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DECOLONISATION AND THE ISSUE OF REPARATIONS:
PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH ASIA

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Overview

The relationship between processes of decolonisation and the issue of reparations is important and interesting, although the explanations for the highly variable experiences of different countries are in many cases quite simple from a comparative historical perspective. One can begin, provocatively, by arguing that in ex-British colonies demands for compensation have most often arisen where there were breaches of British laws (for example in Kenya), which are still effectively in force in that country, but where there was no subsequent judicial enquiry. (These demands even have support in the UK). In most other cases demands for reparations did not arise as the British withdrawal was negotiated and long prepared for. Neither case compares well with the issue of ‘comfort women’ in Northeast Asia, which arose from a relatively brief, largely military occupation by Japan, which ended without negotiation.

The nearest parallel to the case of ‘comfort women’ situation within the British Empire would be the instance of Zimbabwe, where white settler regime, led by Ian Smith, seized power in 19634. The Smith regime was never recognised internationally and widely condemned for its illegality. Compensation was agreed in this case, the UK govt. assuming a measure of responsibility for the misdeeds of the Smith regime, but that was conditional and those conditions were never fulfilled (or so the UK govt claims). During the elections of 1980 that brought Zimbabwe for the first time under majority rule, the former colonial power backed a faction led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa and overlooked irregularities in the election process in anticipation of his victory. Unfortunately for the British, Mugabe’s ZANU (PF) came to power and soon set about seizing control of the media and eliminating all other political groups who had been party to the independence negotiations. This included the elimination of the largely Ndebele followers of ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo. The relationship between the government of Zimbabwe and the UK has been sour ever since. The case of India demonstrates, however, how successfully the majority of the negotiations for the withdrawal of Britain from its former colonies was achieved, and the very considerable advantages that were derived from applying the lessons learned from earliest experiences of decolonisation within the British Empire. Above all, the practice of decolonisation in British India resulted in the avoidance of demands for reparations, both at the time and since, thus

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1 I am grateful to Awaya Toshie, Nakano Satoshi, and Gajendra Singh for discussions and references relating to this essay, as well as to Nagahara Yoko for providing the incentive to write it for a meeting at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies of the research group on ‘Colonial Responsibilities’. All errors and opinions expressed, however, are entirely my own.
setting the British experience apart from that of many other countries in post-conflict and post-colonial situations.

**Independence Negotiations: Elites and Education**

Negotiations prior to independence were the key to successful British and (to a lesser extent) French decolonisation in Africa and Asia. There were often sympathetic agents on both sides in the preparations for European withdrawal. This allowed for a strong political settlement at an elite level (with often considerable popular support), which over-rode any legal demands that might arise from individuals. This has commonly worked to ensure good relations subsequent to decolonisation, provided those same elites, or their heirs, remain in power for a period of time afterwards. In Kenya, the Kikuyu have seen a decline in their political and economic power, which one might speculate is a possible cause of their unrest on several fronts at present.

It further helps if the colonising and colonised countries share a common educational system. In the case of both Britain and France, a long established and to some extent shared higher educational system created amongst elites a common ground upon which disagreements could be discussed. It also allowed for a common frame of reference through which the events of the past and the political agreements resulting could be interpreted and continue to be understood. This was particularly the case in the British Empire, which was much larger and involved far fewer British officials and far more British-trained local elites in the management of its far-flung territories. The classic example of this in India lies in the person of the lead negotiator of the Indian National Congress party (INC) in the months leading up to the British withdrawal from India, who later went on to become the first Indian prime minister. Jawaharlal Nehru was schooled in one of the four most elite private schools in the UK – Harrow College – and received his higher education (in Natural Sciences) at Cambridge University. Nehru then subsequently trained in London as a barrister of law. He once jokingly described himself as ‘the last Englishman to rule India’. Most other successful independence negotiations within the British Empire were led by thoroughly (and not just superficially) British-educated elites in Africa and Asia. Amongst many examples one could mention Malaysian Prime Ministers such as Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak and even Mahatir bin Mohammad, ‘Harry’ Lee Kwuan Yew in Singapore (where he served as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990), Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda (whose father was a Church of Scotland minister in Northern Rhodesia) who served as the first President of independent Zambia from 1964 to 1991. In India, Jawaharlal Nehru’s main political rival, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, was similarly trained in law and also worked for many years in London during the 1930s. Although obliged to wear a fez and other symbols of Islamic identity when engaged in political campaigning, he largely conversed and spoke publicly in English and never gave up his fondness for Scotch Whisky and English cigarettes until his early death. Although pioneering the wearing of traditional Indian clothes as a nationalist trope, Mahatma Gandhi had also studied law in London. Perhaps his most important political tactic was his use of British conceptions of law and Christian ideals of morality against the British themselves, but it is not obvious that he did not believe in them passionately himself, alongside his commitment to reformist Hinduism and individual ‘swaraj’ or self-determination. None of this is to say that these leaders were not sincere patriots, but to understand the
outcome from political confrontation it is important and necessary to emphasise the heavy influence of British culture in the upbringing and education of many nationalist leaders in Africa and Asia, which uniquely equipped them for negotiations with their erstwhile colonial rulers.

