

Book Review

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Lindner, U., & Lerp, D. (Eds.). (2018). *New perspectives on the history of gender and empire*. Bloomsbury. 320 pp. £97.20 (handbook), ISBN: 9781350056336.

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New Perspectives on the History of Gender and Empire is a compelling contribution to the investigation of the entanglements between gender and imperialism. It consists of nine case studies, structured around four sections (mixed marriages and marriage regulations, intimate relationships, indigenous servants in colonial homes, and schooling of indigenous populations), which explore the configuration of “various intersections between gender, race, class, nationality, religion, caste, and sexuality” in several imperial settings. The volume privileges the years between 1880s and the beginning of the First World War, a period marked by the global dominance of European empires, Russia, and later the United States; the radicalization of racial concepts shaping imperial policies; and a spur of globalization that intensified the exchanges and interconnectedness within and between empires. Drawing on influential scholarship on colonialism as a fundamentally gendered project (e.g., Mrinalini Sinha, Ann Laura Stoler, Carole MacGranahan, Anne McClintock), the authors rigorously examine how political–legal systems, local power dynamics, diversified implementations of colonial rule, and global entanglements operated in each setting. By bringing together settings from maritime and continental empires, formal and informal, and long-standing and short-lived imperialisms, the volume exemplifies the fruitfulness of expanding the arena of imperial comparison with peripheries of different types of colonialism. It also proves how productive the revisitation of the colonial archive can be when it combines a multitude of sources and interdisciplinary approaches. Consider, for instance, how Bettina Brockmeyer questions interpretations of colonial gender relations by rereading well-known written documents about the execution of a local leader in German East Africa and interrogating them with the insights from oral testimonies from the colonized. Alexis Rappas’ striking chapter on mixed marriages in the Aegean Sea in the Italian Empire highlights how the incorporation of economic issues and settings of colonialism of proximity are aspects that should be further scrutinized in the investigation on gender and empire. The originality of some chapters relies on the tackling of sources which had not been previously explored (see Julia Malitska’s contribution about marriage regulations for Germans in the Black Sea Steppe, in the Russian Empire) and topics which have been underresearched in scholarship about colonialism (see Jan Severin’s work on homosexuality in German Southwest Africa). The role of white women as agents of colonialism is explored in Silvan Niedermeier’s chapter about an American woman in the Philippines, Eva Bischoff’s examination of two Quaker families in Australia, and Jana Tschurenev’s study about education reform in Colonial India. Of most interest are those chapters that scrutinize how the colonized, against the backdrop of their social positionality in the local hierarchies, and the uneven power relations of the colonial encounter resisted, negotiated, navigated, and/or appropriated aspects of colonial rule and influence: Elisabeth Dillenburg focuses on domestic servants debates in

South Africa and New Zealand, while Divya Kannan analyzes how the participation of some Indian women as intermediaries in the colonial educational system was deeply framed by the caste system and introduced new dynamics in the social fabric of the country.

The several case studies not only add important insights to scholarship on the specific settings but also shed new light on the centrality of the entanglements between violence, intimacy, sexuality, domesticity, and citizenship in the production of colonial rule. Despite the geographical diversity of the case studies, the volume certainly contributes to the perpetuation of the centrality of the British Empire in scholarship about gender and colonialism (four of nine chapters are about this particular empire). Imperial settings from the Maghreb, the Middle East, the Americas and the Nordic context, and the particularities of the Spanish and the Portuguese empires would have definitely complexified, enriched, and deepened the frames of the comparison, had they been the object of analysis. Nonetheless, by convincingly arguing for the need to decentralize research and for tackling the peripheries and marginalized topics, the authors successfully open up fresh perspectives in the study of gender and empire. In that sense, the book encourages researchers to widen the arena of comparison further by resorting to less known configurations of imperial rule.

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