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Teaching in a Gendered World

Karen Sotiropoulos

Cleveland State University, k.sotiropoulos@csuohio.edu

Ian Christopher Fletcher

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Introduction: Teaching a Gendered World

Ian Christopher Fletcher and Karen Sotiropoulos

Sex is a topic sure to gain students' attention, even more so if it appears unexpectedly in history courses. What many students don't know until they encounter it is that more than two decades of scholarship by historians has shown the gendered (and often sexualized) nature of politics and state formation, social hierarchies and relations, and elite and popular culture. This scholarship is not limited to histories of Europe or the United States. Indeed, the early work of Sheila Rowbotham and Kumari Jayawardena highlighted the global scope of women's history and the ways it intersected with the political history of socialism and nationalism.¹ Even as Joan W. Scott was advancing gender as an analytic category, Chandra Talpade Mohanty was undertaking another critical task by deconstructing Orientalist discourse within feminism.² More recent scholarship, such as the new imperial history of interactions between metropolises and colonies, has included among its topics the gendered character of cross-cultural encounters, colonial rule, and anti-/postcolonial nationalisms. Today English-language readers can access exceptionally rich historiographies of gender and sexuality in Africa and the African diaspora, the Arab and Muslim worlds, China, India, Japan, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Now is an exciting time to be bringing together women's, gender, global, and transnational history in our teaching.

In this installment of "Teaching Radical History" we are delighted to publish lively and wide-ranging essays by Merry Wiesner-Hanks and by Ulrike Strasser and Heidi Tinsman on the prospects and practice of infusing gender and women's history into world history. Taken together, these essays show the transformative potential for both teaching fields when world historians and gender and women's historians col-

laborate. We are also very pleased to include a third essay by Jyotsna Uppal on teaching Katherine Mayo's notorious 1927 text, *Mother India*, now available in a critical scholarly edition prepared by Mrinalini Sinha. This text about women in India, written by an American woman supporter of British rule, provoked an imperial and international controversy that engaged, among others, Indian women nationalists and feminists. In addition to reminding us that feminism has always been global, as well as complex and contested, it underlines the need to scrutinize claims about the position and emancipation of women and those who enunciate them in their historically specific political and cultural contexts. Given U.S. claims about liberating the women of Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, this offers a valuable insight for understanding the present as well as the past.

Notes

1. Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution: A History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 1972); and Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1986).
2. Now see Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), a text originally published in 1988; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), esp. chaps. 1, 9.