

Memories of Empire

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Freud's Rome

Why did Sigmund Freud abandon his Roman example?

Remember that Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, had turned to Rome in order to show how the past lingered on in the minds of human beings. He first conjured up a vision of the city as it might have been experienced in his own day. This was a modern metropolis in which contemporary buildings and old ruins co-existed and in which the discerning observer could find traces of different histories. In this city, further remnants lay undetected beneath the surface, antiquities that might one day be brought to the surface again and restored. But Freud then summoned up a second kind of Rome. “Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past—an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one.”¹ In this city, buildings of various periods would all be standing intact, some of them in the same place, somehow co-habiting without the displacement of any older structures. “In the place occupied by the Palazzo Caffarelli would once more stand—without the Palazzo having to be removed—the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; and this not only in its latest shape, as the Romans of the Empire saw it, but also in its earliest one, when it still showed Etruscan forms and was ornamented with terracotta antefixes.”² All these palaces, temples, and monuments would be

¹ *Civilization and its Discontents*, in Freud 1953–1974, vol. 21, 70.

² *Ibid.*

visible to an observer, who “would perhaps only have to change the direction of his glance or his position in order to call up the one view or the other.”³

No sooner did Freud offer up the metaphor of Rome as a psychological entity than he began to back away from it. This Rome was a fantasy, Freud said, and depended on a scenario that was “unimaginable and even absurd”; such a city did not exist, and it was impossible to represent it, at least in spatial terms.⁴ Besides, comparing the human mind to a city, to any urban settlement and not just the ‘Eternal City’, was not feasible, and the friable quality of a city would make it unsuitable for a comparison of the kind undertaken by the analyst. Freud went on to disavow the analogy between Rome and the mind, although he also stated “the fact that it is the rule rather than the exception for the past to be preserved in mental life.”⁵

Readers have wondered why Freud included this description of Rome if he was going to deny its validity for the argument of *Civilization and its Discontents*. Various explanations have been put forward, including one by Ellen Oliensis, who suggests that Freud’s text shows how large-scale feelings of desire and aggression lies behind imperial expansion. For Freud, the ‘ego-feeling of maturity’ co-exists with the survival of an infantile ego-feeling, which is “a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.”⁶ This infantile ego-feeling, Freud suggests, lies behind the “oceanic feeling” to which he refers in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In presenting to his readers the “archaeologist’s dream (or nightmare) of total preservation” in his second description of Rome, Freud is also providing an example of the mature adult’s

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Freud 1953–1974, vol. 21, 72.

⁶ Freud 1953–1974, vol. 21, 68.

desire to reconnect to that oceanic feeling.⁷ The psychoanalyst's Rome "embodies the imperious desire to reabsorb the world the infant had perforce to let go."⁸ As Oliensis puts it, "the oceanic feeling resurfaces as the sensation of Roman imperialism,"⁹ and Freud's city stands for an aggressive fantasy of complete possession, in time and space. It is this "imperial problematic," so well explored by Latin poets such as Virgil, "that Freud could not bring himself quite to write out of his *Aeneid*," namely, *Civilization and its Discontents*.¹⁰

One way of understanding Freud's use of Rome in *Civilization and its Discontents* is to read it as an acknowledgement of the difficulties involved in recalling the past and in finding ways of comprehending it satisfactorily. But Freud's peculiar deployment of Rome suggests that more is at issue than infantile memory. Many if not most of Freud's references to Roman buildings refer to the period of ancient Rome's rise to world historical importance and to the era when it becomes established as the imperial capital *par excellence*. Approached from this perspective, Freud's disavowal implies that memories of empire are not easy to explore, that they frustrate the best efforts to represent them, and that metaphors or rhetorical figures are unlikely to provide adequate models for exploring the imperial past. Neither the initial example of contemporary Rome nor the turbo-charged image of permanence that he constructs is sufficient for the purpose of working through what an imperial experience felt like in the past and what it might mean for the present and the future. Memories of empire are not (like) cities, or palimpsests, or chronotopic structures that can be easily accessed and analyzed. Such memories can be impactful but also

⁷ Oliensis 2009, 134, following Leo Bersani.

⁸ Oliensis 2009, 135.

⁹ Oliensis 2009, 135.

¹⁰ Oliensis 2009, 136.

complex and indirect, and their recollection is never pure and simple but frequently uncertain, fallible, contested, and difficult.

An additional implication of Freud's work is that 'memories' can be construed expansively, so that Freud's description of Rome can itself count as a 'memory' of the city. Broadening out the term in this fashion is not inconsistent with historiographical developments in the twentieth and twenty-first century, when historians have become familiar with concepts such as collective memory, social memory, and historical memory and have explored the significance of 'places of memory'. Freud himself provided an example of what has subsequently been called 'mnemohistory' in *Moses and Monotheism*, a book which tries to show how the effects of historical trauma have lingered among the Jewish people for centuries. Let us, therefore, take the expression 'memories of empire' in a very broad sense. Memories of empire are individual and collective; they seep into narratives that are historical and fictional, pictorial and verbal; they can be found a generation after the event, or a millennium. Events may be forgotten or repressed, and an individual or a group may feel a compulsion to act out or work through what has been forgotten; at times, what is forgotten may be displaced or transformed into narratives that bear little correspondence to the past. For these reasons, any discussion of memories of empire remains challenging and tentative.

The expression 'memories of empire' is intelligible in at least two ways. In the sense that I have been using it can denote the memories that people or groups have of empires in the past. My parents' or grandparents' reminiscences about India during the period of British rule fall into this category, as do recollections by any number of others who were alive during the Raj. A Kenyan waiter in Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* remembers "that the same people who controlled the land before independence still control the same land, that he still cannot eat in the restaurants or

stay in the hotels that the white man has built.”¹¹ His memory of empire is framed by the realization that, as in colonial days, small elites control a disproportionate share of the country’s resources and that inequalities of wealth persist. Numerous studies attest to the pride, melancholia, nostalgia, guilt, and shame felt by the French or the British after the loss of their colonies in the twentieth century: such feelings were prompted, in part, by recollections of empires that once existed. National traditions, ceremonies, and archives are frequently built around such memories of the imperial past.¹²

But construe the genitive in a subjective rather than an objective sense and you grasp a different implication of the term ‘memories of empire’, and in this meaning, empire itself is said to have memories. What memories does empire have? Empire has a memory of empire. To illustrate the matter in simple terms, one might point out that Samudragupta’s Allahabad pillar inscription, “a foundational document of the self-expression of imperial polity in the Sanskrit cosmopolis,” was engraved on a pillar used by Ashoka to display two of his edicts.¹³ The pillar was then exploited, after some centuries, by the Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir and has prompted observers to proclaim that it “embodies two millennia of Indian political charisma.”¹⁴ Or one might deploy another chain of linked instances and say that the French and British Empires looked back to the Roman Empire, the Roman Empire recalled Alexander the Great, and Alexander himself sought to emulate the kings of Persia. But so bald a sequence barely does justice to the phenomenon, which needs to be analyzed, conceptually and in detail, and to which we can merely allude here. At any rate, both senses of the term ‘memories of empire’ will be relevant as we explore its associations in this chapter.

