

## Partisanship and Parochialism in the History of the British Empire

Alan Lester (ed.) *The Truth About Empire. Real Histories of British Colonialism* foreword by Sathnam Sanghera (London: Hurst & Co, 2024).

There is clearly something about Nigel Biggar and his work that really gets up the noses of academic historians of the British Empire. In 2015 he attracted widespread ire and opprobrium for arguing that the statue of Cecil Rhodes on the façade of Oriel College, Oxford, should not be removed.<sup>1</sup> In 2017 we had the collective condemnation by 58 Oxford historians and over 100 worldwide of his project on 'Ethics and Empire'.<sup>2</sup> In 2019 Professor Richard Drayton of King's College, London published an extraordinary ad-hominem attack in the guise of a scholarly paper, which held up Biggar as an exemplar of the reactionary nostalgia which produced Brexit, whilst reserving particular scorn for his Unionism.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by a swathe of scathing reviews of 2022's *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*, numerous meltdowns on Twitter/X and a lengthy exchange in the pages of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* with Alan Lester, in which the latter accused Biggar of 'egregious distortions, motivated wholly by politics and patriotic emotion rather than any desire to understand the past' and of being a 'right-wing culture warrior'.<sup>4</sup> Although to his credit Lester was not one of the signatories of the 2017 letter denouncing him, since then his attacks on Biggar have become almost obsessive. This volume is his latest anti-Biggar project, and considerably more substantial than its predecessors.

Maybe it is because I have known Nigel Biggar for over 25 years, since I was an undergraduate at Oriel College, Oxford, when he was chaplain there, or maybe it is because (to lay a few more 'identity' cards on the table) we are both Anglo-Scots with a family connection to the British Empire, but I find this loathing baffling and disproportionate. Biggar's work is certainly not above criticism – I have criticised it myself – and it is quite just that his errors of fact and interpretation or failures to engage with the specialist historiography of the British Empire should be pointed out. However the criticism goes well beyond this, and is clearly political in inspiration, perhaps at least partly because of the claim that imperial nostalgia contributed to Brexit, and that Biggar, though himself a Remainer, is one of its main standard-bearers.<sup>5</sup> As David Edgerton and Robert Saunders have argued, this is almost certainly a misconception – if nostalgia played any role in Brexit (a proposition which in itself is pretty dubious), it was not for the expansive, cosmopolitan days of empire when British identity was dissolved in the larger imperial whole, but either for an imagined, pre-imperial, buccaneering England, or for the post-imperial British nation-state.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile the keynote of Biggar's politics is not imperial nostalgia, but his advocacy of Liberal interventionism – as Samuel Rubinstein has put it, he is more Blair than Farage.<sup>7</sup> This may just provide another set of reasons for his critics to dislike him, but they should at least identify their opponent correctly, and try to see beyond these political

---

<sup>1</sup> For a review of that debate, which discusses Biggar's part in it, see <https://oxfordandempire.web.ox.ac.uk/article/rhodes-must-fall-uses-historical-evidence-statue-debate-oxford-2015-6>

<sup>2</sup> <https://theconversation.com/ethics-and-empire-an-open-letter-from-oxford-scholars-89333> ; <https://medium.com/oxfordempireletter/a-collective-statement-on-ethics-and-empire-19c2477871a0>

<sup>3</sup> Drayton, "Biggar vs Little Britain".

<sup>4</sup> Lester, "The British Empire in the Culture War," 766. See further Arnold "In defence of empire; Malik "Colonialism by Nigel Biggar review".

<sup>5</sup> Lester, "The British Empire in the Culture War," 767.

<sup>6</sup> Edgerton, "Brexit is not a product of history". Saunders "Brexit and Empire".

<sup>7</sup> Rubinstein, "Unpicking Imperial History".

disagreements to understand what Biggar set out to do in his book, which as he explicitly states is not primarily a work of history, but of political and ethical evaluation.

There are at least three key elements of Biggar's arguments about the British Empire that his academic critics have failed to engage with seriously. The first is that Biggar's own discipline of Ethics has something to offer the history of empire, and that despite their denials many British imperial historians are in fact making ethical judgements all the time without acknowledging them or explaining their basis. Having been a participant in the series of workshops organised under the banner of Biggar's 'Ethics and Empire' project between 2018 and 2022, where historians, theologians and ethicists exchanged ideas frankly but firmly, I can say with some confidence that he was right about this. There is nothing like that kind of interdisciplinary discussion for clearing away woolly thinking, and the project certainly did not produce the kind of predetermined consensus about the ethical purity of any empire – British or otherwise – that its pre-emptive critics anticipated.<sup>8</sup> Something that emerged clearly from these discussions is that ethical judgements have to move beyond rhetorical denunciations of all violence and war, or the parading of one's own virtuousness in relation to the depravity of the past. Instead they must lay out clearly the framework for any ethical judgement about the past, ensure it is properly contextualised within its own time, and try to imagine what the alternatives to any particular course of action might have been.<sup>9</sup> All that said, I am not sure Biggar really achieved this in *Colonialism*, where his insistence that motive rather than outcome should be the lodestar of ethical evaluation often led him to 'retreat from the colonies back to Britain', and to excuse episodes of violence, displacement and dispossession which were considered reprehensible even in their own time.<sup>10</sup>

As this suggests, criticism of the British Empire is nothing new - it was widespread and often fierce throughout its existence amongst both colonisers and colonised. Indeed during its heyday the tolerance and prominence of internal criticism and dissent was one of its Liberal hallmarks, at least in the metropole.<sup>11</sup> However Biggar's second main point, reiterated throughout *Colonialism*, is that the last two decades have seen criticism take new and disproportionate forms, in which the British Empire stands forth as a peculiarly malevolent historical phenomenon. Thus the East India Company is held to be uniquely rapacious even by 18<sup>th</sup>-century standards – but somehow Nader Shah or the Maratha confederacy are not subject to the same kinds of moralising judgement.<sup>12</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Indian Nationalist theory of the 'Drain' of wealth from India to Britain has been revived and supercharged even though it has not been taken seriously by economic historians since the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, despite decades of sympathetic but ultimately devastating critique, there has been a revival of the Williams thesis from *Capitalism and Slavery*, which argued that Abolition was not driven by moral imperatives but by purely economic considerations, and that the profits from slavery were a key element in the capital investment that made British industrialisation possible - not because there

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://nigelbiggar.uk/ethics-empire/>

<sup>9</sup> Biggar, *Colonialism*, 8-13.

<sup>10</sup> Lester "The British Empire in the Culture War," 21.

<sup>11</sup> See Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*; Howe *Anticolonialism in British Politics*; Owen, "Critics of Empire in Britain" & *The British Left and India*; Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*; Guha, *Rebels against the Raj*.

<sup>12</sup> Dalrymple, "The East India Company." & *The Anarchy*, xxiii-xxx, 40-44. For an evaluation of the East India Company vis-à-vis the Marathas which explains why the Indian mercantile class tended to prefer the former, see Roy *An Economic History of India 1707-1857*, 28-35.

<sup>13</sup> Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, 9-23; Patnaik, "Independence Day".

is any new evidence to support it but because the political climate seems to demand it.<sup>14</sup> British rule in India is said not only to have failed to prevent famine but to have actively fostered it, creating repeated ‘Holocausts’ from the 1770s until 1943.<sup>15</sup> Winston Churchill was a war criminal, and he and Cecil Rhodes were morally indistinguishable from Hitler.<sup>16</sup> Violence was ‘endemic to the structures and systems of British rule’ and also ‘inherent to Liberalism’.<sup>17</sup> The British concentration camps in Kenya during the suppression of Mau-Mau were akin to the Stalinist Gulag, and their plague and famine camps in India paved the way for the Nazis.<sup>18</sup> Indeed British imperial rule, Nazi Germany and the USSR under Stalin are regularly cast as ethically equivalent, though this is usually a form of rhetorical insult, designed to shock, provoke and attract attention to otherwise mediocre research. It rarely involves any real engagement with the complex, specialised historiographies of the Nazi or Soviet regimes, or with sources in German or Russian – for instance in *Britain’s Gulag* Caroline Elkins makes just one casual reference to Solzhenitsyn, and relies on a handful of secondary works for the sketchy parallels she draws between the Mau-Mau camps and Nazi and Soviet ones.<sup>19</sup>

In the public sphere, at least, historical judgements about the British Empire have become increasingly parochial, a form of Anglospherical navel-gazing which seems almost oblivious to what Biggar calls the ‘ocean of injustice’ that exists throughout human history, and which simultaneously attributes all of modern Britain’s ills, from racism to Brexit, to ill-defined ‘legacies of Empire’.<sup>20</sup> Underlying this is the curiously Victorian idea that only the British possessed real moral and historical agency, and therefore their contemporaries, opponents, rivals and successors need not be judged in the same way – something akin to Leila Al-Shami’s ‘anti-imperialism of idiots’, in which ‘everything that happens is viewed through the prism of what it means for westerners — only white men have the power to make history’.<sup>21</sup> Supposedly historical judgements on the British Empire are also increasingly politically partisan, as its legacies are instrumentalised by both Right and Left, nostalgists and nationalists. Academic historians of the British Empire have had plenty to say about the former, but with some honourable exceptions have largely abdicated their responsibility to counter the latter with properly researched and contextualised accounts of British imperial history.<sup>22</sup> Kim Wagner, for instance, tells us that Shashi Tharoor’s *Inglorious Empire* ‘is in some ways problematic – empirically and analytically’, but he is clearly not prepared to engage in the sort of comprehensive dissection of

---

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*; The critical literature is vast, but see Engerman, “The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century”; O’Brien, “European Economic Development”; Drescher “Eric Williams: British Capitalism and British Slavery”; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson “The Rise of Europe”; Huzzey *Freedom Burning*, 108. For a recent revival of elements of the Williams thesis see Berg and Hudson *Slavery, Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution*. For a further critique see Goldman “Slavery, Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution: A Dissent”.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*.

