Toward a feminist historiography of geography

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ABSTRACT

Recent attempts to contextualize the history of geography have ignored the gendered construction of much of that history, while arguments for a post-modern human geography have ignored feminist theory. By examining the stories of Victorian women explorers, this essay suggests how women have contributed to the formation of geographic knowledge, and, by implication, asks what can be learned by considering the contribution of women's ways of knowing to our reconstruction of human geography.

KEY WORDS: Explorers, Women, History of geography, Post-modern, Feminist theory

> It is, too, a matter for pride that our history contains such a record of achievement at the farthest ends of the earth. Let us salute with Conrad, men great in their endeavour and in hard-won successes of militant geography; men who went forth each according to his lights and with varied motives . . . but each bearing in his heart a spark of the sacred fire. If that spark ever dies, then our geography will indeed have become a dry and bloodless thing. (Stoddart, 1986, p. 157).

> Such as it is, Estes Park is mine. It is unsurveyed, 'no man's land', and mine by right of love, appropriation, and appreciation; by the seizure of its peerless sunrises and sunsets, its glorious afterglow, its blazing noons, its hurricanes sharp and furious, its wild auroras, its glories of mountain and forest, of canyon, lake, and river, and the stereotyping them all in my memory (Bird, 1879, p. 120).

If, as Stoddard suggests, many of the more heroic episodes in the history of geography are the results of a spark in men's hearts that set them out on voyages, then geography truly is the inheritor of the enlightenment tradition, a tradition that energized and legitimized that 'spark' that would bring light to the world. And, as the second quote makes clear, that spark for exploration was as evident in the accounts of women explorers as of their male counterparts. Although a contemporary reading of Isabella Bird's travels in the Rocky Mountains may suggest a political agenda in her ability to appropriate through love a land that no man has yet controlled, it can not be denied that her thrill of discovery and wonder at what she has found places her well within the confines of the male exploratory tradition, as outlined by Stoddart (1986). The 'sirens' that, in J. K. Wright's words (1947), lure people to unknown lands were surely at work in motivating Bird to leave her family in Scotland and venture by herself, and on horseback, into the Rocky Mountains. Yet the accounts of Isabella Bird, and the many other women travellers, are not included in the histories of geography, not even in Stoddart's book, which attempts to recover the exploratory tradition for geographic historiography. Certainly we are not to deny that the excitement of discovery, whether it be of new lands or new ideas, is a spark that should not be doused, and geography's roots in the exploratory tradition are indeed, as Stoddart indicates, quite inspiring and should act as sources of pride. It becomes problematic, however, when only part of that tradition is remembered and recorded in the official histories of the discipline. In so doing, geography loses some of its history, and in a time when geographers are looking far afield for sources of ideas about reconstructing geographic thinking, (Cosgrove, 1988; Dear, 1988; Daniels, 1989) this loss becomes even more problematic.

Given the recent attempts to rewrite and contextualize geographic history (Livingstone, 1988; Driver, 1988), it would behove us to recover from our own history the stories that have gone unnoticed. Recent work on women travellers has opened an entirely new chapter on the history of geography

from which we can recapture sources for a post-modern reconstruction (Birkett, 1989; Middleton, 1982; Tinling, 1989). It is in pointing to these possible sources that this essay is directed. This essay will draw on the writings of Victorian and post-Victorian women travellers to suggest what a 'women's way of knowing' (Belenky *et al.*, 1986) could contribute to our rewriting of the history of geography, and, by implication, to a feminist historiography of geography.

By focusing on the experiences of these women explorers, I am not implying that they are the only group to be systematically excluded from the histories of geography. Many individuals, both male and female, have been ignored in our institutional accounts of geography because their views and activities did not accord with the standards of 'scientific' geography. What I am suggesting, however, is that the experiences of Victorian women travellers were different from those of their male counterparts. This does not imply any statement of essential differences between men and women, only that Victorian women explorers could not escape the contexts in which they lived – contexts that were, in significant and well-documented ways, quite distinct from those of men. And those contexts shaped not only their outlook on personal matters and the structure of their social networks, but operated in very material ways, by limiting the resources and support networks available to women in their travels.

