Emplacing Current Trends in Feminist Historical Geography

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ABSTRACT  In this article, the authors assess some of the major trends within anglophonic feminist historical geography appearing in the decade since Rose & Ogborn called for the development of an explicitly feminist approach to the subfield. In examining the ‘geography’ of feminist historical geographies, three main categories of scholarship are evident: a ‘new’ historical geography of North America, portions of which are informed by feminist theories and methods; a British school of feminist historical geography with a focus on the discipline of geography, geographical knowledges and colonialism/imperialism; and feminist historical geography interventions in cultural politics of space and place. A diversity of feminist methods and epistemologies appears across the literature. In an attempt to avoid a reading of these trends as better or worse approximations of historical ‘progress’, the authors conceptualize them as emplaced within a number of specific social and spatial contexts. Most recent work is concerned with the production of gender differences as they are worked through economic, political, cultural and sexual differences in the creation of past geographies. The continued need simply to write women into historical narratives and geographies, however, is also evident. The work of feminist historical geography questions and challenges geography’s masculinist historical record.

Introduction

A decade has passed since Gillian Rose & Miles Ogborn (1988) first argued for the development of an explicitly feminist historical geography. They noted that while a number of feminist historical geographies existed, none had been produced by self-styled historical geographers. Rather, feminist historical geographies had been produced by either non-geographers or by feminist geographers identifying themselves with other subdisciplinary aspects of geography (e.g. McDowell & Massey, 1984; Walby, 1986). This posed a significant problem, according to Rose & Ogborn (1988, p. 405), since ‘historical geography’s ignorance of feminism has resulted at best in the marginalisation of women, and at worst in their total exclusion from the histories which are created and taught by historical geographers’. As they and other feminist writers at the time noted, the result of this was that it ‘propagat[ed] an inaccurate understanding of the past’ (1988, p. 405; also see Kay, 1991, Monk & Hanson, 1982).

Ten years later, much has changed in historical geography, but much has also stayed the same (after Lee, 1990). In this article we discuss some of the recent histories and geographies of feminist historical geography, outlining some of the current trends in the subdiscipline. Our documentation is primarily published journal articles appearing in the
major English-language geography journals over the past 8 to 10 years [1]. We attempt to present some of the diversity of feminist approaches to historical geography, and we hope to situate these practices within specific intellectual milieus (see Monk, 1994).

As our review of feminism and historical geography will illustrate, a relatively large number of feminist geographies have been published in recent years. Accordingly, Rose & Ogborn’s call for the development of a feminist historical geography might be seen as having succeeded. At the same time, however, feminist geographers have had to push continually for acceptance of feminist theory—and just plain gender sensitivity—in historical geography. A few years subsequent to Rose & Ogborn’s (1988) article, for example, Mona Domosh (1991) noted the continued failure among historiographers of geography to acknowledge the gendered character of both the discipline and the historiographical accounts of ‘geographical traditions’. As she observed, ‘the recent rewriting of the history of geography has ignored the gendered construction of that history’ (1991, p. 102). In the same year, Jeanne Kay (1991, p. 435) noted the continued ‘male orientation and near-absence of material on women in North American regional historical geography, despite nearly 20 years of scholarly publications in women’s history’ (also see Kay, 1989, 1990).

Geographical knowledges and histories are not neutral; rather, they are bound up with power relations that work to erase certain Others from geography (Rose, 1995). The ongoing necessity for continually advocating feminist approaches in historical geography and historiography is symptomatic of the continued masculinist inertia in academia. Part of this problem arises because ‘gender’ has often been mistakenly conflated with ‘women’. Thus, men who are not necessarily opposed to feminist historical geographies may be inclined to avoid feminism because it is seen as a ‘women’s issue’. On the other hand, there are examples of strong, explicit resistance to feminist geography as well (e.g. see Stoddart, 1991; Gould, 1994). However one reads the resistance of some geographers to feminism, the fact remains that historical geographers have generally been slow to take up feminism [2].

But what exactly is this arena, ‘historical geography’? We start by defining feminist historical geography as work that brings both feminist and geographical sensitivities to bear on the study of past phenomena. Because we are sensitive to the exclusions that inhere in the disciplinary practices of geography in general and the historiography of geography in particular, we want this definition to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Our definition of feminist historical geography resonates with, yet also diverges from, those of our predecessors (Rose & Ogborn, 1988; Kay, 1991), and it reflects recent thinking in both feminism and geography. Rose & Ogborn (1988, p. 406) defined feminist historical geography as ‘exploring in detail the processes and practices of patriarchy, often stressing the resistance of both women and men to patriarchal pressures’. They argued that while geographers have attempted to clarify the forms patriarchy has taken historically involving space, place and landscape, those analyses also needed to take gender into account. Rose & Ogborn focused on locality studies, whereas Kay (1991) and Domosh (1991) discussed women’s narratives of travel or pioneering as correctives to gender-blind historical geographies.

Anglophone feminist historical geographies today move beyond those definitions and topics in subtle ways. While simply writing women into historical geography remains common, many current feminist historical geographies demonstrate a more fundamental interest in the production of gender differences themselves, and the ways gender differences work within and through economic, political, cultural and sexual differences in the creation of past geographies. Thus, the process of writing women into the past
itself involves negotiating a complex interplay of many axes of difference within particular spatial–historical contingencies. The goals of this work range from discovering how one enacts citizenship (e.g. Cope, 1998a) or participates in the act of nation-building (e.g. Johnson, 1995), to how public space is created and accessed (e.g. Boyer, 1998), to how colonial spaces reconfigure the gendered and racialised identities of home (e.g. Blunt 1994), to the role of the state in constituting heterosexuality (Nast, 1993), and more. In one of the few explicitly methodological statements made about the practice of feminist historical geography over the last decade, Domosh (1997, p. 227; also see Gregson & Rose, 1997, pp. 13–48) draws on the work of historian Joan Scott (1992) in arguing for ‘historical geograph[ies] of difference’. The practice of historical geography in her framework (and ours) becomes the study not of fixed and autonomous authors and the landscapes they created, but of the broad, historically contingent social and spatial conditions out of which authors and landscapes produce one another.