<sup>16</sup> Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War*, 272; Oppenheim “Winston Churchill is no better than Adolf Hitler”; Khomami “Oxford Students step up campaign to remove Cecil Rhodes Statue”.

<sup>17</sup> Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, 13, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*; Forth *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*; See further Morrison “Convicts and Concentration Camps”.

<sup>19</sup> Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, 147, 153, 171, 179-181; in his otherwise excellent, keenly-researched and argued work on the Kenyan ‘Dirty War’ David Anderson also has a short section entitled ‘The Gulag’, in which he attributes this ‘tellingly accurate’ parallel to the work of Marshall Clough on Mau-Mau memoirs, but he makes no reference to any academic literature on the Soviet Gulag, nor does he explain in what way the parallel is accurate. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 311-327; Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*.

<sup>20</sup> Sanghera, *Empireland* & Riley, *Imperial Island* are leading examples of the genre. For effective critiques see Anil “Imperial Island by Charlotte Lydia Riley Review”; Rubinstein “Imperial Miasma Theory”; my own view is that this recent rash of works adds very little to the well-known Mackenzie-Porter debate: Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* & Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*. See also Thompson *The Empire Strikes Back?*.

<sup>21</sup> <https://libcom.org/article/anti-imperialism-idiots-leila-al-shami>.

<sup>22</sup> See, however, John Darwin’s excellent review of Elkins, *Legacy of Violence* - Darwin “Lowering the flag”.

the book's political claims which Tirthankar Roy has undertaken on the economic side, let alone the kind of attack that has come Biggar's way.<sup>23</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that if academic historians of the British empire were going to engage in any collective refutation of the many nationalist distortions, over-simplifications and outright falsehoods to be found in *Inglorious Empire* then they would have done so by now.<sup>24</sup> Instead it has found an established place on many undergraduate reading-lists, while its arguments about the iniquities of the British Raj are being gleefully employed by Tharoor's supposed political opponent, Narendra Modi, to attack inconvenient portions of the Indian constitution on the grounds that they are British legacies, and promote Hindu nationalism even more aggressively under the banner of 'decolonisation'.<sup>25</sup> Under those circumstances it is hardly surprising that Biggar and the *History Reclaimed* collective (which attracts a similar degree of dismissive loathing) consider that double standards are at work, and that they need to counter these falsehoods because academic historians of the British empire cannot be relied upon to do so.<sup>26</sup>

Biggar's third substantive point is a strictly political one, but I still think requires some consideration. It is that this exaggerated demonisation of the British Empire in the public sphere has consequences in the real world. Biggar explains how his original motivation to write *Colonialism* came from the false narratives used by Scottish Nationalist politicians and activists to attack the British Empire and to claim that Scots had been its victims rather than enthusiastic participants and disproportionate beneficiaries.<sup>27</sup> He also notes that these narratives of British colonial perfidy are seized upon and magnified by the enemies of the 'West', notably Russia and China, and used by them both as propaganda in the Global South, and as an insidious means of weakening collective identity and solidarity in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> As Lester rightly points out, Biggar has subsequently undermined his own position by agreeing to speak at the opening of the Matthias Corvinus Collegium in Brussels, which is certainly a misjudgement, given Viktor Orban's status as Putin's patsy in the EU.<sup>29</sup> Lester might also have a point when he says that 'The denial, minimisation and mitigation of British colonial racism and violence seem to me counterproductive' in this ongoing propaganda war –but not when the accusations themselves are grossly overblown in the first place, which Biggar argues – with some reason – they often are.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps it is because I travelled to Russia for research almost every year between 2001 and 2019, and saw what I think we must call Russian fascism developing in real time (though like so many others I was too slow to recognise it for what it was);<sup>31</sup> because I was living and working in Kazakhstan, another former colony, when Russia invaded Crimea and began its war in eastern Ukraine in 2014; because I am an editor of the journal which first published incontrovertible evidence of the existence and scale of the CCP's 're-education' camps in Xinjiang,<sup>32</sup> and have colleagues who have disappeared or fled China to escape from them - but Biggar's original

---

<sup>23</sup> Wagner, "Imperial Legacies by Jeremy Black review"; Roy, "Inglorious Empire".

<sup>24</sup> Apart from Roy's review the only comprehensive critique of Tharoor seems to be by the late Charles Allen, a wonderful historian who worked outside the academic establishment: Allen, "Who Owns India's History?".

<sup>25</sup> See for instance Dhingra, "How Hindu Nationalists Redefined Decolonization in India". Tharoor notes receiving congratulations from Modi on his original speech denouncing the *Raj* at the Oxford Union in 2015: *Inglorious Empire*, xxi. He does not appear to have reflected on what this might mean.

<sup>26</sup> <https://historyreclaimed.co.uk/>

<sup>27</sup> Stephenson, "The subversion of History Education in Scotland".

<sup>28</sup> Biggar, *Colonialism*, 5-7. See for instance Lavrov "Rossiia i Afrika".

<sup>29</sup> Lester, "On Colonialism. A Response to Nigel Biggar's Reply".

<sup>30</sup> Lester, "The British Empire in the Culture War," 788.

<sup>31</sup> Morrison, "After the War. Central Asia without Russia".

<sup>32</sup> Zenz, "Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude".

argument makes more obvious sense to me than it does to most British imperial historians. It suggests that they should be at least as concerned about the widespread circulation of falsely exaggerated negative narratives about the British imperial past – such as those of Tharoor or Elkins – as they are about Biggar’s defence of it. In both cases what matters is historical truth, but without wishing to be overly melodramatic I think in the current state of the world – threatened by two ruthless and aggressive varieties of Eurasian imperial authoritarianism – the stakes have become a lot higher.

So now we have this almost 400-page response to Biggar’s *Colonialism* from a collective of historians, edited by Lester, which with its lengthier, fully-referenced academic format offers the opportunity for a more constructive engagement with Biggar than is possible on Twitter. The book sets great store by the professional academic credentials of its contributors. ‘Amid history’s appropriation by apologists, racists and culture warriors’, the blurb loftily proclaims, ‘*The Truth About Empire* comes from expert historians, who believe that the truth, as far as we can pinpoint it, matters; that our decades of painstaking research make us worth listening to; and that our authority as leading professionals should count for something in today’s polarised debates over Britain’s imperial past.’ This immediate resort to a combination of insult and argument from authority does not promise well, and indeed *The Truth About Empire* contains plenty of outraged gatekeeping and *de haut en bas* sneering, but it also contains some excellent contributions which make very effective, penetrating and fair criticisms of Biggar’s work, and it seems right to begin with these.

Saul Dubow does a superb job of explaining the history of South Africa in the decades on either side of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo-Boer war to a lay audience, and exposes some of the elisions and inaccuracies in Biggar’s account of Cecil Rhodes, who as he says is far too morally ambiguous a figure to play the heroic role conferred on him by Biggar. His account is properly historicised, and does actually present some alternative, less well-known figures from South Africa in that period who better illustrate the liberal conscience of Empire, such as the Cape Colony’s Attorney-General, William Porter. He is also the only contributor to express any sympathy at all for any of Biggar’s arguments, noting the absurdity of reducing the British Empire to a single ‘essential’ quality such as racism or violence, though he is also deeply critical of the many omissions in Biggar’s survey of South African historiography.

I also greatly enjoyed Stuart Ward’s ‘No End of a Reckoning’ on the intellectual history of the ‘balance-sheet’ approach to the British Empire, which gently pokes fun at some of its absurdities while taking the question of how British imperial actors and historians grappled with ethical questions seriously. A starring role is played by the academic and writer on African colonial affairs Margery Perham, who in her Reith Lectures of 1961 attempted, but did not complete, an ethical evaluation of British colonialism. Ward would perhaps be surprised to learn how closely his analysis mirrors the discussion of Perham at one of Biggar’s much-maligned ‘Ethics and Empire’ workshops, which was led by Brad Faught, whose biography of Perham he cites.<sup>33</sup>

Andrea Major’s elegant essay on ‘Sati’ is genuinely illuminating on the origins of a much-repeated quotation from Sir Charles Napier regarding the practice, the myths surrounding which she carefully deconstructs. Her meticulous archival research takes us well beyond the nihilistic arguments about the impossibility of recovering any historical truth about Sati which were put forward by

---

<sup>33</sup> Faught, *Into Africa*.

Gayatri Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak' over thirty years ago.<sup>34</sup> However she also clearly shows the rhetorical use the British made of their 'abolition' of the practice, which was never complete and driven at least in part by Indian demand.

Gareth Knapman's bracing deconstruction of the Raffles myth is also excellently researched, although he should perhaps consider more fully why Lee Kuan Yew's regime promoted it so enthusiastically after Singaporean independence. He is rather grudging about the abolition of slavery in Singapore by Raffles, but in other respects the portrait of an unprincipled careerist seems very convincing – here too, as in Dubow's essay, we catch a glimpse of Empire's ethical complexity in the form of Raffles's successor, John Crawfurd, an altogether more interesting and in some ways admirable figure, who advocated equal political rights for all British imperial subjects in Southeast Asia despite his belief in racial difference.