The Role and Rule of Law

If countries that have invaded or colonised others are to avoid demands for reparation, on any grounds, it is important that they assume responsibility in some shape or form rather than assume simple authority by right of conquest. In every British colony from the late nineteenth century onwards an effort was made to secure the involvement of local collaborators, even in the most responsible positions. Thus very large numbers of Indian were trained as doctors, teachers, policemen, judges, and lawyers, and were involved in the management of the Indian Empire. Alongside this, serious attempts were made to ensure colonial officials were in theory officially and legally subject to the same laws as subject peoples. This was a part of the price of this method of governance. When these laws were evaded through the abuse of power (which was easily done) outrage often ensued. It was that outrage (following the 1883 Ilbert bill) that led to the foundation of the Indian National Congress, and it was a similar outrage (following the Rowlatt Bill of 1919), and outrage at the ‘whitewashed’ enquiry into the associated Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 that followed, which led to the INC to become a formal political party campaigning for independence. The normative expectation of the Indian subject was thus that colonial officials would and should be held accountable for their actions.

The operation of a formal and equal legal system was one important way in which French and British colonial regimes was perpetuated - by arguing that they served a common good (and that native and foreign elites might equally prosper). This only worked, of course, if unruly colonial officials were indeed occasionally suspended, sent home or dismissed, or charges laid against them and a civilian jury trial at least occasionally held. In British colonies, when a conflict or popular opposition arose, an ‘independent’ commission of enquiry would sometimes be appointed and there were also limited forms of political representation. Of course, in any society, the powerful and privileged can evade the law, and for the British in India, and to a greater extent in colonies elsewhere, this was often easily done. Native rights, although existing in theory (flowing in India from the Queen Victoria’s famous proclamation of 1858), in practice they might only the partially implemented. This is what Partha Chatterjee has referred to a ‘the rule of colonial difference’. In this way, the colonial regime created at least an illusion of culpability for its actions, and for some always it was more than this: there being a highly articulate anti-colonial section in British intellectual life even from the

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2 Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: colonial and postcolonial histories (Princeton University Press, 1993). The exceptions to legal equality are also detailed at considerable length in Elizabeth Kolsky, Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law (Cambridge University Press, 2009, forthcoming). Unfortunately, her argument may be weakened by the fact much of the evidence of abuse used in Kolsky’s study was collected, and made publicly available, by colonial officials themselves in pursuance of prosecutions of Britishers in India.
eighteenth century onwards, ranging from Edmund Burke, through Gladstone, to Stafford Cripps. One might argue that every oppressive system of governance requires its idealists, but they are often also still a part of its unmaking.

In a comparable fashion, the government of post-war Germany itself undertook prosecutions of German war criminals in the 1970s. The regime did not merely issue formal 'apologies' - which carry little weight - but undertook full scale trials of its own citizens. War crimes were defined according to their own terms and the trials took place without international interference or control (as with the trials that had formerly occurred in Nuremberg). The process was of course helped by a high degree of unity amongst the German public in their condemnation of the policies of the Nazi wartime regime. In this way Germany has assumed responsibility, ownership and control over allegations of criminality in its conduct of the Second World War. This has greatly smoothed Germany's relationship with the Eastern Europe nations that have recently been incorporated into the European Union. By distancing the government from the crimes of individuals, and by endeavouring to bring those individuals to justice, the present-day government has been able to destroy the political momentum and even the legality of subsequent claims for reparation (since no-one in law can be charged for the same crime twice). Unfortunately, the opportunity for a similar initiative, in the case of Japan, has probably now been missed.

