GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This thought-provoking book leads us to think of the ways we are all socialised into Western concepts of time. As babies, we establish our own timetables for feeding and sleeping, yet very early in our lives the position is reversed and we become slaves to the clock. Primary school does this to us from the age of five (in Britain, though perhaps later in other countries); we have to be there for a certain time. All through the day, bells signal the periods of study, the time in the playground, the lunch break and the welcome release to go home. When I was a boy, I lived in a city where the day was punctuated by sirens, which summoned workers to the shipyards of the Clyde, or to the iron foundries and other heavy industries of the city of Glasgow. I was well aware that the evening sirens led to the formation of great rivers of workers rushing through the streets and on to the ferries or the trams to get as much free time as possible before the summons on the next day. While these noises have largely vanished from our cities and towns, we still hear the bells of the local church and we see public clocks everywhere. There have traditionally been clocks on the roofs of the stable blocks of great estates, often combined with bells. Every town had its clock steeple as a symbol of its status and its modernity. Clocks were set into the faces of town halls, the towers of churches, and above all railway station buildings. Unless we are determined on non-conformity, time-watching and time-keeping enter into the very fabric of our lives. Time even blinks at us from the screens of our computers.

Giordano Nanni applies this concept to the social and cultural revolution wrought by imperialism throughout the world. Indigenous peoples had different notions of time, based on the positions of the sun, moon or stars, ideas that demarcated days, divisions of the year and seasons in largely different ways. This book charts the manner in which Europeans saw the introduction of Western concepts of time (including weeks and months, as well as hours) as part of their necessary reformation of the world, a reformation that was indeed moral as well as practical in its import. Yet, as he shows, different peoples were handled in different ways, depending on their own indigenous economies and where they were placed on the sliding scale of cultures and their supposed relative 'value'. The ways in which Europeans set out to impose forms of 'time discipline' on the Aborigines of Victoria or the

various African peoples of southern Africa can be distinguished according to the manner in which such people were valued for their potential for contribution to the colonial economy.

Missionaries constituted the shock troops of such colonial conversions, in the widest possible sense. Protestant missions, particularly those with a Calvinist theology, were more or less obsessed with the significance of the Sabbath and with the essential character-forming value of time disciplines. Extraordinarily, they indulged in the wholly atavistic practice of returning to the disciplines of medieval monasticism, marking out the day's devotions and work through the ringing of bells, the sounding of bugles or other noises designed to mark out the day. In analysing this, Nanni makes an important contribution to the debate about the role of missionaries in the crucial socialisation processes of imperialism. But, significantly, he goes further. He recognises that not all Aborigines or Africans accepted such disciplines, often to the despair of their mentors. As in the whole business of offering labour itself, indigenous peoples found ways of resisting, sometimes overtly, often subtly and in a variety of covert fashions.

In other words, Nanni offers a fresh and highly important dimension to the social, economic, religious and cultural aspects of imperialism. In doing so, he demonstrates the ways in which metropole interacted with periphery. He also addresses the kind of issue which too many histories, obsessed with strictly outward-looking forms of political, military and economic issues, have missed. He offers modes of analysis that are of universal application and in doing so he has driven significant approaches to imperial history in fresh and stimulating directions. This book will prove highly illuminating to other scholars, to students at all levels and to those general readers who are simply intrigued by the manner in which imperialism created so many of the characteristics of our modern world. The concept of globalisation has, perhaps, become over-used (and sometimes misused) in modern times, but this book reveals an area of genuine globalisation, the worldwide adoption (if not always acceptance) of one set of concepts of time, one that supremely symbolises the dominance of the imperial powers.

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