Richard Huzzey provides a characteristically thoughtful essay on the moral ambiguity behind British abolitionism, in which sincere revulsion at the practice of slavery and the slave trade were inseparable from the pursuit of British commercial and political interests under the banner of 'anti-slavery' – not as an exercise in cynical instrumentalization, but because Victorian imperialists saw this as a virtuous circle. His analysis is marred only by repeated but curiously conflicted attacks on the *History Reclaimed* collective, whom he seeks to disaggregate – dismissing Robert Tombs as a nostalgist wedded to a simplistic, positive narrative of the British imperial past, while acknowledging Lawrence Goldman's full engagement with the complex historiography on Abolitionism. Nowhere however does he acknowledge that there might be at least some justification to *History Reclaimed's* concerns about 'treating History as a playground in which self-confessed radicals find an outlet for their political instincts' rather than engaging in more sober analysis of the sources, and the growing 'immaturity, intolerance and unfairness' found in much academic writing and public discourse.<sup>35</sup>

The remaining contributions are generally more partisan and mean-spirited about Biggar's work than these, but still make some very important critiques. In her very brief contribution Bronwen Everill does not really refute Biggar's arguments about the central role of anti-slavery to British imperialism from the 1830s onwards, and her suggestion that this was largely a means of projecting British power is in some tension with Huzzey's arguments on the same topic. However she makes the reasonable point that in West Africa itself abolition was only possible at first through political alliances with African elites who were also opposed to slavery, notably in Sierra Leone. The essay on the Tasmanian genocide by the late Lyndall Ryan explains - convincingly in my view - why Biggar was wrong to question whether the indigenous Tasmanians were deliberately exterminated by British settlers on the island, and the consequences of his over-reliance on the controversial work of the Australian historian Keith Windschuttle. That on Canada by Adele Perry, Sean Carleton and Omeasoo Wahpasiw rehearses some by now familiar and justified criticisms of Biggar's handling of the speech by the *Métis* rebel leader Louis Riel at his trial in 1885,<sup>36</sup> but also betrays its partisanship by dismissing some of the historians on whom Biggar relies as 'right-wing' or 'Christian', as if no further commentary is needed. The authors vigorously defend the view that the system of native residential schools in Canada constituted a 'genocide' and dismiss all those who oppose this as 'denialists', but undermine their argument by failing to address what seem to be legitimate doubts over the real

---

<sup>34</sup> Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

<sup>35</sup> Goldman, "Working from the Sources".

<sup>36</sup> Lester, "The British Empire in the Culture War," 771.

existence of 'mass graves' of First Nations children at Kamloops and other residential schools, given that no bodies have actually been found.<sup>37</sup>

Robert Bickers seems particularly anxious to distance himself from Biggar, perhaps because his work is so extensively cited in *Colonialism*, but his short essay arguing for the defining role of violence in the British relationship with China comes across as shallow and rhetorical. Violence was clearly important to Sino-British relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in his other work Bickers is always careful to contextualise it alongside trade and missionary activity - it should be possible to recognise the violent origins of the colony of Hong Kong and of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (on which Bickers is the acknowledged expert) while also accepting the at least partly positive and constructive role that both ultimately played in Chinese history.<sup>38</sup> Bickers mocks Biggar's presentation of British violence in relation to that of Mao, but given that all states use violence and the threat of violence as tools of policy and to project power at home and abroad, an ethical judgement as to its severity or necessity can only ever be relative as to scale and motive. In the case of China its 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century history were sadly scarred by violence and human suffering on a massive scale, to which the British Empire's contribution was very minor. One might cite not just Mao's Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but the Taiping Rebellion, the Muslim revolts in Ili, Kashgar and Gansu and their suppression by the Qing, Japan's wars of aggression in China and Rape of Nanjing, or the Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet in 1950, to say nothing of what the CCP is currently doing to its Uyghur and other Muslim minorities.<sup>39</sup> This does not excuse British imperial violence in China – even Biggar considers the Opium Wars to be unjustified - but it does make it more historically comprehensible and contextualised, as well as making it clear that the CCP's choice to continue emphasising the 'century of humiliation' at the hands of western powers in its official rhetoric and historiography is an eminently political one.

Erik Linstrum provides an overview of the violence of decolonisation which is well-researched and effectively integrates the best-known examples – the India/Pakistan Partition, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus – into an overall critique of the supposedly entrenched view that Britain's retreat from Empire was a dignified and peaceful one. This consensus is perhaps less entrenched than he claims – after all, perhaps the most comprehensive debunking of the myth of Mountbatten's skilful handling of Partition came from that bugbear of the Left, Andrew Roberts, in *Eminent Churchillians* thirty years ago.<sup>40</sup> Linstrum writes that retreat from empire was also 'a project of shedding moral burdens, dissolving relationships of obligation, and evading mechanisms of accountability' – but perhaps it would be more correct to say that the British state *attempted* to do these things but often failed. It would be perfectly possible to turn the story he tells of legal chicanery and documentary destruction around to argue that the remarkable thing is how much *was* known about the abuses of the anti-Mau-Mau campaign even at the time,<sup>41</sup> and how much documentation has been accessibly

---

<sup>37</sup> Glavin, "The year of the graves".

<sup>38</sup> Bickers, *Britain in China* & "Revisiting the Chinese Maritime Customs Service".

<sup>39</sup> Apart from the article by Zenz cited above, see also Zenz, *Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control*; Haitiwaji, *Rescapée du Goulag Chinois*; Byler, *In the Camps*; Izgil, *Waiting to be Arrested at Night*. For a necessarily incomplete but still horrifying database of the victims, see <https://shahit.biz/eng/>.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, "Lord Mountbatten and the Perils of Adrenalin".

<sup>41</sup> Bizarrely Caroline Elkins devotes a considerable amount of attention to these contemporary public debates herself, before dismissing their significance. It certainly begs the question of why she claims to have thought the camps were an example of the success of Britain's 'civilizing mission' before she began her research. Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, x, 275-310. For a sample of contemporary debate see 'Prisons and Detention Camps, Kenya' *Hansard Deb* 24 February 1959 vol.600 cc.1019-78 <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1959/feb/24/prisons-and-detention-camps-kenya>

preserved to allow the telling of this history of repression – as David Anderson put it ‘what is astonishing about Kenya’s dirty war is not that it remained secret at the time, but that it was so well known and so thoroughly documented’.<sup>42</sup> The claim by Caroline Elkins that the documentation had largely been destroyed, necessitating a reliance on oral history, turned out to be false (like a lot of other things she argued), something shown clearly enough by the court records used by Anderson in *Histories of the Hanged*.<sup>43</sup> Even the 8,800 files which were discovered at Hanslope Park during the successful attempt by a group of former Mau-Mau detainees to obtain justice for the torture they had undergone ended up there more through bureaucratic infighting and inertia than deliberate concealment.<sup>44</sup> Linstrum actually hints at an interesting comparison with France when he notes that British legal instruments designed to draw a line under decolonisation and prevent litigation proved weak and full of loopholes – though he does not pursue this line of reasoning, the degree of personal and public accountability for war crimes and human rights abuses in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus or Ireland, while surely insufficient, seems to have been greater than for any other decolonising power, or for any of America’s wars of liberal intervention in the past 25 years.

Liam Liburd’s essay on the Empire in Black Political thought between the wars also offers interesting insights into the thinking of opponents of the British Empire from the Caribbean, most of them Communists, such as George Padmore, who in the pages of *The Negro Worker* and *International African Opinion* made comparisons between British rule in Trinidad, South Africa and elsewhere and the fascism which was engulfing the European continent at the time. It is important to show that this comparison *was* made by at least some contemporaries, and that it is not just a retrospective insult invented for the purpose of modern ‘culture wars’. This does, not, however, make it any more analytically useful – after all, until 1935 the Comintern insisted that even European Social Democratic parties should be described as ‘Social Fascists’ by Communists such as Padmore. Liburd is certainly correct that authoritarian and racist models derived from British imperial rule were important for the small fascist movement within Britain<sup>45</sup> – and indeed there were other fascist movements within the British Empire, such as the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which unlike Mosley’s Blackshirts still exists today - however it does not follow that any part of the British empire was actually governed fascistically. Even if we take the original Italian and the Spanish variants of Fascism, as opposed to the Nazi regime, no part of the British Empire engaged in the kind of mass control and mobilisation through a party-state, the sacralisation of politics and the attempt to control the private sphere that was characteristic of fascist regimes.<sup>46</sup> Even the abrogation of political rights, press censorship and the use of violence to which Padmore and other critics referred was neither as extreme nor as systematic and unchallenged. By contrast, as David Motadel has shown, some anticolonial nationalist movements in the interwar period took direct inspiration from fascism as they turned against the Wilsonian liberal international order upheld by the British and French empires, the RSS being a leading example. This process accelerated during the Second World War, when many anti-colonial leaders found sanctuary in Rome, Berlin or Tokyo - whether the exiled Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan, the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husayni of Jerusalem or, later,

---

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 309 – also quoted by Ogot “Review: Britain's Gulag,” 500.

<sup>43</sup> Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, x-xii. Apart from Ogot’s devastating review, cited above, see Blacker, “The demography of Mau Mau.” which casts significant doubt on Elkins’s claims about excess mortality and lower birth-rates among the Kikuyu.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, “Guilty Secrets”.

<sup>45</sup> Liburd, “Thinking Imperially”.

<sup>46</sup> See Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*, translated as *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*. The most comprehensive and accessible study of the nature of the Nazi regime in English is probably Evans *The Third Reich in Power, 1933 – 1939*, but obviously there is an enormous specialist literature on how the regime functioned practically and ideologically.