¹¹ Obama 1995, 314.

¹² Hall 1998.

¹³ Pollock 2006b, 239.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Memories of Empire

“Around him the whole dream-world of the East took shape and substance; of him every old story of a divine world-conqueror was told afresh. More than eighty versions of the Alexander-romance, in twenty-four languages, have been collected, some of them the wildest of fairy-tales . . . no other story in the world has spread like his.”¹⁵ Every subsequent conqueror, and conqueror manqué, has remembered Alexander III (‘the Great’), of Macedon. *His* memory has never passed into oblivion. So many rulers of so many countries have called themselves Alexander, Iskandar, or Sikandar, after him, that it would be impossible to arrive at an exact count. The inhabitants of parts of north-west India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan still claim descent from him and his soldiers. Kipling’s *The Man Who Would Be King* gains much of its plot and popularity from this conceit. In Kipling’s youth, Kafiristan was the subject of intense colonial interest because Britons perceived a connection, which was encouraged by many locals, between the Kafirs and Greco-Macedonian settlers in the region. Perhaps Alexander’s only historical rival is Julius Caesar, but already for Romans such as Caesar, Alexander had set a demanding precedent.

Some Romans tried to walk *in* the footsteps of Alexander; a few of the inhabitants of Pompeii walked *on* him, or rather, on his likeness. The Alexander Mosaic is a floor mosaic that was originally part of the exedra of the first peristyle in the so-called House of the Faun (Casa del Fauno), in Pompeii; it dates to the late second century BCE and now forms part of the collection of the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. The Mosaic was discovered in October 1831. At the time, the House of the Faun was known as the House of Goethe (Casa di Goethe),

¹⁵ Tam 1953, 435.

in honour of the poet, who had visited the site in 1787, “just when German Romanticism had transformed the classical world in its image, largely through the agency of Goethe’s genius.”¹⁶ Goethe added a drawing made by Wilhem Zahn of the mosaic to his collection in Weimar not long before his death. The words he wrote down on receiving the drawing are frequently quoted: “The present and the future will not succeed in commenting in a manner worthy of this artistic wonder, and we must always return, after studying and investigating it, to simple, pure admiration.”¹⁷ [Plate 1]



Plate 1. The Alexander Mosaic, ca. 100 BCE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.

¹⁶ Badian 2012, 404–406.

¹⁷ Goethe, letter to Wilhelm Johann Carl Zahn (10 March 1832), in Goethe 1967, 4.473–476, at 475: ‘Mitwelt und Nachwelt werden nicht hinreichen, solches Wunder der Kunst würdig zu kommentieren, und wir genötigt sein, nach aufklärender Betrachtung und Untersuchung, immer wieder zur einfachen reinen Bewunderung zurückzukehren.’

Goethe thought that attaching his own name to this house in Pompeii was “an echo from the past meant to temper the loss of my son.”¹⁸ The *casa* of Alexander for the death of a son — what would Freud say? In fact, the young Freud had been enthusiastic about Alexander and advocated, successfully, that his younger brother be named after the Macedonian conqueror. Much later, Freud was to write to Carl Jung, “Just rest easy, my dear son Alexander, I will leave you more to conquer than I myself have managed, all psychiatry and the approval of the civilized world, which regards me as a savage!”¹⁹ The ‘deeply oedipal undertones’ of this remark are evident; the remark also casts an informative light on “Freud’s original desire to name his own brother Alexander in the first place, as if to displace his own oedipal feelings toward his father.”²⁰ Freud’s statement illustrates to us that Alexander often appears in oedipal relationships and that he is used to address issues of power, conquest, and desire.

It is simplistic to say that the Romans’ fascination with Alexander had an oedipal element to it. Yet, whatever commenting in a manner worthy of the Alexander Mosaic might look like, any such commentary would have to take into account the interpretive ambiguity of the image, an ambiguity that renders the image at once admiring and hesitant in its stance toward Alexander.²¹ On the one hand, the Mosaic ‘represents’ a scene from a battle that Alexander won and pays tribute to the victor and to his subjugation of the Persians, at Gaugamela and elsewhere. On the other hand, the Mosaic undercuts Alexander’s triumph and calls into question the value of his conquests. The prominence given to the Persian king Darius is extraordinary.

¹⁸ Goethe, letter to Carl Friedrich Zelter (11 March 1832), in Goethe 1967, 4.476–478, at 477: ‘Ein Echo aus der Ferne, welches den Verlust meines Sohnes mildern soll.’ Translation in Bodley 2009, 552.

¹⁹ Quoted in Armstrong 2005, 108.

²⁰ Armstrong *ibid.*

²¹ See the discussion in Briant 2003, 226–247.

Critics such as Ernst Badian have said that he “dominates the action,” and Darius assuredly seems to rise above the fray in his chariot.²² The “look of horror on his face” is brought on by the “self-sacrifice of his fellow nobles” and shows him as a sympathetic ruler, distraught at the loss of his countrymen.²³ By contrast, Alexander is “leaning away from his enemy,” and his helmet has been knocked off his head: “he is, to put it bluntly, a man who has lost his hat.”²⁴ Badian writes, “The representation as a whole may justly be called not merely not heroic, but deliberately unheroic . . .”²⁵ Moreover, the figural counterpart to Darius is not Alexander but a dead tree. Badian reads the tree as a symbol of “the destruction and denudation caused by Alexander’s war” and for “the vanity of human, and especially of heroic, effort”;²⁶ for him, the centrality and symbolism of the tree is suggested not by Greek or Roman artistic precedent but by “Persian hunting scenes in *paradeisoi* depicted in Asia Minor.”²⁷ Far from promoting Alexander’s success over the Persians, the Mosaic emphasizes the sorrow of the Persians and the emptiness of the conqueror’s accomplishment.

The location of the Mosaic complicates our understanding of the work’s reception in antiquity. Pompeii was notionally not a ‘Roman’ town in the late second century BCE, and the Pompeiians obtained Roman citizenship only in the first century BCE. The owner of the house may have been from Samnium, as some have suggested, and may have had pro-Roman or anti-Roman views, or views that were ambivalent about Rome.²⁸ Even the fact that the Mosaic was on the floor of the peristyle adds to the indeterminacy of meaning. In her book about the Roman Alexander, Diana Spencer says, “[T]he most fundamental instability for this mosaic is

²² Badian 2012, 409.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Badian 2012, 410.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Badian 2012, 410–411.

²⁷ Badian 2012, 415.

