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around 1389 and left with the care of three children, her mother and a niece. Following the death of her husband Christine chose to write to support her family. Attracted first to lyric poetry Christine produced hundreds of love poems between 1392 and 1400, including many written in the voice of a lady and autobiographical poems of widowhood. Around 1400, however, she turned away from 'pretty things' to produce her first non-lyric work, the *Épître d'Orléans*, a mirror for princes or conduct manual, in which she drew lessons from mythology to instruct men in morality.

Christine first expressed interest in the representation of women in the *Épître au dieu d'amours* (1399). This work playfully challenged the authority of texts such as Ovid's *Art of Love* and Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, accusing both authors of maligning women. In this text Christine undercut the arguments made in the *Rose* by drawing on examples of women such as Medea and Didon and revising their history to show their virtue and constancy in the face of male peril, a theme she wrote on for the next six years. Having found a popular voice Christine created the first vernacular literary quartet in France when she commented on a treatise by Jean de Montreuil praising *Romance of the Rose* in 1401. Questioning the dubious literary merit of that work Christine defended women against their misogynist representa-

Christine's interest in women's role as peacemakers was articulated further in later works born out of the political unrest that characterised France in the early fifteenth century. *Le Livre du corps de police* (1407) dedicated to the dauphin, Louis of Guyenne, drew on the political theories of John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome and artfully suggested that just government prevented civil unrest. *Le Livre des faits d'armes et de chevalerie* (1410), an innovative political work commissioned by the Duke of Burgundy, laid out standards for chivalrous warfare. Christine's works on war were read for several centuries, though her name and sex were sometimes suppressed. Christine also wrote on the worsening political situation in France in *La Lamentation sur les maux de la France* (1412) and in *Le Livre de la Paix* (1412). Her *Épître de la prison de vie humaine* (1418), written after Agincourt, was addressed to Mary of Berry who had lost many members of her family at the battle. Written as a consolation this text reflects Christine's desire to retreat from the worldly realm of politics, which she did when she entered the convent at Pontoise. Christine's final work, *Ditie de Jehanne d'Arc* (1429) was one of the first literary celebrations of Joan. In this text she synthesised many of the themes most dear to her—patriotism, virtue, female power and the miracle of divine intervention.

Following her death Christine became part of the *catalog tradition* she had used to defend women, with male authors such as Jean de Marcanville, Johann Caspar Eberti and Gustave Lanson using her as an example of female excellence. Her writings were rediscovered in the early nineteenth century and she was the subject of several male-authored critical studies. With the onset of first-wave feminism Christine became an iconic figure. Alice Kemp-Welch wrote in *Six Medieval Women* that de Pizan 'may be regarded not merely as a forerunner of true feminism, but also as one of its greatest champions. Nearly 700 years later Joan Kelly connected Christine with modern feminism, claiming that she was the first feminist theorist. The first modern biographical study of Christine de Pizan was written by Marie-José Pine in 1927. More recently Emily Mceled has produced *The Order of the Rose, The Life and Ideas of Christine de Pizan* (1976) and Charity Cannon Willard, Christine de Pizan: *Her Life and Works* (1984).

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Major works
experience by non-Western women; and an academic tradition distinguished by the confluence of ethnography, minority histories, women’s history as well as the application of postcolonial and feminist theories. Both streams have challenged the basis of Western knowledge, and induced a shift away from male and Western-centric narratives to a mode of writing aimed at offering alternate, woman-centred and non-Western perspectives of the colonial past.

Postcolonialism as an intellectual concept emerged after the Second World War during the global processes of decolonisation. There has been much discussion about the definition of postcolonialism among scholars. Gyan Prakash most clearly outlines what postcolonialism is, along with its intents, when he describes it in 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism' as having compelled a radical rethinking of knowledge and social identities and authored by colonial and Western domination (1994: 1475). For historians, it is a critique that places colonialism and its accompanying discourses of racial superiority at the epicentre of historical cause and effect.