The Price of Good Relations: the Indian example

The nature of Indian decolonisation and its aftermath is intimately connected with changes that went on in India’s political economy (and politics) in the months and years that immediately preceded independence in 1947. During the Second World War, from 1940 onwards, more than 2.5 million Indian soldiers served in Africa, the Middle East, Burma, South-East Asia, and Europe, described by the Government of India as ‘the largest volunteer force in history’. Substantial quantities of munitions, cloth, and other commodities were also supplied from India to British forces fighting overseas. A financial agreement reached early during the Second World War divided the costs of this contribution to the war effort between the GOI and the British Government. It was further agreed that the payments due to India would be made in sterling and credited to an account in London that would be frozen, and hence unavailable to India. This was effectively a forced loan which obliged the GOI to raise the entire £2,000 million cost of India’s contribution in terms of men and supplies (especially cloth) to the war effort through taxation, borrowing, and ultimately by the printing of money (which tripled the money supply, and prices, by 1945). However, there consequently accumulated in London enormous sterling balances that were owed to the government of India, equivalent to Britain’s share, amounting to well over £1,000 million (an amount equal to one-third of the UK’s annual tax revenues during the war). Prime minister Churchill

3 The total of Indian troops serving on 29th May 1944 was 2,668,470 (source: Indian Army Morale and Possible Reduction, 1943-1945. War Staff Papers, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, London. L/WS/1/707). By the end of the war (1st September) the total of all South Asian servicemen (including airmen and those in the navy) was 2,581,726 (Anirudh Deshpande. British Military Policy in India, 1900-1945: Colonial Constraints and Declining Power (New Delhi: Manohar), 2005. p.149.

was reported to have objected to this arrangement, arguing that India should bear the bulk of the cost, but the Secretary of State for India, Leo Amery, had insisted that opposition to the war in India would be even greater than it already was if India entered the conflict on any less favourable terms.

At Partition, the sterling balances were divided by land area rather than population between India and Pakistan, thus giving India an arguably unfair share, which amounted to some Rs. 1750 crores (a crore being ten million).\(^5\) It has subsequently been argued that this method of dividing assets (in India's favour) was one of the benefits derived from the particularly close relationship between the Indian Congress party's chief negotiator, Nehru, and the last Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten. After independence Mountbatten became the darling of the Indian middle classes and served as Governor-General of India until June 1948, when the office of a non-executive Indian president was created.

During the war, Indian business flourished. India had supplied nearly four hundred million tailored items, twenty-five million pairs of shoes, thirty-seven thousand silk parachutes and four million cotton-made supply-dropping parachutes. At one point India was supplying as much as 1.2 billion yards of cloth per annum to the defence forces. The main downside of India's wartime experience was the acceleration in food prices, with even rationed food increasing in price by some 300 per cent.\(^6\) This of course, hurt the ordinary Indian consumer considerably. In Bengal there was famine, exacerbated by attempts to halt the advance of the Japanese army through the destruction of boats and bridges, which killed some 1.5 million. These circumstances undoubtedly contributed to the violence of the 'Quit India' campaign, launched by Gandhi in 1942. The Indian political elite, however, was imprisoned and took no part in this campaign, nor suffered the consequences of its violent repression. Thereafter, as the war progressed, the landowning and industrial middle classes benefitted greatly from the government's demand for food grains and manufactured produce. Apart from the introduction of food rationing there was little effective effort to control the prices and Indian industry was able to recover much of the ground lost during the years of the Great Depression, whilst paying little in taxation due to a serious breakdown in the working of the Income Tax Department. Sugar and rice producers benefitted especially after the loss of sugar-producing areas in the Far East to invading Japanese forces, whilst cloth manufacturers, who could charge almost as they pleased for their goods, probably made the largest profits. For others, meanwhile, inflation considerably reduced the burden of debts, money rents and land revenue charges levied by the government.\(^7\) Punjab, the scene of the greatest violence in sectarian conflict in the months and weeks after Partition, probably saw the greatest prosperity during wartime, being not only the largest source of recruits for the Indian army, but also India's biggest producer of wheat. Simple evidence for this came in the growing consumption of tea in rural areas, hitherto considered a luxury.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) Kamtekar, ibid, p. 201.