²⁸ Cohen 1997, 180–181, 193–194.

its openness to a multiplicity of angles of gaze. It is on the floor, beneath the feet of any who enter the room from the peristyle from which it opened. This vast mosaic provides an Alexander who can be trampled upon, turned on his head or sideways, who can be a decorative addendum to a garden, or its focal point, all at the whim of the course strolled by the viewer. One could even, potentially, excise Alexander altogether and gaze from one garden to the next without dropping one's eyes to the floor."²⁹ It hardly needs to be added that Darius, too, could have been trampled upon by anyone in the room. That the Mosaic presents so conflicted a response to Alexander indicates that on the Italian Peninsula, by the first century BCE, he was being remembered not solely as an invincible soldier but also as a symbol of vanity and the transience of military success.

Let us place another image alongside the Alexander Mosaic, a painting not from the Roman era but made by an empire that never ceased to recall the Romans and their imperial accomplishments. 'The East Offering its Riches to Britannia' (1778), which was painted by Spiridione Roma, used to be part of the ceiling of the Revenue Committee Room, in East India House, and now can be found near the top of a stairway in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in London. When the East India House building in Leadenhall Street was torn down, the painting was removed from the ceiling and relocated to the India Office, which was itself later absorbed into the FCO complex. It is not a surprise that a painting commissioned by the officers of the East India Company occupies a position in an official building of the government of the United Kingdom. The government of the twenty-first century continues to use many of the insignia, institutions, and monuments that were created in the days of its empire, and, in that sense, the government keeps alive the memory of an old empire.

²⁹ Spencer 2002, 188–189.

Nor is it a surprise, of course, that a former imperial capital such as London is filled with memorials to empire, and in that sense the city resembles Beijing, Istanbul, or Madrid. Roma's painting is merely one of many imperial creations that has continued into the postcolonial present, where it resonates with contemporary concerns and serves as a reminder of an epoch when the Company was a going concern. [Plate 2.]



Plate 2. Spiridione Roma, 'The East Offering Its Riches to Britannia', 1778. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London.

The painting's classicizing features refer its viewers back to ancient Rome; these are typical of the late eighteenth century, but in this case are put at the service of the ambitions of the powerful Company. A description offered by *Gentleman's* magazine, in 1778, is worth appreciating at length:

“The principal figure represents Britannia seated on a rock, to signify the firmness and stability of the empire; and as guardian and protectress of the Company, who are denoted by children behind Britannia, and overshadowed by her veil.

The union of the old and new Companies is expressed by two children embracing each other, and one of them placed sitting on the upper part of the rock, to show the firm basis on which the present Company stands; on the other part of the rock the child climbing up towards the summit is intended to express the prospect of the Company’s continuance.

Britannia is characterised by the usual emblems of the shield and spear, and guarded by a lion, which lays tamely by her side, pleased with the offerings made her from the different East-Indian provinces.

At the foot of the rock lays the genius of the Ganges, in a majestic attitude, pouring out his whole stream on Britannia’s footstool.

The various provinces are represented under the Conduct of Mercury, the god of merchandise, eagerly pressing to deposit their different produce and manufactures before the throne of Britannia.

Calcutta (the capital settlement of the Company in Bengal) presents a basket with pearls and other rich jewels, which Britannia receives.

China is characterised by jars of porcelain and chests of tea; the produce of Madras and Bombay by a corded bale; Bengal is denoted by an elephant, palm-trees and a camel.

Persia appears at a distance bringing silks, drugs, and other effects, and with her are to be supposed all the rest of the provinces; which the artist could not describe on the canvas without crowding or destroying the whole composition, and harmony of the picture.

At a distance is an Indiaman under sail, laden with the treasure of the East, an emblem of that commerce from which both Britain and the Company derive great and singular advantages.”³⁰

Few images illustrate more dramatically the ‘gentlemanly capitalism’ of the Company, its self-image as a national enterprise, and its political and mercantile ambitions across the seas. As the riches of India, China, and Persia are made available to Britannia, who, from her elevated perch, looks down on the other characters, no trace of force or violence is manifest in the picture, the Company’s arms and sepoy being wholly effaced from the tableau. The gestures of the Eastern figures are those of presentation, that is, obeisance and offering, as if these riches were being eagerly and respectfully tendered to the Company: *Calcutta presents*, *Britannia receives*, as the magazine’s description has it. The movement across the painting’s horizontal axis is thus of giving and taking, with jewels and pearls on offer, and Mercury, the god of commerce, extending his staff in the direction of Britannia. Hovering discreetly in the back and centre is the ship that conveys these valuable commodities back to Britain, while Ganges, an almost indifferent figure, in the foreground allows his waters to flow beneath the elevated Britannia.

³⁰ *Gentleman’s Magazine* 48 1778, 628–629.

Roma's painting was commissioned by the Company and aimed to please its patron. A preliminary drawing, made in pencil, pen, wash, and signed by Roma, suggests that he was asked to make certain changes to his original design, presumably to accommodate the wishes of the Directors.³¹ The design was brought closer to an existing marble chimney frieze, which was about a related theme ('Britannia receiving the riches of the East') and which had adorned the Director's Court Room in Leadenhall Street since about 1730. One critic writes, "The finished painting is altogether more classical in conception with a greater degree of symbolism . . . The theme has also changed; and Britannia now dominates the scene."³² The preliminary drawing is missing Britannia, Mercury, and the lion, among other things, and does not show Calcutta offering its riches either. The Directors were plainly seeking a more classicizing idiom for the painting and they chose to emphasize their contribution to the nation by asking Roma to alter his initial plans. They wanted to be remembered by a painting that was more classical, more evocative of older histories, than the initial design of the artist.

The painting used to be a fixture in a building that had been constructed over another image, an image which served as a marker of the Roman Empire in Britain. A mosaic dating from the Roman era was found underneath the premises of the East India Company, to the surprise of nineteenth-century observers. 'Appropriately enough', notes the British Museum, to which the work was transferred in the 1860s, the mosaic shows the god Bacchus riding or reclining on a tiger and alludes to the story of the god's journey to India. **[Plate 3]** *Appropriately enough*, the mosaic shows a memory trace of the Roman presence in Britain coming back to the surface in a century when Britons increasingly compared their own empire to the Roman Empire,

³¹ British Library, India Office Prints and Drawings (Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections), WD3546.

³² Rohatgi 1976, 3.

when they came to think that they were displacing the Romans as the most powerful empire-builders on earth, and when they were consolidating their hold over the Indian subcontinent.