The majority of postcolonial women’s historians examine how colonial and race ideologies operated with the added dimension of gender in historical processes. Working from the premise that colonialism created a state of flux for both colonised and colonising societies, many historians have examined how colonialisms reordering of traditional social structures and economies impacted upon men and women differently. They also consider colonialism’s impact on gender relations in non-Western cultures.

Postcolonial women’s historica: writing is geographically diverse. It encompasses writing on the colonial regions of Africa, South Asia, Asia and South East Asia, the Middle East, South America and the Pacific; and the histories of settler societies and their indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In many cases, especially the United States, this history includes studies of slavery as well as relations between indigenous and incoming peoples.

Autobiographical and biographical writing
Writing in the 1830s Mary Prince told of her life as a female slave born on a plantation in Bermuda. Her account, ‘related by herself’, became a classic articulation of the female slave’s experience and, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr, this narrative “broke the silence of the black woman slave” (1987: xvi). Prince’s account was generated and timed with a specific intent: to draw attention to the plight of slaves and slave women, at the height of debate on the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

A History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, first published in London in 1831, is a chronicle of the multiplicity of brutalities endemic to slave societies and the particular perils that befell women bound by slavery. Prince revealed the sadistic treatment of herself and other slave women at the hands of malevolent masters: she was sold away from her family ‘like sheep or cattle’; subjected to arduous labour and endured sexualised corporal punishment. This was graphically conveyed when she described her master, Mr D — stripping her naked and hanging her up by the wrists, beating her with a cowwhip or his bare hands ‘till my body was raw with gashes. This treatment was “nothing very remarkable” as it characterised the power exercised over both male and female slaves. Yet Mr D — ‘s “ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked and ordering me to wash him in a tub of water” was the most despised treatment she experienced, intimating that this practice also entailed sexual violation (Gates 1987: 191, 199, 202).

At the same time that Prince was highlighting injustices in the British Caribbean empire, a parallel tradition of African women’s writing was emerging in the United States. The writings of Maria Stewart, Religion and the Pure Principle of Morality and Production of Mrs Maria W. Stewart first published in 1829 and 1835 respectively, advocated a special role for black women in moral Christian African-American society that centred on ‘solidarity, self-help and racial pride’. This would be fortified by the establishment of institutions of ‘higher learning by and for themselves’ (Andrews 2003: viii—x). Stewart’s writing which commenced with a sketch of her personal story also contained an overt critique of the United States for sustaining slavery. The worst indictment against America was that they hast caused the daughters of Africa to commit whoresoms and fornications; but upon thee be their curse (Andrews 2003: 13).

Following Stewart, a number of other African-American women writers authored ‘oral essays’ that focused upon women’s experiences of slavery as well as spiritual autobiographies that charted personal experience and the self-improving Christian path that led them ‘to speak out for freedom’ (Gates 1987: xiv—xx; Andrews 2003: xii—xiii). Of these, The Narrative of Sojourner Truth (1850) was one of the most influential in the years before the Civil War in highlighting the experiences of slave women. Yet, this was not an autobiography but a biography. Although Truth was renowned for her oratory skills she was not literate and so collaborated with Olive Gilbert, a white out-spoken opponent of slavery, whose name did not appear in Truth’s published book (Andrews 2003: xvi). William Andrews, along with other historians of early slave literature, has shown the limits of such literature as the voice of Gilbert is clearly present in the text censoring and revealing colonial condescension (2003: xvi).

The issue of how African-American writers were limited and influenced by white collaborators, editors and publishers was an issue at the time of publication as it is for current analyses of their works. The inclusion of the phrase ‘written by herself’ on title pages was key to indicating the degree of ‘authenticity’ of these accounts. Such was the case with Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, ‘written by herself’ and first published in 1861. This account ‘brought this category of slave narratives to its summit’ although, like Truth, the silent hand ofabolitionist Lydia Maria Child may have been at work. If not only outlined her own history, it also revealed broader histories of labour and the fracturing of families, the routine sexual violation by masters, the accompanying scorn from the white mistress, the punishments and the degradation of the system that impacted upon white slave-owners, as well as their enslaved families (Gates 1987: xvi).

