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IMPERIAL LEATHER

RACE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY
IN THE COLONIAL CONTEST

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INTRODUCTION

POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE ANGEL OF PROGRESS

There are many maps of one place, and many histories of one time.

—Julie Fredriekse

RACE, MONEY AND SEXUALITY

In the opening pages of Henry Rider Haggard's bestselling novel *King Solomon's Mines*, we discover a map. The map, we are told, is a copy of one that leads three white Englishmen to the diamond mines of Kukuanaland somewhere in southern Africa (Fig.A.1).¹ The original map was drawn in 1590 by a Portuguese trader, Jose da Silvestre, while he was dying of hunger on the "nipple" of a mountain named Sheba's Breasts. Traced on a remnant of yellow linen torn from his clothing and inscribed with a "cleft bone" in his own blood, da Silvestre's map promises to reveal the wealth of Solomon's treasure chamber, but carries with it the obligatory charge of first killing the black "witch-mother," Gagool.

In this way, Haggard's map assembles in miniature three of the governing themes of Western imperialism: the transmission of white, male

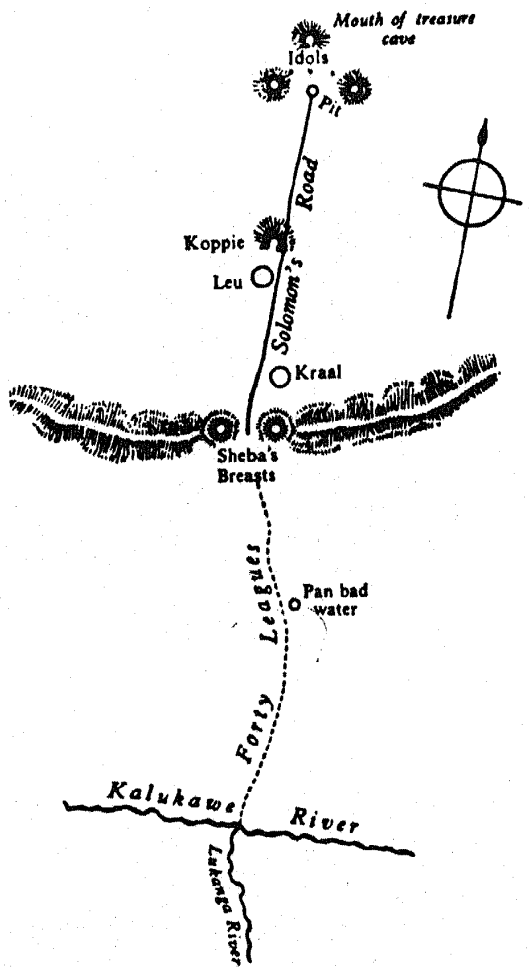


FIGURE A.1. THE LAY OF THE LAND.
Haggard's sketch map of the Route to King Solomon's Mines.

power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital—three of the circulating themes of this book.

What sets Haggard's map apart from the scores of treasure maps that emblazon colonial narratives is that his is explicitly sexualized. The land, which is also the female, is literally mapped in male body fluids, and da Silvestre's phallic cleft bone becomes the organ through which he bequeaths the patrimony of surplus capital to his white heirs, investing them with the authority and power befitting the keepers of sacred treasure. At the same time, male colonial inheritance takes place within a necessary exchange. Da Silvestre's demise on the bad (frozen) nipple is avenged and white patrilineal inheritance assured, only with the death of Gagool, the "Mother, old mother" and "evil genius of the land."² Haggard's map thereby hints at a hidden order underlying industrial modernity: the conquest of the sexual and labor power of colonized women.

The map also reveals a paradox. On the one hand, it is a rough sketch of the ground the white men must cross in order to secure the riches of the diamond mines. On the other hand, if the map is inverted, it reveals at once the diagram of a female body. The body is spread-eagled and truncated—the only parts drawn are those that denote female sexuality. In the narrative, the travelers cross the body from the south, beginning near the head, which is represented by the shrunken "pan bad water"—the mutilated syntax depicting the place of female intelligence and creativity as a site of degeneration. At the center of the map lie the two mountain peaks called Sheba's Breasts—from which mountain ranges stretch to either side as handless arms. The body's length is inscribed by the right royal way of Solomon's Road, leading from the threshold of the frozen breasts over the navel *koppie* straight as a die to the pubic mound. In the narrative, this mound is named the "Three Witches" and is figured by a triangle of three hills covered in "dark heather."³ This dark triangle both points to and conceals the entrances to two forbidden passages: the "mouth of treasure cave"—the vaginal entrance into which the men are led by the black mother, Gagool—and, behind it, the anal pit from which the men will eventually crawl with the diamonds, in a male birthing ritual that leaves the black mother, Gagool, lying dead within.

