Priya Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019.

This social and material history of guns in 18th-century Britain revisits the long-standing narrative of the industrial revolution as a leap of progress that allowed Britain and, more widely, the West to set out on a path of modern development by which it radically diverged from the rest of the world. Questioning the myth of a peaceful industrial revolution, Satia invites us to understand that the passage from an agrarian-based to an industrial and modern society did not simply take place through the invention of steam engines and the rise of cotton factories. She reframes the industrial revolution in a context of violence, war and plunder, highlighting the importance of guns and gun-making in supporting it. Addressing the failure of scholarship to reflect on the centrality of war and militarism to the industrial revolution, she urges the reader, from the very start, to reconsider the role that the state, with its colossal demand for war-making machines and materiel, played in this process. This work is to be applauded not only for emphasizing violence as a key component of the industrial revolution, but also because it does so through meticulous, in-depth archival research that supports the whole narrative.

The book's journey begins with the pivotal story of Samuel Galton, an English gentleman and a Quaker. While Galton's faith held that it was

not Christian to make war and resort to violence, he owed his material fortune entirely to his career as Britain's most prolific, prominent, and productive gun-maker. In 1795, with Britain having failed to quell the rebellion of its American colonies and now embroiled in yet another war with France, a controversy erupted that touched him: the Society of Friends publicly reprimanded him for his war-related business activities and called on him to give them up. Galton, long accepted and respected, now suddenly stood accused of having grown rich thanks to war. Priya Satia builds on Galton's response to those charges to develop her book's main lines of inquiry. Galton built his defense, in fact, on two main arguments: first, that everyone in the Midlands and Britain was involved in the production of guns, and second, that guns were not to be renounced as a barbaric tool but, on the contrary, incarnated the spirit of civilization and were essential to uphold and preserve a model of progress based on private property.

Divided into three parts, the book investigates the industrial, social, and moral life of guns, to answer the question: what role did gun-making, violence, and war play in shaping the economic and political formations that were so essential to the spread of a "civilizing discourse" based on the idea of property rights? The first part examines who produced guns and the dynamics that shaped demand and output. As to who produced guns, the most direct answer is the state. In fact, the British state not only steadily guided the growth of the gun industry, but also directed its development. For instance, between 1688 and 1765, the government introduced a process of standardization in the production of guns that became a critical step toward mass production (p. 38). Further, this process allowed the government to avoid relying on a single individual contractor and to spread the manufacturing of guns across a dispersed assembly line. Satia shows how the government pursued this strategy, so as not to become hostage to one single contractor that might also support a political rebellion. She also points out how extensively society participated in the actual production of guns. Local historians, she observes, complain that there are no records

of gun-makers in Birmingham (p. 66). This absence reflects the fact that thousands of metal manufacturers were involved in the production of guns because the people who made guns also made such other things as jewelry, cutlery, daggers, carpentry tools, knives, and so on. The second part of the book investigates the social and material life of guns, delving into the symbolic and material value that guns assumed in various contexts at home and abroad. It traces the strengthening interconnections between the metallurgic industry and the banking and financial sector, thus linking guns to money and reinstating their importance in the formation of the modern British economy. Guns functioned, in fact, as a currency both domestically and internationally. Because of their metallic content in an era when money was the representation of value, Satia argues, money "was more important as a system of measurement and communication than as a medium of exchange" (p. 197). Gun-makers did not simply help manufacture coins and currency, but they themselves became bankers and sought relations with the financial world. Interestingly, the Lloyds' bank evolved precisely out of such dynamics, which witnessed metalworking industrialists transformed into the banking sector in order to cope with the unpredictable nature of defense contracts and the war economy. The book's astounding feat is to reveal the very narrow lines separating finance, industry, and the state, in an era in which bankers lent money to the state, the state demanded guns from industry, and industrialists became bankers.