This essay draws much of its inspiration from recent discussions both within geography and the other social sciences concerning what has come to be called the post-modern turn. The issue of post-modernism is a complex one, providing differing critiques and constructions as it has been filtered through the lenses of the humanities and sciences. In its questioning of the assumptions that have supported our deeply-embedded philosophical systems since the enlightenment, it throws open doors to ways of thinking that we have yet to explore fully. The issues raised by the post-modern turn go way beyond those that can be addressed here, so I have chosen to outline only those directly relevant to my discussion of a feminist historiography in geography. Although I recognize the tensions that exist between feminist theory and post-modernism,[1] I have chosen to concentrate on those aspects of post-modernism that have allowed us to hear and appreciate the voices of these women travellers. Specifically, a reassessment and deconstruction of the enlightenment notions of knowledge, objectivity and language has provided the space through which women like Isabella Bird can be seen and heard. Although here I can provide only the briefest of discussions, an outline of the particular elements of post-modernism that inform this essay should help us to understand the importance of re-telling the stories of Victorian women travellers.

Simply stated, the post-modern deconstruction has allowed us to understand that knowledge is both ideologically and socially constructed and therefore cannot be separated from its specific context. Accordingly, there can be no universal truths nor universalizing discourses since knowledge is dependent on the contingencies of social relations. The very idea of a perspective-less knowledge is revealed as a product of a specific time and place, and therefore is seen as both reflecting and legitimizing the social conditions and relations of power from which it was derived (including those of gender).

The idea that there exists a world somehow separate from the subject, that is, an abstracted, objective world, is exposed as an assumption on which a perspective-less knowledge is built. We can investigate the world only from a perspective of the contingencies of our self, which includes our physical, social and historical experiences. To explore the world, both figuratively and literally, involves the active participation of the subject as observer. Language embodies and embellishes that participation, giving form to the observation. That form is not a direct representation of a separate reality – language is not transparent – but instead reflects a particular way of seeing that world. A post-modern critique allows us to see both words and objects as socially constructed. The following discussion of women explorers is grounded within this perspective of a post-modern view of knowledge, objectivity and the use of language.

THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN EXPLORERS

To start, it is worth considering why the stories of these women have been omitted from the official histories of geography. Many of these women travellers were born into the British upper-middle classes of the Victorian era, at the time of the professionalization of the academic disciplines. Denied access to the academic training that would confer on them the appropriate status as 'scientists', women like Mary Kingsley, Mary Gaunt, Isabella Bird, and Marianne North found that fieldwork in the sense of exploration was as open to them as to anyone with adequate resources. Yet, as the disciplines in general

were professionalized, and geography in particular came to be rigorously defined, these women were removed from the newly defined label of 'geographer'. The fieldwork of 'professional' geographers was codified and regulated in order to advance scientific learning. Fieldwork as geographic inquiry was limited to a few, elite, white males and was fostered in the male club atmosphere of the Royal Geographic Society (RGS) in England and the American Geographical Society in the United States.

It was not until 1915 that women were elected to membership in the RGS, and the 30-year story of that battle reveals the predilections and prejudices of Victorian male culture (Middleton, 1982). Women had been elected to membership earlier, but only as exceptions to the rule. When it became apparent that the few women members might represent a trend, the doors to their membership were effectively shut. Such fervour followed the election of twelve women as fellows in 1893 that membership to others was immediately closed. As Birkett points out, much of the objection to women began to be voiced in terms of proper geographic knowledge. Women travellers, it was thought, were not truly adding to geographic knowledge – i.e., they were not surveying new lands and therefore could not qualify for membership, although such a requirement of 'new' geographic knowledge was never applied to men seeking membership. As one member inquired, were the ladies to be 'young and beautiful' or 'old and scientific' (Birkett, 1989, p. 219)? George Curzon, on his return from Asia, was a vehement speaker against women's membership: 'Their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration, and the genus of professional female globe-trotters with which America has lately familiarized us is one of the horrors of the latter end of the nineteenth century' (quoted in Middleton, 1982, p. 13). Curzon and his group were effective in preventing those 'professional globe-trotters' from becoming professional geographers.