Our definition of feminist historical geography can also be clarified by considering the definitions posed by Philo (1994) and Overton (1994). For Philo, historical geography ought to be something more akin to ‘geographical history’ (1994, p. 254). He argues for a move away from the ‘entrenched historicism’ that has dominated social studies of all types, toward a ‘spatialised form of historical inquiry’ (1994, pp. 272–278). Philo rightly assumes a more dynamic relationship between society and space than has often been apparent in anglophone historical geography. Overton (1994, p. 246) defines historical geography as ‘the human geography of the past’. He distinguishes between the work of those who consider themselves part of this ‘self-conscious’ discipline (or subdiscipline), whose prime concern lies with the study of the past, and other geographers who also make reference to the past although their prime concern lies with the present (1994, p. 246). Overton’s (1994) distinction between geographers focused on the past and those interested in the present is also helpful, primarily because we want to focus our discussion upon those geographers whom we believe self-consciously identify as historical geographers—and we see these people as primarily interested in ‘geographies of the past’. That said, we would qualify Overton’s distinction by saying that even geographies of the past are concerned with the present, even if they do not explicitly narrate a contemporary situation. Histories are almost always ‘presentist’; they narrate the past in order to provide some understanding of the present (Rose, 1995; Gregson & Rose, 1997). In so doing, they assume—often implicitly—a linear relationship of causality, rationality and progress between some past events, knowledge, or personalities and present-day circumstances and actors. They also tend to valorise temporal relations at the expense of spatial relations (Soja, 1989).

In focusing on the geographies of feminist historical geography we hope to avoid the implicit construction of a teleology of linear progress among feminist epistemologies. One of the problems of presentist histories is that they tend to construct history as progress: what happened in the past has now been improved upon in the present. In so doing, presentist histories often construct a specific linear progression towards a universal pinnacle of theoretical development, often erasing significant Others from the canon (Gregson & Rose, 1997). In order to counter such notions of progress and improvement, we want to begin the process of writing a geography of feminist historical geographies. We want to suggest that certain theoretical approaches in feminist geography have specific emplaced histories. In this way, we might avoid, or at least reduce, the tendency to construct a tripartite (liberal–socialist–post-structuralist) feminist geography that constructs certain feminisms as less sophisticated than others. Instead, we suggest that different feminisms can be read as strategic reactions to, and
therefore constituted within, specific sets of geographically contingent social relations (see, for example, Monk, 1994).

Geographers have drawn upon multiple conceptions of space in their work (Sack, 1980; John Pickles, 1985; Simonsen, 1996), and this has implications for the way that we ‘emplace’ feminist historical geography. Geographers have conceptualized space in three ways: as material environment, as difference, and as social spatiality (Simonsen, 1996). We draw upon the latter two conceptions—difference and social spatiality—for our approach to emplacing feminist geography. To see space as difference is to acknowledge that ‘different places, regions or localities are substantially different—in a material as well as an immaterial sense—and that this difference influences social processes and social life’ (Simonsen, 1996, p. 499). In this sense, then, we would expect to find differences in the kinds of feminist historical geographies produced in the varying social processes of different places. We attempt here to illustrate some of the ways that space has thus made a difference in the production of feminist historical geographies. We also know that spatial forms are an integral part of social practices and processes, and that such social spatiality ‘has to be theorised as a fundamental human and social dimension’ (Simonsen, 1996, p. 503; also see Soja, 1989). Socio-spatiality involves a complex set of interrelated processes, but it generally refers to the constant recursive relationship between the spatial and the social. In this regard, space is socially produced, but at the same time, space itself is productive of the social.

Emplacing feminist historical geography in this sense, then, would help us to understand the social production of historical geographic knowledge, and the spatial production of social geographies. Emplacement might thus be seen as a way of contextualizing feminist historical geography within a number of social and spatial settings. Such contexts might include (but would not be limited to) the context of the wider discipline of geography, the context of theoretical and methodological debates in geography, the context of training (such as the schools of thought and material places where feminist historical geography is taught) and the context of publishing historical geographies. Our article suggests a number of ways of understanding some of these contexts, but we hope that others might take this project further with more substantive analyses of the social spatiality of feminist historical geography.

The work examined here has been produced by people whom we think self-consciously identify (at least in part) as historical geographers. We recognize that this strategy introduces a number of problems, not least of which is knowing which geographers identify as historical geographers. In other contexts their work may be viewed as political geography, urban geography, post-colonial geography, or a number of others. Our designation might also serve to reinforce an idea about a subdisciplinary divide that is no longer valid, given the blurring of subdisciplinary boundaries arising from the cultural and linguistic turns in geography. Furthermore, because so few academic institutions actively search for strictly ‘historical geographers’ in their hiring processes (at least during the last 10 years), perhaps many historical geographers have moved away from this designation for professional reasons. In the UK, for example, a significant number of newer scholars who publish as historical geographers tend to have been hired to supplement research clusters in social and cultural geography rather than historical geography.

Nevertheless, we feel the label historical geography provides an appropriate starting point to our project. Our approach is necessarily limited in scope and objectives. We have structured the principal areas of study by feminist historical geographers in three main categories: North American ‘new historical geographies’; critiques of the history of
geography and European empire-building; and feminist interventions in cultural politics of space and place. Although there has been much work undertaken by feminist economic geographers that draws upon historical explanations to understand present economic conditions (e.g. Massey, 1994), we did not feel these geographies appropriately fit our definition of self-conscious historical geography, and thus, they are not included in our discussion.