The book moves on to describe the diverse forms of symbolic capital associated with guns in Britain and abroad (including West Africa, South East Asia and the Americas) to justify and advance the establishment of a system of economic exploitation based on the notion of property rights. For instance, guns were portrayed as a form of "cold and impersonal," hence civilized, use of violence in contrast to the "brutal and barbaric" methods adopted by Native Americans. Here, Satia makes an important contribution to developing the ideas laid out by Michel Foucault on the progressive decline of the "repressive hy-

pothesis" of power in Europe and the emergence of subtler productive forms. What her book shows, instead, is how guns — and their making — embodied this passage, which was not less violent. Technological inventions became the vehicle for the plundering and subjugation of populations, based on the premise of their civilizational power. Paradoxically, guns (like drones nowadays) sanitized the imperial use of violence, which was described, instead, as a natural attribute of protesting crowds at home or resisting natives and colonized populations abroad.

The third part of the book touches on the moral use of guns, focusing on two main aspects: first, the gradual emergence of pacifist movements or, more simply, societal rejection of the violence of using firearms, which partly coincided with the decline of the British empire; second, the failure of these critiques to capture the linkages between war and industrial capitalism. In particular, it is worth stressing how the appeals for the control or abolition of the arms trade often linked private companies and war profits while failing to grasp that a rejection of war and militarism required a fundamental rethinking of the model of industrial-capitalist expansion, the beacon of progress of the West. As Satia brilliantly shows, the economy as an episteme had allowed guns to be turned into a neutral commodity because, as Galton argued in self-defense, almost all of society contributed to military production. These questions are not merely of historical interest; on the contrary, they remain equally valid today and central to contemporary society, where war and militarism occupy a role functional to the maintenance of neoliberal capitalism.

The book's signal merit lies in demonstrating how war was part and parcel of the myth of the British industrial revolution. Satia examines the unique and omnipresent function that guns performed in the unfolding of this process, debunking any possible attribution of a mythological or divine quality to the British Isles and the British people during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If such a unique quality did exist, it consisted in a boundless appetite for war, since war

was good for business. Beyond showing us how English industrialization depended on guns, the book explores how peripheral settings functioned as both markets and laboratories for them. Where did these guns go? How were they used? Starting its quest in the city of Birmingham, the book answers these questions meticulously and brilliantly.

Several critical observations are called for, however. The writing is overly dense with details on the process of gun-making, and the author often fails to stop and ponder, on a more conceptual level, the richness of her findings. While the level of detail proves the empirical richness of this study, I believe it also reflects the author's failure to engage on a theoretical level with the crucial concepts analyzed throughout the book, namely imperialism, capitalism, industrialism. For instance, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin and – more recently – Ali Kadri (2019) have shown at length how crucial war is to supporting imperial and capitalist rents. Kadri, for instance, has explained how war and militarism function as sphere of production and accumulation by dispossession. Satia builds multiple levels of analysis that end up being linked more to the story of an individual, Galton, than to the devastating and destructive power of the capitalist world-system. Guns sustained the expansion of British imperialism through the looting and plundering of peoples in the South of the world, the savages who could be killed with the civilizing power of the "gun." To be fair, the book does present and discuss these dynamics, but the author could have been much more daring in paving the way for an intellectual reflection on political counter-struggle. If capitalism and the industrial revolution are based on war and militarism, what does this tell us about the West? In this sense, Satia's book gives us a splendid social history of guns but fails to situate it in a wider class or world-system analysis. For instance, the foundational role of war for the "economy" is a reminder that there are possibilities for countering this system, as the Italian dock workers did not long ago when they refused to load generators onto a Saudi cargo ship carrying arms to be used in the plundering of Yemen. At the same time, society's complicity

with the war industry should not overshadow the various class interests, the North-South divide that constituted British and US-led imperialism.

Ultimately, while liberal history and political economy continue to normalize war in order to rewrite the history of colonial dominion and imperialism under the heading of progress and modernization, Satia goes in the opposite direction, puncturing this mythology. If for no other reason, this alone would make the book required reading for all those who are politically and intellectually interested in identifying the material and social conditions in which modern gun-making emerged and ushered in the triumph of liberalism and capitalism in the world.

Matteo Capasso
European University Institute