Subhas Chandra Bose and his puppet government of 'Azad Hind' – and their alignment with Nazism was often not simply one of convenience, but arose from real ideological conviction.<sup>47</sup>

It was also a mistake for Liburd to frame this with an opening discussion of the supposedly academic conference organised by Professor Priyamvada Gopal at Churchill College, Cambridge in February 2021, on 'The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill' and the backlash against it.<sup>48</sup> This is portrayed by Liburd as another example of the right-wing culture war, but there could hardly be a clearer example than this 'conference' of a deliberate provocation launched from the radical left. Why else would you invite the racial polemicist Kehinde Andrews, who is best known for claiming that Churchill and Adolf Hitler had similar views on race, and who stated at this conference that 'the British Empire was far worse than the Nazis', and the journalist Madhusree Mukerjee, who has attempted unconvincingly to reduce the complex causes of the horrific mortality of the 1943 Bengal famine to the racism of Churchill and Frederick Lindemann<sup>49</sup> - but not extend an invitation to any of those who have spent their career writing about Churchill and his time, such as David Reynolds, who probably has a more detailed knowledge of Churchill's writings and archive than any other living historian?<sup>50</sup> But no, there are no 'culture warriors' on the Left, only rational, objective academic historians. Lester was quite right to note in his original response to Biggar that 'It is not enough to defend the British Empire on the grounds that it was not as bad as the Nazis', but seems oblivious to how widespread the opposite tendency actually is in some parts of the left-wing public sphere.<sup>51</sup> Given that drawing an equivalence between Churchill and Hitler has now apparently also become popular among right-wing conspiracy theorists, perhaps we will finally see an end to this nonsense.<sup>52</sup>

Despite these lapses, if the collection were judged purely on the basis of its substantive articles, it would be a worthy contribution to an ongoing debate that could be read with profit by non-specialist readers who have not already made up their minds one way or the other about the British Empire. This is seriously undermined by the framing of the volume – by Sanghera's foreword and Lester's introduction, and also in the final piece, a methodological critique of Biggar by the distinguished UCL historian Professor Margot Finn. These are so obviously partisan and riven with double standards that many readers of a different or possibly even of the same political persuasion will be unwilling to take *The Truth About Empire* seriously.

Sanghera and Lester will not admit that it takes two sides to make a culture war, or that at least some of the criticism of the British Empire in the public sphere is exaggerated and simplistic. Nor are they prepared to tackle Biggar's political arguments. I do not know whether either is a Unionist (Lester's publication of yet another critique of Biggar in the Scottish Nationalist magazine *Bella Caledonia* suggests not)<sup>53</sup> but they ought to acknowledge that it is legitimate for those who are

---

<sup>47</sup> Motadel, "The Global Authoritarian Moment".

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/news/churchill-empire-and-race/racial-consequences-mr-churchill/>

<sup>49</sup> [https://x.com/kehinde\\_andrews/status/1270637392760889345?lang=en](https://x.com/kehinde_andrews/status/1270637392760889345?lang=en); Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War* – for critique see Lelyveld, "Did Churchill Let them Starve?" & Chatterton "The Bengal Famine". For more thorough re-examinations of the causes of the famine since Sen's groundbreaking *Poverty and Famines* see Ó'Gráda, "The Ripple That Drowns?"; Sarkar, "Fed by Famine", and, most recently, on the impact of the famine as well as its causes, Mukherjee *Hungry Bengal*. For a comprehensive and to my mind damning critique of the 'conference' as a whole see Roberts & Gebreyohanes *'The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill': A Review*.

<sup>50</sup> Reynolds, *In Command of History*.

<sup>51</sup> Lester, "The British Empire in the Culture War," 788.

<sup>52</sup> This claim was made by Darryl Cooper in an interview with Tucker Carlson on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024. For rebuttals see Roberts, "No, Churchill was not the villain"; Koureas, "Debunking Tucker Carlson's Darryl Cooper Interview".

<sup>53</sup> Lester, "The British Empire Rehabilitated?".

to be able challenge Scottish, Welsh, Irish or indeed English nationalism – and that the survival or otherwise of the United Kingdom is more than just a confected episode in a ‘culture war’. Lester does briefly refer to Biggar’s claims about the way in which attacks on Britain’s colonial record are exploited by Russian and Chinese propaganda, but brushes this aside by saying that the best way of countering this is to maintain a supposedly even-handed criticism of all forms of imperialism. This shows a remarkable degree of naivety – nothing that is written in the Anglosphere about Russian imperialism has the slightest effect on Russian official or popular opinion, as I know all too well.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand the Russian state and the Chinese Communist Party are always ready to seize upon and inflate what they see as decadent self-harm by the West, and to make use of it in their propaganda war in the Global South and to minimise their own crimes – a 2018 essay on ‘UK political crimes’ by Maria Zakharova of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs cites both Elkins and Tharoor, while in 2021 China sought to pre-empt a Canadian demand for an investigation into the abuse of the Uyghurs by tabling a counter-demand relating to residential schools.<sup>55</sup> Underlying Lester’s attitude is the parochial belief that British politics is uniquely afflicted with a dangerous, toxic form of imperial nostalgia, characteristically expressed in this evidence-free assertion from Elkins, which it is fair to say has not aged well:

The nation’s majority is embracing Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Empire 2.0. Britain’s imperial nationalism has endured and is underwriting Britain’s belief that the tiny island nation is a giant ready to stake its historically informed claim to the world. In no other contemporary nation-state does imperial nationalism endure with such explicit, social, political and economic consequences.<sup>56</sup>

Quite apart from the fact that the British people turned out to be rather less keen on Boris Johnson than Elkins appreciated, the ‘Empire 2.0’ phrase never seems to have been used by Johnson, and as Robert Saunders has shown was invented as a satirical term by civil servants who were opposed to Brexit.<sup>57</sup> In any case this statement would be questionable even if the comparison were with France, which retains many more overseas possessions than Britain, and which with the CFA franc and a series of garrisons has long maintained a much heavier footprint in its former west African colonies than Britain does anywhere in its former empire. Extending the frame of comparison to Eurasia, presumably she had not been paying much attention to the recent words or actions of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Xi Jinping, or Vladimir Putin. However toxic Elkins and Lester may believe British imperial nostalgia to be, I don’t believe any reasonable person thinks it includes the sort of territorial revanchism that might produce an attempt to reconquer Ireland. It seems the message of the war in Ukraine is still not really penetrating to parts of the Western Left.<sup>58</sup>

Sanghera seems an odd choice to write the foreword to a volume which sets such store by the academic credentials of its contributors, and the only thing we really learn from his contribution is that he does not like the Conservative Party, whose politicians in his view bear the sole responsibility for fomenting a ‘culture war’ around statues and other monuments. In Sanghera’s world those who sprayed graffiti on Churchill’s statue in Parliament Square are not ‘culture warriors’, only those who objected to this behaviour. His claim that ‘it faced no real threat’ is hardly the point – whatever you think about Churchill, defacing his statue was clearly a deliberate political act – and indeed is referred

---

<sup>54</sup> Alimova & Morrison, “U Rossii allergiya na slovo ‘kolonializm’”.

<sup>55</sup> Zakharova, “Political crimes committed by the UK”; Taylor, “China calls for Canada human rights inquiry”.

<sup>56</sup> Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Saunders, “Brexit and Empire”, 1143.

<sup>58</sup> Bilous, “An Open letter to the Western Left from Kyiv”.

to approvingly as such by Elkins in the introduction to *Legacy of Violence*.<sup>59</sup> It is strangely disingenuous to claim that this was somehow anodyne. Despite his focus on monuments Sanghera does not mention the single most egregious case of attempted statue-toppling – that by Jesus College Cambridge to remove the memorial to one of its most generous benefactors, Tobias Rustat, from its chapel, because of what turned out to be an entirely spurious claim that his donations to the college were funded with profits from the transatlantic slave trade. Here again, according to Sanghera’s logic, it is not those who tried to remove Rustat’s memorial who count as ‘culture warriors’, but Lawrence Goldman of *History Reclaimed* who provided the expert and properly-documented evidence that convinced the Consistory court to forbid the removal.<sup>60</sup> Apparently historical truth is a less desirable commodity in this context.

Beyond this Sanghera is crippled by the parochialism which has afflicted most British imperial historians who have commented on this topic. Attacks on statues and monuments as visible reminders of a contested past may be relatively new in a metropolitan British context, but are familiar territory for countries that have been through revolutionary political change. The Bolsheviks were probably the most thorough political iconoclasts of this kind, which explains why today the only surviving statues of the ‘Liberator’ Tsar, Alexander II, stand in Helsinki and Sofia. This is, to put it mildly, not an encouraging precedent.<sup>61</sup> On one point I agree with Sanghera – those who argue about statues are not really interested in the past at all. What the statue-topplers are demanding is that their own values and ideological beliefs should have a monopoly over the public sphere in the present. This is what supposed ‘culture warriors’ who object to this mean when they talk about the removal of monuments as an erasure or ‘rewriting’ of History. Historians do indeed rewrite and come up with new historical interpretations of past events and personalities all the time. This does not mean that the physical remains or reminders of that past should be constantly removed or altered to reflect these new interpretations, which in their turn will no doubt one day be superseded. It is much healthier to allow commemorations and monuments to build up in a layered manner over time, with each generation leaving its mark alongside those that came before it, than for every generation to insist that it has a right to purge what came before. That is the path to a permanently impoverished historical fabric and public sphere.

The collection is rounded off by Margot Finn’s essay on ‘Colonialism: A methodological reckoning’, which is a qualitative and quantitative analysis of Biggar’s bibliography. The exercise is queasily reminiscent of the gender and race ‘audits’ which some ‘decolonising’ history departments have imposed on their teaching bibliographies, but it also almost reads as a backhanded compliment (how many trade books in History get this kind of detailed attention)? She certainly highlights some significant gaps and weaknesses – the absence of Catherine Hall’s crucial work on slavery, of any work by John Mackenzie, or of any reference to volumes in the *New Cambridge History of India* – but yet again the problem of double standards, motes and beams, re-emerges. Amongst Finn’s methodological critiques is that the works Biggar refers to in *Colonialism* are ‘overwhelmingly Anglophone’. *The Truth About Empire* is not blessed with a bibliography, but after trawling through its 835 endnotes I could find only two references to works that were not in English, one in French and one in Dutch – not even the inevitable invocations of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire are cited in the original. This is testimony to the invincible lack of curiosity in other forms of colonialism – French,

---

<sup>59</sup> Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> <https://lawandreligionuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Re-the-Rustat-Memorial-Jesus-College-Cambridge2022-ECC-Ely-2.pdf>; Goldman “Has Jesus College learnt anything from its Rustat defeat?”.

