

Title—Empires and Colonies in the Modern World: A Global Perspective
Author—Heather Streets-Salter and Trevor Getz
Year—2016

Categories: Empire, Colonialism, World History

Place: World

Time Period: 1350-1990

Argument Synopsis:

A world historical work covering concepts of **empire, imperialism, and colonialism** from the mid-fourteenth century up to the very recent past. They argue that colonialism and imperialism in the modern period were shared experiences in a global context (a more global definition of the terms). Streets-Salter and Getz claim the modern terms of empire and imperialism emerged in the fifteenth century, which coincided with the emergence of increasingly powerful states in Europe and maritime empires. Simply put: empire is the product of interactions between the metropole and the periphery.

The rise and fall of empires allows a view of empires as a set of **structures and processes** that unfold on a global stage. Their work is a global study of these processes in the modern age. It is organized chronologically, beginning with the emergence of empires in the early modern period through the present.

The terms “empire” and “imperialism” are noticeably older than colonialism, which was popularized during the seventeenth century in order to describe the processes not adequately covered by empire and imperialism. This was due, in part, to the dramatic increase in geographic reach these empires underwent between the early modern period and the seventeenth century. For them, the area where these processes operate helps define them, with imperialism in the metropole and colonialism in the periphery.

Streets-Salter and Getz point out that 1500 is the usual starting point for the modern period, with the European “discovery” of the New World. The modern period is described as a period of world history characterized by increasing cross-cultural interaction beginning in Eurasia and North Africa. They claim a multitude of cultural features of modernity are, partially, products of imperialism and colonialism.

One of the fundamental arguments of the book is the empires are never simply unidirectional, with the metropole completely in control. In other words, both the metropole and periphery were shaped by each other; these connections are metaphorically referred to as **“sinews.”** These sinews represent the cords linking and supporting, simultaneously, the relationships between metropolises and colonies. Not all imperial systems were the same, but they were all shaped by interactions between the metropole and the colonies. Thus, all imperial systems created blurred boundaries between center and periphery.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Difference in imperialism and colonialism lies in where they operate: imperialism mostly in the metropole and colonialism mostly in the periphery
- Competition between empires a notable aspect of the modern period
- Empires are not unidirectional—they are influenced from both sides