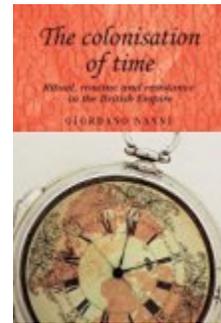


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Giordano Nanni. *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire*. Studies in Imperialism Series. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012. xviii + 254 pp. \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-8271-9.

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Time exercises cognitive control over humanity: it is unseen yet palpable. Its governance over appropriate and inappropriate actions pervades the modern world. In August 2012 in Manitoba, Canada, town and village councils debated opening retail malls and private businesses on Sundays. Two towns adopted bylaws on Sunday shopping: one kept stores closed while the other opened businesses. The media coverage never got beyond the local debate. No comments on recognition of the continued presence of Christian influence over appropriate conduct on the Sabbath and acceptable leisure time for “moral, sober and self-improving activities” appeared (p. 48). No one mentioned the Sabbath, the marker of “what counted as ‘work’ and ... ‘leisure’” in modern society (p. 102). Similarly, no coverage of modern preoccupation with revenue generation, the economic bottom line, appeared. However, the debate in 2012 demonstrates how Christian ideals of time usage still affect people in a purported secular society; and “how deeply entrenched time is in society” (p. 106).

Time’s emphasis appears logical, without value, in the twenty-first century. However, for Giordano Nanni, it is a concept that was meant to advance colonization of minds, hearts, and spirits in the nineteenth century. *The Colonisation of Time* traces the application of the concept to Brits; the five Kulin nations of Aboriginals—the Woi Wurrung, Wathaurong, Boon Wurrung, Daung Wurrung, and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples—in Victoria, Australia; and the Xhosa, Tswana, and Khoisan indigenous to the Cape Colony of South Africa. Through exposure of missionary and entrepreneurial tendencies to subjugate indigenous knowledge of time through the punitive depiction of the timeless “other,” Nanni demonstrates

how Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) became an unquestioned and nonnegotiable tool deployed to save “others.”

The Colonisation of Time opens with a discussion of the intellectual history and practice in nineteenth-century Evangelical Protestant treatises, correspondence, personal diaries and journals, travel writing, poetry, magazines and periodicals, sermons, lectures, and books and secular scholarly work that led to the imposition of a standard routine governed by the clock. The author focuses on Britain, the home of Greenwich and GMT, and draws from legal, religious, and technological breakthroughs in recognition and development of means to calculate and promote standard time. Nanni proceeds to track the export of ideals of time from Britain to two of its colonial frontiers: Australia and South Africa. In Britain, citizens had to accept “universal definitions of time, regularity, [and] order” (p. 3). The clock was one of many means to split family production and community solidarity. It became associated with profit accumulation and corporate hegemony in British society and Christian worship. Individuals, not families and communities, produced goods on the clock.[1] Resistance comes up, however, only when Nanni speaks of the colonial frontiers. He suggests that all Brits and newcomers to Britain accepted, without question, the twenty-four-hour clock and the objects that conveyed this order to subjects: bells, whistles, clock towers, and watches. In reality, it seems as though the imposition of standard time in colonial spaces was as much about ensuring comfort and order in “the wilderness” as it was about ensuring that its settlers in South Africa and Australia remained loyal to the empire.

Evangelical Protestant missionaries transferred the secular recognition of time to colonial frontiers. Nanni analyzes photographs of mission stations to demonstrate how indigenous foundations of societal order were replaced by Christian ideals through agriculture, education, and worship. He considers responses grounded in indigenous knowledge systems through oral histories, poetry, and hymns, and teases perspectives out of missionary and government records. Despite a connection by missionaries and scientists to “the spirit of modernity,” Nanni also briefly unveils the conflict between what he calls “biblical chronology” and “geological time” in chapter 4 (p. 156).

Chapter 6 is the book’s strongest chapter. Early on, Nanni argues that “Britain’s leading Evangelicals ... [and their] missionary societies came to proffer an alternative, ‘humanitarian’ model of imperialism” (p. 17). Missionaries gave what they thought was a gift to indigenous peoples: education. They conceptualized it as a benign liberator of the mind and a commodity for social and economic development and progress.[2] To refuse the gift “framed within the rhetoric of philanthropy, self-improvement,” and nationalism signaled a trap in backwardness; these communities, deprived and in need of help, were thought of as “culturally oriented towards the past” (pp. 86, 205, 232). Here, Nanni concentrates on a Lovedale missionary school in the Cape Colony to show how time was not only part of profit accumulation and Christian worship but also an intrinsic part of the curriculum. Like the stories of the monarchy and prime ministers, time was, like English literacy, numeracy, and citizenship, part of the “hidden curriculum” celebrating empire. It was to be naturalized into the school’s routine to ensure that children and youth grew to become loyal to the British Empire in Australia. For teachers and staff, “ideological conversion” would guarantee survival of routine and economic benefit but most important, redeem indigenous peoples through careful guidance at school (p. 20). Nanni correctly observes that academic study took second priority over lessons in “morality, sobriety, discipline, rationality and civilisation” (p. 198). Chapter 6 is a case study in replacement of indigenous peoples’ worldviews with the supposedly superior and apparently value-neutral colonial mind-set in school: cognitive imperialism.[3] This superb chapter could stand alone as a piece for study in undergraduate and graduate history of education courses.

