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*Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the  
Colonial Contest*

Anne McClintock. New York: Routledge, 1995.  
449 pp.

*Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and  
the Colonial Order of Things*

Ann Laura Stoler. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.  
237 pp.

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As suggested by their respective titles, these two books address a number of similar issues in colonial studies, albeit from different perspectives. Departing from the traditional approach that views categories of “colonizer” and “colonized” as givens, both authors undertake to demonstrate that colonialism is, in fact, a project through which the nineteenth-century European middle class sought to constitute its class identity by laying down a number of class markers. One of the main features of this project was, McClintock and Stoler argue, the cult of domesticity that “was crucial in helping to fashion the identity of a large class of people (hitherto disunited) with clear affiliations, distinct boundaries and separate values—organized around the presiding domestic values of monogamy, thrift, order, accumulation” (McClintock 167-68). This same argument is made by Stoler, who points out that far from being a secure bourgeois project, colonialism

“was not only about the importation of middle-class sensibilities to the colonies, but about the *making* of them” (99). Among the myriad forms assumed by the cult of domesticity in imperial politics, one which both authors identify as all abiding, is the discourse on the family in its promotion of the importance of maternity, good childbearing, home environment, public hygiene, and moral upbringing. For it is, Stoler argues, “in the domestic domain, not the public sphere, where essential dispositions of manliness, bourgeois morality, and racial attribute could be dangerously undone or securely made” (108). Hence the deployment of numerous strategies in the forms of medical manuals, tropical hygiene guides to ensure the physical and moral soundness of colonial living in the Dutch Indies in the nineteenth century. By thus identifying the centrality of domesticity to the imperial project of the West, both books bring a new dimension to colonial studies, which traditionally occulted gender politics in colonial history.

Another important point developed at great length by both authors is the criss-crossing of the categories of class, gender, and race in imperial politics. In their readings of travel narratives and texts that represent women, the working class, peasants, or the Irish, Stoler and McClintock note that these groups described as “deviant” are given the same attributes as those used to depict the colonized. For example, peasants and Irish are said to belong to a different “race” from the English, while British urban poor are compared to “savage tribes.” If gays in the metropole are figured as “racial deviants,” colonized people are inversely treated as “sexual deviants.” Likewise, women and colonized are seen as sharing the same defects of atavism and irrationality, which place them outside history proper and inside what McClintock calls an “anachronistic space.” This management of the male bourgeois self brings about both the convergences and conflicts of class, gender, and race memberships which, as registered in *Imperial Leather*, take the form of “racialization of domestic space” as well as that of “the domestication of colonial space.”

While sharing certain similar concerns of European imperialism, these two books also proceed from quite distinct agendas. The starting point of *Race and the Education of Desire* is a reflection on the paradox generated by both the centrality of Foucault’s writings to colonial studies and the near total absence of discussion of colonial politics in his work, in particular in his *History of Sexuality*. Foucault’s “short-circuiting empire” in his history of European discourse on sexuality is all the more puzzling given the fact that the sites of production of such a discourse lie, Stoler argues, as much in the metropole as in the colonies. To this interrogation of the omission in Foucault of colonial bodies as a possible site of the articulation of nineteenth-century European sexuality, Stoler adds the further question of the relation between the discourse of sexuality and that of race in *The History of Sexuality*. These queries lead the author of *Race and the Education of Desire* to a close reading and commentary of both the volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* and Foucault’s 1976 Collège de France lectures, which deal more directly with the question of racism within the framework of the political technology of biopower. In the second part of the book, Stoler frames her

own discussion of the race and gender politics in the Dutch Indies in the Foucaultian narrative of sexuality and biopower.

Using feminism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis as her theoretical frames, McClintock explores the functioning of imperial politics in Victorian Britain. In her reading of diverse cultural artifacts such as Pears' soap advertisement, private diaries, novels, oral histories, travel narratives, ethnographical writings and photographs, the author of *Imperial Leather* studies different economic and cultural tactics deployed in the imperial scheme—commodity racism and fetishism, the reinvention of race and patriarchy, and the cult of domesticity. In her analyses, McClintock aims to disengage the intricate filaments that subsist among imperialism, domesticity and money. In terms of organization, the book is divided into two parts; the first section being devoted to an analysis of imperial politics in the metropole while the second part focuses on the discussion of gender and race issues in South Africa.

If the two books, as noted earlier, share similar positions on a number of issues, they diverge on one important point, namely the usefulness of sexualized interpretation in colonial studies. This divergence rests on the two authors' own theoretical choices between Foucault and Freud. While highly critical of the phallogocentricity of both Freud and Lacan, McClintock, following a long line of colonial critics, applies a great many Freudian notions in her discussion of the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Her reading of Columbus's and Haggard's writings focuses mainly on highly sexualized imageries which turn non-European lands, McClintock contends, into "a porno-tropics for the European imagination—a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears" (22). McClintock further interprets the feminizing of the colonized land as a syndrome of "an acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss" (22). While not rejecting the use of Freudian concepts in colonial studies, Stoler alerts us to some of the dangers of this Freudianized colonial narrative as "Freudian notions of a repressed, sublimated and projected sexual impulses are invoked to explain political projects in instinctual psychosocial terms" (171).

Both books display impressive documentation and erudition. Some of their analyses are highly illuminating, in particular their discussions of the role of gender politics in colonialism. These two books do open a number of new directions to the rethinking of colonial politics that is not only, as traditional colonial studies have it, about the domination and exploitation of colonies and the colonized. Both authors convincingly argue how in different ways colonies also served as "laboratories" for European modernity and how the very notion of "Europeanness," instead of being a given, finds its formulation and self-definition in Europe's colonial experience. To the imperial rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice* that claims to bring a superior culture to the "lowly" natives, these two books show that it is in the very process of the imperial venture that the European middle class comes to constitute its own identity and class sensibilities. To these metropolitan cultural changes that resulted from the colonial encounters, I would also

like to add the role the colonies as “laboratories” played in the development of Western contemporary social sciences. One important example that comes immediately to mind is the sociological theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu. The notion of “symbolic capital” so central to his analysis of French society has its genesis in the study of Kabyle culture which Bourdieu conducted in Algeria in the 1950s (*Sociologie de l'Algérie*, Paris: PUF, 1961).

Besides helping us to rethink what seem to be unproblematic notions, such as “colonizer” and “colonized,” the two books under review also have the great merit of un-charting the Western ideological mapping that confines the colonial space to the margins of civilization. Both studies challenge social critics and colonial historians to reconsider the politics of Othering in the traditional critical practices of segregating metropolitan from colonial cultural productions.