

**Title—Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism**

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**Year—1998**

Categories: Empire, Gender, Colonialism, Anthology

Place: French & Dutch Empires (Asia & Africa focus)

Time Period: 1650-1950

Argument Synopsis:

This is a collection of essays organized around a central theme: the ways Europeans conceived of gender differences and verbalized them in their daily encounters with Asian and African subordinates. Editors begin with a critique of the historiography of empire—claiming it has ignored millions of ‘natives’ and marginal Europeans. Women, especially, are identified as being noticeably absent from old narratives of empire. Many of the essays are tied together through a shared focus on colonial language, and its use in created social divides in both the periphery and the metropole.

**Colonial language of social division** most often fell into old gendered and parental tropes, originating in the enlightenment. This collection helps to highlight how colonial spaces were feminized by imperial powers, in part to legitimize their control; it also demonstrates the use of colonial language in the metropole for similar controls.

This essay collection refines and expands the history of European imperialism, by focusing on how gender shaped colonial societies. This collection of essays seeks to make issues of gender, race, and identity the main focus in discussions of empire, specifically the French and Dutch empires. They argue that the **British Empire is the focus of the bulk of empirical and theoretical scholarship** on colonial history, thus they choose to focus on France and the Netherlands to counter narratives of uniqueness regarding the British Empire. Focusing on both empires creates a juxtaposition of a wide range of theories regarding metropolitan ideas about gender relations, race, and class alignments. An example of the differences between the two empires: France pushed for assimilation believing their culture to be self-evidently superior, while the Dutch used association so not to affect the uniqueness of local cultures.

Julia Clancy-Smith’s essay she argues that the construction of French Algeria encompassed the construction of a view of Arab women, as well as the construction of mechanisms for political and economic control. Clancy-Smith argues that the status of Algerian women was used as an argument against Algerian male suffrage, because it was claimed to demonstrate that Algerian society was not mature enough for enfranchisement.

*Domesticating the Empire* seeks to expand understandings of European imperialism by bringing in social groups usually ignored, as well as highlighting the reciprocal relationship between the metropole and periphery; especially regarding language. Feminizing the colonies justified their need for imperial control, using the same gendered logic that was found in the metropolises to prevent female suffrage. In this way, gender became a narrative tool to affirm social hierarchies.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Use of colonial language in creating social divides in both metropole & periphery
- Imperial powers gendered (or feminized) colonial spaces to legitimize their control, and used similar language for similar purposes in the metropole