Like Prince’s account it is not a story of unrelenting victimisation. Jacob portrays herself as a determined young woman who is supported by her respected and monied grandmother who instilled Jacobs with a strong sense of honour and virtue that ran counter to the predominating stereotypes of black women’s depraved sexuality (Gates 1987b: 349—51, 362, 383). Jacob’s account accentuated the centrality of women to slave families and the manner in which slaves resisted the overwhelming power of slavery.

The full impact of Jacobs’ account, despite its powerful rendering of the experiences of slave women, was not felt until over
100 years after its publication as it was 'overshadowed' by the Civil War. With the emergence of an academic tradition of African-American women's history, Jacobs' account was rediscovered and has become 'the best-known and most widely read' African-American woman's text from the nineteenth century (Andrews 2003: xxv).

Autobiography and biography continued in the twentieth century to expose the continuing injustices of colonialism upon women and their communities. It remained a very powerful medium for promoting empathy within democratic nations so as to put continuing institutionalised racism on political agendas in those countries, evidenced by Maya Angelou's iconic work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

Within Australia, for instance, following the nation-wide Aboriginal rights movement that sought the redress of legal, social and economic inequities and land rights in the 1960s, a literature of Aboriginal women's autobiographies emerged. Autobiographies and biographies by Aboriginal women were particularly potent literary forces to bring to light the human impact of legal, political and social policies of child removal and the accompanying practice of using these children as labourers. These works gave far greater insight into the extent that government policies affected Aboriginal lives and the impact they had upon individuals, thus putting a human face on the often-deprecated scientific and state procedures.

Political activist Margaret Tucker's autobiography *If Everyone Cared* (1977) echoed a number of themes of nineteenth-century American slave narratives - the break-up of her family, institutionalised violence, drudgery and exploitation, and her conversion to a doctrine that she saw as a salvation for herself and other Aboriginal people. Tucker's autobiography records her life in Depression-era New South Wales, her removal from her family by police and her placement in a state-run institution to train Aboriginal girls for domestic service in affluent Sydney homes. Her experience led her to Communism, the doctrine that appealed to her and others in her situation in the years before the Second World War, as a readily identified with the downtrodden workers this political party professed to represent. Long before her autobiography was published, Tucker had gained a public profile as a musical performer and speaker at political rallies.

Other Aboriginal women's autobiographies detailed conditions in different times and places in Australia. Amongst these works those of Ruby Langford Ginib, *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988), Glenys Ward, *Wandering Girl* (1987) and *Una Yafa Thinallas* (1991), and Sally Morgan, *My Place* (1987), have gained wide popularity. All contributed to the watershed in Australian society in the 1990s when this aspect of its colonial history became more widely recognised and acknowledged. More recently Doris Pinkington Nungg Garimara's *Fell into the Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) that told the story of her mother's escape from a West Australian institution was the basis for the acclaimed 2002 feature film *Rabbit Proof Fence*. This highly successful film alerted the international community to Aboriginal Australia's Stolen Generations and the government policies that underlay the forced removal of children from their families.

Autobiographies and biographies of this nature, written by women who experienced colonialism in its worst excesses in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, became the foundational sources for scholars investigating colonialism from the 1970s. The issues explored in these works - the destruction of the family, the place of women in non-white societies, labour, sexual exploitation, the social and scientific construction of the female black body, the question of victimisation - were all questions that scholars would take up from the 1970s.

