H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, Gary Minkley, eds.. *Deep hiStories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa.* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002. xlvi + 356 pp. $150.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-420-1229-5.

Reviewed by Dawne Y. Curry

Published on H-SAfrica (November, 2003)

Using selected papers from the 1997 Gender and Colonialism Conference held at the University of the Western Cape, this edited volume includes case studies from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Cameroon. Three sections, comprising fourteen essays, constitute the book's structure. The overall objective is to theorize around the issue of gender as a socially constructed entity; however, the contributors transcend this traditional methodological exercise. They use the diametrical opposites of "silence" and "voice" to reinterpret or redefine official colonial texts as visible and invisible spaces of gendered history. The contributors excavate court testimonies, colonial photographs, mine records, and other texts to trace the origins of voice as a genealogical form of knowledge. This book, therefore, is not as Shula Marks queried at the conference, "the history of the white man being replaced in Africa by the history of the white woman in Africa." Instead, it draws upon the experiences of men and women from different ethnic backgrounds, social statuses, and sexual proclivities. How the contributors execute this feat valorizes the comprehensiveness of the work.

Featured topics of the collection include slavery, literature, nursing, photography, incest, patriarchy, reproductive rights, race, and identity politics. Together, these subjects thematically relate to power, knowledge, and resistance issues, which neatly intersect with questions and notions of gender in the colonial context.

In her chapter entitled "Contradictory Tongues," Wendy Woodward examines the court testimony of two female slaves, Lea and Sophia/Sylvia, both of whom suffered indignities at the hands of the Browns, their master and the mistress, but who refused to conceal the experience of their tortured bodies. The women's bodies represented commodification, as well as an archive of silence, voice, and, to a certain extent, disempowerment. The situation changed when the enslaved appealed their cases before a court of law. They assumed the role of narrator while those persons that enslaved them assumed the antagonist's position. Despite the change in the relations of power, the victims regained sounds of audibili-

ty, even if muffled, when the abused resurrected memories of bodily ravishment. Brown utilized force, violence, intimidation, and other unlawful means to prevent his chattel from lodging a complaint before the Protector of Slaves. For his insidious actions, he was found guilty in separate cases and fined £10 each. The theme of the home as a site of secrecy and the public sphere as a confessional continues in the work of Kirsten Mackenzie.

Mackenzie's "Women's Talk and the Colonial State" examines the Wylde Scandal, in which the father was accused of incest and of concealing the abortion of his daughter Jane's unborn child. In this case, the accused represented a Capetonian Chief Justice, not a rural slaveholder. Wylde endured intense public scrutiny from 1831 to 1833, because of his high profile in society. Unlike the previous court case examined above, the so-called victim did not emerge to break the silence. Instead, the private sexual act, which allegedly occurred between father and daughter, gained prominence in the town folklore when household speculation surfaced among the servants concerning the physical condition of Wylde's daughter. Servants claimed that Sir John Wylde would not have behaved in any other way than "what was highly worthy of, and becoming in him, as a Father, a Christian, and a Gentleman" (p. 92). In contrast, a housemaid advanced her own theory. She noticed her madam's swollen appearance, and she knew of the cessation of her menstrual cycles, and cited these occurrences as evidence of an impregnated state. To address this issue and lay to rest any "false" rumors, the Chief Justice summoned two doctors to his palatial home. Each independently concluded that Jane suffered from a condition concurrently prevalent at the Cape, which produced symptoms similar to that of pregnancy. Two courts now operated: the court of law, which found the accused not guilty, and the court of public opinion, which reached the converse conclusion. The conspiracy of silence also tainted the sordid affair. Three actors contributed to the controversy. Physicians possibly altered official patient files to conceal "the truth." The *Advertiser* and *De Zuid-Afrikaan* among other local newspapers publicly supported Wylde. These media assisted in Wylde's defense by using their pages to protect "the fledgling masculine public sphere in a world where the colonial male elite had no formal recognition in the power structure" (p. 106).