<sup>61</sup> Morrison, “Monuments and Memorialisation”.

German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, Chinese – and in non-Anglophone historiographies among many historians of the British Empire, but also to the fact that their professed concern for the fate of its colonial subjects only rarely extends to taking the trouble to learn their languages.

In any case, this game is not a difficult one to play with other works which have met with marked approval from the British imperial history establishment. Sanghera's own *Empireland* and *Empireworld* would quickly wilt under this treatment, to say nothing of the thin and selective citations in Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire*, but these are avowedly popular, journalistic books, so in the spirit of credentialism which infuses this volume let us instead take *Time's Monster* by Stanford Professor Priya Satia, whose gushing endorsement ('Expert historians patiently, and devastatingly, prove the scholarly malpractice behind recent ideologically motivated attempts to whitewash the past') adorns the back cover of *The Truth About Empire*, and who is frequently cited in it. *Time's Monster*, which has had almost universally favourable reviews, is a study of the ways in which history-writing justified imperialism and vice-versa, largely focused on British India.<sup>62</sup> Along the way Satia makes by now familiar claims about famine in 19<sup>th</sup>-century India being a direct and well-nigh deliberate consequence of British rule, using Mike Davis's *Late Victorian Holocausts* as her sole reference and source of authority. There is no acknowledgement anywhere in her notes or text of the critiques of Davis's work by Tirthankar Roy (whose work she does not cite at all) or the many other economic historians of India and historians of famine who have tackled this contentious topic since Davis's book appeared over twenty years ago.<sup>63</sup> Similarly her principal reference for the trial of Warren Hastings is Nicholas Dirks's slender and highly tendentious *The Scandal of Empire* – although she cites P. J. Marshall's standard edition of Burke's speeches, nowhere does she engage with his wider body of work on the Hastings trial and the history of the East India Company more broadly.<sup>64</sup> She only cites one volume from the *New Cambridge History of India* (Thomas Metcalf's *Ideologies of the Raj*) and, staggeringly, not a single work by Chris Bayly, not even his classic *Empire and Information*, despite its centrality to her arguments about the role of knowledge in motivating and justifying imperial expansion and rule.<sup>65</sup> Her discussion of James Mill's notorious *History of British India* (1817) makes no reference at all to Eric Stokes's seminal *The English Utilitarians and India*, and while she frequently cites Javed Majeed's brilliant *Ungoverned Imaginings*, she elides one of his most important points, which is that Mill's book, with its lurid depictions of Indian and above all Hindu backwardness and corruption, was not really about India at all, but a plea for Utilitarian political reform in Britain.<sup>66</sup> A caricatured imagining of India was Mill's warning of what Britain itself would become without reformed governance and true religion. Satia also repeats the familiar shibboleth that 'Mill's history became the single most influential book among British Officials in India',<sup>67</sup> a notion of which one is easily disabused by actually reading the fourth and fifth editions which were prepared for teaching at Haileybury – edited by the Sanskritist Horace Hayman Wilson, they carried a critical apparatus which debunked most of Mill's assertions about Hinduism and Indian society in no uncertain terms.<sup>68</sup> Most astonishing of all, in a book whose argument is that the linear idea of 'progress' which characterised so much 19<sup>th</sup>-century history writing served to justify imperial

---

<sup>62</sup> Satia, *Time's Monster*. See for instance Mitchell "Review of *Time's Monster*".

<sup>63</sup> O'Grada, *Famine, A Short History* summarises much of the historiography before 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*; Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings*; Marshall, *Bengal-the British Bridgehead*; Marshall, *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*.

<sup>65</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

<sup>66</sup> Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*; Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, 123-50, 200.

<sup>67</sup> Satia, *Time's Monster*, 74.

<sup>68</sup> Mill *The History of British India* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. & 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, 129.

expansion, there is no reference anywhere to the original critique of ‘History as Progress’ – Herbert Butterfield’s *The Whig Interpretation of History*.<sup>69</sup>

This is not to suggest that Satia is guilty of the scholarly malpractice of which she so freely accuses others, or even of particularly sloppy scholarship – in modern academia there is nothing unusual about her thesis-driven approach, which cherry-picks both evidence and secondary literature to prove a case. It is that what she does here is entirely comparable to Biggar’s elisions and omissions in *Colonialism* – in fact in many ways it is worse, as Biggar does take on numerous works he disagrees with in the lengthy notes to *Colonialism* and seeks to rebut their arguments. I am sure though that none of the contributors to *The Truth About Empire* would dream of subjecting Satia’s work to a similar analysis because they find its obvious political partisanship more congenial.

Finn instead accuses Biggar of double standards when he criticises what she claims is a co-authored article by Elleke Boehmer and Tom Holland arguing that Empires are bad, writing that the latter author ‘intriguingly fails to attract Biggar’s condemnation’, but had she taken the trouble to consult the piece she would have seen why – it is not a co-authored article, but a debate between the two in which Boehmer is arguing that empires are ‘bad’, and Holland is arguing the opposite.<sup>70</sup> Finn’s final substantive point against Biggar mocks his resort to credentialism when insisting on the intellectual and academic qualifications of his supposed ‘ally’, Professor Tirthankar Roy of the LSE, contrasting this with his reference to the recent promotion to a Professorship at Cambridge of one of his most implacable opponents, Professor Priyamvada Gopal: ‘Professor Roy, one might surmise, in contrast, has perpetually written as a professor, having emerged from his doctorate fully-fledged, like Athena from Zeus’s manly forehead’. Presumably this is intended by Finn as a joke, but if so it lands very flat – Tirthankar Roy and his scholarship surely deserve more respect than she affords them here. As for Biggar’s contrasting treatment of the two, perhaps this has more to do with the fact that Roy’s Twitter feed is notably less sulphurous than that of Gopal, who notoriously used hers to call for Biggar’s ‘Ethics and Empire’ project to be ‘shut down’ in 2017.<sup>71</sup> In any case, given that the entire basis of this volume is the supposed credentialled expertise of its authors, it seems a bit rich to criticise Biggar for invoking the same authority in his references.

It is Lester’s introduction which more than anything else sets the tone for the book as a whole, and which ultimately undermines the entire enterprise. Lester is of course correct to deplore the often very personal attacks in the press on academics such as Corinne Fowler or indeed on Sanghera, and the online harassment which often ensues. He does also rather grudgingly concede that 2017’s collective pile-on by imperial historians targeting Biggar (and the earlier campaign against Canadian political scientist Bruce Gilley) was a mistake, and that some (unspecified) academics went too far in their comments on Twitter. This does not do anything to shake his conviction that the ‘culture war’ has only ever been launched and fostered from the Right. He repeatedly dismisses arguments he disagrees with by noting their appearance in the *Spectator* or the *Daily Telegraph* as if this absolves him from having to engage with their substance. More damning is a consistent pattern of selective citation, which casts various controversies in British imperial history in a highly misleading and partisan light. I will highlight just a few.

---

<sup>69</sup> Butterfield *The Whig Interpretation of History*; see further Bentley *The Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield*.

<sup>70</sup> Boehmer & Holland “The Duel: Are Empires always bad?”.

<sup>71</sup> <https://x.com/PriyamvadaGopal>

The first is the now familiar claim that British rule in India caused an increase in famine mortality. To support this Lester turns with wearying predictability to Davis's *Late Victorian Holocausts*, which as we have seen has a section on famine in British India amid its wider polemic claiming that global capitalism was responsible for late 19<sup>th</sup> century 'extermination' policies against the poor of what would become the 'Third World'. The basic premise of Davis's work – that global markets in grain increase food insecurity –denies the rather important point that *before* improved transportation and communication technology and trade networks enabled globally integrated markets in foodstuffs, local scarcity as a result of poor harvests would usually mean famine, because there was no means or mechanism for bringing in food from outside – the local 'coping mechanisms' which he sentimentalises would never have been enough.<sup>72</sup> Davis's ignorance of Indian history is profound – the evidence he cites to demonstrate that Mughal India did not experience famine all comes from the correspondence of East India Company officials over a century after the Mughal Empire's demise, when they were engaged in a debate over whether British rule in India should take on 'European' or 'Oriental' forms – it was the 'Orientalists' who were making these claims about the superiority of Mughal governance for their own polemical purposes (they lost the argument).<sup>73</sup> Davis also believes that the Bengali zamindars were a traditional, paternalist Indian elite who had sought to protect their peasantry from the worst excesses of want, whereas in fact they were a British administrative creation known best for their ruthless extraction of agrarian surplus and maximisation of revenue. Lester does then cite Tirthankar Roy's critique of Davis's work, which points out that while famines in British India are far better documented than those which occurred before, this does not in fact mean that they became either more frequent or more severe, and that British attempts at famine relief did slowly become more effective, such that by 1915 excess mortality had largely disappeared.<sup>74</sup> Lester dismisses this judgement on the basis of two blog posts, neither of them referenced, and one of which is by Jason Hickel, who shares Davis's extreme anti-capitalist political slant.<sup>75</sup> In any case, Roy is far from the only critic of the idea that British rule actually exacerbated famine in India – the leading global historian of famine, Cormac O'Grada, writes that 'In the longer run, although colonial rule may have eliminated or weakened traditional coping mechanisms, it meant better communications, integrated markets, and more effective public action, which together probably reduced famine mortality' while also noting that 'again and again, historians have been unable to resist the temptation to infer the incidence and frequency of famines from the documentary record,'<sup>76</sup> which is one of Davis's key methodological failings. None of these arguments are properly explored by Lester.