*Minority histories, national histories and histories of imperial regions*

Writing in 1979 in her landmark work, *The Majority Finds It Past*, Gerda Lerner dwelt upon the double neglect of African-American women in historical writing because they were women and because they were black (1979: 63). Lerner was one of the first historians who acknowledged the shortcomings of feminist historiography that had concentrated exclusively upon white women as historical subjects. Lerner's identification of the absence of black women from American history sparked similar scrutiny of other national historiographies followed by an effort to place minority women into a broader historical framework.

The subsequent field of African-American women's writing grappled with the tensions between the practice of writing history, feminist historical models and the stark differences between 'Native American' and 'Black' women. Whereas 'the patriarchy' had been identified as the source of women's oppression by feminist theorists, historians of minority women instead concentrated on racism and imperialism as the predominating source of oppression as Ranu Samaratne has argued in *AlterNatives* (2002: 10). This schism between white feminist and black feminist or 'womanist' historical models reflected a wider debate about the limitations of the women's liberation movement that was strongly informing historical writing. Black critics of the feminist movement exposed it as a predominately white, middle-class movement that had little knowledge of, or empathy for, the plight of black women. In particular, critics of white women's liberation objected to the notion of 'universal sisterhood' that assumed that all women suffered equally in comparative social, economic and political situations. Liberation for black women entailed diametrically opposing objectives from those of the white feminist movement as writers such as bell hooks, * Ain't I A Woman?* (1984) and *Postmodern Blackness* (1993), Bonnie Dill Thornton, 'Race, Class and Gender: Prospects for an All-inclusive Sisterhood' (1983), and Michelle Wallace, *Invisibility Blues* (1990), pointed out.

Writers and activists from many different contexts echoed this objection to feminism. American Indian Movement activist Mary Dog Crow (Shoemaker 1995: 12) argued in the 1970s that feminism was 'irrelevant' to Native American Indian women; and Australian Aboriginal writers, Pat O'Shane, *Is There Any Relevance for the Movement for Aboriginal Women?* (1976), and Jackie Huggins, *A Contemporary View of Aboriginal Women's Relationship to the White Women's Movement* (1994), followed. Yet, as Nancy Shoemaker accents in *Negotiators of Change*, many Native American Indian writers also acknowledged that as women of colour they were not 'traditional' Indian women but had a distinct historical experience from their menfolk, but this could not be conflated within a universal history of women and their struggle against the patriarchy. Instead liberation for women in their societies involved benefits for the extended family and wider community rather than individual women (1995: 12-13). Such interventions and refinements of feminist arguments impacted upon postcolonial historical writings by women in many national arenas.

This critique of feminist scholarship was also taken up on a theoretical front from 1986 by Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential critique *Under Western Eyes* Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses (1986) and Gayatri Chakravorty
Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), Spivak objected to what she perceived as the depoliticization of colonial studies, the inference that colonialism was an historical artefact that is implicit in postcolonial. Like Mohanty, Spivak found feminism to be another Western hegemonic discourse that was acting to silence or speak on behalf of non-Western women. Spivak, amongst others, advocated the adoption of the terms 'subaltern' and 'Third World' to differentiate between the work produced by 'centriloquism' white scholarship and that produced by scholars of non-Western heritage. This position vis-à-vis feminism was furthered most notably by Trinh T Minh Ha in Woman Native Other (1989) and The Moon Wakes Real (1991) and Sara Suleri, Woman Skin Deep (1992). These works compelled feminist scholars who worked in colonial studies, such as Margaret Jolly in Colonising Women: The Maternal Body and Empire (1993), to re-examine their position, polities and intents in light of these far-reaching critiques.

