

and culturally as a lesbian on the fringes of the Welsh-speaking community; Mary Lloyd Jones's analysis of her life as an artist, full of telling detail as she gradually locates herself as an artist and Welsh-speaking woman, weaving the political and the lyrical, anger and hope; Menna Elfyn showing that it is possible to be Welsh activist, poet and feminist at the same time. The book would be worth reading for these alone. For those who think of Wales in terms of the Wales Tourist Board's images of mountains, castles, tall hats and harps, *Our Sister's Land* will provide a valuable corrective, and even some shocks.

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan

Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance

Edited by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel

Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992

ISBN 0 253 20705 3 Pbk, ISBN 0 253 31341 4 Hbk

As the editors of this collection are all too well aware, all histories of imperialism necessarily tread a fine line between unmasking the violence of the colonial encounter and capitalizing on the all too prevalent nostalgia for a mythic moment where men were 'men' and women were 'ladies'. In this scenario European women exist primarily as the passive beneficiaries of an ancient chivalric code – living out a stable class existence in exotic locations unthreatened by the disruptions accompanying the growth of industrial capitalism in the metropolitan centres of empire. The indigenous populations exist solely as foils for the main movers in the narratives of imperial melodrama who are almost uniquely the masculine heroes of *Boys Own* fame, battling against recalcitrant 'native' insurgents or policy-making from the comfort of overstuffed leather in the seclusion of the 'club'.

Chaudhuri and Strobel's collection succeeds in disrupting this fantasy and in reinstating the central role of women in the propagation of imperial ideology. The essays in this collection go much further than this however. Recognizing the way in which such a strategy of recovery risks supplanting one set of 'heroes' with another equally dubious set of 'heroines', neither of which dislodges the main tenets of the colonial imaginary, the editors have been careful to select a series of contributions which demonstrate the ways in which gender intersected with class and 'race' in complex and contradictory ways at various moments in the history of Western imperialism. *Western Women and Imperialism* is a rich and accessible introduction to a wide range of issues and problems associated with the

historiography of the colonial encounter and the heterogeneity of women's experiences as participants in the colonial project. Any criticism of the collection can perhaps be confined to a concern over the almost exclusive concentration on middle-class women's involvement in and experience of colonialism and a lack of consideration over the impact which imperialism made on the lives of lower middle-class and working-class women in Britain, North America and the colonies. Despite the broader historical span signalled in many of the titles, the majority of the contributions focuses on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This leaves Karen Tranberg Hansen's important article on the impact of class relations for the development of racism in post-World-War-II Northern Rhodesia somewhat out on a limb at the end of the collection. In addition, any collection which focuses primarily on British imperialism, as this one does, should include some contribution to the long-standing intersections of class and gender in the history of British imperialism in Ireland.

While one of the strengths of these essays is the extent to which many of them engage on some level with the impact of colonial intervention on the lives of the indigenous populations, the focus of the collection is on white Western women's participation in India and Africa. It is an emphasis which serves as a timely reminder, as Leslie Fleming points out in her essay on American missionaries' ideals for North Indian women, of the need for further research exploring Indian and African women's responses to such initiatives in order fully to appreciate the dynamics of the colonial encounter as a two-way process (p. 204). Two essays do engage with this important issue. Mervat Hatem's contribution is the only one to foreground the dialectical relation between European women's orientalist writings and the emergence of an Egyptian nationalist literature produced by Egyptian and Levantine-Egyptian women. In a carefully historicized account of the dissemination and production of these texts between 1862 and 1920 she analyses the ways in which, despite disparities in the power relations of one to the other, both were produced through and mobilized myths about each other's status and lived experiences. Mrinalini Sinha unmaskes the centrality of gender in the debates over the Ilbert Bill (1883–1884) and the involvement of the native women of the Bengali *bhadramahila* in the fight to remove the discriminatory clause from the Indian Penal Code which banned Indian civil servants from exercising criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects living outside the chief Presidency towns. Sylvia Jacobs provides a tantalizing segment of her research on the impact of the triple inscription of race, gender and imperialism on the experience of Black women missionaries from North America.