In one sense our account can be seen to reinscribe some of the Eurocentric character of much geographic writing, because it does not discuss historical geography scholarship outside of the English-speaking Western world. Our attempt at spatializing the practice of feminist historical geography is to begin the process of ‘worlding’ Western feminist historical geography (after Barnes & Gregory, 1997). We want to make it clear, then, that our (historical) geography of contemporary feminist historical geography is specific to certain anglophone geographies and not universal to all of feminist historical geography. Our hope is that our work will spur others to recount other geographies of geography as well.

In what follows, then, we discuss three approaches to Anglo feminist historical geography: new historical geographies of North America, feminist historical geographies of empire, and identity politics and the cultural turn in feminist historical geography. We realise that it is difficult to balance between over-generalization in representing feminist historical geography and the problem of overcontextualization inherent in trying to accommodate every subtlety of theory or analysis in our representation. We hope, on the other hand, that our broad categorization provides a useful organizational framework, and on the other hand, that we have also managed to represent the diversity within each of the three categories we outline.

New Historical Geographies of North America

Evidence of what might be called a ‘new historical geography’ of the USA and Canada is emerging, portions of which are informed by feminist theories and methods. While the traditional arenas carved out in the historical geography of English-speaking North America are important ones—exploration of the continent, frontier expansion, settlement patterns and sequence, environmental change, and emerging urban and economic integration—insights gained from post-colonial, feminist, or critical social theories have not generally been incorporated into much of the subfield. In fact, this subfield often seems like one of the last bastions of an empirical geography complicit with masculinist language and values. The recent three-volume series on North American exploration edited by John Allen (1997), for instance, successfully brings together a rich array of geographical and historical detail. At the same time, the series attests to the problems of measuring contributions to ‘geographical knowledge’ based on being the first, covering the farthest distance, or accumulating the most specimens, goods, or information. Annette Kolodny (1975, 1984) would have a field day with all of the ‘thrusting’ and ‘penetrating’ of new lands by the bold men described in these volumes.

The epistemic and critical framework of such works leaves little room for posing the most important questions about the historical geography of the continent, such as how patriarchal and capitalistic incentives worked together to enable and support these men’s journeys as well as the host of other social, political, and economic processes that quickly transformed the continent after the arrival of the Europeans. It seems clear that self-reflective and critical analyses of American imperialism itself have been historically neglected by the subfield.
A refreshing turn in the historical geography of North America has recently begun to take shape though, focusing mainly on the American West and inspired greatly by the ‘new western history’ first articulated by Patricia Limerick (1987), William Cronon (1991) and others. In his review of new western history, Gerry Kearns (1998) called for a ‘new historical geography’ that would bring together in a politically-informed way, the relationships between ‘facts’ and ‘values’. This entails moving away from the persistent myths of the West that have formed so much a part of the American popular culture and self-consciousness, toward interpretations of the West as, for instance, the site of the production of nature into capital. While radical critiques have been virtually absent from much North American historical geography, they have now been appearing more regularly, such as in the recent special issues of *Antipode* (1998) and *Ecumene* (1998). In his *Ecumene* essay, Don Mitchell (1998) argues that new Western historians hold to a Sauerian interpretation of Western landscapes, and are ignoring to their detriment the more useful social constructivist arguments widely advanced in geography. Mitchell’s (1996) praiseworthy book also introduced a critical historical geography approach to American imperialism, by examining the exploitation of agricultural labour in the creation of the California landscape and resistance struggles to it.

While Mitchell’s and other critical historical geographies of the West are certainly a step in the right direction, more remains to be done in linking different forms of radical geography. Mitchell’s (1996) work problematizes the racialisation of the California labor force, but it unfortunately displays the all-too-common problem of overwriting gender issues with those of class or race. Mitchell all but ignores the ways that constructions of gender difference created unique problems for women labourers trying to negotiate moveable work sites and their domestic and reproductive work in the labour camps (or at home for that matter, when their family members migrated for work). Women’s historians continue to provide geographers with some of the best models for how to incorporate migratory women into early US agricultural and mining camp work (see, for instance, Ruiz, 1998). Thus, we find it necessary to make the seemingly regressive complaint that ‘women’ still seem to be missing from some of the most influential critical work in North American historical geography. Especially disappointing is the gender-blindness evident in the recent special issues of *Antipode* (1998) and *Ecumene* (1998) (for an exception, see Craddock, 1998, p. 70).

The all-too-familiar observations made by Jeanne Kay years ago (1989, 1990, 1991) still seem relevant, including that historical geographies of the USA and Canada are often gender-blind and/or do not incorporate women’s spheres of influence. That said, it is important to be reminded of Joan Scott’s (1988) caution that simply uncovering information about women says nothing about the relative importance placed on them or their work and activities. For this we need to understand the origins of gender differences, particularly in spatio-historical moments that seem to punctuate them in durable sorts of ways.

While much of the historical geography of North America has yet to be consistently informed by feminist theories and methods, many geographers have recently responded to Kay’s (1991) criticisms and produced a recognizable body of work that problematizes the historical construction of difference around the interworkings of gender, race, ethnic, cultural and class differences in the anglophonic USA, Canada and Mexico. Landscape interpretation studies have occupied a prominent position in American cultural geography, and feminist interventions in them were highly influenced by Norwood & Monk’s path-breaking edited collection, *The Desert is No Lady* (1987). Recent and noteworthy among the historical works informed by such alternative imaginings of women’s
relationships with the land include Jeanne Kay’s (1997) study of Utah Mormon pioneer women’s concepts of land and nature—not as female or mother but tied to biblical metaphors such as God’s handiwork or instrument of retributive justice. Reading historical landscapes as narratives that function to create inclusionary and exclusionary concepts of nation, citizenship, or ‘belongingness’ has long been a concern of feminist geography (see, for instance, Monk, 1992a). In that vein Gulley (1993) describes the ways that Confederate white women were represented in historical markers and monuments in the South during the Civil War period, arguing that these women and their representations helped produce a patriarchal regional consciousness and culture.

