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Carolyn J. Eichner, *Feminism's Empire*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2022. xiv + 302 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$125.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-5017-6380-9; \$32.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-5017-6381-6; \$21.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-5017-6383-0.

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Over the past thirty years, as historians have undertaken fresh analyses of the French empire, they have paid increasing attention to the experiences of French women in empire. [1] They have examined women's travel writing, the instrumentalization of women in France's imperial population politics, women's sexuality, their legal status, and French women's educational initiatives among other topics, in colonial settings. Relatively few however, have examined French feminists' engagement with empire, or their critiques of imperialism, Indigenous cultural practices, and their vocal opposition to the imperial expansion of the Third Republic. [2] In this context, Carolyn Eichner's extensively researched and detailed *Feminism's Empire* contributes to making visible how French feminists, painfully aware of the limits on their rights and seeking to become full-fledged citizens, approached France's domination of colonial others. Eichner has plumbed an impressive array of feminists' travel accounts, novels, journalism, colonial archives (both French and New Caledonian) as well as an extensive secondary source literature. Through an analysis of the gender, class, and racial dimensions of feminists' engagement with imperialism, she shows how they navigated the contradictions between their search for *égalité à part entière* within the Republic and the violence and oppressions of republican imperialism.

Feminism's Empire tracks the trajectories of five French feminists, Hubertine Auclert, Olympe Audouard, Paule Mink, Louise Michel, and Léonie Rouzade. All were educated women who, if not themselves elite, nonetheless had the means to travel, write, and publish their views in the form of travel accounts, journalism and novels that were accessible to a reading public. At the same time, their connections to empire varied almost as much as their politics. Audouard, a liberal feminist advocate of women's political rights and marriage reform, was an upper middle-class Catholic journalist and travel writer who visited North America, Russia, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire, and published her observations extensively during the 1860s and 1870s. Feminist socialist and journalist Auclert on the other hand, noted for her extensive women's suffrage activism, lived in Algeria from 1888 to 1892, where she observed and wrote about Arab women in the French colony. Rouzade, novelist and socialist activist, used her novels to critique gender inequality in imagined Oriental settings. Audouard, Auclert, and Rouzade all believed in the emancipatory potential of women's political and civil rights and, although Auclert criticized the hypocrisy of existing imperial practices, she, along with Rouzade, nonetheless believed in the efficacy of a republican and feminist civilizing mission. Mink and Michel criticized the suffrage

campaign and Civil Code reform as useless diversions from the quotidian struggles of most women. Both condemned imperialism. Michel, socialist and later anarchist, active during the 1871 Paris Commune and subsequently deported to France's penal colony New Caledonia, used her seven-year incarceration to study and write about Indigenous Kanak cultural and linguistic traditions. Travel to Algeria provided her with yet another perspective on colonial exploitation. Mink, a revolutionary socialist feminist who, like Michel participated in the Paris Commune but escaped imprisonment, rejected all institutional restrictions on women's freedom and opposed imperialism as energetically as she opposed capitalism. Like Michel and Auclert, her travels in Algeria amplified her anti-imperial stance, although she too briefly considered the possibility of a feminist imperialism to improve the condition of Indigenous women. Eichner's ability to tease apart these differences and the ambiguities of feminists' approaches makes for a rich and nuanced portrait of the complexities of their engagement.

Feminist observations took at least two forms: the critique of Indigenous cultural practices and the critique of the existing form of French imperialism. Women travelers invariably deployed the familiar Orientalist tropes of barbarity and inferiority, but through a gendered lens. In Eichner's telling, their negative assessment of women's status focused less on the effects of colonization than on Indigenous practices. Audouard, travelling in the American West after the Civil War pointed to what she believed were Native American men's debasement of women's agricultural work as forced labor, a misinterpretation of Native American gender practices (she was far from the only traveler to do so) that revealed her embeddedness in the gender ideals of her own culture. Travelling in Egypt, she deplored the fact that Muslim women were confined and under the control of fathers and male relatives. Paule Mink, visiting Algeria in 1886 similarly criticized what she described as the "patriarchal culture" of Islam (p. 40), a cause of women's oppression, and Auclert, Audouard, and Mink all spilt much ink condemning polygamy in North African and Muslim cultures as damaging to women--in Audouard's words, "the plague of the orient" (p. 74). Eichner argues that feminists' "outsider status" made them especially sensitive to the dynamics of domination and exploitation. Some feminists' critique of empire (Auclert, Rouzade) fixed upon the failure of French imperialism to improve the condition of Indigenous women. A feminist civilizing mission, they believed, could mitigate the worst of Indigenous practices. Others (Mink, Michel) condemned imperialism *tout court*. However, as Eichner shows, French feminists did not focus exclusively on Indigenous women's oppression.