On the map, the female genitalia are called the Three Witches. If the Three Witches signal the presence of alternative female powers and of alternative African notions of time and knowledge, these challenges to imperial power are denied by inversion and control. Haggard wards off the threat of a resistant female and African power, not only by violently dispensing with the powerful mother figure in the narrative but by placing alongside the Three Witches on the map the four points of the compass: the

icon of Western “reason,” technical aggression and the male, militarized possession of the earth. The logo of the compass reproduces the spread-eagled figure of the woman as marked by the axes of global containment.

Clambering from the mine laden with gems the size of “pigeon eggs,” the white Englishmen give birth to three orders—the male, *reproductive* order of patriarchal monogamy; the white *economic* order of mining capital; and the global, *political* order of empire. At the same time, both map and narrative reveal that these orders, far from being distinct, take intimate shape in relation to each other. In this way, the adventure of mining capital reinvents the white patriarch—in the specific class form of the English, upper-middle class gentleman—as the heir to imperial “Progress” at the head of the “Family of Man”—a family that admits no mother.

Haggard’s map abstracts the female body as a geometry of sexuality held captive under the technology of imperial form. Yet it also reveals a curious *camera obscura*, for neither reading of the map is complete on its own, but each reveals the shadowy inversion beneath it of its other, repressed side. If one aligns oneself with the male authority of the printed page, the points of the colonial compass and the bloody labels, the map can be read and the treasure reached but the colonized woman will be stood on her head. If, on the other hand, one turns the male book upside down and sets the female body to rights, the crimson words on her body—indeed the male colonial venture as a whole—become incoherent. Yet neither version exists without the other. *Imperial Leather* sets out to explore this dangerous and contradictory liaison—between imperial and anti-imperial power; money and sexuality; violence and desire; labor and resistance.

GENDER, RACE AND CLASS ARTICULATED CATEGORIES

It was a while before we came to realize that our place
was the very house of difference, rather than the secu-
rity of any one particular difference.

—Audre Lorde

I begin with Haggard’s map because it offers a fantastic conflation of the themes of gender, race and class that are the circulating concerns of this book. *Imperial Leather* offers three related critiques. In many respects, the book is a sustained quarrel with the project of imperialism, the cult of domesticity and the invention of industrial progress. Haggard’s map intrigues me, moreover, because it offers a miniature parable for one of the central tenets of this book. Throughout the chapters that follow, I argue

that race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways. In this sense, gender, race and class can be called articulated categories. This, then, is the triangulated theme that animates the chapters that follow: the intimate relations between imperial power and resistance; money and sexuality; race and gender.

In Haggard’s map, the diamond mines are simultaneously the place of female sexuality (gendered reproduction), the source of treasure (economic production) and the site of imperial contest (racial difference). Da Silvestre’s phallic cleft bone is not only the tool of male insemination and patriarchal power but also the insignia of racial dispossession. Gender here, then, is not simply a question of sexuality but also a question of subdued labor and imperial plunder; race is not simply a question of skin color but also a question of labor power, cross-hatched by gender. Let me hasten to add that I do not mean to imply that these domains are reducible to, or identical with, each other; instead, they exist in intimate, reciprocal and contradictory relations.

A central claim of *Imperial Leather* is that imperialism is not something that happened elsewhere—a disagreeable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather, imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity. The invention of race in the urban metropolises, which I explore in more detail below, became central not only to the self-definition of the middle class but also to the policing of the “dangerous classes”: the working class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd and so on. At the same time, the cult of domesticity was not simply a trivial and fleeting irrelevance, belonging properly in the private, “natural” realm of the family. Rather, I argue that the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, dimension of male as well as female identities—shifting and unstable as these were—and an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise.