Plate 3. The Leadenhall Street Mosaic. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Trauma

The history of empires provides no shortage of traumatic events and no dearth of commemorations either. What counts as trauma, how you remember a traumatic event, and what you remember of it depends, of course, on who is doing the

remembering. Already by the ninth century CE, Arabs were mourning the loss or transformation of their empire, especially since it was the peoples they conquered who more or less displaced them from the seat of power.³³ The end of the British Empire was welcomed by hundreds of millions, but many millions of others lamented the loss and displacement that followed. Who was traumatized by the Morant Bay rebellion, the Mau Mau uprising, and the Indian Mutiny of 1857? The colonizers, the colonized, or both? To take the example of the Indian uprising, many in Britain had little doubt that the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ was an unjustified and violent provocation by Indians against the British, or that it needed to be stopped ruthlessly. A recent study, by Christopher Hibbert, bears the title *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* and seeks to show that the response to the uprising of 1857 was multifaceted in Britain and that not every British commentary should “properly be read as anything like a confident allegory of British virtue and racial entitlement to rule.”³⁴ For Hibbert, the uprising caused Victorian British writers to come face to face with the excesses of their own rule in India, with its racism, violence, and venality. He writes, “The shock of finding that they were despised by their supposedly grateful imperial subjects in India was in part the shock of finding that their national idealism and national self-esteem were self-deluding and morally corrupting.”³⁵ Yet, Hibbert’s study itself has prompted a reviewer to observe, “The trauma of the traumatizers becomes a cause for great compassion, and their honesty about their participation in it a cause for tremendous admiration and, indeed, forgiveness.”³⁶

The impact of the uprising on the British, in South Asia and Britain, in the nineteenth century, can scarcely be in doubt. St James’s Church in Delhi still bears

³³ See Crone 2006.

³⁴ Hibbert 2008, 17.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Freedgood 2008,.

Victorian inscriptions that “pay tribute to the military and civilian casualties: to three members of the Corbett family, ‘who were murdered During the Massacre of the Christians in Delhi’; to Thomas Collins and no fewer than 23 members of his extended family, ‘all barbarously murdered at Delhi on or about the 11th of May 1857’; to Dr Chimmun Lall, a ‘native Christian and a Worshipper in this Church’, who ‘fell a martyr to his faith on the day of the massacre of Christians in Delhi’.”³⁷ Some thirty years after the events, *Blackwood’s* magazine claimed that “there were more accounts of the Mutiny in popular fiction than of any other nineteenth-century event.”³⁸ According to one reckoning, about seventy novels about the uprising were published, most of them in the nineteenth century.³⁹

By the early years of the twentieth century, the uprising was an occasion for commemoration and for acknowledging the bravery of those who fought on behalf of God and Empire. On 23 December 1907, fifty years after the uprising, the British survivors came together for dinner, at the Royal Albert Hall, in London, as guests of the owners of the *Daily Telegraph*. On the following day, “At the conclusion of Lord Roberts’ speech . . . the ‘Last Post’ was sounded . . . Mr Ben Davies then sang ‘Recessional’, and Mr Lewis Waller recited a commemorative poem by Mr Rudyard Kipling entitled ‘1857-1907’. The proceedings closed with ‘Auld Lang Syne’ sung by Miss Muriel Foster and Mr Ben Davies . . .”⁴⁰ The poem that Kipling wrote to accompany this characteristically British celebration of bravery was entitled ‘The Veterans’ and went as follows:

“TO-DAY, across our fathers’ graves,
The astonished years reveal

³⁷ Jasanoff 2005.

³⁸ Schwarz 2011, 235, summarizing Gregg 1897.

³⁹ Chakravarty 2005.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, quoted at http://www.kipling.org.uk/rg_veterans1.htm.

The remnant of that desperate host
Which cleansed our East with steel.

Hail and farewell! We greet you here,
With tears that none will scorn—
O Keepers of the House of old,
Or ever we were born!

One service more we dare to ask—
Pray for us, heroes, pray,
That when Fate lays on us our task
We do not shame the Day!”⁴¹

The classical and biblical echoes are not surprising from Kipling, who elsewhere wrote of the mutineers in pejorative terms. In this poem, the narrator salutes the soldiers who are present at the gathering, doughty soldiers who are said to have used their steel swords and ‘cleansed’ the colony of its murderous rebels; the narrator asks that younger defenders of the Indian Empire similarly to rise to the task and not be found wanting on Judgement Day.

The distance of nationalist Indian commentators from this kind of tribute and from earlier treatments such as John Kaye’s *History of the Sepoy War in India* (1864–76), can be measured by reading the title alone of Vir Savarkar’s *Indian War of Independence* (1909). Savarkar’s book was one of many Indian responses to the uprising; several took the nationalist line and preferred to see the events of 1857 as the stirrings of a widespread native demand for independence rather than as a small

⁴¹ From *The Years Between*, in Kipling 1938, 353.

mutiny by soldiers in the army of the East India Company. Savarkar wrote about “the brilliance of a War of Independence shining in ‘the mutiny of 1857’” and described how “out of the heap of ashes appeared forth sparks of a fiery inspiration.”⁴² Prone to characterize the uprising also as a ‘Revolution’, he claimed, “The seed of the Revolution of 1857 is in this holy and inspiring idea, clear and explicit, propounded from the throne of Delhi, THE PROTECTION OF RELIGION AND COUNTRY.”⁴³ What was the uprising: a sepoy mutiny, a war of independence, or a revolution?

The debate is familiar: it can be traced back to disputes of the Victorian period and unfolded in both Britain and India. It will suffice here to say that the legacy of this reception continues to be felt in the Indian subcontinent where school textbooks caution against an unqualified use of the word ‘mutiny’ and also recognise the contested nature of the historical record. That the Mutiny continues to provoke strong passions in India can be learned from the force of the protests that greeted a British party to Lucknow when, in 2007, on the 150th anniversary of the uprising, it attempted to visit a church for British soldiers who lost their lives in the conflict.⁴⁴ In the same year, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, made an address to Parliament in which he said that Indians “cannot forget those inspired revolutionaries—many of them anonymous to history—who sacrificed their lives in 1857 to free the country from foreign yoke.”⁴⁵ William Dalrymple’s detailed account, *The Last Mughal* (2006), arguably prompted more debate in India than in Britain. In the subcontinent, reviewers vigorously objected to his claim that Indian historians had neglected sources in their own archives and had not written about the uprising from an Indian

⁴² Savarkar 1930: i.

⁴³ Savarkar 1930, 7.

⁴⁴ “Briton visits India Mutiny grave.” *BBC News*, 26 September 2007: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7014281.stm.

⁴⁵ “Indians mark revolt anniversary” *BBC News*, 11 May 2007: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6645457.stm.

perspective. In Britain, the debate was far less heated and the book created a smaller splash than its predecessor, *White Mughals*, which recounted the tragic love story of James Achilles Kirkpatrick and Khair un-Nissa. But the uprising had begun to lose its hold on the British imagination as early as the Second World War, when Madame Tussaud's removed its wax statue of Lord Roberts, a recipient of the Victoria Cross for gallantry during the uprising, the hero of Kandahar, and Commander-in-Chief, India. The removal, we are told, was "a matter of no public controversy as no one much remembered who he was or what he had done."⁴⁶

That the uprising was traumatic for nearly everyone involved in the action can hardly be in question. The repercussions were vividly felt, by Kipling among others. Kipling was born in Bombay several years after the events, in 1865, but he grasped like no other Anglo-Indian writer the fragility of the hold exercised by the rulers over the native population. Even if he could not have experienced the uprising first-hand, and even if Bombay was far from the scenes of the most violent encounters, he lived among those who could not forget what must have seemed an unimaginable horror, a horror doubtless amplified by hearsay and the passage of time.