\(^7\) Kamtekar, ibid, p. 205.

\(^8\) Kamtekar, ibid, p. 207.
When Jawaharlal Nehru came to power, following the British hand-over in August 1947, a central pillar of his policy was the maintenance of the control and privileges acquired by the Indian middle classes before the during the second world war. Although publicly committed to a policy of socialism, this was hardly in practice implemented. By an agreement with India’s industrialists, the so-called ‘Bombay Plan’ of 1944, the Indian government agreed to leave Indian industry un-touched, provided that their efforts remained in ‘the national interest’. Lightly taxed, Indian industry was secured in a position of monopoly control over the economy by an elaborate framework of import controls and licensing laws. This was done in the name of ‘swadeshi’ (encouraging Indian manufacture), but had the effect of widening inequality and further enhancing the privileges of the middle classes. At the same time, the civil service remained unchanged and unreformed since colonial times, and land reform was not implemented to any serious degree before the 1970s.

This then was basically the diplomatic ‘coup’ that Britain achieved in 1946: the hand-over of power to an elite, who maintained the broad framework of British and their own strategic interests. Liberal immigration law in the UK further cemented the relationship until at least the mid 1960s, enabling the Indian middle classes and lower middle classes to migrate in large numbers to the UK, with little hindrance. After 1965, a tightening of immigration laws was matched by a since unchanged official commitment to a policy of ‘multiculturalism’, which has worked to ensure exceptional levels of harmony between Indian and Pakistani immigrants and the native population of Britain.9

Significant trading concessions were made to Indian exporters wishing to sell into the UK market. The British government further raised no major objections when the Nehru government announced a policy of ‘nationalising’ foreign owned assets. This involved the passing of a law soon after independence that prevented an Indian company having more than 49% foreign ownership. All British-owned enterprises accordingly had to sell 51% of their stock to Indian businessmen, often at prices well below their real market value. In 1973 the coal industry and all oil companies were completely nationalised, ending completely any share of foreign ownership. The same fate befall the banking system, which was nationalised in successive waves, beginning with the Imperial Bank and its subsidiaries in 1955, and six further major banks in 1980. Foreign disinvestment was this conducted largely on Indian terms, and not according to the whims of the international market.

India was allowed to draw upon its ‘Sterling Balances’ to pay for the large imports of food that were necessary following Partition. The GOI was obliged, however, to pay or the large stocks of military supplies and ordinance left behind in India following the British withdrawal. A considerable portion of the ‘Sterling Balances’ had also to be spent

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9 A measure of the success of multiculturalism may be gauged through marriage statistics. According to the 2001 census, 2% of all marriages in the United Kingdom were inter-ethnic. And despite the UK’s having a much lower proportion of non-white population (9%) than the USA, the frequency of mixed marriages is as common. This proportion has since increased. As of 2005, it is estimated that nearly half of British-born African-Caribbean males, a third of British-born African-Caribbean females, and a fifth of Indian and African males, have white partners. Lucy Bland, "White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War", Gender & History (April 2007) 17 (1): 29–61
in paying pensions to former British military officers and government officials. In return, the British ensured an easy transition in the government of the country – many British officials staying on until Indian replacements had been trained to replace them, particularly in the Indian army, which continued to be supplied with officers by the British government for several years after independence. The first Indian commander-in-chief of the Indian army (Field Marshall K.M. Cariappa) was not appointed until January 1949.

The Indian businessmen who purchased and assumed control of foreign-owned businesses in the 1950s were the same business elites who had prospered during the war. Until the advent of liberalisation, the same people who acquired these assets held on to that prosperity and influence well into the 1990s. Since liberalisation, new entrepreneurs have prospered and the total of rural poor has decreased slightly from 33% to 26-29%, but there has been no diminution of inequality, rather an increase since 1983. To this day, therefore the Indian middle classes remain firmly in power, are highly prosperous, and observably happy with the settlement of 1947. The largest enmity is preserved for Pakistan, the newly formed Muslim nation that split away from India in 1947, with whom four successive wars have been fought, not with the British.