One might think it could go without saying by now that European men were the most direct agents of empire. Yet male theorists of imperialism and postcolonialism have seldom felt moved to explore the gendered dynamics of the subject.⁴ Even though it was white men who manned the merchant ships and wielded the rifles of the colonial armies, white men who owned and oversaw the mines and slave plantations, white men who commanded the global flows of capital and rubber-stamped the laws of the imperial bureaucracies; even though it was white, European men who, by the close of the nineteenth century, owned and managed 85 percent of the earth’s surface, the crucial but concealed relation between

gender and imperialism has, until very recently, been unacknowledged or shrugged off as a *fait accompli* of nature.

In the last decade a good deal of evidence has emerged to establish that women and men did not experience imperialism in the same way.⁵ European imperialism was, from the outset, a violent encounter with preexisting hierarchies of power that took shape not as the unfolding of its own inner destiny but as untidy, opportunistic interference with other regimes of power. Such encounters in turn transformed the trajectories of imperialism itself. Within this long and conflictual engagement, the gendered dynamics of colonized cultures were contorted in such ways as to alter, in turn, the irregular shapes that imperialism took in various parts of the world.

Colonized women, before the intrusions of imperial rule, were invariably disadvantaged within their societies, in ways that gave the colonial reordering of their sexual and economic labor very different outcomes from those of colonized men. As the slaves, agricultural workers, houseservants, mothers, prostitutes and concubines of the far-flung colonies of Europe, colonized women had to negotiate not only the imbalances of their relations with their own men but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their new relations with imperial men and women.⁶

Colonial women were also ambiguously placed within this process. Barred from the corridors of formal power, they experienced the privileges and social contradictions of imperialism very differently from colonial men. Whether they were shipped out as convicts or conscripted into sexual and domestic servitude; whether they served discreetly at the elbow of power as colonial officers' wives, upholding the boundaries of empire and bearing its sons and daughters; whether they ran missionary schools or hospital wards in remote outposts or worked their husbands' shops and farms, colonial women made none of the direct economic or military decisions of empire and very few reaped its vast profits. Marital laws, property laws, land laws and the intractable violence of male decree bound them in gendered patterns of disadvantage and frustration. The vast, fissured architecture of imperialism was gendered throughout by the fact that it was white men who made and enforced laws and policies in their own interests. Nonetheless, the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided—if borrowed—power, not only over colonized women but also over colonized men. As such, white women were not the hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting.⁷

I argue throughout this book that imperialism cannot be fully understood without a theory of gender power. Gender power was not the superficial patina of empire, an ephemeral gloss over the more decisive

mechanics of class or race. Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise. In my view, however, gender was not the only—nor the dominant—dynamic of industrial imperialism. Since the late 1970s, an impassioned and compelling feminist critique has emerged—largely from women of color—that challenges certain Eurocentric feminists who claim to give voice to an essential womanhood (in universal conflict with an essential masculinity) and who privilege gender over all other conflicts.

Hazel Carby, for one, offered an early critique of white feminists who “write their herstory and call it the story of women but ignore our lives and deny their relation to us.” That is the moment, she argues, “in which they are acting within the relations of racism and writing *history*.”⁸ In the United States, likewise, bell hooks has argued powerfully and influentially for the recognition of racial difference and diversity among women as well as for the politics of alliance.⁹ In Britain, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, amongst others, followed Carby in accusing white feminists of the “historical amnesia of white male historians, by ignoring the fundamental ways in which white women have benefitted from the oppression of Black people.”¹⁰

I argue, moreover, that gender is not synonymous with women. As Joan Scott puts it: “To study women in isolation perpetuates the fiction that one sphere, the experience of one sex, has little or nothing to do with the other.”¹¹ Unlike Catherine MacKinnon—for whom “sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism”—I argue that feminism is as much about class, race, work and money as it is about sex. Indeed, one of the most valuable and enabling moves of recent feminist theory has been its insistence on the separation of sexuality and gender and the recognition that gender is as much an issue of masculinity as it is of femininity. As Cora Kaplan argues, the focus on gender as the privileged category of analysis tends to “represent sexual difference as natural and fixed—a constant, transhistorical femininity in libidinated struggle with an equally ‘given’ universal masculinity.”¹²

Michel Foucault argues that, in the nineteenth century, the idea of sexuality gave a fictitious unity to a host of “anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures.”¹³ The fictitious unity of sexuality, he says, became a “causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: sex was thus able to function as a universal signifier and as a universal signified.”¹⁴ By privileging sexuality, however, as the invented principle of social unity, Foucault forgets how an elaborate analogy *between* race and gender became, as I argue in Chapter 1, an organizing trope for other social forms.

