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and plentiful local ingredients – rich fruity olive oil and saffron. Pulses, green vegetables, roots (including potatoes), gourds, onions and garlic, herbs and seeds, and moderate amounts of spices, are all used imaginatively, and artichokes, cheap and versatile, have many recipes. Altamiras tends to use tomatoes with discrimination as flavouring; they must have had a sharp, sweet, fruity tang, an alternative to lemon or bitter orange juice.

'Cook's instincts may reveal untold stories' says Hayward as she pulls together threads from Altamiras's culinary past, with its roots in medieval and Arab cuisine, and our own future, with its gastrophysics and oral referrals, to spin a yarn, in every sense of the phrase, that we can only put down to escape into the kitchen, and enjoy this careful, funny, delicious cooking.

Gillian Riley

Lizzie Collingham: *The Hungry Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World*: Bodley Head, 2017: 400 pp., hardback, £25.00.

In *Hungry Empire*, Lizzie Collingham makes the case that 'Britain's quest for foodstuffs gave rise to the British Empire.' To that end, '[e]ach chapter opens with a particular meal and then explains the history that made it possible.' Collingham has told an interviewer she intends the conceit to attract readers. 'I try to tell them about real people in particular situations and how the food demonstrates why they were there and what they were doing and how these stories come together.'

To her immense credit, Collingham is a fluid writer who avoids the overwritten and needlessly obscure jargon that plagues much academic history. Unfortunately, however, there is a debit side to her methodology, and the premise underlying *Hungry Empire*, that the search for food fuelled the imperial project, cannot withstand scrutiny.

'Food,' as Collingham herself observes, 'was only one among the many commodities – textiles, dyestuffs, tin, rubber and timber – that flowed into Britain.' Britain imported food for the same reason it imported other commodities, to maximize the profit from its unrivalled manufacturing sector, but Collingham nowhere alludes to the doctrine of comparative advantage, an aspect of trade, not empire, that drove its economic strategy.

Conflating empire not only with trade and especially free trade, but also with capitalism (variously 'brutal' or 'rapacious'), commercial agriculture and the industrial revolution, Collingham conjures a unitary engine of exploitation, oppression, misery and death, in the home islands and throughout not only all the imperial possessions but everywhere another nation or culture encounters the British abroad.

Even something as broadly beneficial as repeal of the Corn Laws was, in conjunction with the availability of cheap sugar, but a means of exerting social control: 'The repeal of the Corn Laws and the supply of foreign wheat

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enabled Britain to feed its mushrooming industrial population; it may even have diverted them from social revolution,' whatever that means, 'although it could be argued that the workers were simply drugged into compliance by lavish quantities of sugar.' So outlandish and sweeping an argument, relying as it does on the nonexistent narcotic effect of sugar, requires some kind of substantiation, which is absent from *Hungry Empire.*

One of its twenty chapters encapsulates the infirmities of *Hungry Empire*. It opens with an enslaved family sharing supper on a rice plantation in South Carolina during the 1730s, and describes the food they prepared in considerable detail:

> 'The father was a good hunter and had found an opossum in one of his traps the previous evening; the animal was now roasting on a stick stuck in the ground next to the fire. Squatting on their haunches, the family each [sic] tore a piece of maize 'porridge' off the mass in the big iron pot, rolled it into a ball and dipped it into a small clay jar of sauce. This evening the family's relish was made of sorrel and watercress, which the children had collected from the edges of the rice fields….
>
> 'After they had eaten, the father went off to plant peas in their garden patch…. Throughout the American South, the hours of darkness were a busy time for the slaves, as this was when they carried out their own chores after the long slog of working all day for their masters…. While the father worked in the garden, the … mother was sewing a patchwork quilt out of rags…. The children were fashioning seagrass baskets that the family would sell in exchange for a little sugar or some bottles of porter….'

Collingham's endnotes reveal that none of the people described in the passage about Middleburg is real or based on anyone real, none is based on contemporaneous documentation or other evidence, none of her sources refers to the plantation itself, few of them support any of her assertions, and a number of them contradict her.

Two citations are slave memoirs, whose authors were born decades later than the 1730s and never lived in South Carolina or planted rice.

Archaeological citations indicate that the supper described by Collingham is unrepresentative: 'The wild animal and plant components of slave diets were generally small' while 'domestic livestock such as pigs and cows were the principal components of the slaves' meat diet.' When slaves cooked meat, they added it to soups and stews rather than roasting it. The applicable citation does not mention a relish or watercress but does emphasize the importance of mustard and collard greens along with guinea squash and taro in the slave diet more generally. Collingham ignores those foods.