Denied institutional support, Victorian women explored and travelled at their own expense and in their own contexts. Their lone travels were neither followed up with full-scale explorations nor sponsored by institutions (as was the case with their male counterparts). Thus their names survive, if at all, through their writings but not through their sanctioned deeds; their stores were, and are, not part of the institutional histories of geography. Stoddart is not alone in writing a man's story of geography, but by celebrating the exploratory tradition in geography, his omission of women is even more blatant than many other authors. The 'spark' that energized many women explorers took them to places they themselves could not have imagined, and it contributed far more to geographic knowledge than we have heretofore recognized.

WOMEN AND GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

If our post-Kuhnian critiques of science have taught us anything, it is that knowledge is socially and therefore ideologically contructed; it is as much a product of who defines it as of some objective reality. The case of the redefinition of 'exploration' mentioned above clearly makes the point for the field of geography, and one of the challenges for a post-modern geography is somehow to come to terms with the subjectivity of defining what constitutes knowledge. The stories of women travellers are incredibly diverse, yet they share some common threads, one of which is their quite explicit recognition of the personal goals of their travels. The so-called objective discoveries of new places were not separated from the discoveries of themselves.

Women travellers set out on their treks with some definite goals, but 'discovery' *per se*, in the sense of discovering new lands, was not one of them (Birkett, 1989; Middleton, 1982). Many of these women travellers were in middle age when they started to live the life they had only imagined in their youth. Most had grown up with family members who had been involved in some aspects of exploration, but they could only dream of setting out on voyages themselves. It was usually only after they had fulfilled their family 'duties' that they were free to set out on their own. Divorced from the institutions that served to legitimize travel for discovery, for fulfilling some objective purpose, women travellers were free to explore in the broadest sense. As Gertrude Bell states, 'My thoughts travelled forward, and I longed to follow the path they had taken' (quoted in Birkett, 1989, p. 62). If one were to draw their journeys on a map, their routes would not resemble the fairly direct lines to sources of rivers or tops of mountains, as was the case with most of their male counterparts. Instead, their routes were often circular, appearing to have no definite destinations. They often took the form of what Stoddart calls planned journeys, 'of which the aim is simply to proceed between known points, with no suggestion of adding to knowledge other than through traversing unfamiliar routes' (1986, p. 142). Yet the lack of such external and institutional support

did not mean that these women were undirected. Their direction came from internal sources, for most were seeking places where they could live a type of life denied them at home. Growing up in worlds circumscribed by Victorian standards and expectations, their lives had been molded for them. Their freedom came from living in places removed from that circumscription.

These women often spoke of the empowerment they felt when they were exploring, and their utter despair on losing that power when they returned home. It was felt most acutely when they were visiting regions that were located within the colonial power structure. Colonialism allowed women to be powerful as representatives of the white race; it created a structure for a type of power dependent on race, not on sex. In this light, we can begin to understand their political support for colonialism, and their belief in the essential nature of the differences between the races. Their power and control over their lives was based on their race; once those differences were eroded or erased, their power was drained. Overcoming the dangers encountered in their travels was also a source of empowerment for such women, and many wrote of these experiences with great pride. Dangerous situations allowed them to prove their abilities – abilities that could not be tested at home – and it provided testing grounds for their own strengths in controlling their life situations. These sources of empowerment certainly were not exclusive to women, but given the general context of Victorian women's lives, they often provided the only sources of such intensely-felt personal power and authority. For some women explorers, their empowerment when travelling often overcame physical disabilities. Isabella Bird, for example, was continually diagnosed with severe physical problems when she returned to Britain from her travels, only to find the symptoms disappear when she set out again. When speaking of her decision to travel through Japan, she claimed it was recommended for her health:

> Having been recommended to leave home, in April 1878, in order to recruit my health by means which had proved serviceable before, I decided to visit Japan, attracted less by the reputed excellence of its climate than by the certainty that it possessed, in an especial degree, those sources of novel and sustained interest which conduce so essentially to the enjoyment and restoration of a solitary health-seeker (Bird, 1987, p. 1).

Women travelled, then, for quite specific reasons, but what they were seeking was as much empowerment and self-knowlegde as 'objective' knowledge. 'The women travellers followed invisible red lines across a map into a distant unknown. But the pot of gold they were chasing was not the mountain, the source of the river, or the oasis in the desert, but the long shadows, cast by the tropical sunlight and mountain glare, of themselves' (Birkett, 1989, p. 71). Their satisfaction was derived not in the external discovery of 'new' geographies, but in the process of exploring, in experiencing a world in which they could participate in their own definition.

In our questioning of the objectivity privileged by the scientific method and in our recognition that our choices of research topics, methodologies and results tell us as much about ourselves as of some objective reality, we might do well to reflect on a geographic heritage in which such goals were explicitly recognized. Certainly male explorers were also interested in self-exploration, but their contexts usually demanded that the external discovery of 'places' was given priority. Denied institutional context, women were in a sense more free in their travels, and more explicitly aware of their subjective goals.

WOMEN AS OBSERVERS: THE VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE

The process of exploration is by definition an ambiguous one. On the one hand, it involves the so-called 'opening up' of previously unknown lands and peoples (that is, the exploration of 'foreign' peoples by Western culture), while on the other, that 'opening up' itself changes and ultimately destroys those very societies that it 'discovers'. The role of the explorer also is by definition ambiguous: explorers are both outsiders and insiders, observers of, yet participants in, the lives and lands that they travel through. In the histories of exploration, these perspectives frequently conflicted, and the external demands of discovery so often a part of the male explorer's mission often meant that these conflicts were ignored. Yet many women explorers were arguably better suited to deal with their ambiguous role. They were outsiders in the everyday world by virtue of their sex, and much of their energy throughout their lives had been spent dealing with that fact. The ambiguity of the role of explorer was not new to them. As women, their lives were created around that dilemma; they were certainly insiders and participants in their culture, yet they always stood outside the structures of power. Women carried that duality of identity into the field with them, and they found that such duality served them well. At home they were outsiders by virtue of

their sex; in the field they were outsiders by virtue of their race. And they realized the precariousness of that position. Their authority in the field was derived from their role as outsiders – as representatives of the white race – yet the basis of that authority is what made them insiders in a culture in which they had no authority. Their skills at switching the basis of their authority must have been well-honed, which, in turn, allowed them to accommodate the ambiguities of the role of 'observer'. 'Women travellers continually juggled their identities in the foreign lands to meet these turbulent emotions of sympathy yet distance, and found comfort in a role which did not necessitate the resolution of these seemingly insurmountable conflicts of interest' (Birkett, 1989, p. 176).

Many such women found that their inclinations as sympathetic observers could act as a basis for their authority within their own culture, and therefore they were keen supporters of the uniqueness of fieldwork. Isabella Bird made a point of noting that as a woman travelling alone, she was able to observe matters that others may have missed:

> As a lady travelling alone, and the first European lady who had been seen in several districts through which my route lay, my experiences differed more or less widely from those of preceding travellers; and I am able to offer a fuller account of the aborigines of Yezo, obtained by actual acquaintance with them, than has hitherto been given (Bird, 1985, p. 1–2).

