



Erik Linstrum. *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016. 309 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-08866-5.

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Published on H-Asia (March, 2018)

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In this book, Linstrum attempts to show the dialectic between the aspiration of British colonizers to control and regulate their imperial subjects by innovations in psychology at the turn of the last century and the subversive potential of such an undertaking: "The gap that opened up between far-reaching aspirations and disillusioned realities is a central theme of this book" (p. 2). Unlike other scholars who have written about the use of psychology in the establishment of empire, he highlights a paradox at the heart of this enterprise. The investigation and attempt to understand the inner lives of their colonial subjects generated interest, curiosity, respect, admiration, and empathy for the "natives" and called into question the civilizational motives of their imperial overlords. This disrupted the primary goal of this project, namely to better regulate, subjugate, and dominate them.

Linstrum shows how the new techniques of psychological testing, laboratory experiments, and psychoanalysis were used in a dual way to both challenge and confirm racial hierarchies. Colonialists hoped to use psychology to "strengthen British control by improving efficiency and governing emotions"; to ensure the smooth running of factories and armies; to recruit talent for government jobs and limited school placements;

to combat anticolonial movements and to remold families, economies, and societies (p. 2).

But these techniques also served to "expose pathologies at the root of the relationship between colonizer and colonized"(p. 1). In the attempt to reconcile human diversity with a universalist model of the mind, psychologists had to confront, and account for, the assumptions and prejudices that fed imperial rule, as well as the needs of colonial regimes. Researchers learned to respect local practices, became skeptical of plans for total control, and began to question the positive benefits of imperial rule. Psychological knowledge complicated rather than reinforced the project of empire.

Well researched, rivetingly written, and with revealing photographs which document the work of colonial researchers foregrounded with their subjects on the margin, Linstrum's central concern differentiates his work from that of other scholars who have written about the intersection of modernity, psychology, and empire. The latter have tended to focus more on the use of the human sciences and psychology to highlight cultural difference in order to stigmatize and put down those they sought to rule, thereby valorizing imperial values and upholding empire. Linstrum on the other shows that science and research can

swing either way—and can dislocate rather than buttress such values.

He shows how from one end of the globe to the other, government bureaucrats, academics, missionaries, and anthropologists used personality and intelligence testing, as well as the theories of Jung and Freud to try to research, rationalize, "modernize," and control their subjects. He has conducted a vast survey of primary and secondary source material to make his case. Using archival material from cities on five continents, he divides them into three categories: "Minds," "Tests," and "Experts."

The section titled "Minds" begins with the psychological activities of the Torres Strait expedition, led by William H. R. Rivers and continues with Charles G. Seligman's work on dreams. The story starts in 1898-99 with the study of perception in the Torres Strait expedition, in which Cambridge researchers strove to determine whether the tools of Western science could be usefully applied far from the place of their invention. Their findings—that colonized minds were intelligent, adaptable, and diverse—was unexpected and unsettling. The section titled "Tests" deals with missionaries' and educators' enthusiasm for the new intelligence tests, also covering the application of aptitude tests for the army and colonial labor markets. The section titled "Experts" describes the various psychological activities employed to suppress the growing independence movements and examines psychological mechanisms for the continuation of Western hegemony in the former British colonies.

Jack Meserve, who wrote about Linstrum's work in *New York* magazine's blog "The Cut," gets it precisely right. He argues that the fundamental tension Linstrum unearths in *Ruling Minds* is still with us today. The social scientists and psychologist whose stories and experiences he documents in this book were doing something innovative and reformatory: "They were often the only ones arguing, No, there's no such thing as 'martial races'

and Yes, mental states really are identical in Africans and Europeans.... But they were also working, formally or informally, for an empire that treated their subjects as subhuman.... The history of this tension—between embracing science's ability to improve people's lives and being aware of its tendency to reinforce existing hierarchies—is a reminder that the line isn't always so clear."^[1]

Note

[1]. Jack Meserve, "How Psychology Helped Support—and Subvert—the British Empire," blog post, The Cut website, February 16, 2016, <https://www.thecut.com/2016/02/psychology-helped-and-hurt-the-british-empire.html> (accessed February 28, 2018).

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Citation: Madhu Sarin. Review of Linstrum, Erik. *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. March, 2018.

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