A similar pattern is seen when Lester discusses an equally hackneyed topic, the supposed 'drain' of wealth from India to Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a common trope in the writings of early members of the Indian National Congress, and was further explored in the early twentieth century by the economic nationalist Romesh Chandra Dutt. Since Indian independence more detailed analysis by economic historians revealed it for what it always was – a nationalist myth, whose basic premises cannot even be tested, let alone proved.<sup>77</sup> Recently however it has been revived by Shashi

---

<sup>72</sup> Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 6-11.

<sup>73</sup> Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 141-175, 285-7.

<sup>74</sup> Roy "Were Indian Famines 'Natural' Or 'Manmade'?"

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.jasonhickel.org/blog/2023/1/7/on-the-mortality-crises-in-india-under-british-rule-a-response-to-tirthankar-roy>

<sup>76</sup> O'Grada, *Famine, A Short History* 19, 25.

<sup>77</sup> Chaudhuri, "India's International Economy in the Nineteenth Century"; Roy "The Economic Legacies of Colonial Rule in India".

Tharoor in *Inglorious Empire*, and in a notorious article by Utsa Patnaik, which made the now regularly repeated claim that the British extracted \$45 trillion from India.<sup>78</sup> While Lester is rightly sceptical about the possibility of attaching such precise figures to the drain, he accepts the premise that it existed. He cites Tirthankar Roy's critique, but only to dismiss it, this time on the basis of an entirely unreferenced private email from none other than Stanford Professor Priya Satia.

It is of course right that these controversies should be rehearsed in the introduction to a book of this kind, and I realise that Lester is not a South Asian specialist, but I do not think it is a coincidence that these mis-steps both tend towards a more negative portrayal of British rule. Once again we are in the realm of the unacknowledged ethical judgement. Lester's obvious partisanship undermines his claim to be taking a dispassionate, objective view of British imperial history, or prioritising historical truth. The truth is that Davis's work on Indian famines or Tharoor's on the Indian economy are no more reliable than Windschuttle's on the Tasmanian genocide – they just lie at the opposite end of the political spectrum, and ought to be treated as such. Meanwhile Tirthankar Roy is presented by Lester 'one of the few academic defenders of Britain's economic record in India', which is untrue on two counts – firstly because Roy is not by any stretch of the imagination a 'defender' of Britain's record in India – he is highly critical of the Raj's failure to invest in rural development, education, healthcare and other infrastructure on a sufficient scale, which led to stagnant growth in the agrarian sector and low life expectancy throughout the period of British rule. However he is not prepared to pander to the nationalist myth-making which describes the Raj as a massive, extractive state whose purpose was to drain wealth to Britain and prevent Indian industrial development. Instead, as he has patiently explained many times, the problem with the British Raj was its sheer lack of state capacity, a product both of the British reliance on Indian elites and very low levels of taxation. What the relationship with Britain did provide in at least some pockets of the Indian economy was the services, skills and investment which produced a level of industrialisation which in Asia was second only to Japan.<sup>79</sup> Nor is Roy alone in this interpretation, which lies very much in the mainstream of Indian economic history, not least because it actually accords with the available data – it is also the view taken by Brian Tomlinson in the volume of the *New Cambridge History of India* on the Indian Economy.<sup>80</sup> The truth is that Lester and Finn are dismissing Roy's massive contribution to Indian economic history over the past three decades because of his association with Biggar. This is just not acceptable.

However Lester's partisanship is most obvious in his reference to what should by rights be the most notorious historical scandal of the past year, namely the article by the UCL historian Jenny Bulstrode on 'Black Metallurgists and the Making of the Industrial Revolution' which appeared in the journal *History & Technology* in the summer of 2023, and made a series of very well-publicised claims about the origins of a key late 18<sup>th</sup>-century iron-rolling process in techniques developed by enslaved black metallurgists in a Jamaican foundry, from whom the supposed inventor, Henry Cort, was said to have stolen it.<sup>81</sup> On closer scrutiny much of Bulstrode's argument seemed to fall apart for lack of evidence, but for Lester this is yet another 'culture war' episode – while he acknowledges that there was some 'more thoughtful' criticism of her article, and rightly condemns the personal attacks on this young historian in the press, he is not prepared to acknowledge that there might have been some

---

<sup>78</sup> Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, 9-23; Patnaik "Independence Day".

<sup>79</sup> Roy, *The Economic History of India 1857 – 1947*; Roy, *India in the World Economy*, 181-209.

<sup>80</sup> Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India*.

<sup>81</sup> Bulstrode, "Black metallurgists and the making of the industrial revolution"; Devlin "Industrial Revolution iron method 'was taken from Jamaica by Briton'".

real basis for this criticism. Instead he repeats the smear that it arose only because some historians are so racist they cannot bear the idea that a key innovation of the industrial revolution was discovered by enslaved black people. He does not cite the most devastating (and entirely measured and impersonal) analyses of Bulstrode's article, by Anton Howes and Oliver Jelf, which exposed serious gaps in her knowledge and a complete absence of evidence for her most important claims, nor does he cite David Wootton's rather apposite defence of the importance of historical truth in relation to this case.<sup>82</sup> He does, however, cite the defence of Bulstrode's article by the editors of *History & Technology*, which completely failed to address these criticisms and instead made the extraordinary claim that 'we must grasp that what is experienced by dominant actors in EuroAmerican cultures as 'empiricism' is deeply conditioned by the predicating logics of colonialism and racial capitalism'.<sup>83</sup> This was compounded by the disgraceful behaviour of the British Society for the History of Science, whose council issued a statement claiming that Bulstrode's research was 'authoritative' (that word again) and that any criticism of it must be motivated by racism.<sup>84</sup> It was the most outrageous attempt to shut down legitimate debate by the illegitimate exercise of academic authority which I can recall, more worthy of a politburo than a scholarly society. Somehow Lester does not find the space to mention any of this.

Biggar is being taken to task throughout *The Truth About Empire* for precisely this kind of *suppressio veri, suggestio falsi*, and this case alone gives the lie to Lester's claim to expert and impartial even-handedness. There is a further and even more important point – the editors of *History and Technology* were attacking the very notion of empiricism, of the use of evidence or historical truth. This form of standpoint epistemology is common among those who advocate a 'decolonial' approach to research, in which 'truth', knowledge and disciplinary tools of the kind used by professional historians are held to be a construct imposed by colonial power – but it is clearly disastrous for the arguments about objectivity, evidence, truth and historical professionalism which are being made throughout *The Truth About Empire*.<sup>85</sup> The Cort case presented Lester with a test – does he think evidence and the truth about the past matters, even when it leads to conclusions, which, as in this case, are politically uncongenial to him? He fails that test, and at that point it is not clear why we should pay attention to any of his other strictures.

Despite the best efforts of some contributors then, this volume is a missed opportunity. It represented a chance to display real scholarly leadership and objectivity, and to temper fair and constructive criticism of Biggar's work with some acknowledgement of the important areas of debate it has opened up. Instead it ends up being almost a mirror-image of Biggar's *Colonialism* – equally partisan, equally political, equally selective, and often considerably less open about areas of historical debate and disagreement. To me, as a partial outsider to the field, what *The Truth about Empire* reveals about the current state of British imperial historiography is very different from what the editor and contributors intended – the problem is not Biggar, or *History Reclaimed*, or the 'culture war'; it is one of political partisanship, sweeping, ill-informed and unacknowledged ethical

---

<sup>82</sup> Howes, "How to be a Public Historian"; Jelf, "The origin of Henry Cort's iron-rolling process"; Wootton, "Cort Case shows why Historical Truth Matters".

<sup>83</sup> Slaton and Saraiva, "Editorial," 134.

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.bshs.org.uk/bshs-council-statement-on-black-metallurgists-and-the-making-of-the-industrial-revolution>

<sup>85</sup> As Dalia Gebrial puts it 'the epistemological insistence on history as a positivist endeavour functions as a useful tool of coloniality in the institution, as it effaces the power relations that underpin what the "production of history" has thus far looked like.' Gebrial, "Rhodes Must Fall," 24. See further Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* & Mignolo, «Parce que la colonialité est partout, la décolonialité est inévitable». For a devastating critique of the 'decolonial' approach to knowledge see Táiwò, *Against Decolonisation*.

judgement, combined with a profound degree of Anglo-American parochialism. My prescriptions for a cure would also be very different. Historians of the British empire need to engage much more fully with the historiographies of the other European and Eurasian empires which were the British Empire's contemporaries.<sup>86</sup> The failure to do this produces the impression that the British empire was a sort of monstrous aberration, rather than just one more manifestation of what has undoubtedly been the most common form of state structure throughout human history. Those expansive, comparative studies of empire which transformed the field fifteen or twenty years ago do not seem to have many modern successors.<sup>87</sup> As John Darwin recently observed, even Martin Thomas, a superbly talented imperial historian who is one of the few working today whose work is genuinely multilingual and comparative between the French and British empires, was unable to integrate the Russian or Chinese empires into his recent, supposedly global history of decolonisation.<sup>88</sup> Alongside this, if British imperial historians are going to make comparisons or draw equivalences with the British Empire's Nazi and Fascist opponents or Soviet allies in the Second World War (a parlour game I would rather see discontinued, but which it seems is bound to carry on) then they should similarly do so with due respect to the very complex historiography surrounding these ideologies and regimes, and with real analytical intent.<sup>89</sup> They need to avoid idealising pre-colonial states and societies and anti-colonial nationalist movements, and evaluate them with the same critical eye they bring to British imperialism – you cannot gain a proper understanding of the Mughal empire if, *à la* Mike Davis, your only sources are the works of East India Company officials whose own knowledge of it was sentimental and second hand. Nor are the actions of Mau-Mau or the Communist insurgency in Malaya (whose victims were overwhelmingly Kikuyu and Malays, respectively) automatically justified because they were resisting British rule. A little more economic literacy and hard-nosed realism about power and how it is exercised is also needed – all too often British imperialism seems to exist in a vacuum, where without it some utopian alternative world would come into being where there would be no states, no oppression, no organised violence, and communism would have proved a viable alternative to capitalism. Historians of the British Empire also need to recognise – as Richard Huzzey wisely acknowledges in this volume – that professional historians are not the only stakeholders in this debate. Their authority with the general public has to be earned, and will be forfeited if they are seen to be adopting obviously politically partisan positions, or are only prepared to defend historical truth when it is expedient. *The Truth About Empire* makes great play of this claim to professionalism, authority and objectivity, but falls sadly short.