Consider the *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, which was published in 1885, and which remains what Angus Wilson, in *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, called "one of the most powerful nightmares of the precariousness of a ruling group, in this case of a group haunted by memories of the Mutiny not yet twenty years old."⁴⁷ In Kipling's short story, the protagonist, Morrowbie Jukes, accidentally strays into a sandy crater with a low-lying encampment inhabited by the living dead, or as the narrator says, by "the Dead who did not die, but may not live."⁴⁸ These were Hindu Indians who were believed to be dead and who showed signs of life just on the

⁴⁶ Schwarz 2011, 338.

⁴⁷ Wilson 1977, 72.

⁴⁸ Kipling 1937, 183.

point of cremation but who could not be returned to the world of the living since the last rites had already been performed on them and were thus forced to live in badger-holes in the small village beside a river. The site's residents were prevented from fleeing by swampland, by high sand walls that enclosed the crater on the sides which did not open onto the river, and by a boat that patrolled the river all day. Jukes falls into the place by accident when his horse bolts and flies headlong into the crater so that both animal and rider find themselves among a group whose "filth and repulsiveness . . . [are] beyond all description."⁴⁹ The only native to recognize Jukes in the village is a man called Gunga Dass, who used to be in charge of a telegraph office. But these natives are not prone to defer to their colonial masters, for instead of encountering the "civility from my inferiors" to which he had grown accustomed, "even in these days, when local self-government has destroyed the greater part of a native's respect for a Sahib," Jukes is greeted with the sounds of cackling laughter, whistling, and howling.⁵⁰ Ultimately, Jukes' servant boy, Dunnoo, tracks the horse's hooves to the crater and hauls him out of the village of the dead and delivers him back into the world of the living.

In commenting on Kipling's work, Christopher Lane has suggested that "the colonial drive leads its subject inexorably toward ruin and death." Lane adds, "When Freud likened the ego's regulation of the unconscious to 'a man on horse-back, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse,' he unwittingly endorsed the most common allegorical structure of Kipling's fiction."⁵¹ Thus, Jukes' strange ride "over what seemed to be a limitless expanse of moonlit sand"⁵² links the story, in Freudian terms, to colonial fantasies about "the convulsive bliss of self-sabotage — a

⁴⁹ Kipling 1937, 188.

⁵⁰ Kipling 1937, 188–189.

⁵¹ Lane 1995, 32.

⁵² Kipling 1937, 185.

jouissance ride into the hole of oblivion and the brink of the real.”⁵³ From this perspective, Jukes’ decision to saddle his horse and hunt down the “huge black and white beast” that is keeping him up at night can be read in the terms of a colonial psychodrama, made all the more pungent by the “delirium of fever and the excitement of rapid motion through the air” that marks the rider’s journey over the sand dunes and into an abyss of inversion. And the crater, which lies across the sands and beyond the colonial outpost, thus comes to symbolize “Jukes’ self-destructive fantasy.”⁵⁴

Yet, Kipling indulges the fantasy of self-destruction only up to the point when Jukes is rescued by his servant, Dunnoo. The ‘normal’ master/servant relationship is reasserted at the end of the story and the exploration of the troubling world is called off in a few sentences. What scares Jukes in the crater is not just that the worst elements of colonial India are all compressed into a small space — disease, filth, smells, lack of hygiene, the breakdown of hierarchy — but also that his own life may someday come to resemble his fearful experience. For Jukes, the crater in the sands not only bears witness to the breakdown of colonial rule but also offers a harrowing vision of life among the natives as an equal. It is not an experience that Jukes expects to suffer in the near future, but it may yet lie after that moment on the horizon which marks the end of empire.

Melancholia

In his book *After Empire*, Paul Gilroy writes about the ‘imperial melancholia’ that Britons have come to feel following the end of their empire. Gilroy’s discussion owes as much to the social psychology of Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich (*Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, ‘The Inability to Mourn’) as to Freud’s

⁵³ Lane 1995, 32.

⁵⁴ Lane 1995, 33.

analyses of mourning, melancholia, and narcissism.⁵⁵ The Mitscherlichs wrote about “the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence,” and Gilroy extends their work to say: “From this perspective, before the British people can adjust to the horrors of their modern history and start to build a new national identity from the debris of their broken narcissism, they will have to learn to appreciate the brutalities of colonial rule enacted in their name and to their benefit, to understand the damage it did to their political culture at home and abroad, and to consider the extent of their country’s complex investments in the ethnic absolutism that has sustained it.” Gilroy adds that Britons have been slow to work through “[t]he multilayered trauma—economic and cultural as well as political and psychological—involved in accepting the loss of the Empire.”⁵⁶ As a result of their slowness in working through this trauma, he suggests, the British have been unable to deal fairly with questions of race, ethnicity, and nationhood or to respond hospitably to the arrival of immigrants, especially those who come from former colonies.

One reason why the trauma of imperial loss has been treated inadequately is that the public sphere in Britain has not dealt effectively with memories of empire. Many Britons are embarrassed and ashamed about the country’s imperial past and want to forget that part of the nation’s history, even if they were actively involved in it and even if they ultimately cannot forget. Many of those who were born during or after the Second World War suppose that the history of the British Empire has little relevance to the modern nation. There are others who glory in the history of empire and exhort their fellow Britons proudly to embrace this chapter of their past and to value its contributions to culture and civilization. But, in the terms of Gilroy’s diagnosis, we can say that the imperial legacy is not addressed directly by these

⁵⁵ Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1968.

⁵⁶ Gilroy 2004, 108.

groups of people and that, rather, the Empire is brushed under the carpet, its importance is minimized, or its achievements are championed simplistically. None of these attitudes to the Empire can be construed as a satisfactory attempt to engage with its afterlife, and none of them is, therefore, going to lead to a more inclusive reckoning with history. A consequence of this pathology is the nation's dysfunctional stance toward its own history no less than toward racial and immigrant minorities.

J. Enoch Powell, who was a classical scholar before he gained notoriety as a politician, is sometimes characterized as an extreme personification of this condition, but he was only an unusually articulate spokesperson for a widespread phenomenon. He had a way of conjuring up images that would catch the attention of the press and the public, as he did when he spoke of the river foaming with much blood or of the time the black man would have the whip-hand over the white man. After Edward Heath, the leader of the Conservative Party, dismissed him from the shadow cabinet on the grounds that his speech was "racialist in tone and liable to exacerbate racial tensions," polls showed the public coming out in support of Powell by an overwhelming majority: in a survey conducted by the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 372 thought that Heath was right to dismiss him, but 35,000 said Heath was wrong.⁵⁷ What is interesting about Powell, in this context, is that, as an older man, he did not boast loudly about the Empire and appeared to have lost his youthful enthusiasm for it. But he, like his many supporters, was able to talk explicitly about racial and ethnic issues, the perils of immigration, and the decline of England, and all these conversations "drew upon memories of the imperial past."⁵⁸ As Bill Schwarz

⁵⁷ Schwarz 2011, 35, 39.