At the same time, I do not see race and ethnicity as synonymous with black or colonized. Indeed, the first part of this book is written in sympathy with bell hooks' wry challenge: “One change in direction that would be real

cool would be the production of a discourse on race that interrogates whiteness."¹⁶ The invention of whiteness, here, is not the invisible norm but the problem to be investigated.¹⁶

I remain unconvinced, however, by arguments that race is a mere affect of floating signifiers as well as by claims that "there must be some essence which precedes and/or transcends the fact of objective conditions."¹⁷ I am in agreement here with Paul Gilroy's cogent argument that "the polarization between essentialist and anti-essentialist theories of black identity has become unhelpful."¹⁸ Exploring the historical instability of the discourse on race—embracing as it did in the nineteenth century not only colonized peoples but also the Irish, prostitutes, Jews and so on—by no means entails a spin into the vertigo of undecidability. To dispute the notion that race is a fixed and transcendent essence, unchanged through the ages, does not mean that "all talk of 'race' must cease," nor does it mean that the baroque inventions of racial difference had no tangible or terrible effects.¹⁹ On the contrary, it is precisely the inventedness of historical hierarchies that renders attention to social power and violence so much more urgent.

Imperial Leather is thus situated where a number of discourses—feminism, Marxism and psychoanalysis, among them—merge, converge and diverge. An abiding concern of the book is to refuse the clinical separation of psychoanalysis and history. All too often, psychoanalysis has been relegated to the (conventionally universal) realm of private, domestic space, while politics and economics are relegated to the (conventionally historical) realm of the public market. I argue that the disciplinary quarantine of psychoanalysis from history was germane to imperial modernity itself. Instead of genuflecting to this separation and opting theoretically for one side or the other, I call for a renewed and transformed investigation into the disavowed relations between psychoanalysis and socio-economic history.

Imperial Leather attempts to rethink the circulation of notions that can be observed between the family, sexuality and fantasy (the traditional realm of psychoanalysis) and the categories of labor, money and market (the traditional realm of political and economic history). Perhaps it is fitting that such an investigation take place as a critique of imperial modernity, for it was precisely during the era of high imperialism that the disciplines of psychoanalysis and social history diverged.

Because I do not believe that imperialism was organized around a single issue, I wish to avoid privileging one category over the others as the organizing trope. Indeed, I spend some time questioning genesis narratives that orient power around a single, originary scene. On the other hand, I do not wish to be complicit in a commonplace, liberal pluralism that generously embraces diversity all the better to efface the imbalances in power that adjudicate difference. Certainly, one of the founding assumptions of this

book is that no social category exists in privileged isolation; each comes into being in social relation to other categories, if in uneven and contradictory ways. But power is seldom adjudicated evenly—different social situations are overdetermined for race, for gender, for class, or for each in turn. I believe, however, that it can be safely said that no social category should remain invisible with respect to an analysis of empire.

PITFALLS OF THE POSTCOLONIAL

Almost a century after the publication of *King Solomon's Mines*, in November 1992—the year of quincennial triumph in the United States—a postcolonial exhibit called the Hybrid State opened on Broadway. To enter the Hybrid State exhibit, you enter The Passage. Instead of a gallery, you find a dark antechamber, where one white word invites you forward: COLONIALISM. To enter colonial space, you stoop through a low door, only to be closeted in another black space—a curatorial reminder, however fleeting, of Frantz Fanon: "The native is a being hemmed in."²⁰ But the way out of colonialism, it seems, is forward. A second white word, POSTCOLONIALISM, invites you through a slightly larger door into the next stage of history, after which you emerge, fully erect, into the brightly lit and noisy HYBRID STATE.

I am fascinated less by the exhibit itself, than by the paradox between the idea of history that shapes The Passage and the quite different idea of history that shapes the Hybrid State exhibit itself. The exhibit celebrates "parallel history":

Parallel history points to the reality that there is no longer a mainstream view of American art culture, with several "other," lesser important cultures surrounding it. Rather there exists a parallel history which is now changing our understanding of our transcultural understanding.²¹