So how did this contemporary debate over feminist historical models, the writing of minority women's history and postcolonialism intersect? One critical development was the rejection of the notion that non-white women were unmitigating victims under the weight of the dual burden of racial and gender oppression (Higginbottom 1989: 51). Rather, women exercised 'agency' in order to gain advantages and better conditions when they could. Evelyn Brooks Higginbottom in her pioneering essay, 'Beyond the Sounds of Silence: Afro-American Women in History,' argued that the African matrilineal family structure was revitalized in New World slave societies. She argued that as slavery undermined the role of the male provider, the economic power and autonomy of women within the household were a fundamental feature of black women's history that differed greatly from their white bourgeois counterparts (1989: 54). Deborah Q White in 'Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South' (1983) and Jacqueline Jones in Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present (1986) likewise grappled with linkages between economics and slave women's familial and social status during and after the fall of southern slavery. This remodelling of power made all historical subjects actors. This had extensive ramifications for this field of historical writing. In the writing of fornication histories indigenous women were portrayed as critical go-betweens between traditional indigenous cultures and colonial societies. This revision of the frontier decentred the overwhelmingly masculine character of the frontier that existed in previous historical constructions of frontiers.

From the 1980s, feminist histories of the frontiers in the United States, South America, Australia, the Pacific and beyond resurrected indigenous women from the confines of victimhood and infused their history with new dynamism. Yet, this new outlook also required refinement as the critique of colonialism became obscured in many instances by an emphasis upon the opportunities that indigenous women were exposed to, and neglected to account for the impact upon the wider indigenous community. Aboriginal historian Jackie Huggins, writing with Heather Goodall in 'Aboriginal Women Are Everywhere' also censured writers who adopted this vision of the historic past as it portrayed Aboriginal men in a denigratory manner (Huggins and Goodall 1992: 415). Such histories tended to blame Aboriginal men for violence within indigenous communities rather than incorporating colonial violence into the causes of upheavals within Aboriginal communities or women's decisions to move into frontier societies. Aboriginal writers insisted that their main objective was the cohesion of their communities rather than the politics of individualism advocated by feminists. This point is supported by Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel who argued in their introduction to the Restoring Women to History series:

As with any major societal upheaval resulting in challenges to existing authority, colonialism both created opportunities and oppressed women. In the final analysis however, the vast majority of women have opted to work for the independence of their societies. (1999: xi–xii)

Another very important outcome of this dialogue between postcolonial theory and postcolonial historical writing was a rethinking of the limits of postcolonial approaches to history. As Florence E Mallon in 'The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History' outlined there is an 'unfulfilled promise' of even-handedness in postcolonial methodology in which the colonial and colonised would supposedly be given equitable treatment by the historian. Mallon argued, through a review of postcolonial or 'subaltern' histories of Latin America, that despite the best intentions of a number of scholars, the limitations of sources, particularly archival sources, necessarily results in European bias. She also laments that 'like Spivak, I, too, want to touch pictures of the historical subjects I struggle to retrieve but often these lives are irreversibly given the requirements of the empirical method that remain central to historical practice despite the postmodern critique (1994: 1507). Such critiques drew attention to the limitations of unearthing the past and resulted in an adjustment of the claims of postcolonial writers and a rethinking of the achievable parameters of such studies. The limitations and remoteness of the academic tradition have been countered by many non-western cultural producers by re-telling historical stories through oral traditions, fiction, performances and the new media of film. Toni Morrison's Tar Baby (1981), Beloved (1987), Jazz (1992), Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1985), Tracey Moffatt's Nice Coloured Girls (1987) and Nightingales (1989), Rachel Perkins' Radiance (2001) and various writers in Susela Naas's Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, Caribbean and South Asia (1992) have chosen to make their statements on colonialism via these mediums. As postcolonial historians had to rethink what they could retrieve of colonised people's history, so too did they need to rethink the universal categories of 'coloniser' and 'colonised' and the notion that colonisation was experienced in uniform ways. This flaw in early postcolonial theory, clearly outlined by Ella Shohat in 'Notes on the Post-Colonial' (1992) that it collapsed the experience of all colonised peoples into one homogenous experience, overlooked that colonialism varied enormously throughout all colonised zones. Historical writing, as opposed to ahistorical postcolonial critiques, emphasised the specificity of time, place, environment, colonising powers and indigenous social structures as critical factors that differentiated indigenous experience.

