

Racial Science and Human Diversity in Colonial Indonesia. By Fenneke Sysling. Singapore, NUS Press, 2016. viii+303 pp., illus., maps, endnotes, bibliog., index. ISBN 978-981-4722-07-0 (pbk). SGD 42.00.

Fenneke Sysling's *Racial Science and Human Diversity in Colonial Indonesia* touches on many issues readers of *JPH* will find relevant to the study of Pacific history, despite focusing primarily on Dutch studies conducted on the western portion of colonial Indonesia and only in later chapters on Western Papua. Sysling's work is a welcome contribution to the history of racial ideas, scholarly discourses and practices within specific colonial regimes in an area once more commonly referred to by European savants as 'Oceania'. By focusing on the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies, Sysling's book is similar to other scholarship which focuses on a particular European power's colonial territories or language of study, and the interaction between ideas of race from Europe and those formed in the colonies, to tease out fruitful ruptures in racial thought. Parallel studies have been undertaken on the Portuguese in Timor (Ricardo Roque's *Headhunting and Colonialism*), German anthropologists in New Guinea and the Pacific (Hilary Howes's *The Race Question in Oceania*) and the British in peninsular Malaya (Manickam's *Taming the Wild*). This review will highlight some major insights arising from this scholarship in general and Sysling's study in particular, and consider in which directions future work might be undertaken.

Sysling's book takes as its subject matter the discipline of physical anthropology as developed in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies from the turn of the twentieth century until shortly after World War II. The book's two parts, comprising three chapters each, are roughly chronological. Part One studies the practices of physical anthropologists who began studying skeletal remains but who then added bodily measurements, photographs and plaster casts of live subjects to their stores of racial material. Part Two goes on to trace the exploration of major questions within Dutch physical anthropology and the often confused attempts at answering them. The book ends with an important observation, that the abundant physical remains of Dutch colonialism of the Netherlands East Indies are still housed in Dutch institutions today, and that hopefully a book like this will prompt further scholarly and perhaps wider public engagement with the issues surrounding their collecting and the history of science in the Netherlands (180).

Several preoccupations within Sysling's book are shared by the studies on race and anthropology mentioned previously. The book tracks the influences of field encounters, as well as other more well-known European scholars, on Dutch practitioners' thinking. A major insight from scholarship on the development of racial ideas between colony and metropole is that the colony was not secondary to racial science in the metropolises but constituted a central part of the intellectual endeavour in most, if not all, of the situations studied. For colonial Indonesia, Sysling shows the development of physical anthropology from its initial base in Leiden to the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam (34, 40). These institutions had links to the colony through medical training institutions such as STOVIA and military hospitals (38, 54, 55). Later, racial material was collected by professional anthropologists who visited or were based in the colony. Sysling outlines the linkages amongst Dutch scholars and between them and their European counterparts, particularly from France and Germany.

The second part of Sysling's book shifts focus to individual anthropologists, primarily Herman ten Kate, J.P. Kleiweg de Zwaan and Hendrik Bijlmer, and the racial questions they sought to answer. Chapters Four to Six answer Warwick Anderson's call in his 2010 review of Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard's edited book *Foreign Bodies*, published in *JPH*,

where he wrote that '[w]e know enough already about what celebrated European savants thought about race. Yet we know surprisingly little about the racial discourse of ordinary anthropologists ... and other relatively boring people who densely populated places like Oceania'. While agreeing with Anderson that it is necessary to refocus studies of racial science away from 'the big floating ideas' towards how it was put into practice in specific locations, ordinary anthropologists' ideas often make for bland, undeveloped reading. I faced a similar issue when writing about Ivor H.N. Evans, a minor character who wrote on Negritos in Malaya. In a sense, these ordinary anthropologists' lives were often more interesting than their writings, and this is evident in Sysling's retelling of Dutch anthropologists' various travels and exploits. Sysling's conclusion – that there were too many variations in the data for any answer to be convincing, or that Dutch anthropologists' conclusions were at variance with those of major scholars – is adequate, but does not display the nuanced analysis of earlier chapters, mainly due to the material she was studying.

We can discern outlines of a body of knowledge on racial science from Sysling's book and similar publications. In the history of racial science, there were big ideas based more on fancy than fieldwork, and smaller ideas which were specific and did not seem to significantly change larger ideas in racial thinking. Facts and knowledge aimed at discerning racial difference were produced, articles were written and artefacts were collected for museums and institutes, but few conclusions made lasting impressions. Among this confusion and variety of interests, there were connections between ideas, such as when a thread from a minor scholar or government official would pop up again in major anthropological or governmental thinking, and vice versa. This outline of a history of racial science is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's study of knowledge production in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, where fields of study emerge from earlier areas of expertise only to splinter again into other fields, influencing them in idiosyncratic ways. Perhaps it would be fruitful to begin a wider study of the discourse of racial knowledge which draws on the findings of Sysling's book and others like hers.

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