Fieldwork was based on subjective experience, and women could claim that they provided valuable insights that could not be gained from reading books or studying in the university, luxuries denied to many of them. Although herself highly educated, Gertrude Bell supported the preciousness of knowledge gained from direct experience:

> Often when one sets out on a journey one travels by all the roads according to the latest maps, one reaches all the places of which the history book speak. Duly one rises early and turns one's face towards new countries, carefully looks and laboriously one tries to understand, and for all one's trouble one might as well have stayed behind and read a few big archaeology books. But I would have you know that is not the way that I have done it . . . Here is a world of history that one sees with the eye and that enters the mind as no book can relate it (quoted in Birkett, 1989, p. 173).

Ironically, it is this very claim to knowledge that eventually was used to deny women's experiences and exclude them from the status as professional geographers. The subjectivity of fieldwork that women could claim as their special contribution to geographic knowledge was, as pointed out above, systematically taken out of the realm of scientific geography. The suppression of the subjective and the denial of the ambiguity of observation was part of the legitimation of the academy and the professionalization of the social sciences that occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet as anthropologists and other social scientists have recently argued, fieldwork and ethnographic studies are by definition exercises in metaphorical storytelling, and are as much constructions of the subjective realm as of the objective realm (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Indeed, it is the very recognition of the blurring of distinctions between the subjective and the objective – between observer and participant – that is at the heart of recent critiques of science (Harding, 1986; Sayers, 1987; Grosz, 1987). The 'pre-scientific' experiences of women travellers at the turn of the century, therefore, are in one sense more relevant today for what they can tell us about the role of the outsider and the methods of observation than for any information about 'new' places.

REPRESENTING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

The inherent ambiguity in the experiences of women explorers necessitated forms of representation that differed from the scientific accounts of their male counterparts. At one level, their choice of language was circumscribed by the fact that they were women engaged in work that was male-defined. To utilize the discourse of exploration was to deny their gender and identify totally with the male explorer. To 'conquer' and 'penetrate' unknown lands was a male activity, and the exploratory routes had provided the grounds upon which men could prove their masculinity, suppressing foreign lands as they had suppressed women, imagining and describing those lands as female (Said, 1979). The tensions between being a women and being an explorer were made manifest in many ways, including how the women chose to dress themselves (whether they should dress like men in trousers or wear long dresses was always at issue), but in their choice of language these women were confronted directly with those tensions. Their search for a vocabulary that would lend legitimacy to their experiences was a search that brought them abruptly against the confines of the world circumscribed by a male-defined language.[2] In this, they could not take language for granted, and they undoubtedly were forced to recognize its opacity.

Many women travellers took to referring to themselves as men in order to better utilize the language of exploration. Identifying with the male exploratory tradition was empowering for these women, as it legitimized their own travels, and supported their claims to authority over different races. As Birkett points out, at times their identification with the masculine was so strong that their references to themselves as men were often unwitting, as when Mary Kingsley wrote, 'I have given into temptation and am the third Englishman to ascend the Peak' (quoted in Birkett, 1989, p. 124). Their (perhaps unconsciousness) recognition of the power of language was apparent in their acceptance of male titles for themselves, and in the fact that they often gave their male attendants female names.

The problematic of language was apparent to many women travellers at another level – the tension between the subjective and objective in the reports of their travels. When it became apparent that the objective mode of discourse was favoured in the 'scientific' world of professional geography, many women began to remove the 'I' from their writing. Although many wrote their first acounts as mixtures of personal reminiscence and factual observations, they soon learned to distinguish and separate what was becoming defined as different forms of knowledge (Middleton, 1982). Mary Kingsley originally intended to write one large volume of her West African voyages, but ended up writing two separate books: one factual, the other more of a narrative (Frank, 1986). Mary Gaunt always wrote a factual travelogue and a novel of each of her trips (Birkett, 1989). In this, women were once again forced to confront the problem of language.