⁵⁸ Schwarz 2011, 31.

writes, “Inside the nation’s forgetfulness about empire, the memory-traces remained. Empire may not have been spoken for what it was. It was, however, present.”⁵⁹

Traces of imperial melancholia permeated through the culture broadly and could be found in non-racial discourses as well. In the early 1980s, Salman Rushdie famously attacked novels, television series, and films set in colonial India for their ‘Raj revisionism’ and pointed out that they were proliferating roughly at the same time as the Falkland Islands war, which, in his view, was spearheaded by Margaret Thatcher, “who most plainly nailed her colours to the colonial mast, claiming that the success in the South Atlantic proved that the British were still the people ‘who had ruled a quarter of the world’.”⁶⁰ Raj nostalgia was really connected with the ideologies of the ruling Conservatives, as Rushdie argued, and would not lead to a deeper historical appreciation of the fraught British presence in India or the relationship between Indians and Britons in the colonial period. It was associated with melancholia and was a defensive response to the traumatic loss of empire: it put Rushdie “in mind of the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb.”⁶¹ Raj nostalgia flourished for some years but now has been subsumed into neo-Victorian and neo-Edwardian fiction, which consists of texts set in the long nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, not all these texts are explicitly about empire (for instance, *Possession*, by A. S. Byatt, offers only a fleeting glance at a postcolonial interlocutor), and some are explicitly critical about the colonial power and/or created outside the old metropolitan centre of London (for instance, the Hindi film *Lagaan*). These texts are not just colonialist in the sense that Rushdie deplored, therefore, but also postcolonial, in all the senses of that term. To quote one scholar who has written about the genre, “the return to the Victorian in the present offers a highly visible,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Rushdie 1991, 92.

⁶¹ Rushdie 1991, 92.

highly aestheticized code for confronting empire again and anew; it is a site within which the memory of empire and its surrounding discourses and strategies of representation can be replayed and played out.”⁶²

Britain is not the only country to suffer from the kind of imperial melancholia that Gilroy describes, and he himself mentions Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands as other countries that have yet to fully acknowledge their colonial histories and the violence done to the colonized and the colonizer in the name of empire.⁶³ To this list, one should also add the United States of America, a country which has continued to act as an imperialist power in our time. Each nation deals differently with imperial trauma and melancholia, and in the case of the USA, the traumas have taken many forms, including the war in Vietnam, the Iran hostage crisis, and the attacks of 11 September 2001. After each of these events, many Americans believed that their nation was required to respond forcefully, that decisive action needed to be taken overseas, and that national pride had to be restored. The first Gulf War was seen by several commentators as America’s attempt to lay to rest the ghosts of Vietnam and Iran; the later invasion of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan were direct responses to the attacks of 9/11. But an extremely bloody aftermath followed the occupation of Iraq, while the war in Afghanistan has continued for many years, with an enormous loss of life on all sides. In each case, America has failed to achieve all its objectives, ill-defined as these were in the first place. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with the economic recession that began in 2008, have led observers to speak of the decline of the American empire and of an imperial melancholia in that culture as well.

⁶² Ho 2012, 5.

⁶³ Gilroy 2004, 109.

But it is misleading to talk about imperial melancholia only in relation to the colonial metropolises of London, Paris, and Washington, D.C., or only in relation to places such as Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, and Tibet where Empire survives. Many people today manifest a form of nostalgia for the Muslim Caliphate. Algeria, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, the Korean Peninsula, South Africa, and the Caribbean, all are locations in which memories of empire still remain, where men and women hark back to a lost golden age and dream of an earlier political order. To varying degrees, a sense of trauma and feelings of melancholia and nostalgia can be perceived among some groups in these postcolonial cultures. We can discern these emotions most starkly in local elites, abandoned or largely forgotten by the colonizers, and not as successful or powerful as they once were, but also among subalterns and non-elites. A whole body of prose and verse has explored how questions of empire persist in the words and actions of people living in former colonies, in memories and memoirs, visual materials, archives, institutions, and bureaucracies. J. M. Coetzee, Seamus Heaney, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, and Rushdie himself can be counted among the most distinguished exponents of this literature. Not only do they examine the bloody legacies of the colonial past: they also explore the many charms, allures, and seductions of empire and depict the betrayal and disappointment left in its wake.

The Postcolonial Predicament

While nationalism nurtured colonial and anti-colonial movements, nationalism has continued to shape the legacies of empires in the wake of decolonization and postcoloniality. Nations and political parties regularly invoke public memories to authorize a particular claim to the past or to promote a particular conception of the

community. It is not surprising that the political use of memory, especially the memory of empire, stirs up debate, rouses fierce passions, or provokes conflict. But these divisions are as much about the community's conception of itself in the present and future as they are about judging the past. Longing to shape the public agenda or to implement dearly held policies, political leaders are driven to memorialize histories, to refashion or repudiate traditions, and to insist on accounts congenial to their own interests.

Nationalist passions and imperial memories fuelled each other, for instance, long after France was compelled to withdraw its troops from Algeria and accept the independence of its colony. In the years following the Algerian War of Independence (*Thawra al-Jazā'iriyya*, 1954–1962), the French government seemed not to want to acknowledge or mention either that there had been a war or that the nation was a colonial power in Algeria. Instead of a reckoning or a formal acceptance of the colonial war, there was a prolonged evasion — despite, or because of, an official death toll in the tens of thousands, the destruction of entire communities, and the widespread use of torture. It was the war that dared not speak its name: until 1999, the official name for the conflict used to be ‘des opérations de sécurité et de maintien de l'ordre’. Why was the war not acknowledged officially for forty years? Patricia Lorcin explains the situation thus: “For France, the relinquishing of Algeria was a political, economic, and psychological loss . . . There was a measure of shame attached to the loss, whether it was shame at having indulged in the deplorable experience of colonization and colonial warfare, which dishonored France's humanitarian traditions, or shame at having lost what was perceived to be ‘rightfully French’ and thus at diminishing France's world status. These conflicting sentiments meant that no dominant memory could satisfactorily emerge. Instead, there was

silence—a silence resonating with France’s inability to forget.”⁶⁴ And so, for all the critiques of the war by thinkers of the stature of Jean-Paul Sartre, the official position of the French government remained unchanged for decades after the formal end of hostilities.