Jane Wylde also participated in this conspiracy. She never came forward to speak before a judge or a jury, which was not the case for her enslaved counterparts Lea and Sophia/Sylvia. Instead, her silence seemed to convey the need to protect the mirage of respectability and gentility that her father seemed to project as a recognized pillar of the community. She, on the other hand, represented womanhood; her silence was cloaked in "delicacy." The one occasion when she was allowed to "speak" surfaces in a photograph that the author includes following the narrative. There she sits amongst her mother and father, and an unknown guest or possibly a sibling in the parlor, stringing a harp. The mother seems oblivious to her husband's transgressions, as she knits near a closed window. He, on the other hand, sits with his back facing the camera. What is not known by historians is the photograph's date--in other words, was the picture taken during or before the infamous trial? Assuming that Wylde slept with his teenage daughter, his action supposedly represented his ordained right as a man to penetrate her, and restore some semblance of manhood he found lacking. Whether violated by Wylde, the upstanding citizen, or Brown, the capricious slaveholder, these female bodies serve as metaphors of colonial intrusion. Physically and emotionally, these men ploughed the fertile soil, only to discover an inhabited land of resilience that they sought to pacify.

The same thing occurred when European powers arbitrarily partitioned Africa without regard to established kinships, ethnic groups, or boundaries, a subject adequately addressed in De-

sir=e Lewis's analysis of Bessie Head's *A Bewtiched Crossroad*. Lewis notes that the "[novelist's] critique of annexation and boundary-making,... [not only] confronts the pathology of racial, ethnic and colonial oppression ... [but also] the self-defining colonizers are seen to extend their own boundaries and continually enclose the colonized within their domain" (p. 275). Jane's father, as well as the media, served in this capacity astutely described by Head. The photograph, which portrayed Wylde as a committed husband and family man, rather than as an adulterer and a child rapist, extended the notion of the colonial metaphor. The picture reconstructs and preserves Wylde's masculinity, while it also reinforces the cult of true womanhood. Jane features in the photograph but the visual representation conceals the tensions she might have suppressed. Instead, the family portrait depicts harmony and unity, as this emerges as the subject, and the act of incest is relegated as the other. This discussion on the camera's gaze and the paused moment is continued by Ciraj Rassool and Patricia Hayes, who analyze a collection of photographs taken of a woman named /Khanako from the Southern Kalahari.

In "Science and the Spectacle," Rassool and Hayes examine visualization and the politics associated with representation. /Khanako, who served as an interpreter for a delegation touring Cape Town, was according to some Europeans the anatomical epitome of the "female bush type." She is visually depicted in four images. These representations include a commercially produced photograph, a variety of photographs housed in different institutions, actual film footage from South Africa's National Film Archive, and body casts found in a medical museum. The manifestations of reproduction and the sites of occupation led these authors to argue that /Khanako represented a modernized version of Sarah Baartman, who was taken to Europe where she was displayed before numerous audiences as "The Hottentot Venus." The authors argue that, like her predecessor Baartman, /Khanako reluctantly participated in the South Africanization of science.

An analysis of one of these images sheds light on /Khanako's complicity, albeit involuntary, in perpetuating myths of white supremacy. In this particular picture the Kalahari inhabitant stood in an open veldt among clusters of small trees, with her buttocks exposed, her stomach protruding and her breasts in full view. The photographer manipulated /Khanako's surroundings by adding props such as the shrubbery to erase her personal history. He also polluted her African frame with articulations of foreign symbols. Traditional items of jewelry and the German Swastika, conveniently superimposed on her left cheek, adorned her curvaceous body. The Nazi symbol was not a natural feature of /Khanako's body but it became part of her captured inferiority. German officials apparently felt the need to emblazon the notion of empire, state, and whiteness upon her frame, in an attempt to institute another form of hegemony. /Khanako's body ceased to be her own. Rights to her person now belonged to the German state and not the family from whence she came.

The same could be said of Zimbabwean women in 1981 when they wanted to test the birth control contraceptive Depo-Provera. The newly invented contraceptive required women to undergo injections rather than having them orally ingest pills. Amy Kaler demonstrates in her chapter entitled "The Banning of Depo-Provera" that problems emerged because of two converging patriarchal systems. Husbands felt threatened because they could no longer control their wives' ability to reproduce, while state officials viewed contraception as a national issue and sought its repeal. The state represented masculinity, as did the indigenous authority system.