The issue of representation has been identified as one of the central concerns of a post-modern geography (Cosgrove, 1989; Cosgrove and Domosh, 1991), and post-modern social science (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Whether the discussion centres on the reading and decoding of texts (Duncan and Duncan, 1988) or the proper use of drawings and travelogues (Quoniam, 1988), attempts to rid the discipline of a belief in the naivete of language will provide many challenges for reconstructing human geography. As explorers whose experiences lay outside the realm of acceptable discourse, women were forced to confront that dilemma early. Their recognition of the power of language, that it both encodes and represents a particular view of the world, and therefore can be used to support that view (as when women referred to themselves as men, and their male attendants as women) or challenge it, is a recognition that takes on new meaning in the recent debates and discussions about language, both within geography and feminist theory (Irigaray, 1974; Franklin, 1985).

OTHER EXPLORERS

Subsequent stories of women explorers and geographers are in many ways quite similar to those of their Victorian predecessors. Many of the same considerations informed the activities of the next generation of women explorers, those that were associated with the Society of Women Geographers. Although exploring in the post-Victorian period, these women were similar to their Victorian predecessors in their general life contexts, as well as their exclusion from the scientific community. The women explorers that Elizabeth Fagg Olds writes about in *Women of the Four Winds* (Annie Smith Peck, Delia J. Akeley, Marguerite Harrison, Louise Arner Boyd) form what Olds calls a transitional group between the Victorian lady travellers, and modern women scientists (Olds, 1985). Still not accorded scientific status, and living lives often circumscribed by their sex, these women nonetheless set aside much of their Victorian past to embrace the new scientific community. For example, Louise Arner Boyd, an independently wealthy socialite from San Francisco, provided the funding herself for most of her polar expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of those expeditions, however, were officially sponsored by the American Geographical Society (AGS), and were undertaken with explicit scientific goals. Trained botanists, geologists and surveyors accompanied many of her voyages, and the AGS published in book form the results of the expeditions (Olds, 1985). Boyd enthusiastically embraced the professional credentials that sponsorship by the AGS afforded and made sure that she purchased for her trips the very best scientific equipment and instruments available.

Yet she herself was not a trained scientist, and accordingly was often treated with much disdain:

> Her emergence from a wealthy society background to become a significant explorer with serious credentials required that she buck up against even more derision than most women explorers of the day. Not only was she female and a wealthy socialite, but she was not a scientist. And as she would learn, even in the field of polar exploration she would not always be accepted by the snobbish band of specialists (Olds, 1985, p. 236).

Although scientific activities were integral to her expeditions, Boyd's adventures were not explicitly

meant to discover new lands. The so-called new lands that she did survey were discovered by accident:

> Louise had never set out to 'conquer' and 'discover'; she more or less stumbled upon what became Miss Boyd Land and the Louise Boyd Bank. So when she at last decided to go to the North Pole, her motive was curiosity and a need for emotional satisfaction rather than ambition (Olds, 1985, p. 290).

Not hampered by the strict constraints of Victorian society, Boyd nevertheless had lived the life of a wealthy heiress, sponsoring social parties, and attending appropriate functions. We do not need to stretch our imaginations far to suggest what the adventures of polar expeditions offered in the way of 'emotional satisfaction'. And like her Victorian predecessors, Boyd did not engage in many of the traditional practices of the male exploratory tradition. She only found out after the fact that part of an ice fiord that she had 'stumbled upon' had been named in her honor:

> I am not guilty of giving the name 'Miss Boyd Land' to the land that lies between the De Geer Glacier, which I had the good fortune to discover in 1931, and the Jaette Glacier... My first intimations that this land had been so designated came in a letter from Dr Lange Koch and on seeing the name of his published map (quoted in Olds, 1985, p. 247).

This is not to say that Boyd was not deeply proud of her accomplishments, only that she did not position herself within a tradition that used naming as a form of recognition of accomplishments (a tradition associated with male explorers).

