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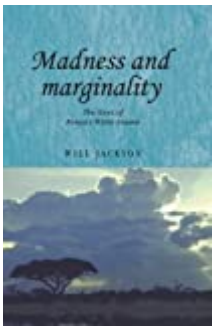

Will Jackson. *Madness and Marginality: The Lives of Kenya's White Insane.* Studies in Imperialism Series. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013. 224 pp. $100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-8889-6; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-5261-0655-1.

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Madness and Marginality: The Lives of Kenyaâs White Insane brings together important insights from diverse studies of empire and of insanity. Will Jackson raises some challenging questions: How can we see beneath the surface of imaginings of a mythical time and place, even an era as close to us as the British settler-colony of Kenya (1920-63)? What can such a perspective tell us about the nature of imperialism and power in the twentieth century? How are race, sexuality, gender, class, desire, fear, and even madness lived and experienced? What are the consequencesâmaterial and mentalâfor those who fail to inhabit fully the roles they feel obligated to fulfill? And, influenced more by Frantz Fanon (1925-61) than Michel Foucault (1926-84), can it be said that colonialism breeds pathological states of mind?

The mythology of British Kenya is recounted in many memoirs and popular imagery. For whites at least, the imagined colony was a âHappy Valleyâ and a place of wide horizons and new beginnings. The interwar era is especially remembered as a time of âalcohol, altitude and adulteryâ (p. 121). Then came the fall: the repression of the state of emergency and the terrors of the Mau Mau Uprising of 1952 to 1959, followed by independence in 1963, and, for most whites, a return to Britain or onward emigration.

Against this, revisionist historians, including those of psychiatry and empire, have, for some time now, highlighted the realities of the violence of colonial dispossession and occupation, and the arrogance, contemptuousness, and self-serving nature of the colonial era. Through this lens, the still powerful scientific racism of the mid-twentieth century, which pathologized all Africansâespecially those who participated in anticolonial nationalist uprisingsâis unsurprising and a vivid example of psychiatry as a form of âsocial control from aboveâ (pp. 13-14). Jacksonâs compassionate study, however, is of the whites of Kenya whose lives have not, until now, been reflected in either romanticized literature or critical historiography: those who found (or lost) themselves experiencing social marginality and mental illness.

Before the 1920s, eccentric, overindulging, or neurasthenic whites were, most usually, repatriated âhomeâ or to South Africa, sometimes after spending a stint in jail, often for their own protection. But, with the waves of more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse immigrants, there emerged a strata of white Kenyan society not easily assimilated into the elite. Their foibles, drunkenness, indiscretions, and transgressionsâespecially sexualâacross the legal, social, and emotional boundaries of racial categories could not easily be passed over.

From 1910, Mathari Mental Hospital in Nairobi provided a place of custodial care for thousands of white men and women deemed to be insane. Jackson gives us close, critical, and deeply sympathetic analyses of more than 250 patient case files from 1940 to 1960. These are retained at the Kenyan National archives, though there were many more admissions whose records are apparently now lost. He argues that these records give us a unique and important perspective of the less than happy realities of colonial life. Chapter 3 discusses the challenges of interpreting such documents, and is an excellent illustration of methodological difficulties imaginatively embraced. Simultaneously, Jackson is respectful of the settler memoirs and memories, analyzing them for what they can offer to help illuminate the expectations of empire.

During the âsecond colonial occupation,â and especially after 1914, most of the white population (which at its maximum in the late 1950s numbered around sixty thousand) lived in towns, and were female, single, working class, or unemployed. âNine out of ten new arrivals to Kenya in the inter-war years left. Failure was less exception than the normâ (p. 57). Many became financially âembarrassed,â and it was feared that they would disgrace their race by becoming âPoor Whites.â After World War II, âthe question of deviance emerge[d] as a significant public concernâ (p. 64).

It was not, Jackson argues, that mental illness among whites necessarily increased in extent, but it was no longer possible to deport or openly tolerate those who did not, or who could not, conform. It was also the case that, just as the numbers of those who were financially and socially marginal increased, tolerance or acceptance of nonconformity decreased. Nor was this only a project of the settler elite: those most at risk of losing their status as members of a racially exclusive, colonially run society could be deeply politically conservative and vilely racist in both conviction and actions.

Indeed, the white Kenyan âcolonial conditionâ (a term Jackson treats with caution) was frequently characterized by âfeelings of antipathy towards Africa and Africans ranging from estrangement to alienation, anxiety and fearâ (p. 40). Even so, this was also a society that required enormous (though hidden) effort to present a face to the world that acceptedâperhaps even embracedâthe âindisputable hardshipsâ of colonial life, often including discomfort, disease, and distances of time and space from loved ones. It was a projected, racialized, and gendered persona. But, for many whites, it was a brittle faÃ§ade, the sustaining of which could be a great burden.

âThe totemic Europeanâ is explored more fully in chapter 4, âBattered Wives and Broken Homes: The Colonial Familyâ (p. 107). The reality of colonial life often included violence, loneliness, marital strain, and fearâfear of âbetrayalâ and murder by African servants, as well as fear of letting down oneâs guard and failing to maintain the strenuous performance of heterosexual whiteness, not only in public but also in the intimate theater of the home.

The following chapter, âStigma, Shame and Scandal: Sex and Mental Illness,â shows that sexual desire, particularly of white women for black men, struck at the heart of colonial boundaries. Such âloose womenâ could run the risk of being ostracized from ârespectable white society,â even being committed to Mathari as irredeemable âpsychopathsâ (p. 131). There were also âother men,â and the Mathari files give us testimony to transvestism, alcoholism, suicide, and same-sex relationships between European and African men. There is, however, little or no evidence that white men were admitted as mental patients due to homosexuality, and it is not possible to discern clear patterns in diagnosis or treatment.

In the final chapter, âStates of Emergency: Psychosis and Transgression,â Jackson skillfully explores the content of whitesâ âdelusions.â These typically identified âNativesâ and âdanger.â As with poverty, it was not so much the reality of fear that was regarded as abnormal; rather, it was not managing oneâs fear that was seen to âlet the side down.â Other fears and terrors encompassed shame, sexual violence, betrayal within the home, and witchcraft. There was also the psychological damage of counterinsurgency training and operations. Jackson raises the intriguing possibility that âthe voicesâ of the white insane constituted a form of protest against, or challenge to, colonial rule. He argues that in the context of the late colonial period, they were a cacophonous refracted, though fractured, truth.

Jacksonâs view that the histories he has brought to our attention in this book are âvaluable in their challenge to the ideologically freighted archetype of âthe Europeanââ is, I think, convincing (p. 177). He successfully shows how for âthose individuals *within* empire who found themselves recipient of psychiatric care … empire was as tedious as it was traumatic, both brutalising and banalâ (p. 13). Moreover, he notes that âcolonial rule … entailed, for whites as well as blacks, stress, jeopardy, doubt and alienationâ (p. 178). While there are some

who might feel that sympathy for white settler suffering is misguided or misplaced, Jacksonâs most important insight, perhaps, is that the absence of these fuller accounts of the past has also meant a missed opportunity to critique the costs and wounds of imperialism, past and present.

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