Leonard Smith

Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1838–1914. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. x + 285 pp. (Cloth US\$116.33)

Despite citing Fred Hickling's proposal that European colonization of the Caribbean represents "a psychosis," Leonard Smith proposes this book as a study of institutions. So perhaps readers miss out on some of the intellectual excitement we associate with Lawrence Fisher's *Colonial Madness: Mental Health in the Barbadian Social Order* (1986), M.G. Smith's *Dark Puritan* (1963), or Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan's more recent *Psychiatry and Empire* (2007). He proposes that British Caribbean asylums after Emancipation followed the more general pattern of life and politics in the colonies—experiencing declining economic significance, some rather half-hearted colonial benevolence, and benign neglect in terms of their practical management. Smith suggests that established British mental health practice, founded on the idea that asylums should be run with diluted "moral management" (an administrative term in the nineteenth century emphasizing a dialogue between patient and doctor) led to a return to policies of physical restraint, a pattern that was translated to the colonies, initially India, Australia, and Canada and then, in the mid-nineteenth century, to the Caribbean. In the islands, those who were seen as mentally ill had previously been placed in prisons, and the first mental hospitals were often developed from disused barracks where the problems of inadequate sewage (which led to epidemics of cholera and dysentery) and physical restraint still continued; money from the metropolis went to the planters in compensation for the loss of their slaves but not to local social and educational reforms.

In 1858 (just before the Morant Bay Rebellion), a scandal erupted at the Kingston Lunatic Asylum and spread to the Colonial Office and the Commissioners in Lunacy in London. It involved charges of partiality, staff violence ("tanking"—a technique curiously reminiscent of today's waterboarding), and the refusal to discharge recovered patients, who were still useful for asylum finances. Smith cites poignant evidence offered by patients to the subsequent inquiry. Eventually some reforms were carried out: a laundry, a bakery, and a fishery with vegetable planting were established, along with a monthly magazine, sports days, dances, and cricket matches. Nevertheless, there were continuing complaints of patient overcrowding, understaffing, and random violence among patients, which resulted in an occasional return to the use of physical restraint.

From surviving hospital records, it appears that the patients admitted were predominantly drawn from the "labouring classes" (presumably the darker

skinned population) and indentured immigrants from India or other West Indian islands. The use of alcohol and cannabis was taken as a cause of mental illness, as was a poor bodily condition and even the practice of religious revivalism. Smith discusses the well-known instance of Alexander Bedward, a Jamaican pastor who engaged in anticolonial preaching, and then stated that he would ascend into heaven; he was arrested for sedition and sent to the asylum. Hospital admission depended on such court orders or on certificates signed by a doctor and a magistrate, usually after violence or arson or the public stripping off of clothes. The records contain little information on physical treatment except for the use of such general sedatives as potassium bromide or chloral hydrate.

Explicit racist theorizing in the medical record appears absent, concealed beneath intermittent benevolence, indifference, and casual abuse. Local psychiatry does not seem to have contributed to a wider debate on racial psychiatry as happened later with studies by the British African psychiatrists G. Tooth and J.C. Carothers in the 1940s and 1950s. Psychiatry remained an intellectual backwater in the Caribbean: there was certainly prejudice and neglect, but little in the way of practicable ideologies of racial or cultural inferiority. Nevertheless, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism* remains a useful introduction to the provision of one particular civic resource during the Caribbean's long nineteenth century.

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