We can only speculate what women in the contemporary geographic community inherited from their Victorian and exploratory heritage. The professionalization of the discipline removed most geographers from the arena of exploration, and women from their histories of exploration. With the hindsight afforded by historical reflection, we can point to the potential contributions of Victorian women travellers with some degree of clarity; a discussion of gender and its implications for contemporary knowledge construction is far less certain (Goodchild and Janelle, 1988, have presented us with some of the data to begin this discussion).

The study of gender and its contribution to the construction of knowledge has been undertaken in several other disciplines, and this work may help us suggest avenues for discussion in geography. The work of Evelyn Fox Keller (1985) in exploring the role of gender in the sciences is particularly enlightening, and her discussion of Barbara McClintock's research on plant genetics suggests several directions in which a women's science might differ from a science that operates totally within a patriarchal system.[3] Perhaps more relevant to geography is the discussion of the implications of women and gender in anthropology. In *Daughters of the Desert: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest, 1880–1980,* Barbara Babcock and Nancy Parezo suggest how women anthropologists have shaped the history of the discipline:

> Restless and rebellious' women seeking freedom from their stays and from their drawing-room domesticity of Boston and New York found in the southwest not only topographical and psychological space, but an otherness that intrigued and nurtured ... As scientists, humanists, romanticists, and activists, they were to significantly shape anthropological understandings, public conceptions, and government policies, regarding the Native American Southwest (Babcock and Parezo, 1988, p. 2).

The stories of these women's lives sound amazingly familiar in light of my discussion of Victorian women explorers. Women anthropologists were often ignored in the official histories of the discipline, they were limited in what they could study and write about, and few held academic posts, though many worked in museums, work that anthropologist Clark Wissler thought was 'fitting for women since it resembled housekeeping' (Babcock and Parezo, 1988, p. 4). The stories of even the most prominent of these women anthropologists, Elsie Clews Parsons and Ruth Benedict, seem to parallel our Victorian travellers. 'They compartmentalized and compromised their discourse, wrote poetry under pseudonyms, and packed away their feminist writings under pressure to conform to male standards of 'scientific' academic anthropology' (Babcock and Parezo, 1988, p. 4). Anthropologists have begun to use the self-reflexivity allowed by their post-modern turn to explore the implications of gender in shaping the construction of their knowledge. It is past time for us to do the same.[4]

IMPLICATIONS

Let me close this essay with suggestions for how we can begin to create a feminist historiography of geography. First, we need to broaden our definitions of geography so that in our histories we do not

restrict ourselves to the canon of the 'great' Western thinkers – to what J. K. Wright called the 'relatively small core area' (1947, p. 81) of geography. Livingstone (1990) and Mitchell and Smith (1990) have made the same plea elsewhere; we have no excuses for continuing to write histories that are essentially an 'exclusionary chronological litany of white, male, aristocratic heroes' (Mitchell and Smith, 1990, p. 233). By discussing the contributions of Victorian women travellers, this essay has attempted to open the borders of geography, and is only one example of how we could construct a more inclusionary historiography.