Through their attention to temporal specificity, historians have shown how divergent colonialism was even within national or larger colonial boundaries. Native American
Imperial feminism and feminist history

The tensions between feminism and post-colonial women's political objectives of decolonising western knowledges that we have examined in part above are also clearly evident in histories that explore white women's drive to uplift and save their colonised sisters from oppressive cultural practices. Colonialism in Africa, Haiti and Dowry murder in South Asia and various other practices are a dilemma for feminist historians. On the one hand these practices contravene western feminist sensibilities about the social empowerment of women and the fundamental need to protect women's bodies from violence and mutilation. Within the traditional feminist social models, men are the agents who exploit women's bodies and enforce cultures of oppression. Yet a number of post-colonial women's historians have shown that it is often women who perpetuate these practices against other women and it was not necessarily older women imposing cultural regimes on their younger counterparts.

Lynn M Thomas in her important study, 'N'gaijara (I will circumcise myself)' (1997), showed that it was a cross-section of women, including adolescent girls, who defied the 1956 ban on female circumcision in Kenya in the 1950s by excising each other. Her findings opposed earlier feminist scholarship that argued this practice, along with infibulation, was the epitome of patriarchal oppression against women. Thomas argued that within the complex colonial circumstances of the Mau Mau rebellion, the proliferation of this practice by adolescent girls was more than an act of resistance against an imposed colonial regime shaped by Christian missionary politics or about maintaining a valued practice. It became a test and demonstration of their strength and determination as an age group' (1997: 29). Thomas came to understand their motivations through collecting oral testimonies of the women who were involved as young girls in the defiance of laws created ostensibly to protect them.

Veena Talwar Oldenburg in Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime has also complicated the historical picture by examining dowry murders and female infanticide in India. She has shown that these cultural crimes, long blamed by British imperialists upon Hindu culture, were the outcome of the masculinisation of the economy by colonial policies (2002: 4–5).

When viewed sociologically, it is mother-in-laws, accompanied by sister-in-laws or husbands, who perpetrate such crimes against brides. When viewed historically, in the colonial microcosm of the Punjab, the causational reasons for the emergence of dowry-related crimes are found in nineteenth-century economic restructuring undertaken by Britain.

Examining the role white women played in colonial history has been a vibrant genre in postcolonial women's historical writing as it continues to be. Since the 1980s, there have been numerous studies that have examined relations between white women and colonised women that have further complicated the sentimentalised vision of a universal sisterhood. The works by Helen Callaway, Gender, Culture and Empire (1987), Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance (1992), Felicity Nussbaum, Thrill Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth Century Narratives (1995) and Angela Woolacott, To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism and Modernity (2001) have been prominent in this field. More recently historians such as Victoria Haskins with John Mundine, 'Could you see to the return of my daughter' (2003), have commenced the examination of the
equally complex history of relations between white women and colonised men in the empire. Amongst these works, Antoinette Burton’s Burdens of History (1994), has shown that the notion of universal sisterhood comes from Victorian-era feminism. Examining the work and lives of British feminists in India, Burton demonstrated how the feminist vision of women like Josephine Butler was structured around improving the lives of Indian women particularly through education and the reformation of imperial culture. Butler was especially concerned with prostitution and repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts, a campaign that Burton characterised as the ‘white woman’s burden’.

Following close upon Burton’s seminal work, Kumari Jayawardena in her book The White Woman’s Other Burden (1995) has investigated the historical complexity of white women in the empire. Rather than solely being reformers, Jayawardena uncovers the multiple roles that white women played in the empire. She distinguishes between the white women who came to South Asia bringing ‘Christianity, Western education and values, social reform, women’s rights and some modernizing processes to the women of Asia within an acceptance of British rule’ from those who were rejecting Christianity, negating Western values and rediscovering Oriental religions and culture in a context of ‘Home Rule and nationalism, or even Socialism’ (1995: 267). She found that many of the white women she studied disavowed British Rule and acted to undermine it through radical education and lending their support to nationalist movements. It was these women who were most appreciated by local women, especially by those who were politically active (1995: 267).

