



**James Heartfield.** *The Aborigines' Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1837-1909.* London: Hurst & Co., 2011. 379 S. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-70236-2; ISBN 978-0-231-80024-2.

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## J. Heartfield: The Aborigines' Protection Society

James Heartfield tackles an ambitious project in this book, to write the history of the Aborigines' Protection Society from both a metropolitan perspective and by tracing the influence of the Aborigines' Protection Society in the imperial and colonial relations in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and the western Pacific, North America, South Africa and Congo. This approach means that the covers a very broad sweep, drawing on many imperial and colonial contexts and providing significant background to the development of the Aborigines' Protection Society in the metropole. The project is not only an ambitious, but also an important one, because of the need for a clear understanding of this important organisation with a long history of broad influence in many countries of British imperial interest, and also to increase critical understanding of the role of humanitarianism in imperial and colonial endeavours.

The first half of the book is devoted to considering the emergence of the Aborigines' Protection society through an analysis of the 1835 British House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines, looking at the changing outlook to colonial administration during the period of the operation of the Aborigines' Protection Society. Heartfield also considers issues of the organisation's relationship to public opinion in terms of their relationship to public thought regarding race, whether the Aborigines' Protection Society was "snobbish" and considers the question of whether the organisation reflected elite opinion. Heartfield also examines in the first half of the book whether the Aborigines' Protection Society understood indigenous peoples or merely had romantic ideas of indigenous lifestyles and cultures. This first half of the book provides detailed discussion of the personalities involved in the Aborigines Protection Society. The second half of the book turns to the relationship between the Aborigines Protection and imperial and colonial circumstances in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji,

Canada, South Africa and Congo. These chapters follow a loosely chronological framework.

The book is very detailed and is densely written, clearly resting on a foundation of significant research in the history of humanitarian imperialism in a broad range of contexts. The extent of the research undertaken is to be applauded, but the analysis of the research is an area for further development. Readers are asked to digest large bodies of information on disparate topics associated with the Aborigines' Protection Society with little assistance from the author, and are largely left to draw their own analysis from amongst the considerable amount of material included.

The structure of the book tends to mitigate against the development of a deeply analytic approach. Short chapters are devoted in the first part of the book to issues of considerable import to our understanding of humanitarian imperialism, such as racial thought in the work of the Aborigines' Protection Society, or the vexed issue of relationships between settlers and humanitarians. Yet these themes are not developed clearly in chapters in the second half of the book when each colonial situation is considered. Further development of connections and themes throughout the book would make it an easier read and help explain to the reader the relevance of some of the considerable detail included in the book. Overall, there is a sense of disjuncture between events and themes in the material relating to the metropole and the research on each of the sites of the periphery of British imperial concern in the book. To take one example, questions of land and indigenous dispossession routinely arise but are not compared between different sites. It appears that the flow of information is assumed to be between centre and periphery, so that comparisons between the different colonial sites considered are not developed. The best transnational work helps readers to integrate ideas and events from different sites and draw connections be-

tween them.

The clearest analysis offered by Heartfield comes through in his discussions, arising at regular points in the research, of class and the tensions between the interests of those living in the metropole and imperial sites on the periphery. Analysis of these central issues in the history of humanitarian imperialism tends to be gestured towards, however, rather than developed fully. Had this analysis been clearly carried out, the work would make a very important contribution to recent historical work in the analysis of relationships between centre and periphery in empire.

There is scope too for very valuable discussions of the role of gender in humanitarian work, with a number of examples of the important work of female humanitarians (see, for example, pages 244-54). There are additionally a number of examples dotted throughout of the way that indigenous leaders appealed to the Aborigines' Protection Society and the success or futility of humanitarian

interventions on their behalf (for example, pages 206-7, page 245). Drawing out this type of analysis would lead to a broader discussion of the place of the Aborigines' Protection Society within the history of the British Empire.

Overall, the lack of development of clear analysis from such breadth of research is a lost opportunity. The extent of the author's research and the rich material presented would lend itself to detailed analysis and could make a significant contribution to understanding of humanitarian imperialism. Readers will appreciate the detailed empirical research on the Aborigines' Protection Society's interventions in a number of different imperial and colonial contexts, but engagement with the historiography of imperial and colonial formations, the nature of humanitarian work and its contribution to imperial projects, or scholarship on the contribution of transnational histories to historical understandings would see this work reach its full potential.

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