Secondly, we must always be aware that gender relations and representations are integral to the social construction of knowledge. The story of professional geography has, for the most part, been a men's story – they have been the principal actors and writers. But those men have existed in a social fabric of gender relations, and that fabric serves as both context and text for the history of geography. Specifically, the social fabric enters our histories in at least three ways: (1) The practices of geography – for example, the practice of field work as presented in this essay shows how its use, legitimation and de-legitimation were clearly linked to the social roles of women and their potential access to academic geography. (2) The discourse of geography – the formulation of research questions, and the development of particular methods, theories, descriptions and interpretations of results. For example, the history of professional geography is littered with metaphors and theories which suggest androcentric thinking – the 'invasion and succession' of urban development theories, the 'rational man' of consumer behaviour strudies, the competing 'fronts' of climatic activity, the notion of 'virgin' forests. Felix Driver (1988) has shown how much of the thinking in late nineteenth century social sciences in general and, later, in geography, was part of a moral attempt to order and thereby control the seemingly chaotic industrial city, and Sally Shuttleworth (1990) has suggested that such views of urban life and urban form were implicated in attempts to control women. Her analysis of the metaphors used to describe the female body in medical texts, and the urban 'body' found in social scientific literature, strikes a very loud and clear blow to those who believe in the value-free nature of urban geographic inquiry. (3) The types of knowledge deemed appropriate to geography. Geography's commitment to a value-free, perspective-less, objective science must be questioned in light of feminist critiques, as has been suggested throughout this essay. Such a commitment is itself suspect, since the stories of women explorers raise the issue of how and why 'objective' knowledge was given priority over 'subjective' knowledge. If geographic practices, theories and language have been socially and therefore ideologically constructed, can they embody any objective claims to truth? If the structures of geography are the products of particular historical contexts, and embody the biases of those contexts, then those structures both reflect and legitimize those biases. Geography's commitment to one type of knowledge, 'scientific' knowledge, can itself be seen as an indication of androcentric thinking, as Sandra Harding (1986) has so persuasively shown us.

Thirdly, we must be reflexive in our rewriting of the history of geography. Understanding the contemporary social construction of the field, and how that construction is shaping our practices and the writing of our histories must be part of a feminist historiography of geography. We must question, for example, why the post-modern discourse in geography has been a male-dominated discussion, and what our current commitment to GIS[5] tells us about contemporary gender relations.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent rewriting of the history of geography has ignored the gendered construction of that history, and the post-modern turn in geography has ignored feminist theory.[6] A feminist historiography of geography would require an exploration of the relationship between its social practices and the gender stereotyping of society as a whole, and a reassessment both of the particular historical reasons for the invisibility of women in the discipline, and the traditional belief that new scientific practices (such as codified fieldwork) are necessary by-products of the search for knowledge. Such a reconsideration might lead to an alternative categorization of geographic paradigms based on the accessibility of each of those practices to women (Kelly-Gadol, 1976). To contextualize the history of geographic ideas requires a full recognition of the gendered construction of many of its practices, theories, and methods.

Yet to dwell on why women were excluded from the discipline is to risk ignoring their potential contributions. Given recent attempts to reconceptualize human geography, it is worthwhile to reflect on what geography could have been and could be if it included women's experiences and women's ways of thinking into its own canon (Belenky *et al.* 1986). Although

Victorian women explorers are not the only group of geographers to be excluded from the accounts of 'scientific' geography, their well-documented experiences do provide us with a unique opportunity to recover from our own history sources for a more human geography. These were geographers who wrote novels and travelogues to help capture the richness of their journeys, who openly admitted that they were seeking knowledge as much of themselves as of the lands they explored, and who recognized explicitly the ambiguity of their role as outsider in an alien culture. We do not need to look far afield to reconstruct a post-modern geography – it is in our own backyard, if we would only step outside.

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NOTES

1. The most thorough discussion of those tensions, and of the ambivalent relationship between feminism and post-modernism, is found in the essays in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, edited by Linda Nicholson (1990).
2. Annette Kolodny has documented similar confrontations with a male-defined language in her study of women's experiences in the American West (Kolodny, 1984).
3. The discussion of feminism and the practices of science is a somewhat complicated and oftentimes obscure discourse, often revolving around a debate as to whether feminist analysis will bring about a better science, or the total deconstruction of science. For recent overviews, see Harding (1986), and the summer 1989 issue of *Women's Studies International Forum*.
4. Janice Monk has begun to examine the relationships between women geographers and the course of academic geography in America. For a preliminary view, see Monk (1989).
5. A critique of GIS that is informed by both a feminist and post-modern critique can be found in Curry (1990).
6. For an analysis of a similar circumstance in anthropology, see Mascia-Lees *et al.* (1989).

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Notes

[6] **The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective**
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