Some observers invoked the legal status of women in global empires to criticize French laws governing women. Audouard, for instance, travelling in Algeria in 1863, painted a picture of Algerian women as manipulative and scheming, but also saw them as displaying far more agency within marriage than was possible for French women. Likewise, from her experience in the Ottoman Empire she praised the Turkish legal system. Audouard wrote positively about the rights of Turkish women within marriage and contrasted their relative independence with their French counterparts' lack of rights under the Civil Code--a view that clashed with her condemnation of polygamy and ignored the existence of slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Auclert held up the matriarchal society of the North African Touareg and invoked France's recognition of women local government heads in Tahiti in contrast to the inequality of men and women in France. Mink, although she condemned polygamy in North African Muslim societies as damaging to women, also recognized Algerian Muslim women's relative autonomy in marriage as superior to women's lack of autonomy under the French Civil Code. And socialist feminist Léonie Rouzade, in her novel *Le monde renversé* (1872), penned a fictional account of a non-western society where her European heroine takes control of a sultan's kingdom. Women rule

the kingdom and men are subjected to the French laws that govern and restrict women. Eventually her heroine establishes a republic in which both men and women can vote and serve equally in a representative governing body, displaying the potential of a feminist civilizing mission.

For Auclert and others, French imperial policy had to address women's status if colonial subjects were to be assimilated to French norms. Auclert believed in a potential humanitarian dimension of empire, one that could correct the failures of French imperialism. In an entire chapter devoted to Auclert's newspaper, *La Citoyenne*, founded in 1881, Eichner shows how the paper, established to promote the suffrage cause, provided a platform for critiques of French imperialism and arguments for a feminist imperialism. Auclert, like many of her colleagues, used the pages of *La Citoyenne* to denounce the hypocrisy of French claims to a civilization superior to those of its colonial subjects, while simultaneously depriving French women of rights. At the same time, linking women's suffrage and the civilizing mission, Auclert instrumentalized what she believed to be Algerian women's subjugation as an argument for women's suffrage, although she did not speak for most feminists, for whom empire played a minor (if any) role in their rights claims. Indeed, Eichner argues that Auclert's approach to French imperialism differed significantly from that of British feminists. Both believed in their ability to improve the lives of Indigenous, colonized women but "[r]ather than condemn Britain's approach to empire, [British feminists] sought to cement their role in the British imperial project" (p. 100). Imperialism, she suggests, was far more central to the British suffrage movement than it was to the comparatively much smaller French movement.

Of the five feminists whose encounters with empire Eichner examines, Louise Michel's deportation and incarceration in the French penal colony of New Caledonia was unique. In two chapters devoted principally to Michel, Eichner shows how she used her incarceration to interact with the Indigenous Kanak population, learn their language, and conduct ethnographic research. She opened a school for the children of fellow prisoners and a school for adult Kanak (eventually closed by the French authorities), and championed Kanak rebels during their 1878 uprising against French colonialism. Michel also used the Kanak trading language (Bichelamar) that incorporated elements of French, English, and Polynesian and Southeast Asian languages to argue for an international language that would transcend empire and national specificities, and which she believed had the potential to create peace between European nations.