Yet the exhibit's commitment to "hybrid history"—multiple time—is contradicted by the linear logic of The Passage, "A Brief Route To Freedom," which, as it turns out, rehearses one of the most tenacious tropes of colonialism. In colonial discourse, as in The Passage, movement through space becomes analogous to movement through time. History becomes shaped around two opposing directions: the progress forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other movement presents the reverse: regression backward to what I call anachronistic space (a trope I discuss in more detail below) from white, male adulthood to a primordial, black degeneracy usually incarnated in

women. The Passage rehearses this temporal logic: progress through the ascending doors, from primitive prehistory, bereft of language and light, through the epic stages of colonialism, postcolonialism and enlightened hybridity. Leaving the exhibit, history is traversed backward. As in colonial discourse, the movement forward in space is backward in time: from erect, verbal consciousness and hybrid freedom—signified by the (not very free) white rabbit called “Free” that roams the exhibit—down through the historic stages of decreasing stature to the shambling, tongueless zone of the precolonial, from speech to silence, light to dark.

The paradox structuring the exhibit intrigues me, because it is a paradox, I suggest, that shapes the term postcolonialism. I am doubly interested in the term, because the almost ritualistic ubiquity of “post” words in current culture (postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, post-cold war, post-Marxism, postapartheid, post-Soviet, post-Ford, postfeminism, postnational, posthistoric, even postcontemporary) signals, I believe, a widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical progress.

Charles Baudelaire called the idea of progress and perfectibility “the grand idea of the twentieth century.” In 1855, the year of the first imperial Paris exposition, Victor Hugo announced: “Progress is the footstep of God himself.”²² In many respects, this book is dedicated to challenging both the idea of progress and that of the Family of Man, and is written in sympathy with Walter Benjamin’s injunction to “drive out any trace of ‘development’ from the image of history” and to overcome the “ideology of progress . . . in all its aspects.”²³

A good deal of postcolonial studies has set itself against the imperial idea of linear time. Yet the term postcolonial, like the exhibit, is haunted by the very figure of linear development that it sets out to dismantle. Metaphorically, the term postcolonialism marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from “the precolonial,” to “the colonial,” to “the postcolonial”—an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of development. If a theoretical tendency to envisage “Third World” literature as progressing from “protest literature” to “resistance literature” to “national literature” has been criticized for rehearsing the Enlightenment trope of sequential, linear progress, the term postcolonialism is questionable for the same reason. Metaphorically poised on the border between old and new, end and beginning, the term heralds the end of a world era but by invoking the very same trope of linear progress which animated that era.

If postcolonial *theory* has sought to challenge the grand march of Western historicism and its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc.), the *term* postcolonialism nonetheless reorients the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial-postcolonial. Moreover, theory is thereby shifted from the binary axis of

power (colonizer-colonized—itself inadequately nuanced, as in the case of women) to the binary axis of *time*, an axis even less productive of political nuance because it does not distinguish between the beneficiaries of colonialism (the ex-colonizers) and the casualties of colonialism (the ex-colonized). The postcolonial scene occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded our time and are not now in the making. If the theory promises a decentering of history in hybridity, syncreticism, multidimensional time and so forth, the singularity of the term effects a recentering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance.

The prefix post-, moreover, reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to prepositional time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Eurocentered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-). In other words, the world’s multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time.

The term also signals a reluctance to surrender the privilege of seeing the world in terms of a singular and ahistorical abstraction. Rifling through the recent flurry of articles and books on postcolonialism, I am struck by how seldom the term is used to denote multiplicity. The following proliferate: “*the* postcolonial condition,” “*the* postcolonial scene,” “*the* postcolonial intellectual,” “*the* emerging disciplinary space of postcolonialism,” “postcoloniality,” “*the* postcolonial situation,” “postcolonial space,” “*the* practice of postcoloniality,” “postcolonial discourse,” and that most tedious, generic hold-all: “*the* postcolonial Other.” Sara Suleri, for one, confesses herself weary of being treated as an “Other-ness Machine.”²⁴

I am not convinced that one of the most important emerging areas of intellectual and political enquiry is best served by inscribing history as a single issue. Just as the singular category “Woman” has been discredited as a bogus universal for feminism, incapable of distinguishing between the varied histories and imbalances in power among women, so the singular category “postcolonial” may too readily license a panoptic tendency to view the globe through generic abstractions void of political nuance.²⁵ The arcing panorama of the horizon becomes thereby so expansive that international imbalances in power remain effectively blurred. Historically voided categories such as “the other,” “the signifier,” “the signified,” “the subject,” “the phallus,” “the postcolonial,” while having academic clout and professional marketability, run the risk of telescoping crucial geo-political distinctions into invisibility.

