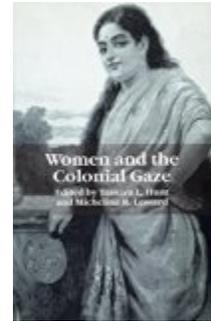


Tamara L. Hunt, Micheline R. Lessard, eds. *Women and the Colonial Gaze*. New York: New York University Press, 2002. viii + 258 pp. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-3647-0; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-3646-3.

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Many Colonialisms, Similar Images: Women as Objects and Subjects of the Gaze

Many Colonialisms, Similar Images: Women as Objects and Subjects of the Gaze

This collection of fifteen essays intends to untangle the complex interrelations between colonialism and gender. The contributors investigate how women were depicted in colonial policies, anti-colonial resistances/nationalisms, Western scholarship, and travel-writing. They successfully illustrate that such representations were created and manipulated in order to justify as well as to challenge the prevailing relations of domination and subordination.

There are five overarching themes in the collection. First, colonized women were depicted either as morally corrupt, ignorant, promiscuous individuals who needed the colonizer's guidance, or as noble savages who embodied desirable virtues such as chastity, modesty, and purity. Second, colonizers utilized these images both to legitimize their colonial administration and to control the women in the metropolis. Third, women from colonizing societies usually approached their colonized sisters differently than the male colonizers. Fourth, women in the colonies were "doubly colonized" because of their nationality and gender (p. 11). Fifth, the images of colonized women served as invaluable symbols for anti-colonial movements.

These are all warranted assessments; but are they not made before? How does the book really contribute to the rapidly growing literature on women and colonialism? In my opinion, the most distinguishing character

of the collection is the breadth of its geographical and temporal scope. It is divided into three parts, each of which covers colonialism in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. The first part includes essays on the Roman Empire, medieval Spain, eighteenth-century Greece, and nineteenth-century Ireland. The following section dwells upon the colonial regimes in Brazil, Rhode Island, Mexico, Canada, Cuba, and Spain. The last part presents cases from India, Vietnam, Korea, Swaziland, and Ethiopia. The holders of the colonial gaze are men as well as women from both colonizing societies (such as the Roman Empire, Britain, or France) and colonized groups (such as Muslims in Spain, Indian nationalists, or Korean elites under Japanese invasion). The objects of gaze are usually the colonized women (such as the Native Americans, or Indian indenture laborers) and sometimes the women in the metropolis.

Another significance of the book is that the contributors go beyond analyzing the typical confrontations between the colonizer and the colonized. In addition, they meticulously unpack how colonial relations are articulated in and through the existing gender, class, ethnic, and sectarian differences. Their vivid analyses shed a light on the inequalities, struggles, and co-optations among colonized as well as colonizing groups.

Unfortunately, the collection's weaknesses outweigh its important contributions. The essays grew out of a panel at the 1996 Berkshire Conference on Women's History. The venue of origin clarifies, to a certain extent,

why some of the essays lack the organization that would be expected from a typical chapter or journal article. Specifically, each chapter presents abundant and novel data, but most of them fail to establish broader connections between the existing studies and the conclusions drawn from the particular case.

Another shortcoming is the lack of an overarching definition of colonialism. Although the editors state that “the concept of the ‘colonial’ [in the book] is taken more broadly than in most anthologies of colonialism and imperialism,” they do not clarify where—and whether—such extended boundaries end (p. 3). This is not to say that the contributors do not raise interesting theoretical and methodological points. Katherine E. Fleming’s definition of “simulated colonialism” (p. 39) and Jiweon Shin’s focus on a non-Western form of colonialism are indeed innova-

tive steps for the literature on (post-)colonialism. Their insightful approaches do not, however, extend to the other essays; and this reader wonders whether it would not be better to omit the term “colonial” from the title.

Finally, the extensive focus on the “gaze” silences—except in a few chapters (Laura Fishman, Ruth W. Hernon, Karen A. Ray)—women’s voices and struggles in colonial settings. For instance, when the contributors dwell upon resistance, they mostly discuss how colonized men manipulated the images of women as a means to break away from colonial subordination. It is nevertheless equally important to explore whether and how women return the gaze. Doing such will illuminate colonized women’s agency and also their strategies to cope with colonial as well as nationalist regimes.

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