Ireland and demonstrates that it can be done well. Another achievement of the book is the successful interweaving of questions of sexuality, gender, and feminism with the workings of nationalism, sectarianism, and diasporic politics of identity. A concluding chapter would have brought the different strands together potentially strengthening the theoretical argument of the book. However, this book represents a unique intervention in debates about sexuality, feminism, and nationalism in Ireland and is an accessible, challenging and enjoyable read.

Breda Gray

doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400289

Sex, gender and science

Myra J. Hird; Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2004, ISBN 1-4039-2177-6 £17.99 (Pbk) 208p; ISBN 1-4039-2176-8 £54.00 (Hbk) 208p

Myra Hird opens *Sex, Gender and Science* with an observation from teaching that anyone who teaches on feminist or gender theory will recognize immediately: the keenness with which students are willing to explore gender, and to accept its social construction, but the parallel reluctance to relinquish the biological 'facts' of the sexed body. Her book has two primary aims: firstly, to make the argument that Western understandings of 'sex' are '...based less upon an actual knowledge of sex 'differences' rooted in morphology than in a cultural discourse that emphasizes sex dichotomy rather than sex diversity' (p. 2); and secondly, to draw on 'new materialism' in order to contest those cultural assumptions. For Hird, the new materialism '...refers to a significant shift in the natural sciences that emphasizes openness and play within the living and non-living world, contesting paradigms which posited a changeable culture against a static nature' (p. 145). She identifies four central tenets to the new materialism – non-linearity and self-organization, contingency, variation and diversity – and explores these via literature from both the physical sciences and from the social sciences, making a powerful case for the role of 'science-literate analyses of matter' (p. 13) within feminist theory.

The scope of the book is wide-ranging, beginning with a review of feminist writing on science and the cultural construction of materiality. Hird then sets out the features and implications of the epistemic and political shifts of the Enlightenment that facilitated a transition from the 'one-sex' body to the understanding of two different, and complementary, sexes, and explores the ways in which the 'essence' of sexual difference – in bones, hormones and genes – has been written into scientific accounts of the sexed body. Chapter 4 revisits

evolutionary theory to argue that, contrary to the arguments from sociobiology and neo-Darwinism, Darwin's original thesis posits that nature can be seen (and is increasingly being seen within the physical sciences) as a 'complex open system subject to emergent properties' (p. 13), rather than one of conformity and linearity. The latter half of the book takes up these principles of the new materialism and non-linearity by looking at the appropriation of sexual reproduction as representative of sexual difference, the silencing of the sexual diversity of living matter, and the intersexuality of the human body. The final chapter reiterates the book's core argument that it is a mistake on the part of feminists to reject science studies as necessarily reinscribing sexual difference in ways which are harmful to women, arguing instead that new materialism offers novel possibilities for both feminist theory and praxis through its articulation of the inabilities of culturally dominant discourses of sexual difference to account for the immense diversity of the natural world. This, she argues, creates not only the possibilities for challenging sexual difference, but more fundamentally, for destabilizing assumptions about the sex/gender binary itself.

The book's argument is rigorously made and is illustrated copiously with the kind of examples that you want to read out loud to those around you. Mushrooms with 28,000 sexes, regenerating livers and human mouths alive with hundreds of bacteria, amongst a host of other examples, line up to illustrate the 'superabundant diversity' (p. 13) of nature. Hird describes at entertaining length the contortions that primatologists have gone through in order to find explanations for homosexual behaviour that conform to heteronormative understandings of sexual activity as necessarily oriented towards reproduction. The attribution of normatively gendered behaviours to plants and animals is also well-documented, ranging across accounts of marriage and monogamy throughout the non-human natural world, displays of 'modesty' from the pistils (designated as female) of flowers, 'divorcing' birds, 'promiscuous' pollen, and 'spiteful' monkeys who 'selfishly' prevent other monkeys from reproducing. Other case studies are more sobering. In particular, the discussion of intersexuality in humans, and of the interventions that a rigid sexual dichotomy demands, illustrates clearly Hird's central argument that biology, and the appreciation of diversity, offers an essential means of challenging sex dimorphism, whose cultural production makes its material consequences no less real for those falling foul of that particular nexus of knowledge and power relations.

Sex, Gender and Science is a useful antidote to the impasse between biology and social constructionism that is apparent in the prevailing reluctance to relinquish the certainties of the sexed body and to engage directly with science studies. It is consistently argued and engagingly written, with a helpful glossary at the end of the book to facilitate the science-literacy it advocates. In the penultimate section of the final chapter, Hird proposes that rather than resist diversity, we

should learn from bacteria, the diversity of whose accomplishments take over a page to list, declaring finally:

'So in the tired game of identity, I would choose neither goddess nor cyborg (Haraway 1991). I would rather be a bacterium'

(p. 151)

By the end of the book, I couldn't have agreed more.

Karen Throsby

doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400290

Some of us: Chinese women growing up in the Mao era

Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng and Bai Di (editors); Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London, 2001, 224p, ISBN 0-8135-2969-7 £15.50 (Pbk); ISBN 0-8135-2968-9 £40.50 (Hbk)

At last, Anglophone readers have an alternative to the stereotypes of suffering and persecution that dominate the numerous autobiographical accounts of the Mao years. Mao's rule involved crimes on a scale and of an order that have still not been properly accounted for. The experience of many who grew up under Mao's 'red banner', including those contributing to this volume, does not deny this, but it suggests a much more complex history than the accepted narratives of the 'victim' genre offer.

Some of Us is a collection of nine memoirs written by Chinese women, mostly from privileged urban families and now working as academics in the United States. Some were members of Mao's 'sent down youth', whose adolescent years were spent thousands of miles away from home in distant villages and state farms. Often left at home to fend for themselves during years when their parents were sent away to undergo political training in 'cadre schools' during the Cultural Revolution, they tell of the delights and difficulties of dealing with the independence that political circumstance gave them. The bare 'facts' of their adolescent experiences are not too different from many of those who have written the familiar mainstream accounts. Yet wanting to account for their past from their detached position in the States, they offer an appreciation of the powerful effects of the Mao era in shaping their cultural and personal identities. In their memories of their adolescent dreams, of their rebellions against their parents, and their own emerging and powerful sense of self formed through the opportunities and limitations that these years represented, the volume thus gives us fresh perspectives on how and why young people of the time 'bought into' Mao's project of social transformation.