Britain's West Indian colonies. Like Ward, Beckles stresses that in order to fully appreciate the extent of women's resistance to colonial domination we need to define resistance as far more than violent uprisings. He calls for a gender-aware history which highlights the centrality of black women to the slave system, both as producer and as reproducer, and explores the resulting complexity of