Deconstructing discourses on race and gender

While numerous postcolonial women historians seek to understand white women’s relationship with empires and colonised peoples, other historians deconstruct stereotypes of black and colonised women. Saratjee Bartman, the South African woman who became known as the Harriet Vonius in the early 1800s when she was displayed in Paris, has been a focal point for a number of scholars, such as Rosemary Wiss (1994) and Anna Fuurto- Sterling (1995), delving into the Enlightenment scientific construction of black female sexuality and the black female body. Londa Schiebinger’s Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science (1993) examined Enlightenment scientific discourses and uncovered their dual purpose of circumscribing the social, political and economic role of European women particularly after the French Revolution and interrogating brutal practices towards women of the empire. Schiebinger demonstrated how the configuration of the ‘black woman’s body’ through scientific discourses had ample uses by slave-owners and others who deployed colonised labour. For instance, enlightenment scientists posited that black women did not experience any significant physical trauma during childbirth, therefore their owners and employers could insist upon their return to hard labour soon after parturition with a clear conscience. Schiebinger demonstrates how these constructions had multiple applications in colonial practices.

Reina Lewis, Gendering Orientalism (1995), Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall, Sexuality and Subordination (1989) and Joanna De Groot’s Sex and Race: The Construction of Language and Imagé (1989), amongst others, have examined art and literature as colonial texts and explored the linkages between colonial practice and the colonial imagination. A number of these scholars undertook to further the gendered dimension of Orientalism as set out by Edward Said, either in Said’s Middle East or other colonial regions. For instance, the art works of Paul Gauguin in Tahiti and the Marquesas at the turn of the twentieth century have proved a rich subject for scholars such as Griselda Pollock, Avant-Garde Gambits (1992), Ann Solomon-Godeau, ‘Going Native’ (1989), and Margaret Jolly and Teresa Tiawa in a special edition of Pacific Studies (2000), who have explored the politics of cultural production, in this case that of sexualised images of women in a colonial setting. Anthropologists, art historians and cultural studies scholars have also delved into the meanings of these cultural artefacts with differing purposes. Postcolonial historians have unravelled the visual hermeneutics of colonialism from art to films as a means to assess historical shifts, altering colonial practices and their interaction with changing attitudes to race, gender and sexuality. The inclusion of visual analysis in postcolonial women’s historical writing is becoming increasingly important, as an acknowledgment of how important these documents are in reinforcing colonial thought and practice.

Contact histories

As we have seen, the predominant body of work by postcolonial women historians has concentrated upon gendered relations and the status of women in the colonial context. Yet a number of historians have written histories that focus less upon the gendered consequences of colonialism and seek to deconstruct and decentre eurocentric imperial narratives thereby recasting imperial episodes within the context of extant indigenous societies. Inga Clendinnen and Anne Salmond, for instance, are two historians whose work has been important for offering colonised peoples’ perspective on imperial history in particular regional contexts. Clendinnen’s Ambivalent Conquest: Maori and Spaniard in Yucatan 1517–1577 (1987) and Salmond’s Two Worlds: First Meetings between Maori and Europeans 1642–1772 (1991) both contributed to a rethinking of colonial history by highlighting the continuities of indigenous societies after colonisation had ostensibly commenced. Both stressed the diffusion of power in these early contact histories thus dismantling traditional historic models of imperialism that posited the coloniser as dominating the colonised from the outset. By foregrounding non-European evidence, these historians formulated a quite different view of what colonisation entailed in these two instances.

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References


Related essays

Abolition; Australia; Body and Sexuality; Dominor: women writers; Empire; Orientalism; Travel; Prostitution; Slavery; United States.