If there is a leitmotif in the group of essays presented in this collection it is as Callaway and Helly state in their conclusion, that simply to dismiss any

of the European women analysed in the book 'as racists and participants in contemporary imperialism without understanding their personal experiences and springs of motivation, their complexities and ambiguities, leaves us with labels, not history' (p. 94). Their answer is to explore the life and writings of such women as Flora Shaw (later Lady Lugard and colonial correspondent for *The Times* between 1890 and 1900) within the context and constraints of their own lived experience in order to gain 'a more textured understanding of gender, ideology and imperialism' (p. 94). In recent years much important work has set about deconstructing the central tropes of colonial discourse. This group of essays can perhaps be appreciated as a complementary intellectual project, producing another much needed materialist account which retrieves the historical specificity of the diversity of political and economic conditions underlying the colonial encounter and the possibilities and limitations of the kinds of intervention available to white middle-class women in Britain and (to a lesser extent) in North America. To this end many of the essays address the ambivalent nature of the power ascribed to Western women in their role as guardians of the imperial 'race' and the ways in which this circumscribed their own definitions of 'femininity' and female sexuality. Dea Birkett's essay on the Colonial Nursing Association (founded in 1896) focuses on the tension between the concept of nursing as a vocation staffed by women conforming to the ideal of the Victorian 'lady', whose primary role was conceived as guardian of those moral values associated with the imperial 'race', and the conflicting desire of many nurses themselves for public recognition of their labour as a demanding and highly skilled profession. Nancy Paxton explores the way in which the prevailing Victorian ideology of all women's sexuality as highly dangerous and potentially destabilizing ultimately informs the politics and actions of women as politically opposed as anti-suffragist Flora Annie Steel and the socialist Annie Besant.

Crucially, the ways in which the histories of even liberal and radical Western feminism are implicated in imperial ideology does not escape scrutiny in the collection. Antoinette Burton's exemplary contribution analyses the reasons why many middle-class women and feminists in nineteenth-century Britain bought into their imperialist identification as moral redeemers and were able to capitalize on this as a way of strengthening their own indispensability to the state. Burton teases out the contradictions of liberal feminist discourse and its dependence on tenets of empire and Christian evangelism. The essay begins with an analysis of the implications for Indian and European women once Josephine Butler's crusade against the Contagious Diseases Act was transferred from the British to the Indian context. Burton then moves to an exploration of feminist writings on Indian women in British women's periodicals of the

period. Here she convincingly maps the extent of the imperialist assumptions underlying the desire for a universal womanhood which, while aiming to 'transcend [] national and racial boundaries', often relied on casting the Indian woman as a voiceless victim of her own society in need of the protective care of her benevolent and 'wiser' Western sisters (p. 148). Sinha's essay raises the same problem when she analyses the contradictions inherent in the liberal Annette Ackroyd's attack on the Ilbert Bill in 1883 (p. 110).

Many of the essays also serve to highlight the difficulties of doing this kind of historical research. Scant documentation on women's participation in many of the central institutions of Western imperialism necessitates inventive research methods and reminds us of the need not only to constitute the archive but to question the nature of the existing archive as a source for historical investigation. Such research also emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of almost all feminist histories and our own imperative to incorporate the insights provided by oral histories, anthropology, literary theory and sociology while respecting the precepts of distinct disciplinary procedures.

Notwithstanding the paternalistic agenda clearly underwriting missionary, nursing and other colonial endeavours, the essays in this collection hint at another important outcome of the colonial encounter and one which has significant implications for continuing research. As Jacobs and Fleming both point out, the fundamental changes to the social and economic structure of African and Indian women's lives, through education, literacy, health care and contraception, while stemming from a total disregard for the significance and value of any indigenous institutions, were often productive of other skills and desires which in some instances contributed to the breakdown of the very imperial order which the colonial emissaries sought to implant in their 'charges'. In other words, what some of this research provides is a glimpse of the fact that the colonial subject was neither as obedient nor as contained as some of the more monolithic histories of imperialism would have us believe.

Annie E. Coombes