The extension of women's bodies as national and local preserves also emerges in Meredith McKittrick and Fanuel Shingenge's chapter "Faithful Daughter, Murdering Mother." They portray the real-life story of Nangombe, an Ovamboland

woman who falls pregnant to a man already selected by village elders as her future husband. Traditionally, marriage took place before sexual relations. Because the two had violated customary ritual, Nangombe and not her male suitor faced permanent banishment. Nangombe returned to her northern Namibian village. The visit resulted in her incurring the wrath of the elders, and family members she left behind suffered. To "redeem" herself, Nangombe murdered her two-year old daughter. The killing failed to earn Nangombe the redemption she sought. Instead, she, along with her mother, faced a court hearing. The colonial courts labeled Nangombe's mother as an accomplice because she had encouraged her daughter to commit the atrocious act. The mother sanctioned the murder because she wanted Nangombe to restore harmony with the ancestors. Prosecutors trying the case failed to understand the intricate nature of Customary Law, and dismissed the aforementioned reason as a pertinent plea or defense. Nangombe did, however, exert some agency. She did not allow the prosecutors to portray her as a cold-blooded murderess. Instead, she projected the image of a caring mother, referring often to her child by name. This strategy allowed her to reclaim her body and that of the child whom the prosecutor treated as a non-person. Nangombe, therefore, prevented the further sullying of her image. This differed for /Khanako, who instead appears despondent and unaware of her role in representing colonial stereotypes of indigenous black people. The woman is othered, but so is the photographer, who falls prey to his own intellectual trappings, which include the need to create a specific model, an aesthetic, if you will, of sublimated beauty, and his quest to immortalize colonial mentality through a picture possessing a thousand words. The visual representations raise some questions concerning professionalism and photography.

In colonial times, ethics seem to disappear in the name of scientific observation. /Khanako's visual chronicler objectified her, as did the museum curators. Cast representations of her hands, genitalia, feet, head, and half of her body appeared in the museum as preserved artefacts. The black male body also met the same fate as victims of lynching. Their disfigured bodies either dangled from bending tree branches, or were castrated by white males who gathered at the scene where the violation occurred to take photographs. These vigilantes also paraded their "trophies" through the streets. The streets served as their "open-air" museums, allowing spectators to view mutilated black male bodies. Museum curators also displayed collected artefacts, but they performed this function in a more formal fashion and within the confines of building space. Certain exhibits resided within the main galleries, while others appeared in anterior rooms because of the art's subject matter. Many of the exhibits, which captured nude subjects, appeared in secluded rooms cast away from the museum's main gallery. Legends with warnings describing the alleged sensitive nature of the male sex organs welcomed visitors to the room. This general advisory warning tarnished the artistry that lay before expectant observers.

In "Colonizing the Queer," Joan Bellis theorizes about her experience in curating with colleagues the First National Gay and Lesbian Art Exhibition in Bloemfontein in 1996. Launched during the debate within Parliament concerning "the sexual orientation clause," the curators conceived this exhibition to contribute to that ongoing intellectual dialogue. What the author observed during the public display was that audiences did not interpret homosexuality as a celebration of choice and way of life, but rather condemned it as different and abnormal. One exhibit, entitled "Pope Art," displayed a photographic cloth screenprint supported in the background by the colors of red, black, green, white, and yellow, which adorn the new South African flag. The motifs included the following: "the face of a crying infant; a headless man bowed down by a ball and chain in such a way that his bottom is invitingly presented; [a col-

lection of] pelvic bones; a rose; a large and erect penis; condoms, some containing a glimpse of a section of the baby's face; [and also] the pope's face in profile with his nose juxtaposed very close to the male buttocks and at other times to the rampant penis" (p. 339). This art of resistance depicted the naturalness of sexual desire as opposed to seeing it as a sin worthy of redemption. Bellis maintains that audience members failed to understand the sublime and forthright messages encoded in the art. They chose instead to label the visual artifacts as obscene, immoral, and unsanctified. Some spectators, Bellis reveals, went so far as to accuse the homosexual community of possessing one-track minds. Sex and only sex ruled.