The authors of the recent book *The Empire Writes Back*, for example, defend the term “postcolonial literature” on three grounds: it “focuses on

that relationship which has provided the most important creative and psychological impetus in the writing"; it expresses the "rationale of the grouping in a common past" and it "hints at the vision of a more liberated and positive future."²⁶ Yet the inscription of history around a single "continuity of preoccupations" and "a common past," runs the risk of a fetishistic disavowal of crucial international distinctions that are barely understood and inadequately theorized. Moreover, the authors decide, idiosyncratically to say the least, that the term postcolonialism should not be understood as everything that has happened since European colonialism but rather everything that has happened from the very beginning of colonialism, which means turning back the clocks and unrolling the maps of postcolonialism to 1492 and earlier.²⁷ At a stroke, Henry James and Charles Brockden Brown, to name only two on their list, are awakened from their tête-à-tête with time and ushered into the postcolonial scene alongside more regular members such as Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'O and Salman Rushdie.

Most problematically, the historical rupture suggested by the prefix post- belies both the continuities and discontinuities of power that have shaped the legacies of the formal European and British colonial empires (not to mention the Islamic, Japanese, Chinese and other imperial powers). At the same time, political differences *between* cultures are subordinated to their temporal distance from European colonialism. Postcolonialism, however, like postmodernism, is unevenly developed globally. Argentina, formally independent of imperial Spain for over a century and a half, is not "postcolonial" in the same way as Hong Kong (destined not to be independent of Britain until 1997). Nor is Brazil postcolonial in the same way as Zimbabwe. Can most of the world's countries be said, in any meaningful or theoretically rigorous sense, to share a single common past, or a single common condition, called the postcolonial condition, or postcoloniality? The histories of African colonization are certainly, in part, the histories of the collisions among European and Arab empires and the myriad African lineage states and cultures. Can these countries now best be understood as shaped exclusively around the "common" experience of European colonization? Indeed, many contemporary African, Latin American, Caribbean and Asian cultures, while profoundly affected by colonization, are not necessarily primarily preoccupied with their erstwhile contact with European colonialism.

On the other hand, the term postcolonialism is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory. Ireland may, at a pinch, be postcolonial but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland, not to mention the Palestinian inhabitants of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the West Bank, there may be nothing "post" about colonialism at all. Is South Africa postcolonial? East Timor? Australia? Hawaii? Puerto Rico? By what fiat

of historical amnesia can the United States of America, in particular, qualify as postcolonial—a term that can only be a monumental affront to the Native American peoples currently opposing the confetti triumph of 1992? One can also ask whether the emergence of Fortress Europe in 1992 may not also signal the emergence of a new empire, as yet uncertain of its boundaries and global reach.

My misgivings, therefore, are not about the theoretical substance of postcolonial theory, much of which I greatly admire.²⁸ Rather, I question the orientation of the emerging discipline and its concomitant theories and curricula changes around a singular, monolithic term, used ahistorically and haunted by the nineteenth-century image of linear progress. Nor do I want to banish the term to some chilly, verbal gulag; there seems no reason why it should not be used judiciously in appropriate circumstances, in the context of other terms, if in a less grandiose and global role.

Most importantly, orienting theory around the temporal axis colonial-postcolonial makes it easier not to see and therefore harder to theorize, the *continuities* in international imbalances in imperial power. Since the 1940s, the U.S.' imperialism-without-colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed. The power of U.S. finance capital and huge multinational corporations to command the flows of capital, research, consumer goods and media information around the world can exert a coercive power as great as any colonial gunboat. It is precisely the greater subtlety, innovation and variety of these forms of imperialism that make the historical rupture implied by the term postcolonial especially unwarranted.

The term postcolonialism is prematurely celebratory and obfusatory in more ways than one. While some countries may be postcolonial with respect to their erstwhile European masters, they may not be postcolonial with respect to their new colonizing neighbours. Yet neocolonialism is not simply a repeat performance of colonialism, nor is it a slightly more complicated, Hegelian merging of tradition and colonialism into some new, historic hybrid. More complex terms and analyses of alternative times, histories and causalities are required to deal with complexities that cannot be served under the single rubric of postcolonialism.