New ways of discussing other traditional areas of North American historical geography are emerging, such as those related to ethnic migration and settlement patterns and labour relations and movements. These are often informed by minority women’s experiences, discussed by literary critics and historians such as Deutsch (1987) and Anzaldúa (1987), and seek to shed new light on American and European imperial processes. Nadine Schuurman (1998), for example, analyses First Nation women’s mobility in and through European and Native communities in the interior of British Columbia in the second half of the nineteenth-century. Schuurman argues that many Native women married early white settlers and miners to avoid disease and the perceived limitations of their indigenous communities, yet were displaced as marriage partners by a growing number of marriageable, immigrating white women beginning in the 1890s. Schuurman’s work forms part of the University of British Columbia school of historical geography that has been critically examining the processes of colonialism in Western Canada (e.g. Galois, 1993–94; Harris & Galois, 1994; Harris, 1997), but to our knowledge hers is the first feminist intervention into these contested historical geographies.

One current area of emphasis in North American feminist historical geography is the spatialisation and politics of identity formation. Many studies tie the mutual constitution of gender and ethnicity with their impact on prejudicial employment patterns of immigrants, access to public spaces, and the practice of politics (e.g. Deutsch, 1994, 1998; Estrada, 1998; Cope, 1998b). Such works have been aided by the development of different understanding of the relationship between ‘race’ and gender. Audrey Kobayashi & Linda Peake (1994), for example, have attempted to ‘unnaturalize’ the discourses of race and gender common to many geographic narratives. The mutual constitution of ethnicity/race and gender provide the theoretical contexts of recent studies on historical labour relations, and in that sense, feminist work has encouraged a shift in North American historical geography away from a rural–agrarian toward a more urban–social focus.

Sarah Deutsch (1998), in her commentary on articles in a special issue of Historical Geography devoted to gender and the city (volume 26, 1998), demonstrates the multiple differences between the experiences of immigrant Italian and Jewish garment workers and Irish telephone operators in early twentieth-century Boston. These labouring women had uneven access to public protest and public space because they had different sets of allies in unions, the police force, elite women’s organizations and the city’s political machinery (also see Deutsch, 1994). Similarly, Estrada (1998) examines three groups of labouring women (prostitutes, factory workers, and street vendors) in Tijuana, Mexico, showing that the spatial regulation of women’s work in public spaces was linked to the city’s economic changes between its inception in 1889 and the present.

Drawing on Doreen Massey’s (1994) ideas about place as ‘constellations of relations’,
Meghan Cope (1998b) has examined the ways that the social and economic relations in and between home and work in the woollen mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts contributed to the social construction of place. Her work illustrates how specific social relations of gender and ethnicity were (re)produced through intersecting divisions of labour and multiple axes of social division. Boyer (1998), in her study of clerical workers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Montreal, argues that female clerical workers’ presence in and use of public space was mediated through ideas of respectability. She highlights the fact that these workers challenged meanings of respectability by maintaining professions in the public financial sector, spaces in which all but ‘fallen’ women were formerly ‘out of place’ (1998, p. 272).

Gendered notions of citizenship, community and historical contextualizations of the many social and spatial constraints involved in the practice of public politics has received some attention in feminist historical geography (Cope, 1998a; Mattingly, 1998a, 1998b). Mattingly (1998b), for instance, describes how identity politics formed around or against the agendas of the ‘anti-feminist’ Christian right were instrumental in producing notions of a local, place-based community in Vista, California in the early 1990s. Cope (1998a) is also concerned with limited, exclusionary and gendered historical constructions of citizenship and community based on institutional politics and liberalism’s notions of individual rights and responsibilities. She argues that white settler women in nineteenth-century Colorado enacted citizenship in everyday, extra-institutional ways, by building and maintaining multiple reciprocal relations and networks of home, family and community in a new place. Such studies are implicitly informed by historian Joan Scott's argument that public, institutionalized forms of politics and government are limited in the extent to which they can reflect women’s status historically (1989, pp. 680–681). Scott argues for moving beyond the notion that politics is related to formal operations of government to a definition that more broadly assesses all contests for power. The writing of history to Scott, then, is a political exercise that ‘both reflects and creates relations of power’ (1989, p. 681).

Issues of community building and citizenship parallel works that focus on the gendering of urban social space more generally, most especially in their collapse of the public–private dichotomy. Consistent with larger trends in feminist geography, the gendering of urban social spaces, at many scales, is probably the most studied area of recent historical geographies of North America. Women’s ‘home extended outward’ in urban social work continues to receive attention, such as McGurty’s (1998) study of Chicago’s settlement house workers at the turn of the century, and their efforts at garbage reform and neighbourhood organizing for women (also see Katie Pickles, 1998).

Considerable scholarly interest has also formed around questions related to the historicity of the creation of public spaces, the relative ‘democracy’ or accessibility of public spaces to various social groups, and the mutual constitution and interrelationships of public and private spaces. Several authors illustrate links between cultural or legal practices and the production of public space at the turn of the twentieth-century, providing historical grounding for contemporary issues about the gendering of certain public spaces. These include downtown shopping areas of US east coast cities (e.g. Domosh, 1996, 1998), a public park of San Francisco (e.g. Schenker, 1996), and Vancouver’s streets after midnight (e.g. Boyer, 1996). Domosh (1998) argues that the streets of nineteenth-century New York City were the scenes of slight, everyday ‘tactical’ transgressions, such as women performing bourgeois respectability at the wrong time of day (after 4 pm, when they should have been at home). And, in examining three historical moments in the USA and UK, Bondi & Domosh (1998) provide evidence
that prescribed regulations about gender divisions and distinctions between public and private spaces persist to today, especially those linked to women’s fear of sexual danger.