Michel nonetheless embodied the contradictions of feminist imperial culture. Her ethnography, in which she transcribed and translated Kanak stories and songs, deemed a valuable resource for French cultural anthropologists at the time (but also criticized by some contemporary scholars as inaccurate), depicted the Kanaks as displaying "medieval manners and customs" (p. 119). Injecting her own political views, she celebrated women as "strong, central characters" (p. 129), and criticized Kanak marriage practices as akin to a business transaction in which women were bought and sold. In defending her radical (for the time) pedagogical views which minimized discipline, and emphasized secular, egalitarian instruction that would allow the "natural intelligence" of her Kanak pupils to emerge, she nonetheless referred to them as savage and child-like, articulating "a Rousseauian romanticism, asserting the importance of protecting the Indigenous people's unspoiled and uncorrupted nature" (p. 158).

French feminists deployed the discourse of imperial domination or Orientalist stereotypes even as they challenged that domination. Indeed, Eichner underscores the discord between feminists'

rights claims and their critiques of empire on the one hand, and their embeddedness in ethno-racial stereotypes of their historical context on the other hand. Particularly interesting in this regard, is her discussion of antisemitism among otherwise enlightened feminists, focusing on Audouard, Auclert, and Michel. Audouard, the most class privileged of the three was also the most vocal antisemite, using the figure of the Jew to condemn the practices of Indigenous populations with whom she came into contact during her travels. Her disparagement of the living conditions of poor Turkish Jews and of the immorality of Jewish women (alongside her praise of the *belle juive*), and her feminization of Polish Jewish men were not new tropes but underscored her willingness to deploy the ethno-racial stereotypes of her time. Auclert apparently had no problem publishing pro-suffrage articles in antisemite Edouard Drumont's newspaper *La Libre Parole*, instrumentalizing antisemitism in the pursuit of women's rights. Michel for her part, simultaneously supported Jews, condemning antisemitic attacks in Algeria in the 1890s on the one hand and deployed the stereotypes of Jewish avariciousness and acquisitiveness that had somehow "malformed" the Jewish character on the other. As Eichner suggests, French feminists were implicated in the very systems they critiqued. Even revolutionary socialists or anarchists such as Mink and Michel were not inoculated against the imperial tropes or antisemitism of their time.

On balance, *Feminism's Empire* makes a stronger case for the influence of feminism on their views of empire than for the influence of empire on their politics. It is not clear, for instance, how Paule Mink's decision to enter politics in 1893 was shaped by her 1884 experience in Algeria, given Mink's own account (pp. 220-221). However, this does not detract from what is a deeply researched and insightful study that pays careful attention to all the nuances, ambiguities, and occasional hypocrisies of feminist encounters with imperialism, and makes an original contribution to the study of global history as well as to the histories of feminism, imperialism, and gender.

NOTES

[1] Yvonne Knibiehler and Régine Goutalier were early pioneers with their *Les femmes au temps des colonies* (Paris: Stock, 1985). More recent scholarship includes essays by Elspeth Locher-Scholten, Jean Elizabeth Pederson, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Jeanne M. Bowlan in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Margaret Cook Anderson, *Regeneration through Empire. French Pro-natalists and Colonial Settlement in the Third Republic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Marie-Paule Ha, *French Women and the Empire: The Case of Indo-China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Patricia M.E. Lorcin, "Women in France d'Outre Mer. Pedagogy and Avenues of Research," *Journal of Women's History* 28:4 (Winter 2016): 213-123; Rebecca Rogers, *A Frenchwoman's Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth Century French Algeria* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013); Judith Surkis, *Sex, Law and Sovereignty in French Algeria 1830-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); and, Isabelle Ernot, "Voyageuses occidentales et impérialisme au milieu du XIXe siècle: Représentations, interprétations," *Genre et Histoire* [*La Revue de l'Association Mnémosyne Online*] 8 (Spring 2011), <https://doi.org/10.4000/genrehistoire.1272>.

[2] See, for example, Jennifer Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Marnia Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing on Women in Algeria," *Feminist Studies* 14/1

(Spring, 1988): 81-107; Sarah Kimble, "Emancipation through Secularization: French Feminists' Views of Muslim Women's Condition in Interwar Algeria," *French Colonial History* 7 (2006): 109-128; Félix Germaine and Syliane Larcher, eds., *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality 1848-2016* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); and, Rachel Nuñez, "Rethinking Universalism: Olympe Audouard, Hubertine Auclert, and the Gender Politics of the Civilizing Mission," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 30/1 (Spring, 2012): 23-45.

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