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Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire, by Erik Linstrum. Cambridge, Massachussetts, Harvard University Press, 2016. 320 pp. $39.95 US.

Erik Linstrum's history is one of contradiction: of psychological techniques adopted with the aim of aiding control in the British Empire, but also of their continual ability, through unexpected findings, to undermine it. This is a story of incredible reach and influence on the one hand, but ambiguity and variety on the other. Linstrum challenges the Saidian notion that expertise aided and abetted the drawing of lines of difference, instead following Susan Bayly's work on caste in the subcontinent (in Peter Robb, 1995) to indicate the existence of a disputed intellectual discussion as opposed to a canon of expertise. The book demonstrates how often psychologists highlighted the universality of human experience and behaviour, cutting across racial hierarchies, rather than producing research that consistently supported the plans and ideology of the colonial state. Documenting shifting and personal networks, Linstrum's overall argument offers not so much systemacity as a picture of variety. What the book highlights above all is a diverse and dynamic relationship between psychological methods and the colonial state, where expectations were often thwarted but the promise of efficiency and rationalism kept psychology in vogue over the course of a century.

The book develops chronologically from experiments undertaken in the Torres Strait islands in the 1890s to efforts to understand the insurgencies of the 1950s in Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya. With the space of one monograph to survey the application of psychology throughout the British Empire, the approach is necessarily of providing snapshots taken from different areas of Empire at different times. This also valuably

highlights variety and avoids the risk of portraying imperial systems in too coherent or systematic a light. Linstrum seeks to emphasise networks, not just within the British Empire but also to include the many other adherents and drivers of psychological discourse, notably in the United States. The primary network under discussion, then, is of western psychology and its observations of 'the rest'. However, Linstrum works against the idea of western 'experts' working in tandem with the colonial state to produce and support government through his central argument: that psychology produced unexpected conclusions and challenged existing thinking throughout its relationship with the British Empire.

The arguments are illustrated through the case studies at the heart of each of the six chapters. These are richly personal, contextualising the work of the different researchers within their backgrounds and preconceptions to highlight the multiplicity of influences and varied scientific conclusions underlying the discourse of psychology in Empire. Chapter one documents the experiments undertaken in the Torres Strait from 1898 by a group of researchers seeking to compare mental life between peoples through tests of perception. Although highlighting that the presumption of racial superiority remained a potent one, Linstrum indicates how the work relied upon close human relationships between scientist and 'native'; indeed, this closeness was emphasised as adding to the reliability of the test results. The differences in personality and normal human interactions which resulted effected a challenge to prevailing notions of separation and difference, rather than a confirmation of them. Similarly, in chapter two, the close study of Charles Seligman's comparative research into dream imagery concludes that the results demonstrated not the difference between the supposedly 'civilised' and 'uncivilised'

worlds, but their shared concepts of dreams as mystical or predictive. Between them, these opening chapters show an undoing of the idea of a ‘simple native mind’, laying the groundwork for more intensive research into the native unconscious.

Chapters three and four consider the uses and challenges of mental and aptitude testing. Chapter three highlights how, as so often the case, scientific interest followed moral beliefs, as the introduction of intelligence testing in India was considered a method that would provide efficiency and fairness in the distribution of limited educational places. The design of these supposedly depoliticised and culturally neutral tests, however, was heavily inflected with the pernicious presumptions of racial and cultural hierarchy. Similarly, in chapter four, the discussion of aptitude tests for military candidates in World War II emphasises the focus on ‘character’ above ‘intelligence’, and the continued belief that an ‘old hand’ could judge this by eye.

Chapters five and six illustrate the established reliance on psychological ‘experts’ by the end of World War II, with their methodologies seen as key to understanding and infiltrating collective resistance to Empire. Whilst demonstrating the pervasive influence of and belief in psychological method, though, Linstrum’s concluding chapters indicate the continued role of rumour, stereotype and violent torture underlying a theoretical shift to psychological warfare. Linstrum argues that, rather than providing answers and resolution, psychology’s enormous and ambiguous promise bought it a consistent place in the British colonial world, even as individuals and their research exposed unexpected conclusions and challenges to existing

thinking. Across changing circumstances, this book highlights a consistent but contradictory discourse underlying the late British Empire.

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