

Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire. By Tony Ballantyne. Palgrave, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, 2002. xi + 266 pp. NZ price: \$69.95. ISBN 0-333-96360-1.

BY WHAT METAPHOR should we think of the British Empire? Was it a 'wheel', with spokes radiating outward from a metropolitan centre? Was it an archipelago, dotted with islands of 'Britishness'? Was it a nursery for hatchling nation-states? If each of these metaphors makes assumptions about the articulation of power and agency, then *Orientalism and Race* offers instead the metaphor of 'overlapping webs', which expose a 'multi-sited' negotiation between 'transnational cultural movements' and local, national, and imperial concerns (pp. 14–15). The transnational movement in question is Aryanism, that bundle of ethnological, historical, and racial claims produced by European encounters with India's Sanskrit traditions. Ballantyne argues Aryanism was a crucial structuring ingredient of imperial culture, representing 'knowledge production and dissemination within the imperial project' (p.8). In six impressively eclectic chapters, *Orientalism and Race* brings together several loci — but most importantly India and New Zealand — to examine how scholars, colonisers and indigenes collectively interrogated the 'Indocentric' linkages between language and race, systematized 'religion' in India and the South Pacific, and fabricated 'new' Maori and Hindi identities through dialogic engagement.

The most impressive feature of *Orientalism and Race* is the consistency with which it probes relationships between multifarious colonial 'sites'. Ballantyne opens, as might be expected, with a reappraisal of the East India Company's 'Orientalists', but he explicitly relates the empirical legacies of 'Indocentrism' to the wider experience of colonial rule in New Zealand and the Pacific. Key figures such as Sir William Jones and Max Müller lastingly framed interpretation of Vedic texts through philology; while depending on indigenous cooperation to unlock linguistic expertise, Europeans then 'discovered' Aryan descent in the linguistic structures of Sanskrit and Maori (in effect, disempowering the content of indigenous texts or traditions). Ballantyne's key point, however, is that philology and ethnology produced a highly fluid form of Aryanism. In the Indian context, it could articulate the grandeur of the Aryan past, the degeneracy of the Indian present, and kinship as well as difference between European and Indian peoples. In the New Zealand setting, Aryanism could be defended (Richard Taylor, Edward Shortland, Edward Tregear) or challenged (J.L. Thompson), but remained a highly flexible way of rendering colonial and indigenous relationships. Neither in India nor in New Zealand, Ballantyne insists, was Aryanism primarily a 'whitening discourse' or even an instrument of racial differentiation; its nuanced claims of circulation and diffusion were a casualty, rather than a cause, of increasingly nationalistic, racially-conscious colonial societies.

Orientalism and Race holds that the European encounter with Indian and Pacific belief systems was similarly complex. Ballantyne concedes, for example, that European understandings of indigenous beliefs were overwhelmingly structured by Protestantism; but he points to the complex repercussions of the textualization, circulation, and critique of those indigenous belief-systems. In India, for example, the profusion of Vedic texts, practices, and beliefs swiftly led Europeans in the eighteenth century to attempt to systematize Hinduism; by the nineteenth century, the rise of Evangelicalism (particularly visible in the work of A.C. Lyall) reframed Hinduism as fragmented and incoherent. Yet Sikh reformers, Ballantyne argues, could appropriate the work of British Orientalists in order to systematize Sikhism as a social, military, and religious identity differentiated from popular Hinduism (and from British exemplars as well). A similar pattern, Ballantyne suggests, unfolded in New Zealand. The legacy of Cook's Tahitian voyages and subsequent missionary 'ethnography' in the Pacific fabricated a 'discourse of negation' lasting until the 1850s, by which Europeans denied Maori beliefs the status of religion. But the wars of the mid-nineteenth century and the colony's emerging market

and print culture created powerful incentives for the textualization of Maori traditions; by the late nineteenth century, Ballantyne argues, European understandings of *tapu* and *tohunga* (as well as the interpretations of 'phallus-worship' advanced by Best and Newman) bore evidence of Indocentric influences.

Throughout, *Orientalism and Race* insists that knowledge production was not simply a story of European hegemony, and that Hindi and Maori sources reveal 'powerful and divergent indigenous engagements with Aryanism' (p.11). The main evidence for this appears in the two final chapters, which deal with the self-construction of nineteenth-century Maori and Hindu identities. Ballantyne argues that Maori actively appropriated the tools provided by literacy and printing; by successfully disembodied colonial knowledge, Maori were able to reshape Christianity to their own purposes (as with Te Kooti's adoption of Old Testament narratives of oppression), and craft a discourse of racial origins that was more relevant to them than Pakeha readings of Aryanism. Similarly, he argues, the lineaments of an early Bengali nationalism in late nineteenth-century India can be traced to a Hindu intelligentsia that appropriated European Orientalist learning; such authors found in Vedic traditions the ingredients for cultural and developmental renewal (Banerjea, Ghosha, Dyananda) as well as anti-colonial claims (Tilak). Aryanism, through the eyes of North Indians, could serve as a tool for local and communal identities even as it remained too divisive for pan-Indian unity.

Orientalism and Race thus offers engagement with major problems in imperial historiography, and immerses the reader in current debates in Indian and New Zealand historiography. Yet the weight of that historiography occasionally gives this work a synthetic (rather than source-driven) feel and leaves the reader wanting more. Why, for instance, is the book's portrait of 'knowledge production' in the 'webs' of Empire so thin in both texture and theory? With rare exceptions — the East India Company colleges, Sikhism — the work rarely fleshes out institutional and intellectual nodes by following chains of correspondence or intellectual clientage. And, while *Orientalism and Race* claims to draw 'extensively on Maori and Hindi sources' (p.11), it must be said that this claim holds true only for a modest portion of the book.

Yet *Orientalism and Race* still leaves the reader feeling that a critical problem has been illuminated. Paradoxically, this is a book about Aryanism that calls into question the relevance of that analytic category: what else to make of the fact that an entire chapter on nineteenth-century Maori identity, drawing on Maori sources, is ultimately about the *irrelevance* of Aryan ideas to the Maori? Yet Ballantyne is clearly onto something big. It is impossible to come away from this book without an intensified appreciation for the extraordinary range of negotiations — literal, creative, syncretic, oppositional — between belief systems, print cultures, and imperial and local identities. This may be the real achievement of *Orientalism and Race*, and it deserves the attention of a wide community of historians.

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