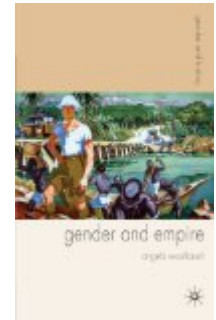


Angela Woollacott. *Gender and Empire (Gender and History)*. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. viii + 164 pp. \$31.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-333-92645-1.



Reviewed by Michelle Tusan

Published on H-Albion (May, 2007)

Angela Woollacott has written a useful survey of the role played by gender in the making and unmaking of the British Empire. Short and concise, this "integrated overview" demonstrates the very real connections forged between colony and metropole from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century (p. 2). *Gender and Empire* consists of six roughly chronological and thematic chapters plus an introduction and conclusion and it offers a mix of primary research and secondary source scholarship. This approach provides the reader with a clear sense of what the cultural turn has meant for the field of the "new imperial history."

Geographically and temporally broad in scope, this recent volume in Palgrave's Gender and History series integrates the history of British settler and non-settler colonies into one narrative. However, it would be misleading to call this a textbook on the British Empire. As the title indicates, Woollacott places "gender at the heart of analysis" while eschewing more traditional political, economic and diplomatic approaches to understanding British imperialism (p. 1). Chapters on slavery, sexual assault, war, and nationalism

tell the story of a fragmented empire joined together by a restrictive gender ideology that linked colony and metropole for over two centuries. This approach offers an important synthesis of research done in the field of gender and empire during the last two decades and provides a point of entry for advanced undergraduates interested in engaging with postcolonial feminist scholarship.

The opening two chapters, "Women and Un-free Labour in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" and "Narratives of Interracial Sexual Assault," explore how gender was used to consolidate racial hierarchies. Both the exploitation of women in the slave system and evidence of sexual assaults as depicted in captivity narratives, Woollacott argues, demonstrate how colonialism enforced standards of "civilized" sexual behavior and thus reinforced imperial rule throughout the British Empire. Here the economic story of colonial exploitation is linked to sexual exploitation: "If the profit motive was integral to both the plantation economy and chattel slavery, so too was sexual mastery" (p. 21). Placing the entire British

Empire in one analytic field does have its drawbacks in that there is the potential to lose the specificity of the colonial experience. Can the distinctive histories of sexual exploitation in Australia and slavery in the Caribbean effectively be understood in the same analytic field? As Woollacott argues, whether living under slavery, convict transportation or indenture, women who challenged this system found themselves at odds with an imperial system governed by the same principles of sexual and racial difference.

Men, too, found themselves bound by gender ideology in the imperial context. Woollacott takes up the theme of war and masculinity in chapter three in order to investigate how "racialized notions of masculinity" emerged through the production and dissemination of adventure stories. Claiming that a militaristic vision of masculinity dominates late Victorian imperial culture, she argues that gender ideology influenced a culture of war. Masculinity continues as a theme in chapter 4, "Gender and Everyday Life under Colonial Regimes." Exploring the diverse topics of "Sport," "Engineering and Construction," and "Politics and the Colonial Civil Service," Woollacott sees socially constructed ideas about masculinity as playing a significant role in the making of empire: "Colonially derived notions of masculinity thus directly affected the shaping of colonial policy and reverberated in debates over gender in the metropole" (p. 89). Normative notions of femininity played a role in this process as well by working to reinforce Victorian sexual roles. This rigid gender system dominated daily life in the colonies while it served to govern the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

In chapter 5, "Women and Gender in Anti-Colonial and Nationalist Movements," the voices of female political activists in India, Kenya, Palestine, Canada, and Ireland take center stage. Woollacott explores the strong link between nationalism and feminism claiming that the decline of the British Empire provided women with new oppor-

tunities to seek "their inclusion in the national mythology" (p. 105). In both colony and metropole feminism found itself engaged with imperial questions. Chapter 6, "Gender and Empire in the Metropole" examines how imperialism shaped British culture. Women often served as carriers of imperial culture and thus helped to shape the course of both colonialism and decolonization.

Although intended as a survey text, *Gender and Empire* does raise some provocative questions regarding future research directions for the new imperial history. The inherent tension in the colony/metropole approach has provided fertile ground for understanding the many ways in which cultural power operates in the imperial context. As Woollacott so well demonstrates, political, diplomatic, and economic approaches to writing history would greatly benefit from a closer consideration of gender. The reverse also seems true as future studies of gender and empire begin to attempt to reconcile political, social, and economic narratives with the lived colonial experience.

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Citation: Michelle Tusan. Review of Woollacott, Angela. *Gender and Empire (Gender and History)*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. May, 2007.

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