Yet, this combination of nationalism and official amnesia did not pass uncontested, with the debate joined by loud voices on all sides. As one would expect, the use of torture in the French-Algerian war sparked particularly heated controversies, accusations, and denunciations. Soon after Louise Inghilahriz, a member of the Front de libération nationale (FLN), spoke about her torture to *Le Monde*, in 2000, others attempted to recount their own experiences, and prominent writers and activists, including Henri Alleg and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “called on France to acknowledge and condemn torture during the *guerre d’Algérie*.”⁶⁵ Notoriously, a French general, Paul Aussaresses, admitted to the use of torture. But after Aussaresses’ declaration, former soldiers of the Algerian War published a collection entitled *Le livre blanc de l’armée française en Algérie*, which, according to Alleg, “justified the torture and assassinations committed under their orders, as well as the methods they had been ‘obliged’ to use against the ‘rebels’ and their accomplices.”⁶⁶ Were the French justified in using torture during the colonial war? Who tortured whom? How should allegations of torture be addressed so many years after the event, given that people’s memories and official records can be so tendentious and partial? These are some of the questions that circulated in France as the nation sought to resolve the consequences of its colonial occupation of a part of North Africa.

⁶⁴ Lorcin 2006, xxiv–xxv.

⁶⁵ Prochaska 2006,, 262.

⁶⁶ Alleg 2006, xi.

In Algeria, meanwhile, the post-1992 civil violence between government and non-government forces has provided a different context to torture. The practice of torture in postcolonial Algeria has meant that discussions of the subject cannot avoid accounting for its use during the more recent violence (when Algerians tortured Algerians) as well as during the Algerian War (when the French tortured Algerians): in Algeria, past and present regimes stand to be indicted in the matter. As David Prochaska writes, “Intellectually, the stakes in recovering a previously occluded historical past in Algeria are even higher than in France, where it is about recovering a key episode in recent French history, because in the Maghreb it is ultimately a matter regarding the history of the Algerian nation in the past half-century, the history of Algerian nationalism, and the FLN’s claim of embodying Algerian nationalism.”⁶⁷ In this scenario, the contemporary political situation colours the reception of memories of the war and potentially implicates Algerians in a brutal practice with a long history in the country. While the violence has been relatively less intense since 2006, memories of the colonial era are not yet fully worked through: the complicity of their own elites in acts of torture, repression, and kidnapping has made it difficult for Algerians to arrive at a historically sensitive reckoning of an earlier period in which torture was practised on Algerians. If the national euphoria that followed decolonization allowed Algerians to gloss over the different roles (for or against French colonialism) they played during the war, the civil unrest of the last two decades re-opened the wounds and allowed them to fester anew.

The French government’s trouble with the naming of the war in Algeria reminds us that the names we give to events reveal a great deal about how we want to talk about them. The question of ‘the proper name’ haunts not just former colonizers

⁶⁷ Prochaska 2006, 269.

but also many postcolonial societies, as the latter seek control over signs and symbols in the public sphere and over narratives that are told about the past. Here, again, the contemporary national situation intersects with the memory traces left behind by empire. India is no stranger to the politics of naming, as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras have yielded to Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. Bombay was officially renamed ‘Mumbai’ in 1995, for example, when the central government of India acceded to the formal demands of the state government of Maharashtra, then ruled by an alliance of two parties, the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Party. The renaming of the city was consistent with the nativist and nationalist ideologies of the parties: the Shiv Sena is a regional right-wing party that has aggressively promoted what it considers Maharashtrian culture, and the BJP is a national right-wing Hindu party. For members of these parties, the act of renaming was an assertion of a regional identity and a repudiation of a colonial European past; it was the declaration of a Maharashtrian and a Hindu claim on the city. The passage from Bombay to Mumbai indicated that “the city could be reinscribed in a national territory as a ‘proper’ Indian city, within a national history and an emerging national modernity that recognized its indigenous cultural and linguistic roots, and its name could be properly enunciated in the vernacular.”⁶⁸ In fact, the change also corresponded to other nominal changes that had occurred, or were about to occur, in the city. The name of the main railway station, Victoria Terminus, was altered to Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, in 1996, while, in 1975, the Victoria & Albert Museum had been rechristened the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum. Numerous roads, monuments, and institutions acquired new names, often to the exasperation of residents. But the demand to change the city’s name was inspired by movements going back at least to the 1960s, and no

⁶⁸ Hansen 2001 4.

political party opposed the change of name. The renaming was supported by socialists, leftists, moderates, and many others, even though the formal change was implemented during a fanatically right-wing administration. At one level, therefore, the change to Mumbai can be understood as the recognition and reassertion of native agency in the age of postcolonialism.

Not everyone, however, celebrated the change in the city's name or the implications of that metamorphosis. At the time of the change, in 1995, a prominent individual from a rival political party described the action as a diversion from the socio-economic problems of the city, a view echoed by contemporary commentators.⁶⁹ Many complained that the city's varied, flexible, and open identity was obscured by the new designation, that its cosmopolitan history had been hijacked by right-wing supremacists, and that the Shiv Sena was attempting to turn Bombay into a Maharashtrian Hindu enclave, emptied of Muslims and other minorities. "And there was no good reason to change the name of Bombay," Suketu Mehta writes in *Maximum City*, a book that is not misty-eyed about the city's darker histories or its structures of oppression. "It is nonsense to say that Mumbai was the original name. Bombay was created by the Portuguese and the British from a cluster of malarial islands, and to them should go the baptismal rights. The Gujaratis and Maharashtrians always called it Mumbai, when speaking Gujarati or Marathi, and Bombay when speaking English. There was no need to choose. In 1995, the Sena demanded that we choose, in all our languages, Mumbai. This is how the ghaties took revenge on us. They renamed everything after their politicians, and finally they renamed even the city."⁷⁰ Mehta here is ventriloquizing the lament of the upper classes and the bourgeoisie and he suggests that their conception of the city clashed with the

⁶⁹ See Chaware 1995.

⁷⁰ Mehta 2004, 140-141.

aspirations of those who sought to evoke a different history or communal identity. The names Bombay and Mumbai, thus, mask different interpretations of urban space: the question of the name is not just about the overthrow of colonial rule or a change into the linguistic vernacular; it is also about competing visions of the postcolonial city and what the city has come to signify to its inhabitants.

When memories of empire are mobilized in the nation state, these memories often rub up against competing desires, priorities, and programmes. Algerians ought to have repudiated torture, given the prevalence of the practice in colonial times and the devastation it wrought then. But torture continued all too patently, and its use in domestic conflict forestalled a fuller analysis of the colonial period, in the fear that such an analysis might lead to unfortunate truths about the present situation. The inhabitants of Bombay ought to have greeted the erasure of the city's old name as the joyful rejection of a time when they, along with other Indians, lived under a colonial regime. Many were jubilant. But others saw the renaming as proof that their city was taken over by a violent, neo-fascist, anti-Muslim party and feared that their polity had lost its vibrant, multi-ethnic, and hospitable character. Unfortunately, subsequent developments, including horrifying violence and civic dysfunction, appeared to bear out their anxieties. The cold realities of postcoloniality require the state to repress or manipulate colonial memories, to bully minorities into submission, and to give fresh dreams to an unsettled populace.

Repetition Compulsion?

“It has often seemed to me far easier,” Sheldon Pollock says, “to argue that it isn't those who forget the past who are condemned to repeat it, but, on the contrary, those—in Ayodhya, Belfast, Jerusalem, Kosovo, or Washington—who remember it.