Conditions for slaves were not uniform throughout the south. As Collingham's sources explain, the 'task labor system' rather than gang system

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was 'used throughout the lower Southeast in the production of tidewater staples' like rice. Under the task system, 'slaves might finish their work by mid-day, with time devoted to gardening, stock-raising, fishing, hunting, or other activities' except during harvest.

The citations do not discuss whether or not South Carolina slaves lived mostly outdoors, and make no mention of seagrass baskets or any purchase, whether of sugar or porter.

This is not history as practised by rigorous historians.

Nor does the eighteenth-century production of rice have anything to do with the 'British quest for food,' and neither does a lengthy description of rice cultivation. Rice was not the first choice of South Carolina planters. 'Looking for a cash crop,' Collingham explains, 'they experimented with ginger, silk, vines, olive and citrus trees.' She might have added indigo and tobacco, further evidence that trade itself, not the demand for food, drove the imperial project in South Carolina.

Perhaps, however, British demand did make rice cultivation profitable. Perhaps not; as Collingham herself notes, 'the British rarely ate rice' so the 'bulk' of the harvest was sold to German states and the Netherlands instead.

Collingham repeatedly resorts to distorting sources. She intones that 'the British eradicated entire native populations,' but the passage she cites makes a different point; 'Europeans… eradicated native agricultural systems altogether or forced native producers to grow their own food on marginal land while working on the Europeans' plantations.' Not a pretty picture, but not genocide either and not a practice delineated as peculiar to the British.

The only extinguished native population described in *Hungry Empire* is the unfortunate Beothuk tribe, who appear incongruously in a chapter on Ireland. The few Beothuks (unreliable estimates range from several hundred to several thousand) lived on Newfoundland before the arrival of European fishermen and, as Collingham's sole source on the subject explains, were alone among the First Nations to spurn contact with Europeans.

The British were not the only nationality that reached Newfoundland and genocide did not eradicate its natives. According to Collingham's source, 'the decrease in Beothuk population over a period of three hundred years was unspectacular,' while evidence exists that before the arrival of Europeans other native populations also became extinct for the same reason as the Beothuks, 'very likely because of changes in the availability of vital food resources.'

Taking a negative perspective on the British Empire is by no means indefensible. But not all was bleak, and Collingham takes an approach that is anachronistic and unfair. As Ashley Parker observes, 'empires have been the default setting throughout human history, which is one of the reasons why accounts that single out the British Empire for special persecution are unbalanced.'

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Factual errors dog *Hungry Empire*. Collingham states that the cheese purchased for Royal Navy ships in 1545 came from Gloucester or Cheshire. As two of her own sources indicate, however, that was not the case. 'The Navy,' according to the authoritative N.A.M. Rodger, 'had always issued Suffolk cheese.... There were frequent complaints against it, and in 1758 the decision was taken to switch to Cheshire and Gloucester cheese.' Janet Macdonald concurs, adding that the Victualling Board also purchased Cheddar and Warwickshire cheese beginning that same year.

The insurrection that began during 1641 in Ireland was not 'an ethnic conflict between the native Catholic Irish and the new Protestant settlers.' Ethnicity is not religion, Irish ethnicity was and is not binary, and people of the same ethnicity fought on different sides. The Old English, for instance, settlers themselves and Catholic, fought on the Irish side against the English administration.

Rum is not, as Collingham assumes, 'one of the most calorific of all spirits' because it is '[d]erived from sugar.' All spirits are derived from sugar, whether refined from cane, barley, corn, potatoes, wheat or anything else, and share similar calorie counts, although by some analyses rum is slightly less calorific than whiskey or gin of the same proof.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, she maintains, 'as spices disappeared from English food, it became increasingly plain.' This 'expulsion of spices from savoury food' transpired because as they became affordable to virtually anyone, nobody wanted the spices anymore; 'loading one's food with cinnamon and clove lost its ability to signal wealth and status.'

It is a peculiar position, especially because Collingham has written a book on curry which, another of her sources says, had conquered the kitchens of Britain during the eighteenth century. She contradicts herself by discussing an English recipe published during 1791 in connection with what may be the highest status food of its era. It seasons turtle soup with cayenne, clove, mace and nutmeg. Hundreds if not thousands of other eighteenth century English recipes also lean heavily on spice.

Works of avowed fiction bookend the last chapter of *Hungry Empire*; first, a fanciful meditation on Christmas pudding from 1850 and last, a curry described in, of all places, *Bridget Jones's Diary.* Ironically they are appropriate selections. Between them Collingham cites Hitler. Because his 'analysis' is 'unfettered by moral scruples' he offers reliable insight about Elizabethan Ireland, which he never addressed, and on the westward expansion of America, which was not a British undertaking. That pretty much says it all.

Blake Perkins

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