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Although written as a cultural history, its political aims can be discerned in the background. *Backpack Ambassadors* gives insight in how youth travel influenced the historical development of European integration by promoting international cooperation and understanding. Backpack travelling was not only linked to youth culture but also enhanced notions of freedom, democracy, interconnectedness and feelings of European belonging. By placing the refusal of national identities and slogans as 'We are all foreigners' within youth culture from the 1960s and 1970s in contrast to the creation of 'fortress Europe' and the tightening of borders in the more recent decades, the author also hints more directly to the political importance of youth travel.

Aimée Plukker, University of Amsterdam

Lizzie Collingham, *The Hungry Empire. How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World*. (London: Bodley Head, 2017). 367 p. ISBN 9781847922700.

DOI: 10.18352/tseg.1005

How Britain's quest for food shaped the modern world. One often does not need to look much further than the subtitle to get an idea of where the author wants to go with his or her book. This rule of thumb is very much applicable to Lizzie Collingham's newest publication.

In *The Hungry Empire* she takes the reader on a journey through the most recent 500 years of British history while demonstrating how food, food demands and food availability to a large extent shaped the actions and evolution of both British individuals and governments (which themselves helped shape global evolutions during such decisive periods as those of the British Empire and the World Wars). At the heart of Collingham's reasoning lies the idea that during the last 500 years Britain evolved from a 'tiny island standing on the edge of Europe' to 'the centre (*sic*) of a powerful network', an evolution that supposedly 'shaped the modern world'.

So how did Britannia come to rule the waves? If one follows Collingham, the emergence of Britain as an influential world power for a large part came about because of Brits following their stomachs. Her story takes the reader both all around

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the world and through the ages. The seventeenth century Newfoundland fisheries, for example, reversed the balance of trade and sent cash flowing to the British Isles, while the eighteenth century provisions industry stimulated both British industriousness and industry. Late nineteenth century Argentina, which was drawn into Britain's so-called informal empire by a growing British demand for grain, provides yet another example of how the evolution of Britain and British influence is charted along lines of tea, sugar, meat, and grain.

Fascinating as such a charting is, above all Collingham excels in the way she conveys her message. Even though this occasionally somewhat blurs the clarity of her arguments, she succeeds in connecting these seemingly impersonal evolutions (changing food markets, claiming land for agriculture, et cetera) with very individual stories. Thus the reader learns how Joseph Holloway sat down for a meal of maize, bread, and beef in New England in 1647 and how this micro-historical image fits in with the much broader evolutions of the settlement of English migrants in North America. Or he reads of infantryman R.L. Crimp eating sweet potatoes as a member of the British forces in Egypt in 1941 and how this connects to the way Britain supplied itself with food from the Empire through the tough war years.

This excellent combination of both a look up close on individuals and meals, and a more generalized view of broad political or economic evolutions is expressed throughout every chapter. One needs only to take a glance at a title such as: 'Chapter Four. *In which Colonel James Drax holds a feast at his sugar plantation on the island of Barbados (1640s)*. How the West Indian sugar islands drove the growth of the First British Empire'.

The same title – which illustrates Collingham's entertaining, informative, and above all gripping style – also touches upon two of the major criticisms which can be formulated on her book. The first is her tendency to view food, and evolutions concerning food, almost exclusively as an explanation for the emergence of the British Empire. This is hardly surprising in a book with the express goal of identifying precisely this relationship. However, the author fails to sufficiently stress two important concerns. For a start, changes in diet and food provisioning have (and had) both causes and consequences *unrelated* to power structures (even if some postmodern historians would quite likely disagree). Moreover, food can hardly be considered as the *only* influencing factor on the growth of the British Empire.

Equally, Collingham's way of *presenting* the message (much more than the empirical foundation of her book, which seems impeccable) has been open to criticism, especially by food writer and journalist Joanna Blythman. In a review for *The Guardian* she draws attention to the way in which Collingham seems to regard the abuse and the horrible treatment of non-European peoples (slaves on the sugar plantations, famine victims in India, et cetera) as regrettable but acceptable side-effects of the British Empire. It is debatable, however, whether Colling-