

present. These are all good things to argue for, especially when good faith exchanges of differing political perspectives feel especially hard to come by. *Futures* might even be read to suggest that periods of disorienting, even existential crisis for political parties should be viewed, from a distant enough perspective, with more sanguinity. These might well be the very moments in which the best (re)thinking gets done. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine the 1997–2010 sequel would contain quite the same level of generative, big-picture debate.

Murphy's approach is—to his credit as a historian—cautious, but it is a powerful example of the role historians can play as debunkers of inherited, politically motivated mythologies from our recent past; as narrators of complexity; and as arch-pluralists, urging us to understand political actors and thinkers on their own terms. Will it change the mind of anyone who already knows what they think about the New Labour governments? Probably not—although latter-day Blairites, Old Labour romantics, and indiscriminate opponents of the changes the party underwent in the period might all gain something from a confrontation with the imagination, dynamic thinking, and intellectual energy that went into this period. After all, the tragedy lurking behind Murphy's book is that, after the raucous cacophony he describes, as the possibilities were narrowed down and attention turned to the day-to-day grind of delivery, at some point the music stopped.

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IPSHITA NATH. *Memsahibs: British Women in Colonial India*. London: Hurst Publishers, 2022. Pp. 496. £30.00 (cloth).  
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Ipshtita Nath's *Memsahibs: British Women in Colonial India* aims to examine the lives of the titular memsahibs as they experienced them, and in doing so challenge some of the entrenched stereotypes that developed contemporarily and in post-colonial popular culture. Like many in both India and Britain, Nath grew up surrounded by certain (mis)representations of white British women during the colonial period and became increasingly “frustrated to see repetitive and limiting representation[s]” (xxvi) of these women. Building therefore on postcolonial and feminist histories, which questioned if these women could speak, Nath instead argues that they have not been heard. Utilizing both published and archival narratives from the women themselves, Nath examines the lives of memsahibs during the entire period of colonial rule, from the early expansion of the mid-eighteenth century to the mass exodus of Britons following Indian independence.

Nath's analysis follows the journey of British women as they leave their families and lives in Britain to journey to India, encountering the harsh realities of life at sea and the trials of finding a husband on their arrival in India's bustling port cities (chapter 1). From there Nath follows the women as they navigate marriage, motherhood, domestic and servant management, social entanglements, and the challenges of loneliness, boredom and homesickness (chapters 2 and 3) before examining the centrality of travel and mobility to the lives of memsahibs and their families (chapters 4, 5, and 6). Moving beyond these experiences, Nath begins to challenge the contemporary representation of memsahibs as frivolous, extravagant, and lazy. She does this by examining their responsibility for maintaining and participating in imperial culture through life in the hill stations (chapter 7); the central role of motherhood to the colonial enterprise (chapter 8); and the changing perception of memsahibs as paragons of strength and virtue in the aftermath of the 1857 Indian Rebellion (chapter 9). The book concludes in 1947 with the exodus of colonial officials following the granting of Indian Independence, and a short consideration of the lives of memsahibs as they returned to Britain.

Three central themes span Nath's work. First, the desire to dispel the misrepresentations and myths of memsahibs in popular imagination. In considering many aspects of memsahibs' lives/identities she is able to expand the horizons beyond the women themselves to position their experience in relation to servants, children, soldiers, officials, and local communities, and move beyond the domestic to public health, housing, social etiquette, security, politics, and travel. In doing so, Nath positions memsahibs at the center of the colonial experience—no longer the marginalized voices they once were and certainly not confined to the stereotypes of popular culture—demonstrating the way in which the history of memsahibs can be a lens through which to examine the history of the colonial community. Secondly, Nath considers the importance of the memsahib as a culturally constructed identity, the pressure placed on British women in India to adhere to strict codes of behaviour, and the exclusivity of the very title of “memsahib.” She explores the ways in which memsahibs were essential to the maintenance of colonial codes of practice and the image of empire, centralizing the experience of women within wider colonial discourses. Finally, Nath identifies the complexity of sentiment felt by Britons towards India's climate, people, culture, and society. She builds on the work of Indrani Sen, emphasizing the duality and tension felt by many memsahibs of being at once an insider within the British colonial establishment and an outsider in a distant country. Whilst Nath's exploration of this tension and complexity is evident and could be expanded on, the work still provides the reader with an essential entry point to consider the nuance of colonial identities and sense of belonging.

In her introduction, Nath emphasizes the importance of utilizing the words and writings of memsahibs in her examination. She employs many of the most thumbed accounts including the published accounts of Eliza Fay, Emma Roberts, and Mary Sherwood alongside less common archival accounts, adding voices which are currently only quiet whispers in the literature. Combining these voices provides Nath with an opportunity to examine a broad spectrum of memsahibs' experiences, from the wives of soldiers, merchants, and officials to those embedded in the upper echelons of colonial society. Of course, inherent in the privilege of preservation many of these accounts are not as representative as we may hope, but Nath makes a clear attempt to engage with a cross section of the available material. Interestingly and refreshingly, Nath recognises the ambivalence of many memsahibs' accounts, removing neither credibility nor significance but acknowledging the complexities of women's relationships with India, writing “they cried, complained, appreciated India, and denounced it all at the same time” (31).

*Memsahibs: British Woman in Colonial India* is a thoroughly researched and engaging read. It captures the essence of existing research into the lives and experiences of memsahibs, collating and expanding it for a new audience. Those new to the study of colonial India or the female colonial experience will find this a helpful introduction to the topic and a springboard for further exploration of works by Indrani Sen and Nupur Chaudhuri, amongst others.

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The nine eclectic essays in this book examine how British murder mysteries published over a span of eighty-five years “both *shaped* and *were shaped* by their social, cultural, and political