Feminist Historical Geographies of Empire

Unlike the North American historical geography tradition that has only recently begun to draw from critical social theory to assess American imperialism, Britain’s historical geography has had a long, self-reflective (if sometimes neo-imperialist) tradition examining the links between colonialism, empire building, and the history of geography (Driver, 1992; Berg & Kearns, 1998; but see Kaplan & Pease, 1993). Most scholarship on the history of geography has focused on questions about the formation of professional geographical societies and geography as an academic discipline (Driver, 1996). Within this disciplinary focus it appears that a uniquely ‘British’ (primarily English and Scottish) school of feminist historical geography has emerged that is likewise concerned with the history of geography, particularly with the patriarchal ‘disciplining’ of the discipline—its exclusionary tradition, masculinist cultural values and language, and creation of boundaries around what counts as ‘geographical knowledge’.

Partly as a reaction against this, much of the feminist historical geography within the ‘British’ system has been concerned with the nature of historical narratives themselves, and women’s (relative) participation in geography and European empire building more generally, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Domosh, 1991; Rose, 1993, 1995; Bell & McEwan, 1996; Phillips, 1997; Maddrell, 1998; McEwan, 1998a; also see Monk, 1992b for a similar agenda in an American context). Historical geographers have been sceptical of not only the content of geography’s historical narratives, but their rhetoric and structure as well (see, for example, Rose, 1993, 1995; Women and Geography Study Group, 1997; McEwan, 1998a). Gillian Rose (1993, 1995) has called attention to not only the Eurocentrism of the geographical tradition, but also its phallocentrism and masculinism and its effacement of women from the histories of geographies. She comments that, ‘Importantly, this erasure of those others ignored as outsiders from accounts of the tradition also works to erase the practice of exclusion itself. Their complete invisibility makes the practice of their exclusion vanish’ (1995, p. 414).

While it is important to point out that others besides the white, male, heterosexual protagonists of geography’s normative history have produced geographical knowledge, more fundamental questions have also been raised about the relationship between certain types of geographies and the construction of gender difference itself. As already noted, Domosh (1991) exposed the continued failure among historiographers of geography to acknowledge the gendered character of geographical knowledge. Many writers responded to Domosh’s assertion that women were excluded from the male exploratory tradition because their views and activities did not conform to the standards of ‘scientific’ inquiry. Some women were excluded from membership in Britain’s Royal Geographical Society simply because they were women, others because their work was considered amateurish or unscientific (Bell & McEwan, 1996; McEwan, 1998b). Domosh (1991) argued that women (such as Isabella Bird) travelling and exploring within the context of patriarchal Victorian gender relations often produced different types of geographies from their male counterparts. She wrote that the ‘so-called objective discoveries of new places were not separated from the discoveries of [the women] themselves’ (1991, p. 97). While Domosh’s piece stimulated much dialogue about the history of geography and women’s
places in it, several writers cautioned against her seeming obliviousness to privileged white women’s participation in colonialism and imperialism, and the potential backlash her thesis held for producing essentialized gendered geographies (see, for instance, Blunt & Rose, 1994, p. 9; Rose, 1995, p. 415).

Thus, the goal of much of the feminist historical geography throughout the decade within this framework has been to expose the not-so-innocent part that women—military and administrators’ wives, missionaries, travel writers, tourists, nurses and others—played in imperialism, and the contributions that women made to colonial and imperial discourses. Primary written sources such as autobiographies, travel narratives, diaries and letters have remained important sources for reconstructing or reinterpreting past places and landscapes from women’s point of views, as well as in demonstrating imperial women’s uneasy or ambivalent associations with European empire building.

Feminist historical geographers are well attuned to post-structuralist theories and approaches in their studies of colonial and post-colonial discourses, and the ways in which cultural forms such as travelogues helped facilitate exploitative practices in the colonies. Scholars have moved away from simply adding women to travel and exploration accounts, toward theorizing women’s imperialist motives in their travels abroad, questioning authorial ‘intention’, and problematizing the ways that women negotiated the complex material and discursive webs of power in the colonies (especially in India and Africa) and at home. The fragmented nature of women’s (and men’s) subjectivities across space has received considerable attention (Blunt, 1994; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Schaeffer, 1994; McEwan, 1994, 1996; Gregory, 1995; Mills, 1996; Phillips, 1997; Kearns, 1997). Mills (1996) challenges the fixity of colonial spatial boundaries in British India by showing the ways that British men and women and indigenous women manoeuvred among differently gendered spaces, including transgressing the boundaries of women’s ‘confined’ spaces. Alison Blunt (1994) provides an explicitly spatialised conception of Mary Kingsley’s travels, demonstrating her changing subject positions as she moved from England to West Africa and back again in the late nineteenth-century. Comparing the letters of Florence Nightingale and Gustave Flaubert during their journeys to 1840s Egypt, Derek Gregory (1995) examines the ways that the differences in their physical passages produced highly gendered ‘imaginative’ geographies.

Works often cited in geography (such as Mills, 1991; Blunt & Rose, 1994) also have emphasized tensions between imperialism and a particular form of conventional, bourgeois, Victorian femininity, and the ways that it combined with imperial discourses of race, class and nation. The mutual constitution of racial/ethnic and gender difference in the colonies has received considerable attention (Blake, 1990; Blunt, 1994; McEwan, 1996; Morin, 1998), much of it framed around questions initially posed by post-colonial literary theorists such as Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and Edward Said (1978). Geographers have shown, for instance, that British women’s whiteness aligned them with the ruling power and thus reconfigured their spatial frameworks in the colonies (e.g McEwan, 1996).