The term becomes especially unstable with respect to women. In a world where women do two-thirds of the world's work, earn 10 percent of the world's income and own less than 1 percent of the world's property, the promise of "postcolonialism" has been a history of hopes postponed. It has generally gone unremarked that the national bourgeoisies and kleptocracies that stepped into the shoes of postcolonial progress and industrial modernization have been overwhelmingly and violently male. As I explore in chapter 10 on gender and nationalism, no postcolonial state anywhere has granted

women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state. Not only have the needs of postcolonial nations been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but the very representation of national power has rested on prior constructions of gender power.

The global militarization of masculinity and the feminization of poverty have ensured that women and men do not live postcoloniality in the same way, nor do they share the same singular postcolonial condition. The blame for women's continuing plight cannot be laid only at the door of colonialism or footnoted and forgotten as a passing neo-colonial dilemma. The continuing weight of male economic self-interest and the varied undertows of patriarchal Christianity, Confucianism and Islamic fundamentalism continue to legitimize women's barred access to the corridors of political and economic power, their persistent educational disadvantage, the domestic double workday, unequal childcare, gendered malnutrition, sexual violence, genital mutilation and domestic battery. The histories of these male policies, while deeply implicated in colonialism, are not reducible to colonialism and cannot be understood without distinct theories of gender power.

Edward Said has famously argued that the sexual subjection of Oriental women to Western men "fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled."²⁹ For Said, Orientalism takes perverse shape as a "male power-fantasy" that sexualizes a feminized Orient for Western power and possession. But sexuality comes close, here, to being no more than a metaphor for other, more important (that is, male) dynamics played out in what Said calls "an exclusively male province."³⁰ Sexuality as a trope for other power relations was certainly an abiding aspect of imperial power. The feminizing of the "virgin" land, as I explore in more detail below, operated as a metaphor for relations that were very often not about sexuality at all, or were only indirectly sexual. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has explored in important ways how the triangulations of male-female-male space often served to structure male homosocial relations.³¹ But seeing sexuality only as a metaphor runs the risk of eliding *gender* as a constitutive dynamic of imperial and anti-imperial power. I make this point not to diminish the enormous importance and influence of Said's work on male imperial relations but rather to regret that he does not systematically explore the dynamics of gender as a critical aspect of the imperial project.

Bogus universals such as "the postcolonial woman," or "the post-colonial other" obscure relations not only between men and women but also among women. Relations between a French tourist and the Haitian woman who washes her bed linen are not the same as the relations between their husbands. Films like *Out of Africa*, clothing chains like *Banana Republic*

and perfumes like *Safari* peddle neocolonial nostalgia for an era when European women in brisk white shirts and safari green supposedly found freedom in empire: running coffee plantations, killing lions and zipping about the colonial skies in aeroplanes—a misbegotten commercialization of white women's "liberation" that has not made it any easier for women of color to form alliances with white women anywhere, let alone parry criticisms by male nationalists already hostile to feminism.

In my view, imperialism emerged as a contradictory and ambiguous project, shaped as much by tensions within metropolitan policy and conflicts within colonial administrations—at best, ad hoc and opportunistic affairs—as by the varied cultures and circumstances into which colonials intruded and the conflicting responses and resistances with which they were met. For this reason, I remain unconvinced that the sanctioned binaries—colonizer-colonized, self-other, dominance-resistance, metropolis-colony, colonial-postcolonial—are adequate to the task of accounting for, let alone strategically opposing, the tenacious legacies of imperialism. Drawn historically from the metaphysical Manicheism of the imperial enlightenment itself, such binaries run the risk of simply inverting, rather than overturning, dominant notions of power. I am thus concerned with the overdeterminations of power, for, I believe, it is at the crossroads of contradictions that strategies for change may best be found.

Throughout this book, I am deeply interested in the myriad forms of both imperial and anti-imperial agency. I am less interested, however, in agency as a purely formal or philosophical question than I am in the host of difficult ways in which people's actions and desires are mediated through institutions of power: the family, the media, the law, armies, nationalist movements and so on. From the outset, people's experiences of desire and rage, memory and power, community and revolt are inflected and mediated by the institutions through which they find their meaning—and which they, in turn, transform. *Imperial Leather* is, for this reason, as deeply concerned with questions of violence and power as it is with questions of fantasy, desire and difference.

