GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Since its inception almost twenty years ago, the 'Studies in Imperialism' series has been centrally concerned with the interaction of ideas as well as political, military and cultural phenomena between the European empires and their metropolises. With Heather Streets's book, we have a study which fits these concerns perfectly. As she amply demonstrates, the concept of martial races was not colour-specific. Although it is a notion that has been principally applied to 'subaltern' peoples in the British Empire (and perhaps in other empires too) who were considered to be ideal, born warriors, it is apparent that it was also attached to Highland Scots. By bringing together Highlanders, Sikhs and Gurkhas, Streets reveals the fluid manner in which such an idea could be applied by leading figures concerned with the recruitment and performance of soldiers in the imperial forces.

In doing so, she unveils further complexities in the processes of 'othering' within the imperial context. It is abundantly apparent that the English categorised peoples within the British Isles as 'others'. These would include the Scots and the Irish, and also, perhaps, the Welsh. Anyone who examines the representations of 'Celts' in the cartoons in *Punch* in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can readily see these processes at work. Irish and Scots were invariably gendered, both with feminine and with ultra-masculine characteristics. They were also given specific and unappealing attributes, often animalistic, some of which were attached to politicians of the day. Indeed, we can disentangle further complexities. Within Scotland, people created stereotypical contrasts as between Lowlanders and Highlanders. In Ireland, those of the 'Pale' thought of the people of the West as crucially different. Contrasts were also inevitably drawn between the Protestants of the northern counties and those who inhabited the counties of the West and the South. Martial race theory fits these representations of 'others' in a curious way. Here was a theory which, instead of ascribing negative characteristics, offered supposedly positive ones. In the case of Scotland, it permitted kilted 'others' to be heroes and saviours (as in the Indian revolt of 1857), icons of the alleged moral force of empire.

Of course all of these representations, both in their negative and positive forms, were in several senses fabrications. The 'Highlanders' who were recruited to the martial kilted regiments were as likely to be the inhabitants of the urban slums or the rural Lowlands as of the Highland glens where pastoralism allegedly produced natural warriors, concerned – like the peoples of northwestern India – to protect herds and lands against the depredations of neighbours. The extolling of the kilted

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

warrior in countless paintings and engravings of imperial actions concealed the fact that the kilt was a garb singularly unsuited to military activity, particularly in hot climates. Moreover, indigenous peoples were often intrigued by the gendered instability that the kilt seemed to convey. But just as leading imperial and military figures placed martial race theory at the forefront of their recruitment and deployment policies, so did reputations, inflated or not, often have an effect upon the self-image of the regiments and the soldiers concerned. In these ways did the theory produce a circular, self-replicating effect. It may even be that the supposed martial races became more warlike precisely because it was expected of them, not just by senior officers, but also by a public influenced by perpetual images and stories celebrating their prowess.

It is tempting to imagine that Scots, Sikhs and Gurkhas all shared these energising myths, promoting recruitment in very different home locations and military action in similar imperial ones. While economic disadvantage must always be seen as playing a key role in the motivation of individuals joining the colours, still there must equally be a complex set of social and cultural forces at play. It could well be that Highlanders, Sikhs and Gurkhas shared more in motivations and experiences than just the martial theory which lumped them together in the minds of an imperial elite and the framers of public opinion.

John M. MacKenzie