Other scholars have conceptualized forms of British imperialism and Victorian gender relations outside of the British empire in women’s travel narratives, such as the American West, Mexico, or other European colonial context (Georgi-Findlay, 1996; Morin, 1998, 1999; Morin & Kay Guelke, 1998; Garcia-Ramon et al., 1998). These works examine historically and spatially contingent concepts of difference as European women travellers negotiated encounters with people such as Native women in the context of empire-building (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1998; Morin, 1998). Garcia-Ramon and colleagues (1998) moved the discussion of imperial travel writing to Spanish colonial Morocco, arguing
that Aurora Bertrana's 1936 narrative projects a Spanish colonial mission that is deeply ambivalent, registering as it does with other Western feminisms in her portrayal of Muslim women.

McEwan (1998a), Morin & Kay Guelke (1998) and others also have opened discussions linking historical geography with the insights of post-colonial critiques of subaltern subjectivity, agency and resistance to colonialism and imperialism (after Spivak, 1988), in both American and British contexts. Morin & Kay Guelke (1998) examine the efforts of Mormon polygamous wives to counteract their negative public images in nineteenth-century Utah, by presenting a positive view of the practice to British women travellers. McEwan (1998a) explicitly examines the problems of combining feminist and post-colonial approaches in the history and historiography of geography. She argues that writing more inclusive histories of geography will involve moving beyond a disciplinary focus to interrogating whiteness as well as reading strategies of resistance of objectified others. She suggests, for instance, the possibilities of reading Mary Kingsley's travels in West Africa as structured around the motivations and interests of West African mountaineering guides.

Tourism, as a gendered, classed, racialized and sexualized process, has taken on special significance in historical works, especially as many tourist destinations were established within the context of Euro-American colonialism or imperialism. Most women's access to travel was severely limited until transportation technologies, the construction of new tourist sites such as national parks in the American and Canadian Wests, and the advent of professional tourist agencies, such as Thomas Cook's in 1850s Egypt, made travel respectable and safe for leisured class women (e.g. Squire, 1995). Recent feminist historical geography critiques of tourism have focused on the ways in which gender difference situates women in feminized job categories in historical places, the way in which social forces positioned women materially and discursively as particular kinds of consumers of historical tourist sites, and positioned women as producers of cultural knowledge about them, especially in written texts (Towner, 1988; Ringer, 1998; Cyndi Smith, 1989; Wynn, 1990; Squire, 1993, 1995; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994). Squire (1995), for instance, documents women's contributions to regional development of tourism in the Canadian Rockies from 1885 to 1939 as explorers, scientists, alpinists and, genteel tourists, following completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad into that region.

Identity Politics and the Cultural Turn in Feminist Historical Geography

Up to this point, we have presented two 'schools' of feminist historical geography. While it is difficult to draw clear boundaries in such instances, it is plausible that the 'geographies of empire' can be associated with British feminist approaches to geography, while—as the title suggests—the 'new historical geographies of North America' can be associated with Canadian and American approaches to feminist geography. This would accord with Janice Monk's (1994) recent assessment of British and American schools of feminist geography. Monk (1994, pp. 282–283) argues that research in the USA has tended to draw upon a liberal tradition, while British feminists have tended to be more inclined towards socialist and Marxist-inspired feminisms. Monk (1994, p. 283) went on to observe, however, that the recent turn to postmodernism, cultural studies, and issues of diversity might bring the two schools into closer alignment.

She seems to be right. The cultural turn in geography in general (e.g. Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Jackson, 1989), along with the attendant use of post-colonial, post-structural, and postmodern theories and approaches, has made it much more difficult to
discern differences between American and British approaches in feminist geography (see McDowell, 1993). Very recent work in feminist historical geography from many different locales tends to be more and more difficult to differentiate along lines of theoretical or epistemological orientation. And like anglophonic feminist geography more generally (e.g. Jones et al., 1997; Women and Geography Study Group, 1997), post-structural and post-colonial approaches to the study of identity and difference have tended to take on special significance for feminist historical geographers working from (or undertaking research within) many places in addition to Britain and the USA.

Despite what we see as some homogenizing tendencies in the cultural turn, some geographical variations in approach can be discerned. Many British feminists interested in the issue of empire, for example, have tried to deconstruct the gendered character of British imperialism. Perhaps because of their own position as both coloniser and colonized (Morris, 1992; Berg & Kearns, 1998), feminists from formerly colonized places have been able to enunciate critiques of masculinism, racism and nationalism from within anti-colonial movements. Accordingly, their analyses often differ significantly from those produced in the metropoles. Nuala Johnson (1994) and Catherine Nash (1996), for instance, both look to the mutual constitution of discourses surrounding masculinity and nationhood in Irish oppositional movements. Johnson’s (1994) examination of the monuments commemorating the centenary of the 1798 Irish rebellion against the English in County Wexford, Ireland, shows ways that anti-colonial movements can be as oppressive as colonial administrations. She argues that monuments erected as part of the centenary celebrations drew upon a romantic clerical vision which constructed narratives of manly Irish peasants fighting for (and defending) a feminine ‘Ireland’ (also see Johnson, 1995).

Historical work in non-metropolitan countries in Africa or the Caribbean offers new insights into dominant theorizations of social–spatial relations as well (Nast, 1993, 1996; Cockerton, 1996; Pulsipher, 1997; Robinson, 1998a, 1998b). Jennifer Robinson (1998a), for instance, examines the management of South African housing estates modelled on principles of ‘friendly surveillance’ developed by the London philanthropist Octavia Hill during the Victorian period. Robinson’s analysis of the Octavia Hill housing managers provides a useful empirical case on which to recast Foucault’s theory of power as friendship. Drawing on her study of Octavia Hill women housing managers in South Africa for a second paper, Robinson (1998b) further critiques current theorizations of the state as gendered masculine. The fact that a specific form of femininity played an important role in the constitution of a widespread practice of state housing provision conflicts with (northern) theories of the state which see it constituted in masculine terms. Accordingly, this work from South Africa helps remind us of the necessity for emplacing feminist theories.