A ‘Royal Ruckus’

Following decolonisation, described officially as ‘a transfer of power’, very close ties were preserved between India and Britain. These were cemented by India joining the Commonwealth in 1950, on condition that majority voting would govern its functioning and that India could remain a republic, merely recognising the Queen as a ‘symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and, as such, Head of the Commonwealth’. This close relationship survived the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (of which India was a leading member) and even the Suez crisis of 1956, when India (and Nehru in particular) led the international denunciation of British and French adventurism in the Middle East. Fortunately on this occasion the Indian government even had the backing of the United States and the relationship was anxiously patched together, on both sides, immediately afterwards.

This then remained the status quo for many years, with Nehru a frequent visitor to London, where he commonly took tea with Edwina Mountbatten, the wife of the last Viceroy, until her death in 1960. Thereafter, a wariness of Soviet influence (despite the GOI’s leftward leaning under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi) meant that Indian officials continued to cultivate a reasonable working relationship with the British government throughout the years of the Cold War. Even events such as the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 were meet with equanimity by the British government, which took care not to voice an opinion that might embarrass the government of its former colony.

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A major rupture in Anglo-Indian relations did not arise until the decline of Congress hegemony in the 1990s and the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - a political organisation representing north Indian Brahmins and a lower middle class (petit bourgeois) section of society: neither of which had been privileged in either the independence negotiations or subsequent decades of Congress rule. The BJP had an anti-western perspective and was culturally nationalistic (articulating a policy of Hindutva). It advocated a policy of renewed swadeshi – of preference being given to domestic production. The BJPs political ancestor, the Jana Sangh, was famous for staging sometimes anti-western and anti-British demonstrations during the 1950s and 1960s. The accession to power of the BJP and its allies to political power in the late 1990s did therefore for a moment threaten the pro-western sentiments of most middle class Indians.

The last majority Congress government ended in 1996, to be followed by a succession of coalition governments until the BJP assumed power for the first time in 1998. This was also a time when in the UK the 18-year long reign of the British Conservative Party was brought to an end by the election of a relatively inexperienced ‘New Labour’ administration in May 1997. The ‘New Labour Party’, in imitation of international socialist ideals within British Labour movement of the past century, was committed to pursuing a ‘moral’ foreign policy and the projection of ideals of ‘human rights’ abroad. This was a policy which some considered to be ‘neo-imperialist’ and an unwelcome innovation when compared with the crude but predictable assertion of British interests abroad, characteristic of Conservative Party rule under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. These political changes in the UK and India marked the beginning of a period of instability in British-Indian relations. It was during a period of coalition governments in India, specifically a Janata Dal-led coalition under the premiership of I.K. Gujral in 1997, that a major problem arose in Anglo-Indian relations, the first for many years, and to the surprise of most concerned.

The controversy began with an incautious British proposal that Queen Elizabeth (of the United Kingdom) should participate in the important Golden Jubilee celebrations of 50 years of Indian independence in New Delhi on August 15th, 2007. The Indian government was wary of this proposal and suggested a visit at a later time. The new Labour British government then proposed a different itinerary, including a visit to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The idea was mooted as it was thought this might appeal to the British Sikh community, who were keen supporters of the newly installed Labour government. Negotiations to arrange this visit were commenced in collaboration with the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which manages the hold Sikh shrine at Amritsar. The SGPC was enthusiastic and said that the Queen would be given a ‘rousing reception’.11

Unfortunately, Amritsar is the site of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, when officially close to 400 unarmed Indian civilians were slaughtered by a British-led army contingent (unofficially as many as 1,500 deaths were claimed). This was by no means the largest number of Indians murdered during the long period of colonial rule, but it was the most prominent, arising as it did during a political campaign to uphold the legal

11 India Today, September 1st 1997.
rights of ordinary Indians. It was also the event which turned Mahatma Gandhi from a reformer into an opponent of colonial rule and began the Indian independence movement. It was thus an event laden with political symbolism (of which apparently the UK government was ill-informed). Controversy erupted after it was reported that the Queen might lay a wreath at the Jallianwala Bagh memorial, which is close to the Golden Temple. Many Indians backed this simple act of remorse, but Parkash Singh Badal, the Chief Minister of the Punjab state, chose to capitalise on the issue and wrote a letter demanding that the British should also return the 105ct. Koh-i-nur diamond (originally mined in Golconda) which had been presented to the East India Company by the son of the last the King of the Sikhs (its latest possessor) and had become a part of the British Crown Jewels when Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877. Meanwhile, a Punjabi University Professor (of Agricultural Science) demanded that the Queen should also pay a visit to the 'martyrs' memorial' erected at Hussainiwala.

