

**Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1995), xi + 449 (Routledge, London and New York, £13.99).**

**Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity. The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1995), xi + 191 (Manchester University Press, Manchester, £40.00).**

**Mary J. Hickman, *Religion, Class and Identity. The State, the Catholic Church and the Education of the Irish in Britain* (1995), viii + 287 (Avebury, Aldershot, £37.50).**

These three books share a project, the project of rethinking colonialism and imperialism in the light of contemporary concerns. Colonialism, they all argue in different ways, is not something that happened somewhere else. It was and is integral to both metropolitan and

colonial histories. Whether the primary discipline is literary and cultural studies, history or sociology, whether the case-study concerns nineteenth-century Britain and South Africa, late nineteenth-century Bengal and England, or the Irish in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one of the crucial arguments in which all three authors are engaged is a concern to demonstrate that the analysis of 'race' and empire has to deal with the domestic and that 'metropolis' and 'peripheries' have been mutually constitutive. Such an intellectual project is not of course new, but it is one that has gained pertinence in these contested post-colonial times and these three studies contribute substantially to our understanding of the dynamics of 'race', ethnicity and empire. In addition Anne McClintock and Mrinalini Sinha argue that imperialism can only be fully understood with a theory of gender power and they convincingly demonstrate their case. The three authors, one South African, one Indian living in the United States and one second-generation Irish woman living in London, bear witness to the significance of those voices from the 'margins' which demand a rethinking of the 'centre'.

Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* is an ambitious and impressive piece of work. To my mind it offers the best map we have as yet of the relations of gender, sexuality and empire. It pushes our thinking forward, is theoretically sophisticated, polemical in constructive ways, promises more than it delivers, yet in the process opens up a series of very exciting questions. The book, she tells us, is 'a sustained quarrel with the project of imperialism, the cult of domesticity and the invention of industrial progress' (4) and aims to explore the 'intimate relations between imperial power and resistance, money and sexuality, race and gender' (5). An introduction lays out the parameters of the project: to utilize the analytic reach of feminism, Marxism and psychoanalysis to lay bare the hidden order which underpins modernity, the conquest of the sexuality and labour power of colonized women. Race, gender and class, she argues, came into existence 'in and through relation to each other': labour, money and the market need to be rethought with family, sexuality and fantasy. Two main sections then follow. The first deals with the ways in which Victorian metropolitan space became 'a space for the exhibition of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race', the second with the ways in which 'Africa' became 'a theatre . . . for exhibiting the cult of domesticity and the reinvention of patriarchy' (16). Domestic space was racialized and colonial space domesticated. A final part of the book turns to aspects of contemporary South African gender politics and argues for a reconceptualization of nationalism, gender and race. Along the way there are a series of commentaries on theoretical issues which incite and excite – on the problems with the term 'post-colonial', on ways of rethinking agency, on Fanon and Benjamin, on time and space, on fetishism, on abjection, on oral history, on Bhabha and Irigaray, in nationalism and gender. The genres through which she works include photography, diaries, novels, ethnographies and poetry. We traverse with her the well-known texts of Rider Haggard and Olive Schreiner and discover the complexities of *Poppie Nongena*.

The book is too rich and complicated to summarize effectively. The section that is closest to my heart is the narrative she constructs of Arthur Munby's life as 'an exemplary parable . . . for the lineaments of power and desire in the imperial metropolis' (77). The long and complex relationship between Munby, civil servant and writer, and Hannah Cullwick, domestic servant and private writer, has been explored by Leonore

Davidoff in terms of its insights into the connections between gender, sexuality and class.<sup>1</sup> McClintock extends this analysis into questions about race, fantasy and fetishism. In the process she discusses the centrality of the nanny and maid to Victorian middle-class masculinity, explores the imperial echoes which were played out in the privacy of one sexual relationship, challenges the absence of female fetishism in Freud's classic account, arguing for more diverse genealogies than the castration scene, and signals the move she wants to make from individual to social forms of fetishism, for 'since fetishes involve the displacement of a host of social contradictions onto impassioned objects, they defy reduction to a single originary trauma, or the psychopathology of the individual subject' (202). The last move I did not find convincingly worked through and the attempt in the final chapter to demonstrate how nationalism inhabits the realm of fetishism left me with more questions than answers. At points I thought that McClintock was too concerned to tie up knots, that the messiness of the world was kept in place, the shadow of a grand narrative lurked too close, articulating everything with everything else rather than allowing the play of contradiction and disjunction. Sometimes the historian in me rose in protest at loose linkages, lack of specificity and overgrand generalizations. But *Imperial Leather* encourages openness not closure, is generous in its references to all the other work on which it has drawn so that we can truly believe in this book as part of a much bigger intellectual and political project, takes risks with ideas, and will feed our thoughts for a long time.

Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity* is a most welcome contribution to the as yet extremely limited body of work which brings together post-colonial and feminist theory with the more traditional concerns of historians of empire. There has been great reluctance among imperial historians to make use of the insights of Said and others, while the post-colonial critics in their turn are little interested in historical specificity. Sinha's text is an important demonstration of the historical working through of a set of arguments about the relation between colonial and nationalist politics in Britain and India in the late nineteenth century. Colonial masculinity, she argues, provides the site for that dynamic. Through a detailed analysis of four moments in British/Indian relations – the conflicts over the Ilbert Bill in 1883, the Volunteer Movement in 1885, the Public Service Commission in 1886 and the Age of Consent in 1891 – Sinha explores the constitution and reconstitution of the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' and the ways in which colonial masculinities provided the discursive terrain for strategies of colonial rule and resistance. There were no fixed categories of colonizer and colonized, rather these categories were produced and reproduced both in Britain and India, in the context of particular debates and struggles.

The Ilbert Bill, for example, which would have allowed 'native' officials to sit in judgement over white British subjects, caused a furious reaction in which even white women were mobilized as part of a newly unified Anglo-Indian public opinion in India. We see how 'a straightforward defence of racial exclusivity' was replaced by 'a supposedly more "natural" gender hierarchy between "manly" and "unmanly" men' (5). In that process white feminists seized the opportunity to assert their interest in politics, and were

<sup>1</sup> Leonore Davidoff, 'Class and gender in Victorian England' in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan and Judith R. Walkowitz (eds), *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London, 1983).

rearticulated to racial hierarchy. The work on the Volunteer Movement explores a crisis over Indian elite involvement in colonial rule for Indian men that had traditionally not been recognized as martial. The discussion of the Indian Consent Bill illustrates the uneven and contradictory impact of metropolitan and colonial histories with different outcomes in each place. Sinha argues convincingly that gender is not always the critical category in terms of historical effectivity, that conjunctural analysis is crucial and she demonstrates that 'the production of colonial knowledge in India was always a two-way process, constructed out of the contestation and collaboration of certain sections of the Indian elite with the British' (22). My one problem with this book concerns the ways in which the focus on moments and on discursive strategies has a kind of flattening effect in terms of the historical narratives which can be constructed. The play of the discursive forces leaves us with a curiously unpeopled world, the specificity of place somewhat lost, in the interests of tracing the moves in the games of power; individual subjects with complex psyches are missing from the dramas in which their subjectivities were partially encoded.

Mary Hickman's *Religion, Class and Identity* focuses on another site of colonial politics – the peculiar place of the Irish in Britain. She utilizes historical and sociological analysis to problematize the commonsense understanding of the Irish in Britain, an understanding which resulted in the determination not to classify the Irish as an 'ethnic minority', part of the 'race relations industry' of the post-war years, because they are seen as successfully assimilated. The Irish, she insists, belong in the current debates about 'race', ethnicity and national identity. 'Both the colonial racism stemming from Anglo-Irish relations and the construction of the Irish (Catholic) as a historically significant Other of the English/British (Protestant) have framed the experience of the Irish in Britain' (5). It is this construction as both inferior and alien, both within and without, both the largest and the most invisible migrant group, both white and racialized, which has distinctively marked the Irish experience in London, Liverpool or Glasgow. Hickman argues that it was the arrival in Britain of large numbers of Catholic peasants which produced the Irish as a 'problem'. The solution was to incorporate and 'denationalize' the children of these working-class migrants through the agency of Catholic schools. By 'denationalization' she means the active attempt to weaken national identity and strengthen religious identity. Catholic schools were given a dual role, to draw the Irish into the British national collectivity, teaching them no Irish history or literature, for example, while simultaneously segregating and differentiating them from the rest of the working class.

Two chapters based on careful reading of the existing historiography provide a spirited account, in argument with significant current orthodoxies, of the discourses of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism from the onset of colonialism to the nineteenth century and the emergence of the Irish presence as an issue. Three central chapters then detail the challenge to the English Catholic church posed by the Irish, the attempt to hold the Irish to the church with the changes that this necessitated, and the historic alliance between those involved in Catholic schooling and the British state to produce respectable working-class citizens. A final chapter reflects on the legacy of this differentiation, based on religion, rather than nationality, to contemporary society and politics. 'Issues about racism in this country', Hickman concludes, 'are not solely the preserve of black-white dichotomies' (250). We need the categories of both 'race' and ethnicity to make sense of the ways in which the Irish, always a predominantly working-class group, have been placed.

Sadly there is no gender analysis here, an analysis which would have complicated and differentiated the picture further, but the book deserves a very wide readership and hopefully will appear as a paperback very soon.

The three books are certainly different in their styles – McClintock's analysis of the interstices of the Victorian sexual mind occupies another space from the raced and gendered world of Bengal or the practices of Catholic schools in relation to Irish working-class children. But this difference highlights the ways in which colonial and post-colonial questions have opened up diverse and rich arenas in which scholars can work. History, cultural studies, sociology – all are contributing, often in interdisciplinary ways, to try and answer questions worth asking, questions which matter about ethnicity, 'race' and empire, both in the past and the present.

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