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Priya Satia. *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution*. New York: Penguin Press, 2018.

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As the year 1900 drew to a close, the political Radical and die hard, anti-imperialist Wilfrid Scawen Blunt published a stern rebuke of Britain's imperial century in the *Times* entitled the "Shame of the Nineteenth Century." At that moment of 'self-praise,' Blunt took his readers through a litany of colonial sins "after these hundred years of violent fraud and crime." He considered India, China, Africa, Egypt, and the South Pacific, each an area Britain had encountered and, according to Blunt, each an area in which British imperial expansion resulted in war, taxation, material exploitation, degradation and ruination. British citizens should have reflected on the onward march of wars for empire with humiliation instead of triumphalism. Blunt concluded, "It is not a moment at the close of this sad Century for anything but silence in England, and to sit with ashes on our heads, mourning for what it has brought us in the loss of our old virtue, and—I say it with a knowledge of foreign opinion both East and West—the amazement, pity, and contempt of the whole world of honest men."¹

Blunt's letter illustrates that there has been critical engagement with Britain's imperial wars and their relationship with the British economic expansion since the time of those wars. Inexorably, the wars to which Blunt refers in this letter were connected to arms manufacturing in Britain and Europe more broadly. In connecting Britain's imperial violence to its relationship with guns, Priya Satia has laid the foundation for an ambitious and detailed study which explores British expansion through its weapon manufacturing but also places gun manufacturing at the centre of the industrial revolution. This sets up Satia's narrative as a rejection of the "grand economic narrative of the industrial revolution," which has traditionally been cast a Whiggish march of free markets and entrepreneurship (2). As a cultural, social and trade history this book works remarkably well, but the thrust of the argument constructing the British gun trade as a primary engine of the Industrial Revolution gets somewhat lost in the vast context and detail the author has set for her readers.

Satia's study does stand on the shoulders of previous works like M.L. Brown's, *Firearms in Colonial America: The Impact on History and Technology 1492-1792*, Emrys Chew's *Arming the Periphery: The Arms Trade in the Indian Ocean during the Age of Global Empire*, and, most recently, Louis G. Schwoerer's *Gun Culture in Early Modern England*.² However, *Empire of Guns'* breadth, range, and impressive collection of archival details lends the monograph a more global scope which creates a large contextual framework to see just how pervasive Britain's relationship with guns was. To navigate such a broad approach to the development, manufacturing, and trade of weapons, Satia has wisely split the narrative into three distinct

¹ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, "Shame of the Nineteenth Century," *The Times*, 24 December 1900.

² M.L. Brown's, *Firearms in Colonial America: The Impact on History and Technology 1492-1792* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1980); Emrys Chew, *Arming the Periphery: The Arms Trade in the Indian Ocean during the Age of Global Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012); Louis G. Schwoerer, *Gun Culture in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

sections around the ‘industrial life of guns,’ ‘the social life of guns,’ and ‘the moral life of guns.’ This allows the readers to understand not only the history of the British gun trade but its social and moral implications in a period which war was the norm. (2) These sections are bookended by the curious tale of Samuel Galton Jr., a Quaker and prominent gun maker from Birmingham whose rise and fall and ultimate rejection from the Quaker community illustrates the contemporary view of the morality around the gun trade in Britain.

The evolution of violence and culture from the sword’s “aristocratic quality of chivalry” to the gun’s “bourgeois quality of private property” in the British experience is well explored (237). Following on from this social role of gun ownership, Satia’s well written and convincing analysis takes the reader to the frontier campaigns of the nineteenth century which Blunt so avidly condemned. It is through this evolution that Satia makes clear the role of constant war as well as the increasing role of the British state at a time when it was impossible to distinguish between private and state enterprise. As British state increased investment, it fuelled innovation (154-161), and as frontier war made more and more guns necessary, the state asked for increased standardization and industrialization of gun manufacturing (378).

This of course increasingly became problematic for pacifists like the Quakers and others who wished to resist the gun trade. Satia’s tenth chapter, on the opposition to the gun trade, is excellent in its bringing of this discourse into the contemporary era. This works very well for the British context and helps make Satia’s work important if not required reading on the history of Britain and guns. However, it also raises a something of problem for the monograph. Satia explores the United States’ contemporary relationship with guns almost as an afterthought, citing the National Rifle Association’s interference on an Arms treaty in 2013 (406), issues around the Second amendment and gun control (407-408), and the Heller vs. the District of Columbia Supreme Court Case (408). The issue that this discussion raises belongs to the book’s context, which is largely focused on the British experience, with brief forays into colonial contexts; Satia’s discussions of the United States and gun control feel fairly disconnected with the rest of the book. Perhaps more importantly, it raises questions of comparison. Satia might have compared the British colonial experience with the United States’ ‘manifest destiny’ and its own frontier wars. This would have provided a useful component in understanding the differences between the fierce individualism in the proliferation of arms in the United States and more state-orchestrated system in the British Empire across the book’s industrial, social, and moral frameworks. Despite this, Satia’s study of guns is an excellent re-evaluation of the British gun trade and the state and social networks which aided and resisted it.

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