And this makes it clear that we have not made much progress in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of history for life.”⁷¹ Pollock adds that the comparative study of empires shows that empires become imperial, that is, empires are made, by the action of looking at older empires. Historical empires stoke the flames of aspiration as much as they hold up warnings to would-be imperialists. Empires often proceed by imitation, and most successful colonialists, from the Achaemenid Persians to the French and British, have displayed an awareness of hoarier exemplars and an inclination to follow or surpass them in conception and in detail. Indeed, a great deal remains to be said about the practice of imperial mimesis, about what provokes it and about what succour it draws from historical memory.

But there is something in Pollock’s claim that resonates uncannily with the Freudian concept of compulsion, and this resonance is worth a concluding glance. Pollock himself does not treat Freud in any detail in his discussion, but he looks at historical phases where empires are driven to mimic other empires and he asks how the world might move toward “a new future, a kind of Empire that might finally end the numbingly repeated imitations of empire.” For Pollock, a possible way to avoid imperial repetition and to progress to an age without imperialism lies in such models as “the Sanskritic cosmopolitanism of Bharata Varsha and the Islamic cosmopolitanism of Al-Hind, which suggest however faintly some alternatives.”⁷² Unlike Freud, who seldom offered the salve of utopia to his readers, Pollock appears to be saying that, were we to look back to precise historical periods and concepts, we would be able to forge a community in the future that was less imperial and more egalitarian and more peaceful than the empires of recent history. Pollock finds these

⁷¹ Pollock 2006a, 176.

⁷² Pollock 2006a, 188.

moments of promise not in the immediate past of the West but in older, non-Western formations.

It was to ancient Egypt that Freud turned in *Moses and Monotheism*, the book in which he explored the possibility that Moses was an Egyptian priest in the kingdom of the pharaoh Akhenaten.⁷³ In Freud's account, Moses is originally Egyptian and not Hebrew, while the originary traces of Mosaic monotheism prove to be Egyptian as well. There are many ways to understand Freud's study of historical memory, but in this context it would be essential to refer both to Edward Said's brief exploration in *Freud and the Non-European* and Jacqueline Rose's response to Said. "For Freud," Said says, "writing and thinking in the mid-1930s, the actuality of the non-European was its constitutive presence as a sort of fissure in the figure of Moses—founder of Judaism, but an unreconstructed non-Jewish Egyptian none the less. Jahveh derived from Arabia, which was also non-Jewish and non-European."⁷⁴ According to Said, the central implication of Freud's book is that Jewish identity, including Freud's own identity, was divided from the inside, and that its defining characteristic was the combination of Jewish, non-Jewish, and non-European elements. To be Jewish, for Freud, was to be cosmopolitan through and through. Jewish identity, in this analysis, cannot conceive of itself "without that radical originary break or flaw which will not be repressed, because Moses was Egyptian."⁷⁵ Thus, the historical memory of Moses agrees with Freud's self-conception of Jewish identity and shows the psychoanalyst himself to be a many-sided, worldly individual. Yet, Said also makes the further point that a group with this sense of identity could potentially reach out to another fraught identity, "by attending to it as a troubling, disabling, destabilizing secular wound—the essence of the cosmopolitan, from which there can be no recovery, no state of

⁷³ Freud 1953–1974, vol. 23.

⁷⁴ Said 2003, 42.

⁷⁵ Said 2003, 54.

resolved or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself.”⁷⁶ Said thus suggests that Israeli Jews ought to embrace Freud’s vision, reach out to Palestinians as another people with a complicated identity, and seek to live peacefully, and on equal terms, with them, so that both might be able to co-exist harmoniously together.

Rose observes in her response that there is an additional dimension that needs to be brought to bear on Said’s analysis: trauma and the response to trauma. As Rose writes, “the most historically attested response to trauma is to repeat it.”⁷⁷ Freud’s text is surely marked by at least a couple of violently traumatic moments, including the murder of Moses by the Jews and the exodus from Egypt. And Freud himself saw the book as further denial of the conventional Jewish understanding of Moses, a denial he made explicit in his memorable opening sentence (“To deprive a people of the man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons is not a thing to be gladly or carelessly undertaken, least of all by someone who is himself one of them”). But quite apart from the literal and figurative killing of Moses, and quite apart from the historical memory with which Freud attempts to engage, there is the historical situation in which the book appeared. Freud’s book was published, in 1939, the year of his death, after he was forced to flee Vienna and seek refuge in London, and after he had reworked the text during the latter half of the 1930s. The book assumes a poignancy in the light of Freud’s exile, and postwar readers cannot but approach *Moses and Monotheism* without an awareness of the Holocaust as well as of the author’s anguish.

The identity of a people who have suffered from a trauma so enormous can only have undergone a huge stress — and not necessarily for the better. Rose asks, “Are we at risk of idealizing the flaws and fissures of identity?” and she points out

⁷⁶ Said 2003, 54.

⁷⁷ Rose 2003, 77, cited in Said 2003.

that trauma, far from leading to openness, can cause “identities to batten down, to go exactly the other way: towards dogma, the dangers of coercive and coercing forms of faith.”⁷⁸ In other words, Israel’s treatment of Palestinians can be interpreted as a response to the historical traumas suffered by Jews, and Israel’s recent history suggests that a traumatized people may go on to inflict suffering on others. On this analysis, Freud’s analysis of historical memory is unlikely to provide a model for the peaceful co-existence of Israelis and Palestinians in a shared space. The implication of his work and its subsequent reception, rather, is that communities are forged on acts of primal murder, that trauma gives rise to the repetition of traumatic violence, and that the memory of oppression is invoked to visit oppression on others. Rose thus draws on Freud’s work in order to qualify Said’s interpretation of his late masterpiece.

Said’s lecture emerges from Rose’s response as a ‘misreading’ of Freud as much as a noble attempt to seek a blueprint for reconciliation. Yet, Freud’s own treatment of Egyptian and Hebrew material in *Moses and Monotheism* was also a misreading of the sources, as many scholars have remarked, and even in his own day few established historians actually espoused the views he held about the ‘the man Moses’. But what is powerful in each case is less the interpretive misprision and more the uses to which the thinker put his analyses, less the putative inaccuracy and more the challenge to a contemporary state of affairs. Each author was compulsively drawn to make an intervention in the political situation of his own day, Freud in relation to the already dangerous circumstances of Jews in the 1930s, Said in relation to the postwar plight of Palestinians. Each was responding to a trauma, the understanding of which was shaped by memories historical and personal. Each teaches his readers, as

⁷⁸ Rose 2003, 76, cited in Said 2003.

indeed does Pollock, that remembering the past is not merely sufficient to avoid repeating it and that what we remember is often shaped by the cues of the moment. Memories of empire are variable, and the way we stitch them together are the result of present exigencies. The lesson for us appears to be that working through jealousy, melancholia, nostalgia, or euphoria is one way to come to a deeper understanding of the past and to avoid repeating the worst excesses of empire.

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