Bellis, like Rassool and Hayes, utilizes visual images to engage issues of race, gender, and sexuality. She accomplishes this goal by dissecting the intricate relations governing the homosexual community. The politics of representation emerge as a source of conflict within the museum space, but also with the artists themselves, who represent different sections of the homosexual community: gays, queers, and lesbians. Bellis depicts the transference of roles in two different ways. The observer (audience) assumed the position of the observed (art on display). Museum officials subverted the power of the curator when they enforced a rigid policy of containment, which prohibited contributors from displaying their art in the main gallery, but allowed them to do so in a remote room.

This theme of power transference and role inversion continues in the chapter by Shula Marks. In "We Were Nursing Men," Marks refutes the notion that only women served in these medical capacities. She adds that this phenomenon was not foreign to other places on the African continent. Yet in South Africa men were often steered away from this traditional "feminine" occupation. Several reasons precipitated their entry into the profession: "fears of white hands on black bodies"; mining men's dislike for women to bathe them; black women wanting perks such as frilly pillowcases and refreshments during breaks; and the fact that some men preferred hospital work to arduous labor in the cavernous mines.

Marks traces the historical evolution of nursing in Johannesburg's gold mines, but she also portrays the complex labor relations that defined the profession and the racialized mine space. White matrons performed in supervisory capacities. Black female nurses administered drugs and stimulants, took temperatures, and "touched" the physically ill black body. They labored in "specially arranged cubicles on the mine premises" while their professional superiors resided with the hospital's sole matron in quarters outside the medical facility. The racialized and gendered division of nursing labor also affected the convalescent and those who sustained minor injuries. Only black men ministered to their needs.

These distinctions within the mine hospital represent another manner in which, as Anne Stoler argues in her chapter entitled "State Racism and the Education of Desires," Europeans created "internal frontiers" to conceal the visual signs of race, but also the "sensed" manifestations of discrimination deeply embedded in the white bourgeois identity. Oftentimes these biases were encoded within languages of class, as noted in the chapter by Johan Jacobs ("Gender-Blending and Code-Switching in the South African Novel: A Postcolonial Model"), or within the public sphere traditionally dominated by men.

In "'Moedermeesteres': Dutch-Afrikaans Women's Entry into the Public Sphere in the Cape Colony, 1860-1896," Marijke Du Toit examines the entry of Dutch-Afrikaans women into the Cape Colony's public sphere as evangelists. These women, who belonged to mission-support organizations, attended and led prayer meetings, while they also attained an academic education. They defied gender norms, but also reinforced them. These mothers, female teachers, and mistresses of black pupils, served as the "vehicle for carrying

the purified nation and motherhood into modernity" (p. xl). In contrast, Elizabeth Elbourne's piece, "Domesticity and Dispossession," whilst asserting similar claims, examines the private sphere and extends the discussion further. Elbourne analyzes not only whiteness but also "who belonged to 'civilization' and who did not," an analysis that also could be applied to Du Toit's "moedermeesteres." These women transcended the private sphere and gender proscriptions, yet in the eyes of their male counterparts had relinquished their feminine attributes and their civility. Questions of civility also relate to notions of citizenship in the colonial context. Together then, these essays both address the dynamics surrounding power relations and question the colonial notion of nationhood.

This collection evinces a high quality of scholarship. Each author addresses a "deep hiStory." The contributors utilize a wide array of sources and methodological approaches to question the notion of gender, and its historical evolution--not only archival documents, but also fiction (in the chapters by both Lewis and Elias Bongmba [on Cameroonian women and missionary design in Mongo Beti's novels]) as used as instruments of historical narrative and inquiry. Together, the authors question, "What is history?" "How is it constructed?" and "What is the relationship of history to gender?" Upon first reading this book, the reader might assume that the narratives come from male perspectives. This is not the case because in constructing a genealogy of voice the scholars alter the position of the subject, even if the story begins with the men. The compilation succeeds ably in its goal of presenting an alternative model for interpreting gender and colonialism. This work, therefore, transcends the usual binary discussions of gender by incorporating an intersectional analysis that challenges scholars to pose new questions for age-old topics.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-safrica

Citation: Dawne Y. Curry. Review of Woodward, Wendy; Hayes, Patricia; Minkley, Gary, eds. *Deep hiStories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa.* H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. November, 2003.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8439