The reaction of the Indian government illustrates very well the 'cross-linkages' between the anxieties of the governments in the two countries. Thus, if the British were to make reparations to the Sikhs for past mis-deeds, might not also the government of India be obliged to make reparations from its own excesses: most notably, the governments military attack on the Golden Temple itself, in 1984, in a desperate measure to dislodge Sikh nationalist militants who had seized control of it. Independent estimates put civilian casualties at close to 5000, the Indian army itself admitting to killing close to 500. Despite outrage amongst the Sikh community, the British government had supported the Indian governments' action. Might these and other controversies resurface?

The Government of India accordingly recommended that the Queen abandon her visit to the Punjab – a proposal that made matters worse as the SGPC then claimed, as did many Sikhs in Britain, that the government was acting to dishonour the Sikhs by denying them the opportunity for such a distinguished visit. The SGPC chief, Gurcharan Singh Tohra said that British Monarchs and Premiers had visited India many a time, but no one had ever demanded an apology. Others accused him of mis-managing the event. The occasion of the Queen’s visit was thus also becoming a tool in the hands of different factions fighting for control of the SGPC.

Eventually Queen Elizabeth’s visit to the Punjab went ahead peaceably in October 2007 (well after the independence anniversary). It was described by the British government as part of a ‘pilgrimage’ to ‘some of the spiritual centres of British citizens of Indian origin’.

She also visited several British charities working in India, and then inaugurated an Indo-British trade fair in New Delhi. At Amritsar, she visited the Golden Temple and the Jallianwala Bagh, where she laid a wreath. Protesters, shouting ‘Killer Queen, go back’, were dispersed four hours before the queen arrived at the memorial site. Other planned protests were cancelled after an emollient speech made by the Queen in New Delhi, where she referred to the massacre as a ‘distressing’ episode in the relations between Britain and India. ‘History cannot be rewritten, however much we might sometimes wish otherwise,” she told the gathering. British-India relations have

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12 India Today, October 27th 1997.
had their share of sadness and gladness, she said; the point is to learn from the sadness and build on the gladness.\textsuperscript{13}

All might have gone well, but for the naive over-enthusiasm of the British Foreign Secretary, who, whilst visiting neighbouring Pakistan, had repeated an offer of British mediation over the Indo-Pakistani conflict in Kashmir. In a speech in Islamabad (written by the Foreign Secretary), the Queen had also urged India and Pakistan to resolve their differences (a comment criticised by the *Times of India*). This was doubly insulting to India, which rejects any outside interference in the in Kashmir (whilst Pakistan seeks resolution through the United Nations). I.K. Gujral was reported to have commented ‘A third-rate power has presumed to say that they have a historical responsibility to solve the Kashmir issue’ and that this was presumptuous, not least of all because they had helped create the problem in the first place.\textsuperscript{14} The prime minister’s spokesman at the request of the British, however, subsequently denied these comments. After similar gaffes elsewhere, Robin Cook was replaced as Foreign Secretary in 2001. Efforts to maintain good relations and to bury the spectre of colonialism included the British Film Council funding an independent Indian film company to produce a film about the life of Mangal Pandey – India hero of the Indian Uprising of 1857. This was despite the film’s militantly anti-colonial rhetoric, which upset the Conservative Party’s arts spokesman in the UK. These complaints were ignored by the British Government, and the Prince of Wales even had his photograph taken alongside the film’s director and principal actor, Aamir Khan, on the day that they began shooting.

