



Bonnie G. Smith. *Modern Empires: A Reader.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 416 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-937592-9.

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Bonnie Smith's *Modern Empires* is much more than a simple collection of primary documents. Indeed, the well-selected sources sometimes play second fiddle to Smith's elegant but concise narration and contextualization of the major issues raised in each of the twelve chapters. For instance, in her introduction to chapter 8, "Increased Expansion, Increased Resistance," Smith touches deftly on the various motives then driving the "New Imperialism" of the period, imperial collaboration, local resistance, the threat of imperial retribution, and the emergence of reform-minded groups in both the periphery and the metropole. All this is accessibly covered in the space of just three pages. Such expert introduction and narration of the documents which follow makes for compelling and focused group discussion. Crucially, Smith's brevity also ensures more students will be prepared for class.

As one might expect, given her prior research in gender history and imperial identities, Smith's selection of documents throughout shows a determination to include a variety of perspectives on many imperial projects and actors. Documents have clearly been carefully chosen to illustrate the entangled and interconnected nature of the empires under study, which are too often presented in survey courses and peer-reviewed research alike as merely co-existing alongside each other.

Her selection resolutely puts many of the powers that feature most prominently in Western-driven narratives in their proper place, as often marginal forces. This is perhaps most evident in the juxtaposition of early Portuguese exploration and small-scale enslavement of Africans so close to the rise of vast territorial empires like those of the Mongols, the Ottoman Turks, and the Mughals in chapter 1, "The Ferment of Empires, c. 1400-1550." Such timely reminders of scale and reach are well integrated through occasional links provided to electronic resources, such as that on p. 53 comparing the length and carrying capacity of the Chinese "treasure ships" of Admiral Zheng He (some reportedly in excess of one hundred meters long) to the *São Cristóvão* (Saint Christopher), in which Bartolomeu Dias and his men famously entered the Indian Ocean after rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 (just fourteen meters long).

Smith's belief in the centrality of documents to history education is apparent throughout. The inclusion of such a broad variety of sources serves to greatly enrich students' understandings of the processes under study. For example, in chapter 2, "Iberians and Others Take to the Sea," Columbus's letters, Pope Alexander VI's Treaty of Tordesillas (dividing the Atlantic world between Portugal and Spain), Bartolomé de las Casas's defense of native rights in the Caribbean, and Al-

brecht Dürer's wonder at the plunder brought across the Atlantic by Spanish conquistadors are set side by side. The result is a depth of experience and range of perspectives, which provides an excellent foundation for nuanced discussion of the initial impact and legacy of the Columbian Exchange. When additional documents are added to this discussion, such as Bernal Díaz Del Castillo's *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (1560) with its emphasis on the role of key native figures—such as the enslaved concubine and translator La Malinche (Doña Marina), who facilitated Hernando Cortes's conquest of Mexico and later gave birth to his son Martín Cortes "El Mestizo"—yet more depth is added to the already rich mix.

Links are continually made across the different eras under study, as with the inclusion of the Ottoman admiral Seydi Ali Re'is' *Mirror of the Kingdoms* (1550s) in chapter 2, which demonstrates the growing importance of the previously marginal "Portuguese infidels" in the Indian Ocean. The admiral's own tale ultimately ends in the sale of the remnants of his fleet in Gujarat, and an ignominious (and slow) return home over land from India.

Despite a clear-eyed focus on the larger processes at work on the vast canvas of imperial history, the reader never loses sight of the basic insight that "imperial history is about people, their aspirations, experiences, crimes, skills, and endurance" (p. 20). Consequently, distinct sections are given over to "Everyday Life amid Imperial Growth" (chapter 4) and "Revolt against Empire" (chapter 5). The latter is defined broadly to include everything from Adam Smith's reservations on "The Cost of Empire" in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), through various individuals' diary entries, to the noted Persian-Indian traveler Mirza Abu Taleb Khan's "Vindication of the Liberties of the Asiatic Women" (1801), which weighs women's asserted freedoms in South Asia against those en-

joyed (or endured) in "England" and Europe more broadly.

Likewise, in chapter 7, "The Big Push: Imperialism at the End of the Nineteenth Century," the range of voices included serves to illustrate the major themes explored well, carrying the reader from the diamond fields of South Africa (in the company of Anthony Trollope) and the meeting halls of the Berlin Congress to Queen Liliuokalani's 1896 account of the overthrow and suppression of her independent Kingdom of Hawaii. In less grand settings it also casts light on the life of the Swahili-Zanzibari slave trader and plantation owner Tippu Tip, the disdain of an Indian poet for local officials "collaborating" with the British, and the experiences of a Danish migrant from the United States to German Tanganyika arriving in the midst of the Arab-Swahili-led Abushiri Revolt (1888-89) against the German East Africa Company.

The introduction to chapter 9, focused on "World War I and Its Aftermath," notes that the war "brought colonizer and colonized up close to one another, not only in the trenches but on civilian terrain" (p. 265) and discusses the impact of such widespread familiarity. However, ultimately it concludes that continuity reigned: "The aftermath of imperial war—this 'holy' war—was thus more imperialism, instability, violence and struggle, both by the colonizers and against them, continuing down to our own time" (p. 266). The selected documents from the pens of Balkan freedom fighters, Young Turks, W. E. B. DuBois, colonial soldiers, Syrian nationalists, and John and Alice Dewey, among others, certainly capture the uncertainty and brutality of this critical period. Chapters 10 and 11, on the interwar period and World War 2, respectively, are similarly impressive.

Chapter 12, "The Rise of Free Nations and the Afterlife of Empire," as the most modern is naturally the most fraught. "The resulting independence" born of decolonization in the aftermath of

World War Two "had mixed consequences," Smith notes (p. 343). In large part, she adds, this was as "the colonial powers [had] devised a system whereby they had taken as many economic and human resources from their colonies as possible. ... Newly independent nations had already been stripped bare." Further, these "new nations had to tack between the Cold War superpowers, who now conducted their struggle in the emerging independent countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and eventually Afghanistan" (p. 344). Again, the breadth of the net cast by Smith rewards the reader. Documents ranging from President Sukarno's speech at the opening of the 1955 Bandung Conference to Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, which cast the British public as passive victims of decolonization, serve to demonstrate the countervailing forces and complexities of the era.

Smith's broad reading of empire, combined with her selection of both well-known and more obscure texts, forwards a networked vision of the past and present. This approach helps to locate the modern obsession with globalization in its proper historical context: of cycles or spasms of globalization, interspersed with "backward" or isolationist lurches. It also shines light on the common practice of the renewal, repurposing, and continuation of the institutions and practices of fallen empires across the past several hundred years. In short, Smith undoubtedly succeeds in reminding her audience that "the world's peoples have not left empire behind, whether they know it or not." Her excellent *Modern Empires* also effectively answers her own call to instill "a mentality constantly rethinking both the past and present of empire and asking what the heavy presence of empire meant and continues to mean for economies, nations, ethnic groups and clans, and ordinary people's lives today" (p. 23). I plan to make use of this text in introductory classes. I urge others to do the same.

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