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Tracey Rizzo and Steven Gerontakis, *Intimate Empires: Body, Race, and Gender in the Modern World*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xxiv + 398 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780199978342.

Review by Philippa Levine, University of Texas at Austin.

Tracey Rizzo and Steven Gerontakis have taken on a tough task in offering a textbook that foregrounds, as their title indicates, the key role of race and gender in the making and sustaining of modern empires. Books like this are difficult to get right. They involve a mass of diverse material in the service of re-narrating and de-familiarizing common tropes and assumptions about both the discipline of history and studies of modern imperialism. Rizzo and Gerontakis's decision to incorporate examples from so many of the modern empires makes the task even harder. For the most part, they succeed in their determination to demonstrate the deep connectedness between the management of bodies and of political structures, as well as the ways in which those bodies could be used in the service of resistance to imperial rule. I found little need for the introductory apology that their focus was largely on the French and British empires. On the contrary, the book ranges generously across an impressively broad range of empires (by no means exclusively European) to drive home their insistence that bodies were always, and in myriad ways central, to the modern imperial project. Impressively, their range is not limited to geography. Each of the chapters offers a lively mix of ideas and case studies covering an astonishing amount of ground, from food preferences and the adopting of pets, to the variety of forms of labour imposed upon and expected of the colonized. The book imparts a strong message and one that certainly needs to be heard in the textbook market.

I was especially taken with some of the lesser-known case studies that begin each chapter. Little-known women such as Emily Ruete (born Salme bint Sa'id) and Anne-Marie Javouhey take their place here, alongside better well-known figures such as Olaudah Equiano and James Cook. Disappointingly, the male cameos in the set pieces that front each chapter are a far more predictable set of choices than those of the women. That is a shame in a book that sets out quite deliberately to unsettle more traditional narratives of empire and, in so many ways, convincingly offers alternative readings. The use of such well-known male figures, including two of the most celebrated antislavery icons (the aforementioned Equiano and Toussaint Louverture), seems at odds in a text that otherwise offers a truly fresh approach.

Powerful as much of the material is, I sadly doubt that I'd choose to use this book in my own classes. While I commend the authors for offering a credible alternative reading overall, I found the structure of the book confusing and was often puzzled by the choices shaping individual chapters. I am not sure I could easily justify or explain those to students. While the prose is clear and the message strong, I found myself increasingly questioning how the chapters unfolded. The problem was less intrusive in the earlier chapters, but even there I found myself scribbling queries about the placement of content. The decision, for example, to include a section on children in the chapter devoted to "femininities" puzzled me. Here surely was an opportunity at least to refer back to the deeply gendered raising of boys already discussed in the section on "European boy culture" in the previous chapter (chapter one) on

masculinities. There is no parallel discussion here of an equivalent “girl culture,” but instead the section focuses on the use of colonial women servants in the bringing up European children. This is not to dismiss that topic as irrelevant or less important. Not at all, but I could anticipate the question students will inevitably and rightly ask about whether young girls received an equally carefully constructed education as their brothers. We don’t learn that here and we should. Without it, students will want to know why that has been omitted.

In that same chapter, I was not sure how I would explain to a class the fact that the section entitled “Independent Women” focuses only on western women. Later in the narrative, but in a different chapter, we do get to hear of women such as Pandita Ramabai and Assia Djebar whose voices, work, and travels disrupt any sense that the colonized woman was always and everywhere servile, but I do worry that independence gets served up here as the province of the privileged European woman. The following chapter (chapter three) goes some way to mitigating this with its refreshing focus on black and women, rather than white male missionaries, as well as its discussion of the syncretism often seen among converts to Christianity. While the text sometimes strays from questions of intimacy to a general history of religious activity in the colonies, this chapter (“The Institutions of Empire”) is the strongest and most coherent, offering readers a convincing picture of organizations and politics in imperial sites.

The case study of Mata Hari that begins chapter four, however, put my teaching teeth on edge. Before (and sadly after) every class assignment, one of my exhortations to students is to avoid the overly speculative and the vague passive that invariably indicates a lack of knowledge. And, alas, there it is on p. 157: “some argue that her death before a French firing squad was actually punishment for a lifetime...of transgression.” As I say to my students, maybe; but who are those “some”? We don’t find out. I want to know, and so will my students who will also, I know, ask me why these professionals can get away with a claim for which I would jump on them with alacrity.

I’m also not sure that Hari and Loie Fuller, the two figures discussed in this introductory section, serve the chapter’s overarching theme very well. Their inclusion in the book is inspired. They certainly belong here as women whose manipulation of a gendered perception of the “orient” brought them professional success. The jump, however, from their dance routines to the broader question of consumption with which the chapter (“The Artefacts of Empire”) is concerned is not clear, and the fact that the next section moves to furniture collecting will not help students to see any connections. It would be hard classroom work to bridge that gap. It is also a great pity that we don’t get an image of Fuller, only of Mata Hari. The same might be said of the charming, wholly original, and informative section on wallpaper and the messages this facet of home decor might contain. A picture would have worked really well here to illuminate the point. And including sexology (again a critical presence in the book) in a chapter on goods and consumption strikes me as an error. I understand (though don’t fully agree with) the logic of folding sexology into a broader discussion of erotica, but framing the new science of sexology in a discussion of consumerism muddies both an understanding of erotic collecting and of sexology itself.

Chapter five (“The Race of Empire”) feels like a grab bag of important themes not wholly related to one another. The authors do make clear in the introductory paragraphs that their theme is the quest for perfectibility alongside a critique of ableism, but many of the sections here (abortion, eugenics, infanticide, contraception) could just as easily have found a home in other chapters. Their inclusion in this chapter was not always clear. At times, the chapter seemed to be focused on the politics of reproduction and sexuality, but then would swing in other and confusing directions, such as body marking and mental health. Again, I found a plethora of good materials here (and would single out the gender variance section as particularly strong), but the connections between all these items were hard to forge. The conclusion wrapping it altogether was unconvincing as a précis of this rather breathless chapter. There is wonderful material gathered here, but making it hang together proved a challenge.

Overall, while there is much to commend this book, I am far more likely to draw on it as a reference work as I prepare classes, than to assign it as a text my students read along with me. *Intimate Empires* offers a rich array of ideas, and the authors have drawn effectively on a remarkably broad set of examples but that may, in the end, be the source of the problem. How do we maintain an analytical structure accessible to students while drawing on such a broad and diverse range of sources? Juggling so many balls at once is a difficult task, and one the authors should be commended and praised for tackling. It is not surprising, however, that from time to time the balls slip, the foundation rocks, and the shape becomes indiscernible. Kudos to Rizzo and Gerontakis for tackling such a difficult project, for making it work quite a lot of the time, and for insisting that intimacy and the body, race and gender, are proper subjects for our classrooms. This is a book I would welcome as a background text when I am preparing, but I would not recommend it for classroom use.

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