I wish to open notions of power and resistance to a more diverse politics of agency, involving the dense web of relations between coercion, negotiation, complicity, refusal, dissembling, mimicry, compromise, affiliation and revolt. Seeking only the fissures of formal ambivalence (hybridity, ambiguity, undecidability and so on) cannot, in my view, explain the rise to dominance of certain groups or cultures, nor the dereliction and obliteration of others. To ask how power succeeds or fails—despite its provisionality and despite its constitution in contradiction and ambiguity—involves investigating not only the tensions of conceptual form but also the torsions of social history.

I wish to emphasize from the outset, however, that I do not regard imperialism as an inherently British power that impelled itself outward from a European center to subjugate the peripheral territories of “the Other.”³² As I see it, imperial power emerged from a constellation of processes, taking haphazard shape from myriad encounters with alternative forms of authority, knowledge and power. I am thus deeply interested in what Gilroy calls “the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents.”³³ Imperialism was a situation under constant contest, producing historical effects that were neither predetermined, uncontested nor ineradicable—in the context, it cannot be forgotten, of extreme imbalances of power.

It seems important to me, therefore, not to read the contradictions of colonial discourse as a matter of textuality alone. What Gayatri Spivak calls, in an apt phrase, “the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project” was also, all too often, backed up by the planned institutional violence of armies and law courts, prisons and state machinery.³⁴ The power of guns, whips and shackles, while always implicated in discourse and representation, is not reducible to the “violence of the letter.”³⁵ If colonial texts reveal fissures and contradictions, the colonials themselves all too often succeeded in settling matters of indecision with a violent excess of militarized masculinity. The chapters that follow are thus deeply concerned with the intimate—if often conflictual—relations between textual and institutional power.

In this book, I hope to do more than point out that different power groups—women and men, colonized and colonizers, middle and working class—occupied different positions in the global arena of imperialism. The story, as Scott puts it, is not simply “about the things that have happened to women and men and how they have related to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed.”³⁶ In other words, the story is not simply about relations between black and white people, men and women, but about how the categories of whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity, labor and class came historically into being in the first place.

In the first part of this book, I explore how Victorian metropolitan space became reordered as a space for the exhibition of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race. In the process, I investigate a number of circulating themes: commodity racism and fetishism, the urban explorers, the emergence of photography and the imperial exhibitions, the cult of domesticity, the invention of the idea of the idle woman, the disavowal of women’s work, cross-dressing and gender ambiguity, the invention of the idea of degeneration, panoptical time and anachronistic space.

In the second part of the book, I explore how the colonies—in particular Africa—became a theater for exhibiting, amongst other things,

the cult of domesticity and the reinvention of patriarchy. Here, I explore some of the stalwart themes of colonial discourse: the feminizing of the land, the myth of the empty lands, the crisis of origins, domestic colonialism, the soap saga and the emergence of commodity fetishism, the reordering of land and labor, the invention of the idea of racial idleness—as well as the complex and myriad forms of resistance to these processes. By exploring the intricate filaments among imperialism, domesticity and money, I suggest that the mass-marketing of empire as a global system was intimately wedded to the Western reinvention of domesticity, so that imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of domestic space and its relation to the market. At the same time, the following chapters explore the beleaguered strategies of refusal, negotiation and transformation that were slung up in resistance to the imperial enterprise. In the last section of the book, in particular, I focus on the tumultuous events in South Africa, from the late 1940s until the current, bloodied contest over national power.

I have chosen, in this way, to tell a series of overlapping and contradictory stories—of black and white working-class women, of white middle-class men and women and of black working-class and middle-class men and women. The genres I address are diverse—photography, diaries, ethnographies, adventure novels, oral histories, performance poetry and the myriad forms of national culture. Amongst others, these cultural forms include the extraordinary diaries and photographs of Hannah Cullwick, a white Victorian maid-of-all-work and her secret marriage to the Victorian barrister and poet, Arthur Munby; the bestselling imperial fantasies by Rider Haggard; the imperial Exhibitions and photography; soap advertising; the political writing and novels of the feminist Olive Schreiner; the narrative of a South African domestic worker “Poppie Nongena”; black cultural politics in South Africa since the Soweto uprising; the writings of Frantz Fanon; and the varied, conflicting voices of Afrikaner and African nationalists in South Africa.

These narratives have many sources and do not promise the unearthing of a pristine past, in any event a utopian task. Rather, this book is an engagement—motivated, selective and oppositional—with both imperial and anti-imperial narratives of fathers and families, labor and gold, mothers and maids.