In a similar vein, Heidi Nast’s (1996) ‘spatial archaeology’ of the gendered and sexualized relations in the Kano Palace, Northern Nigeria, circa 1500, provides a feminist critique of the masculinism inherent in many Foucauldian analyses of discursive power. Instead of focusing on hegemonic (masculine) discursive practices, she is concerned ‘with mundane and materially fluid relations and practices’ such as bodily and socio-spatially mediated practices like women’s seclusion, cooking, and child-rearing. In illustrating some of the ways that the state and society were gendered and sexualized via relations of hetero-patriarchy (also see Nast, 1993), her work shows how different spatial praxes were implicated in the production and reproduction of gendered and (hetero)sexualized identities.

While geographers have contributed much to our understanding of the spatialities of
‘race’ and racism (e.g. Jackson, 1987; Susan J. Smith, 1989; Anderson, 1991), until critiques from ‘Third World’ feminists and women of color were published (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987; Mohanty, 1991), feminist geographers tended to ignore the ‘whiteness’ of much feminist theory. Given that most feminist historical geography has arisen subsequent to the aforementioned critiques, issues of race and gender have often been central to recent works in the subdiscipline. Such works are often part of the corpus of research on empire, but they also form important aspects of feminist critiques of the gender-blindness of ‘race’ research beyond empire (Jackson, 1994; Anderson, 1996; Berg & Kearns, 1996). Kay Anderson (1996) brings a feminist perspective to a re-examination of her earlier (Anderson, 1991) analysis of racial discourse in Vancouver, Canada. Her analysis serves to unsettle the often overly simplistic self–other dichotomy, illustrating, for example, how at certain junctures working-class white women and bourgeois Chinese men were allied against white bourgeois men in Vancouver, while at the same time, female Chinese workers were disempowered by their Chinese male bosses. While refusing to discredit the force of racism, Anderson’s work (1996, p. 210) nevertheless ‘highlight[s] the mutable configurations, cross-cutting constituencies and contingent authorities out of which social relations are made’. Lawrence Berg & Robin Kearns (1996) have analysed the history of a controversy that arose during the 1980s as a result of attempts by Maori people to rename a number of places in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This work explicates the mutual constitution of various discourses of race, gender and place in the politics of naming. Moreover, it illustrates the way people and places are gendered differently under different historical conditions. All these works attempt—by drawing on understandings of the mutually constitutive character of categories such as ‘race’, gender, sexuality and class—both to unsettle the self–other dichotomy of much ‘race’ research, but also to deconstruct the ‘whiteness’ of historical geography generally.

Following Peter Jackson’s (1991) path-breaking call for the study of masculinities in geography, feminist (or feminist-inspired) historical geographers have exhibited growing interest in the topic (Mort, 1995; Phillips, 1995, 1997; Berg & Kearns, 1996; Berg, 1998, 1999). Whereas masculinity was often conflated with ‘male’ in the past, more recent works have tended to focus on the construction of multiple and contradictory masculinities in specific places. Richard Phillips (1995, 1997) charts the production of masculinist geographies and their relation to empire and adventure. His work serves to highlight the important role that adventure narratives played in the mapping of hegemonic masculinities in places as diverse as Canada and Australia, and the imaginative geographies of Robinson Crusoe and Jules Verne’s Voyage Around the World. Berg (1998, 1999) has attempted to retheorize the relationship between Pakeha (settlers) and Maori during the bloody colonial land wars in 1860s New Zealand. This work, which illustrates the imbrication of hegemonic masculinities and class in racialized geographies, attempts a strategic response to the binary politics of ‘race’ that tends to dominate much academic writing in New Zealand.

Drawing upon a diverse range of liberal, socialist, post-structuralist and post-colonial approaches, Australian feminist geographers have contributed much to the discipline (a few examples of which include Gale, 1974; Fincher & Fahey, 1990; Gibson, 1992; Teather, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Anderson, 1995, 1996; Jacobs, 1996). As far as we can tell, only a few feminist geographers in Australia self-consciously consider themselves to be, simultaneously, feminist and historical geographers, although Kay Anderson (1995, 1996) and Elizabeth Teather (1992) might be so categorized. Teather (1992) writes the members of the Country Women’s Association of New South Wales into the historical geographies of Australia. In so doing, she addresses the failure of other Australian
historical geographers to acknowledge women’s important contribution to the development of rural communities. Kay Anderson’s (1995) examination of the history of representational practices at the Adelaide Zoo charts the relationships between colonialism and constructions of nature, the gendered and racialised practices of marking boundaries between humans and non-human nature, and processes of domestication. Her work provides an important feminist and empirical analysis of a geographically, historically and culturally specific instantiation of the Nature/Culture dichotomy so important to masculinist understandings of the world.

Finally, to round out our discussion, there are a number of British writers who do not focus on issues of empire, but instead examine historical geographies of the construction of gendered identities within the UK (Ploszaj ska, 1994; Mort, 1995; Rose, 1997; Maddrell, 1998). Gillian Rose (1997) presents an analysis of two genres of photographs of white working-class women in the streets of East London in the 1930s in order to illustrate how a radically different and ultimately unknowable femininity might emerge from feminist analyses of ‘documentary’ photography. Teresa Ploszajska (1994) examines the external sitting, internal spatial arrangements, and operative ideologies of a boys’ reformatory in Surrey and girls’ reformatory in Bristol during the mid-nineteenth-century. Such works illustrate the important relationships between social relations, space, and the (social) production of gendered, classed and racialized identities during the past.

**Concluding Comments**

In this article we have outlined a broad view of anglophone feminist historical geographies produced in the last decade, touching on key works coming out of places as diverse as Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the USA. Our review suggests that a sizeable body of feminist scholarship is rapidly gaining strength and prominence in the subdiscipline—at least in the literatures from those places we have examined.