Nanni, like his predecessor historians of Christian missions, recognizes that colonies were not spaces where colonizers, whether settler-entrepreneurs, missionaries,

or civil servants, replaced the lower and less advanced temporal culture with a higher temporal culture.[4] The imposition did not happen neatly, and indigenous peoples in Australia and South Africa did not passively accept “this new way of thinking” about order. In his case studies of Victoria and the Cape Colony, Nanni shares stories of resistance and accommodation to suit the aspirations of indigenous peoples contending with the colonial order. Attempts at cognitive control through the bell, the church, and the school were thwarted when lessons were reshaped by those educated in colonial systems to achieve rights to fair work arrangements and land.

There are two deficiencies in this book. Firstly, a quotation in chapter 7, the book’s conclusion, reads: “Both in the Cape Colony and Victoria, the reform of conflicting temporalities, rituals and routines aided settler-colonial and missionary projects—be it with the primary intent of helping to eliminate an Indigenous presence (in Victoria), increasing the productive labour (in the Cape Colony) or helping to justify the dispossession of the natives through Christian and humanitarian intervention (in both settings)” (p. 222). This succinct quotation could be the touchstone to a three-way discussion in a separate chapter of the relationship of time among the imperial power in the global North and its two colonies: a test of impartation of cognitive control across colonial contexts. In such a chapter, assessment of knowledge exchange on appropriate use of time among religious intellectuals and British colonial legislation flowing from Christian ideals that currently sprinkle the book could be grounded. There, points of analysis of how “representations of Indigenous peoples ... travelled across the colonies” through “imperial networks ... forged during the nineteenth century” could be probed extensively (p. 123). Similarly, an analysis of how representations informed laws at key times in the nineteenth century could receive attention. On page 186, Nanni cites passage of the Masters and Servants Act (1856) and the Kaffir Pass Act and Kaffir Employment Act, both passed in 1857. In 1857, the British Province of Canada passed The Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in this Province, and to Amend the Laws Relating to Indians, or the Gradual Civilization Act (1857). It would be interesting to assess how representations and anxieties over indigenous use of time coincided with legislation that seemed to emerge at the same time and throughout the colonial world. This chapter would be an ideal space to develop the argument made by Nanni in the conclusion that colonizers reformed indigenous conceptions of time to advance British dispossession of land.

Secondly, this reviewer wonders if there could be a chapter where the extensive and fine discussion of indigenous temporalities could be a focus. The first endnote in chapter 3 refers to the Mission Voices website as a source to address the “paucity of Aboriginal voices” (p. 117n1). Only a handful of quotations are shared, though, as Nanni goes back to the voices of the colonizer. A deliberate effort by Nanni to set missionary discourse in relation with the subaltern voices under the reign of imperial control in the two colonies would have been appreciated.

Overall, this depiction of the imposition of the rhythm of time through Britain and onto colonial Australia and South Africa in the nineteenth century makes this book original. *The Colonisation of Time* is a story of how GMT inaugurated “a global language” (p. 221). This language shapes debates on Sunday shopping and brings into focus the tenuous relationship of monetary gain with personal rectitude. The town councilors, business owners, and citizens in twenty-first-century Manitoba, like their historical counterparts in nineteenth-century Britain, Victoria, and the Cape Colony, are characters in the narrative of “the dissemination of Christianity, commerce and civilisation” (p. 222). The lack of focus on comparison across colonial contexts weakens its con-

tribution to the literature on globalization and empire. However, Nanni’s eloquent prose results in a compelling study of the way time and its application in order and ritual came to be a way of life in Britain and beyond.

Notes

[1]. See Ruth Sandwell, “The Limits of Liberalism: The Liberal Reconnaissance and the History of the Family in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 84, no. 3 (2003): 423-450.

[2]. See Marie Battiste, “M’ikmaq Literacy and Cognitive Assimilation,” in *Indian Education in Canada*, vol. 1, *The Legacy*, ed. Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert, and Don M. McCaskill, Nakoda Institute Occasional Papers (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 23.

[3]. See Marie Battiste, “Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language, and Culture in Modern Society,” in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 192-208.

[4]. See John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and Indians in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 75, 90-91.

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