**The Role of Economics**

The mitigating role of economics must be given special emphasis. The rise of the BJP in India coincided with the second surge of globalisation, which caused the Indian middle classes to prosper more than ever before from their economic relationship with the West. The BJP-led governments of 1998-2004 especially, benefited hugely from the revenues arising from economic growth and therefore very quickly abandoned its nationalist *swadeshi* policies (urging people to use only Indian-made goods) and began to enthusiastically encourage foreign investment. After a conflict with Pakistan (to please their supporters), the GOI also began to vigorously pursue good relations with its neighbours and with Western powers, especially the United States. The same happened in east Asia. For a while, enmity towards Japan abated whilst Japan invested heavily in the economies of Southeast and Northeast Asia. In the 1990s, however, the Japanese economy crashed. Korean, Chinese and other South-East Asian manufacturers began to find that they could sell more of their goods, and more easily, in Europe and the United States than they could in Japan. As their economic dependence lessened, they became more critical of Japan, and as Japanese corporations began to unilaterally close factories and shift production to cheaper locations such as Vietnam and Thailand in the early twenty-first century (following the simple logic of capital)\textsuperscript{15}, memories of past exploitation were unfortunately revived.

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\textsuperscript{13} *CNN World News* (online), October 14\textsuperscript{th} 1997.

\textsuperscript{14} Reported by Associated Press and in the *Deseret News* for October 13\textsuperscript{th} 1997, page A8.

\textsuperscript{15} ‘Japanese Companies in China’, *The Economist*, July 26\textsuperscript{th} 2007.
Development aid is a poor substitute for economic growth, as it often serves only to reinforce and remind people of the dependent relationship between former colonised and colonising powers. There was thus sustained criticism in the 1970s and 1980s of the European, American, World Bank, and IMF development initiatives as perpetuating ‘neo-imperialism’. These criticisms were renewed in Asia during the financial crisis of 1987. However, genuine independent economic growth in South Asia and South-East Asia since the 1990s, due in part to the opening up of markets in the developed countries under the initiative of the World Trade Organisation, has silenced much of this criticism. In the case of Britain’s relationship with India, London’s role as a financial centre, where money might be raised to fund investment encouraged many Indian corporations to establish offices in the UK, including the global steel magnate, Lakshmi Mittal, who was allowed to purchases the remains of once-nationalised ‘British Steel’, and himself became a UK resident (and a generous supporter of the British Labour Party).

The Role of Democracy in Post-Colonial Regimes

It is hard for idealistic individuals or countries without much international power to accept this, but international relations and natural justice have historically had little to do with each other.16 The International Court in the Hague is a radical and rare innovation. Hitherto, international disputes have been resolved by warfare or (another recent innovation) by majority voting in fora such as the United Nations (which powerful nations may choose to ignore). To understand therefore why some demands for retribution in the form of financial compensation, persist whilst others do not, we need to look beyond the expectations of natural justice. A further development of the argument must look at post-colonial regimes. Those that are stable, and involve elites that prospered in some way from colonial rule (note above), tend to take a benign attitude towards the former colonial power. It further helps if they are fully functioning democracies. If both circumstances apply, the elites in power may even seek quite earnestly to downplay atrocities committed under the colonial regime as this undermines their own popularity and legitimacy as heirs of the political settlement at independence (this is certainly the case in India). And if they are democratically elected, their point of view has in turn considerable influence and further legitimacy as a consequence.

By contrast, unstable and undemocratic regimes (this applies to some extent in China and particularly in the middle east) may seek to hold on to enmities of the past in order to achieve some sort of unity in the present. If a society is highly unequal, as well as undemocratic, then the elites may struggle to hold on to power, which makes conflict with their neighbours and former colonial powers all the more important. Finally, Even if matters were once thought to have been settled, if there is no continuity within the class of the ruling elite, a political settlement agreed at one moment in time will lack continuity and those same claims will surface again and again.

16 Colonialism and the issue of reparations goes entirely unmentioned in Amartya Sen’s recent celebrated study of The Idea of Justice (Allen Lane, 2009)
A further issue to be considered is the extent to which the colonial powers must be held responsible for the nature of the regimes that succeeded them. In most cases, that responsibility is clear, and if the colonial power is criticised or attacked by a successor regime that is unstable and belligerent, it often only has itself to blame (Zimbabwe is again a good example).