In order to reduce the potential for our review of feminist historical geography to be read as a historical narrative of ‘progress’, we have tried to emplace those geographies within specific intellectual milieus. Nonetheless writing women into historical narratives and geographies seems to be an important part of an ongoing project across the board (e.g. Blunt & Rose, 1994; Bell & McEwan, 1996; Nast, 1996; McEwan, 1996; Cockerton, 1996; Kay, 1997; Estrada, 1998; Cope, 1998b; Schuurman, 1998; Domosh, 1998; Garcia-Ramon et al., 1998; Robinson, 1998a; Morin & Kay Guelke, 1998). The varied approaches to doing so may be read as emplaced forms of knowledge production that respond to particular socio-spatial exigencies. In making such readings, we have tried to point to ways in which particular approaches to feminist geography, in the study of women or gender, have specific emplaced histories.

Accordingly, we would like to suggest that the different contexts within which feminist historical geographies are produced—the wider discipline of geography, the theoretical and methodological debates in geography, the training of feminist historical geographers (such as the schools of thought and material places where feminist historical geography is taught), and the publication of feminist historical geographies—are all implicated in the patterns we discuss. For instance, opportunities for publication of feminist and other radical historical geographies have increased over the past 10 years in both Britain and the USA, owing in part to changes in editorial leadership in the two explicitly historical geography venues in those places (*Journal of Historical Geography* and *Historical Geography* respectively), as well as the growth in numbers of journals open to feminist geography
research (such as *Gender, Place and Culture*, and *Ecumene*). In these and other cases, feminist historical geography research has both contributed to and benefited from the larger-scale revisionism apparent in anglophonic human geography.

Feminist historical geographies have contributed valuable insights into the many connections among patriarchal, capitalist and nationalist agendas embedded in British (and other European) colonial power structures and ‘post-colonial’ resistances to them (e.g. Blunt & Rose, 1994; Anderson, 1996; Nash, 1996; McEwan, 1998a; Robinson, 1998a, 1998b). Such studies lend insights to other areas of geographical study (cultural geography, political geography, etc.) in their critiques over what constitutes geographical knowledge itself, the manner in which it is produced, and its intended purposes. Perhaps one of the most significant contributions feminist historical geographers have made to other areas of geography in the last 10 years is their explicit methodological confrontation with the masculinist record of geography. Feminist historical geographers have not only called into question the epistemological foundations of geography’s partial historical record, but have provided extensive, mostly qualitative models for reading the absences in the record, and for addressing issues of data collection and analysis, and subjectivity of historical actors.

Evidence of what might be called a ‘new historical geography’ of the USA and Canada is emerging, portions of which are informed by feminist theories and methods. North American historical geography has traditionally been more focused on weaving complex empirical narratives about past geographies than has been the case in its British counterpart. More recently, however, a new focus on critical social theory has developed in North American historical geography, partly as a reaction to trends in new Western history, but also due to the increasing attention to cultural politics and American imperialism in new cultural history and the new historicism in literary and American studies (e.g. Kaplan & Pease, 1993). The critical historical geographies being produced at the University of British Columbia, particularly those focused on British colonialism (Harris, 1991, 1997; Harris & Galois, 1994), might be seen as arising within the context of strong links to the British post-colonial historical geographers (Gregory, 1994).

Indeed, with a few exceptions, historical geography in Britain has a longer tradition of critical Marxist, feminist and anti-racist theoretical production and reflection than in North America (e.g. see *History Workshop Journal*). Drawing on post-structuralist and post-colonial approaches, a distinctly ‘British’ school has emerged with a focus on the discipline of geography, geographical knowledges and colonialism/imperialism. Having made the claims for recognition of North American and British schools, however, we should emphasize that the cultural and postmodern turns in geography have seen much convergence between the two schools of feminist (and other) historical geographies.

Other white settler societies such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have seen the development of feminist approaches to historical geography that draw from their metropolitan counterparts in the UK and USA, but they are not mere derivatives of these metropolitan approaches (e.g. Robinson, 1998a; Berg & Kearns, 1998). Scholars working outside the metropoles (or working in non-metropolitan field sites) are often positioned much differently from either British or American academics. In this sense, then, they are able to ‘write back’ to the centre, and in doing so, decentralize it.

Ultimately it is all the feminist historical geographies taken in sum, however, that are destabilizing and rewriting historical geography. Writing women in, and documenting the social construction of gendered selves and sexual difference(s), are political acts bound up with relations of power and oppression both within and outside the academy.
Feminist historical geographies are subverting the erasure of women and many Others effaced from geographies of the past.

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NOTES

[1] While we recognize a small number of feminist historical geography book length works, most scholarship we discuss is in the form of published journals articles, primarily those appearing in one of the following journals in the last 8–10 years: *Journal of Historical Geography*, *Historical Geography*, *Gender, Place and Culture: Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Area*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *The Australian Geographer*, *Australian Geographical Studies*, *The New Zealand Geographer*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, and *Antipode*. We undertook a comprehensive literature search of these journals (through roughly October of 1998), and in attempts at being as inclusive as possible, placed a call for submissions on both the GeoFem and Critical Geography Forum listservs on the Internet. (This resulted in very few responses, however, less than 10.) We focused on these journals simply out of an attempt to follow patterns of feminist historical geography submissions within Anglo historical geography. Omissions are sure to have occurred, though, and we regret them.

[2] While Overton (1994) perhaps predictably ignores the influence of feminist thought in his entry on historical geography in the third edition of *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* (McDowell and Sharp, 1999) also renders the relationship between the two invisible: there is no entry for ‘historical geography’ in the volume. While entries for political, economic and social geography likewise do not appear, other subdisciplines do, such as (new) cultural geography, regional geography, and Marxist geography. Thus, we are not suggesting that the editors have ignored historical geography, but rather that they do not see it, and perhaps rightly so, as a coherent hotbed of feminist geographical scholarship.

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