

Book Reviews

and traders, are detailed in all their manifold interactions.

For the historian of medical mission, this represents a fundamental shift in sensibility, the subtleties of which are perhaps best exemplified in Good's commentary on Terence Ranger's 1981 essay on UMCA medical mission in Tanzania. Demonstrating how an aetiology recognizing human agency as a prime cause of illness could supplement, and persist alongside, biomedical models of disease causation in the social contexts of colonial and post-colonial Africa, even given the constraints placed on UMCA medical mission by financial and personnel difficulties, its insistence on celibacy among European staff, and an intentional policy of overextension of its mission surrounding Lake Malawi, Good challenges and complements Ranger's arguments, suggesting that issues internal to mission culture, contributing to its spatial extension and character, might well shape medical pluralism in Africa as much as a purported "passive resistance to 'biomedicalisation'" (p. 309).

Some issues with the presentation of the volume detract from its otherwise exemplary nature. Curiously, for instance, no distinction is made among illustrations between maps, photographs, and plans, all listed under the heading "figures": a more comprehensive and clearer map of place names might also have facilitated the reading of a text which so carefully alternates thematic and chronological narrative. Arguments regarding climate, lakeshore levels, and topographical isolation of stations would have benefited from relevant maps; among these, the lack of a relief map is perhaps the most significant oversight. From the perspective of a non-geographer, if only to underline the distinctiveness of a geographic approach to the history of mission, it might help to indicate the intellectual heritage of terms such as "landscape" and "topology" with the care expended on explicating the use of the term "frontier". These minor quibbles do not detract from an otherwise precise, sympathetic, detailed, and original depiction of the internal contradictions implied in the workings of an evangelical mission involved in medical

provision in societies suffering the rapacities of political instability and unfettered imperial capitalism.

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Kavita Philip, *Civilising natures: race, resources and modernity in colonial South India*, New Perspectives in South Asian History, Hyderabad, Orient Longman, c.2003, pp. xi, 305, US\$ 38.30 (hardback 81-250-2586-3).

It is only fair to the readers of *Medical History* to begin this review by saying that this book touches lightly upon the field of medical history. What it does, however, is to address a number of issues with relevance to the history of colonial medicine. *Civilising natures* investigates the role of science in colonial India, with particular focus on the scientific management of forests and the tribal people living there. It includes chapters on forestry, plantation management, ethnography and—although not scientific in the usual sense of the word—missionary activities. A chapter on medicine would have fitted easily into the account. The analyses are limited to South India and the Nilgiri Hills in particular, but one of the strengths of the book is that the broader colonial framework is constantly present in the analyses. Another strength is that the author insists that discourses must be analysed in connection with specific social practices and generally succeeds in doing so.

Drawing on a wealth of different material, primarily little known printed reports dug up from the Tamil Nadu State Archives, *Civilising natures* offers a number of interesting insights. It shows, for instance, how the natives are sometimes seen as part of nature and sometimes as a threat to the proper management of nature. It also shows how local knowledge is appropriated and transformed by colonial science, a theme well known from the history of colonial medicine. Particularly fruitful is the concept of "mixed modernity", which refers to the fact that "modern" scientific management of forests and plantations required the

preservation—perhaps even the reinforcement—of “pre-modern” hierarchies and labour relations.

Rich in specific observations, *Civilising natures* is not, however, a coherent book. This is readily admitted by the author, who states that “Each chapter . . . takes on a different slice of colonial histories of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century science in India” (p. 7) and presents her aim as “to unravel many little stories that are often lost in the more well known big histories of nationalism” (p.13). Consequently, the introduction and the second chapter appear a bit flimsy. Four core chapters follow, each addressing one of the scientific fields mentioned above. Of these four chapters the first two—on forestry and plantations—are highly interesting. The third—on ethnography—is both much longer and less interesting. I have two objections to this chapter. First, the question raised (“how was the native constructed as an object of scientific knowledge?”, p. 141) has already been addressed in so many studies of colonial ethnography. Second, the chapter has a tendency to loose focus by including general discussions of, for instance, James Mill and Karl Marx, which tell us nothing new. Fortunately, the author is back on the right track in the chapter dealing with missionary activities among tribals in South India. It is convincingly argued that religion and science were only superficially opposed in their attitude towards the native, as they both sought to sedentarise people in order to control them and valued “the upstanding, hardworking citizen of an industrial nation as opposed to the uncivilised, lazy non-western native” (p. 215). The final chapter brings in a global perspective through an interesting reading of the transplantation of the cinchona tree, used in the production of anti-malarial drugs, from the Andes to the Nilgiri Hills. In this way, something resembling “real” medical history appears towards the end of the book. Still, *Civilising natures* is primarily relevant to historians of medicine because it offers an inspiring approach to the relation between science and empire.

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Diana Wyndham, *Eugenics in Australia: striving for national fitness*, London, The Galton Institute, 2003, pp. xv, 406, £5.00 (paperback 0-9504066-7-8).

The importance of eugenics in immigration, Aboriginal and public health policies is a subject of recurring interest in Australian history. Joy Damousi devoted her first issue as editor of *Australian Historical Studies* in October 2002 to the themes of race, migration, eugenics, purity and progressivism. Its contributors, and chroniclers of the history of public health in Australia, notably Michael Roe and Milton Lewis, have suggested factors which gave eugenics in Australia its particular shape. Federation of the separate colonial states facilitated a national approach to public health, especially for infectious diseases, and this included an emphasis on the health of visitors and immigrants. The constant perceived threat of invasion meant there was a need to settle tropical Australia. In addition there was the belief that Australians, particularly children, were and should be stronger and healthier than populations in the Northern Hemisphere. Whether early-twentieth-century Aboriginal policy was eugenic or not is currently being debated. It has been argued that policies of the absorption of Aborigines are counter to eugenics.

In *Eugenics in Australia*, adapted from her PhD thesis, Diana Wyndham states that her aims were to show that fears about the declining birth rate early in the twentieth century led to the acceptance of eugenics; that the movement, although derivative, had distinctive qualities; and that eugenics had a strong influence on the development of health services, especially family planning and public health.

Opening with the most important issue of all, she discusses the impact on the gene pool of colonists and Aborigines and the dilemma of whether the tropical north should be settled by Aborigines, immigrants from neighbouring countries or white Australians; this includes a discussion of the White Australia policy. This rather oddly structured book then continues with biographies of four eugenicists, selected to fit a classification developed by historian Geoffrey