Alexander Morrison

*New College, Oxford*

---

<sup>86</sup> On Chinese colonialism, I can highly recommend Perdue *China Marches West*; Brophy *Uyghur Nation*; Schluessel *Land of Strangers*. On Russia I will immodestly recommend my own *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia*.

<sup>87</sup> I am thinking particularly of Lieven, *Empire*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*; Belich, *Replenishing the Earth* and Burbank & Cooper *Empires in World History*. Some excellent more focused comparative studies were produced in the following decade: Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*; Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*. See also Kumar, *Visions of Empire*. Not coincidentally, he became a core member of Biggar's *Ethics and Empire* project. The most recent book displaying similar ambition is probably von Hirschhausen and Leonhard, *Empires: eine globale Geschichte*.

<sup>88</sup> Darwin "Empires strike back"; Thomas, *The End of Empires and a World Remade*.

<sup>89</sup> A good example of how this can be done is Overy, *Blood and Ruins*.

## Bibliography

Acemoglu, Daron, Johnson, Simon and Robinson, James "The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth" *The American Economic Review* 95, no 3 (2005): 546–79.

Alimova, Yelnur and Alexander Morrison "U Rossii allergiya na slovo "kolonializm". Vosstanie 1916 goda cherez prizmu politiki i Istorii." *Radio Azattyk* 1 July 2021 <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/u-rossii-allergiya-na-slovo-kolonializm-vosstanie-1916-goda-cherez-prizmu-politiki-i-istorii/31334649.html>

Allen, Charles. "Who Owns India's History? A Critique of Shashi Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire*." *Asian Affairs* 49 no.3 (2018): 355–69.

Anderson, David M. "Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's 'Migrated Archive.'" *History Workshop Journal* 80 (2015): 142–60.

Anderson, David. *Histories of the Hanged. Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005.

Anil, Pratinav. "Imperial Island by Charlotte Lydia Riley Review – Cruel Britannia." *The Guardian* 23 February 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/aug/23/imperial-island-by-charlotte-lydia-riley-review-cruel-britannia>

Arnold, David. "In defence of empire. A moral philosopher weighs into the debate." *Times Literary Supplement* 3 March 2023 <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/history/colonialism-nigel-biggar-book-book-review-david-arnold>.

Bayly, C. A. *Empire and Information. Intelligence-Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Belich, James. *Replenishing the Earth. The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Bentley, Michael. *The Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield: History, Science, and God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Berg, Maxine and Hudson, Pat. *Slavery, Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution*. London: Polity, 2023.

Bickers, Robert. "Revisiting the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854–1950." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 no.2 (2008): 221-226.

Bickers, Robert. *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Biggar, Nigel. *Colonialism. A Moral Reckoning*. London: William Collins, 2022.

Bilous, Taras. "An Open letter to the Western Left from Kyiv" *Opendemocracy.net* 25 February 2022 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/a-letter-to-the-western-left-from-kyiv/>

Blacker, John. "The demography of Mau Mau: fertility and mortality in Kenya in the 1950s: a demographer's viewpoint" *African Affairs* 106, no.423, (2007): 205–227.

Boehmer, Elleke & Tom Holland. "The Duel: Are Empires always bad? A source of atrocity—or belonging? Two contributors advance opposing positions." *Prospect Magazine* 8 November 2020 <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/author/3856/elleke-boehmer-and-tom-holland>

Brophy, David. *Uyghur Nation. Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Bulstrode, J. "Black metallurgists and the making of the industrial revolution." *History and Technology*, 39 no.1 (2023): 1–41.

Burbank, Jane & Cooper, Frederick. *Empires in World History. Power and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Butterfield, Herbert. *The Whig Interpretation of History*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1931.

Byler, Darren. *In the Camps: life in China's high-tech penal colony*. London: Atlantic Books, 2022.

Chatterton, Brian, Madhusree Mukerjee and Joseph Lelyveld "The Bengal Famine." *New York Review of Books* 24 February 2011 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2011/02/24/bengal-famine/>

Chaudhuri, K. N. "India's International Economy in the Nineteenth Century: An Historical Survey." *Modern Asian Studies* 2, no.1 (1968): 31–50.

Clough, Marshall S. *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory, and Politics*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

Devlin, Hannah. "Industrial Revolution iron method 'was taken from Jamaica by Briton'" *The Guardian* 05 July 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/jul/05/industrial-revolution-iron-method-taken-from-jamaica-briton>

Dhingra, Sanya. "How Hindu Nationalists Redefined Decolonization in India" *New Lines Magazine* 14 August 2023 <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/how-hindu-nationalists-redefined-decolonization-in-india/>

Dalrymple, William. *The Anarchy. The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Dalrymple, William. "The East India Company: The original corporate raiders." *The Guardian* 4 April 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/04/east-india-company-original-corporate-raiders>

Darwin, John. "Empires strike back. The unfinished business of decolonization." *Times Literary Supplement* 13 September 2024 <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/history/twentieth-century-onwards-history/the-end-of-empires-and-a-world-remade-martin-thomas-book-review-john-darwin>

Darwin, John. "Lowering the flag How the British justified imperial violence to themselves." *Times Literary Supplement* 15 April 2022 <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/history/legacy-of-violence-caroline-elkins-book-review-john-darwin>

Darwin, John. *After Tamerlane. The Global History of Empire since 1405*. London: Allen Lane, 2007.

Davis, Mike. *Late Victorian Holocausts. El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*. London: Verso, 2001.

Dirks, Nicholas. *The Scandal of Empire. India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Drayton, Richard. "Biggar vs Little Britain: God, War, Union, Brexit and Empire in Twenty-first century Conservative ideology." In *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain*, edited by Astrid Rasch & Stuart Ward, 143-155. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Drescher, Seymour. "Eric Williams: British Capitalism and British Slavery." *History and Theory* 26, no.2 (1987): 180–96.

Edgerton, David. "Brexit is not a product of history. It's something entirely new." *The New Statesman* 5 June 2019 <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/the-staggers/2019/06/brexit-not-product-history-it-s-something-entirely-new>

Elkins, Caroline. *Legacy of Violence. A History of the British Empire*. London: The Bodley Head, 2022.

Elkins, Caroline. *Britain's Gulag. The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2005.

Engerman, Stanley L. "The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: A Comment on the Williams Thesis." *Business History Review* 46 no.4 (1972): 430-43.

Evans, Richard. *The Third Reich in Power, 1933 – 1939. How the Nazis Won Over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation*. London: Penguin, 2006.

Faught, C. Brad. *Into Africa: The Imperial Life of Margery Perham*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2012.

Forth, Aidan. *Barbed-Wire Imperialism. Britain's Empire of Camps 1876-1903*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

Gebrial, Dalia. "Rhodes Must Fall: Oxford and Movements for Change." in *Decolonizing the University* ed. Gurminder Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial & Kerem Nişancıoğlu. London: Pluto Press, 2018.

Gentile, Emilio *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*. Bari: Laterza, 1993.

Gentile, Emilio *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Glavin, Terry. "The year of the graves: How the world's media got it wrong on residential school graves." *The National Post* 26 May 2022 <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/the-year-of-the-graves-how-the-worlds-media-got-it-wrong-on-residential-school-graves>

Goldman, Lawrence. "Working from the Sources. A Defence of *History Reclaimed*." 4 September 2024 <https://historyreclaimed.co.uk/working-from-the-sources-a-defence-of-history-reclaimed/>

Goldman, Lawrence. "Slavery, Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution: A Dissent." *History Reclaimed* 12 September 2023 <https://historyreclaimed.co.uk/slavery-capitalism-and-the-industrial-revolution-a-dissent/>

Goldman, Lawrence. "Has Jesus College learnt anything from its Rustat defeat?" *The Spectator* 29 March 2022 <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/has-jesus-college-learned-anything-from-its-rustat-defeat/>

Gopal, Priyamvada. *Insurgent Empire. Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*. London: Verso, 2019.

Guha, Ramachandra. *Rebels against the Raj. Western Fighters for India's Freedom*. London: William Collins, 2022.

Haitiwaji, Gulbahar. *Rescapée du Goulag Chinois*. Paris: Equateur, 2021.

Howe, Stephen. *Anticolonialism in British Politics. The Left and the End of Empire 1918 – 1964*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Howes, Anton. "How to be a Public Historian." *Age of Invention* 28 November 2023 <https://www.ageofinvention.xyz/p/age-of-invention-how-to-be-a-public>

Huzzey, Richard. *Freedom Burning. Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012.

Izgil, Tahir Hamut. *Waiting to be Arrested at Night. A Uyghur Poet's Memoir of China's Genocide* trans. Joshua L. Freeman. London: Jonathan Cape, 2023.

Jelf, Oliver. "The origin of Henry Cort's iron-rolling process: assessing the evidence" SocArXiv preprint 24 August 2023 <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/rp5ae>

Khomami, Nadia. "Oxford Students step up campaign to remove Cecil Rhodes Statue" *The Guardian* 22 December 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/22/oxford-students-campaign-cecil-rhodes-statue-oriel-college>

Koureas, Andreas. "Debunking Tucker Carlson's Darryl Cooper Interview." *The National Interest* 11 September 2024 <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/debunking-tucker-carlson-s-darryl-cooper-interview-212703>

Kumar, Krishan. *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Lavrov, Sergei. "Rossiia i Afrika. Partnerstvo, ustremlyennoe v budushchee." 22 June 2022  
[https://www.mid.ru/ru/press\\_service/vizity-ministra/1823250/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/vizity-ministra/1823250/)

Lelyveld, Joseph. "Did Churchill Let them Starve?" *New York Review of Books* 23 December 2010  
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2010/12/23/did-churchill-let-them-starve/>

Lester, Alan. "On Colonialism. A Response to Nigel Biggar's Reply." 2 June 2023  
<https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/snapshotsofempire/2023/06/02/on-colonialism-a-response-to-nigel-biggars-reply/>

Lester, Alan. "The British Empire in the Culture War: Nigel Biggar's *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 51, no.4 (2023): 763–795.

Lester, Alan. "The British Empire Rehabilitated?" *Bella Caledonia* 7 March 2023  
<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2023/03/07/the-british-empire-rehabilitated/>

Lieven, Dominic. *Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals*. London: John Murray, 2000.

Liburd, Liam J. "Thinking Imperially: The British Fascists and the Politics of Empire, 1923–35." *Twentieth Century British History* 32, no.1 (2021): 46–67.

Lindner, Ulrike. *Koloniale Begegnungen: Deutschland und Grossbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880-1914*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2011.

Mackenzie, John. *Propaganda and Empire. The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Malik, Kenan. "Colonialism by Nigel Biggar review – a flawed defence of empire." *The Observer* 20 February 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/feb/20/colonialism-a-moral-reckoning-by-nigel-biggars-review-a-flawed-defence-of-empire>

Majeed, Javed. *Ungoverned Imaginings. James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Marshall, P.J. *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Marshall, P. J. *Bengal-the British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740-1828*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Marshall, P. J. *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Mignolo, Walter «Parce que la colonialité est partout, la décolonialité est inévitable.» *Multitudes*, 2021/3 (n° 84): 57-67.

Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Mill, James. *The History of British India* with notes and continuation by H. H. Wilson 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: James Madden, 1848. 9 vols.

Mill, James. *The History of British India* with notes and continuation by H. H. Wilson 5<sup>th</sup> ed. London: James Madden, 1858. 10 vols.

Mitchell, Angus. "Review of *Time's Monster: History, conscience and the British Empire*, by Priya Satia." *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 22, no.2 (2021)  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cch.2021.0024>.

Morrison, Alexander "After the War. Central Asia without Russia." *Study of Islam in Central Eurasia Blog* 24/10/2022 <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/sice/sice-blog/after-the-war-central-asia-without-russia>

Morrison, Alexander. *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia. A Study in Imperial Expansion 1814 – 1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Morrison, Alexander. "Monuments and Memorialisation: Lessons from Russia and Central Asia" June 2020 <https://oxfordandempire.web.ox.ac.uk/article/monuments-and-memorialisation-lessons-russia-and-central-asia>.

Morrison, Alexander. "Convicts and Concentration Camps." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no.2 (2019): 390 – 403.

Motadel, David. "The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire." *The American Historical Review* 124 no.3, (2019): 843–877.

Mukerjee, Madhusree. *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Mukherjee, Janam. *Hungry Bengal. War, Famine and the End of Empire*. London: Hurst & Co, 2023.

O'Brien, Patrick. "European Economic Development: The Contribution of the Periphery." *The Economic History Review* 35, no.1 (1982): 1–18.

Ogot, Bethwell A. "Review: Britain's Gulag." *The Journal of African History* 46, no.3 (2005): 493-505.

Ó'Gráda, Cormac. *Famine, A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Ó'Gráda, Cormac. "The Ripple That Drowns? Twentieth-Century Famines in China and India as Economic History." *The Economic History Review* 61, no.S1 (2008): 5–37.

Oppenheim, Maya. "'Winston Churchill is no better than Adolf Hitler,' says Indian politician Dr Shashi Tharoor." *The Independent* 21 March 2017 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-history/winston-churchill-adolf-hitler-no-better-shashi-tharoor-indian-politician-post-colonialist-author-inglorious-empire-nazi-a7641681.html>

Overy, Richard. *Blood and Ruins. The Great Imperial War 1931-1945*. London: Penguin, 2021.

Owen, Nicholas. *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-imperialism, 1885-1947*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Owen, Nicholas. "Critics of Empire in Britain." in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century* edited by Judith Brown and Wm Roger Louis, 188-211. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Patnaik, Utsa "Independence Day: How the British pulled off a \$45 trillion heist in India." *Economic Times* 15 August 2023 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/independence-day-how-the-british-pulled-off-a-45-trillion-heist-in-india/articleshow/102746097.cms>

Perdue, Peter. *China Marches West. The Qing Conquest of Inner Eurasia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Porter, Bernard. *The Absent-Minded Imperialists Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Reynolds, David. *In Command of History. Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War*. London: Penguin, 2005.

Riley, Charlotte Lydia. *Imperial Island: A History of Empire in Modern Britain*. London: The Bodley Head, 2023.

Roberts, Andrew. "No, Churchill was not the villain." *History Reclaimed* 10 September 2024. <https://historyreclaimed.co.uk/no-churchill-was-not-the-villain/>

Roberts, Andrew and Gebreyohanes, Zewditu. 'The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill': A Review. Policy Exchange, 2021. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/%E2%80%98The-Racial-Consequences-of-Mr-Churchill-A-Review.pdf>

Roberts, Andrew. "Lord Mountbatten and the Perils of Adrenalin." *Eminent Churchillians* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994): 55-136.

Roy, Tirthankar. *An Economic History of India 1707-1857* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Abingdon: Routledge, 2022.

Roy, Tirthankar. "Inglorious Empire." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 31 (2018): 135–6.

Roy, Tirthankar. "Were Indian Famines 'Natural' Or 'Manmade'?" *LSE Economic History Working Paper No.243* (2016).

Roy, Tirthankar. "The Economic Legacies of Colonial Rule in India: Another Look." *Economic and Political Weekly* 50, no.15 (2015): 51–59.

Roy, Tirthankar *India in the World Economy from Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Roy, Tirthankar. *The Economic History of India 1857 - 1947* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rubinstein, Samuel. "Unpicking Imperial History." *Engelsberg Ideas* 19 August 2024  
<https://engelsbergideas.com/reviews/unpicking-imperial-history/>

Rubinstein, Samuel. "Imperial Miasma Theory." *Engelsberg Ideas* 24 August 2023  
<https://engelsbergideas.com/essays/imperial-miasma-theory/>

Sanghera, Sathnam. *Empireland. How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*. London: Viking, 2021.

Sarkar, Abhijit. "Fed by Famine: The Hindu Mahasabha's Politics of Religion, Caste, and Relief in Response to the Great Bengal Famine, 1943–1944." *Modern Asian Studies* 54, no.6 (2020): 2022–86.

Satia, Priya. *Time's Monster. History, Conscience and Britain's Empire*. London: Allen Lane, 2020.

Saunders, Robert. "Brexit and Empire: 'Global Britain' and the Myth of Imperial Nostalgia." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no.6 (2020): 1140–1174.

Schluessel, Eric. *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.

Sèbe, Berny. *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

Sen, Amartya. *Poverty and Famines. An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Slaton, Amy E. and Tiago Saraiva. "Editorial." *History and Technology* 39 no.2 (2023): 127–136.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Stephenson, Jill. "The subversion of History Education in Scotland" *The Spectator* 21 December 2020  
<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-subversion-of-history-education-in-scotland/>

Stokes, Eric. *The English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.

Táíwò, Olúfẹ̀mi. *Against Decolonisation. Taking African Agency Seriously*. London: Hurst & Co, 2022.

Taylor, Adam. "China calls for Canada human rights inquiry, pre-empting demand for investigation into abuse of Uyghurs." *The Washington Post* 22 June 2021  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/06/22/china-canada-uyghur-indigenous/>

Tharoor, Shashi. *Inglorious Empire. What Britain did to India*. London: Hurst, 2017.

Thomas, Martin. *The End of Empires and a World Remade. A Global History of Decolonization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024.

Thompson, Andrew. *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Harlow: Longman, 2005.

Thornton, A. P. *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies: A Study in British Power*. London: Macmillan & Co, 1959.

Tomlinson, Brian. *The Economy of Modern India. From 1860 to the Twenty-First Century* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

von Hirschhausen, Ulrike and Jörn Leonhard. *Empires: eine globale Geschichte 1780-1920*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2023.

Wagner, Kim. "Imperial Legacies by Jeremy Black review – whitewash for Britain's atrocities." *The Guardian* 10 February 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/10/imperial-legacies-jeremy-black-review-empire-multiculturalism>

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944.

Wootton, David. "Cort Case shows why Historical Truth Matters" *Engelsberg Ideas* 28 September 2023. <https://engelsbergideas.com/notebook/cort-case-shows-why-historical-truth-matters/>

Zakharova, Maria. "Political crimes committed by the UK" 19 April 2018. [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/historical\\_materials/1804830/](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/historical_materials/1804830/)

Zenz, Adrian. *Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang*. Washington, D. C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/product/sterilizations-iuds-and-mandatory-birth-control-the-ccps-campaign-to-suppress-uyghur-birthrates-in-xinjiang/>

Zenz, Adrian. " 'Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude': China's political re-education campaign in Xinjiang." *Central Asian Survey* 38 no.1 (2019): 102-128.