An Indian Peculiarity

A special circumstance of the Indian freedom struggle, which aided the process of decolonisation, was its high moral agenda and the ‘non-violent’ method of agitation preferred by the Congress party’s principal leader – Mahatma Gandhi. This does not mean that there was no violence in the Indian Freedom Struggle: far from it. There was considerable violence on both sides, with numerous bomb explosions and assassinations carried out by Indian nationalists, as well as reprisals against unarmed civilians by the British. And of course every non-violent popular demonstration carried within it the veiled threat of violence, implicit in organised, mass mobilisation on any scale. However, in principal at least, violence was something the Congress leadership, and this privileged the process of negotiation with the imperial power.

The most violent agitation during the closing years of British rule was the already mentioned ‘Quit India’ movement of 1942. This was widely supported, especially in north India, and required the mobilisation of some 57 army in order to restore order (delaying the war against Japan in Burma). By the end of 1943 some 100,000 people had been arrested, 1,000 killed in firings and 3,000 injured according to official figures. Furthermore, terrorism was not incidental, but central to the uprising: in total 208 police out-posts were attacked and destroyed, 332 railway stations were wrecked, and 945 post offices were burnt to the ground according to official statistics. Thousands of miles of telegraph wires were put out of action and 664 bomb explosions took place, whilst 63 policemen died in the struggle and a further 216 defected – mostly in Bihar.17 This event may have been the most important factor, alongside the devastating financial consequences of World War Two and the popular demand in the UK for the demobilisation of the British army, persuading the British that they could not longer afford to hold on to their Indian colony. However, the leadership of the Indian National Congress was imprisoned and did not participate in this movement. Their claim to leadership was based upon earlier, non-violent agitations, which all came to an end following negotiation. It was a negotiated settlement to which the Congress leadership were therefore committed when they were released from prison in 1945 and their representative status was recognised by the British, even before elections were held (on the basis of a limited male franchise) in 1946.

So debilitated was the Congress by the end of WW2, they were in no position to renew agitation. In addition, they had to deal with the Muslim League, which was recognised as another key partner in the negotiations by the British (as a reward for their war-time support). Nonetheless, the political process between 1945 and independence in 1947 was marked by a commitment to negotiation on both sides. Undoubtedly, this may have disadvantaged the Congress (and was a factor in the decision to Partition the

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subcontinent into the separate nations of India and Pakistan), but the independence negotiations were led, on the Indian side, by aged and even sickly men. None of them (aside perhaps from Mohammed Ali Jinnah) shared the radical edge which occasionally characterised Mahatma Gandhi’s political interventions and Gandhi’s own influence by this time was on the wane. At the end of a long and gruelling struggle, most were glad to seize power almost on any terms that could be negotiated. Interpreted as a ‘success’, this approach to decolonisation was subsequently widely imitated by nationalist movements facing colonial powers elsewhere in Africa and Asia.

The worst aspect of the Indo-British negotiations was the abandonment by the British of their former allies amongst the rulers of the Indian Princely States (whose fate was left undecided by the negotiations) and the decision by Lord Louis Mountbatten to advance the date proposed in Parliament in London for the British withdrawal from June 1948 to August 15th 1947. This was two days before the borders of the new states of India and Pakistan were announced on August 17th. By this device, the enfeebled, newly created government of independent India then held responsibility for the wholesale violence which accompanied Partition. Some 8 million Hindus and Muslims migrated to opposing sides of the border and more than a million lost their lives in the accompanying violence. This, however, was clearly made an Indian responsibility and not the responsibility of the British. Alongside the instalment of broadly sympathetic, liberal, social democratic regime, this was the greatest ‘coup’ achieved by the British when they abandoned India in 1947. It was also an Indian decision to use force to incorporate several of the remaining independent Princely States who did not agree, on the basis of a democratic mandate, to join the India Union. The GOI thereby assumed responsibility for the discord and conflict, still ongoing, in the most controversial of these cases, that of Kashmir.

Conclusion

Because of the exemplary emphasis on a process of negotiation to end colonial rule in India, the Indian National Congress, and other similar social democratic, bourgeois nationalist parties in Africa and Asia, voiced only muted objections to the suppression of armed insurrectionary movements by the British and French elsewhere in Asia. Having claimed to have achieved Indian independence with popular support and by non-violent means, it was difficult if not impossible for the government of India (and the non-aligned movement) to advance support to violent anti-colonial campaigns elsewhere — such as in Malaysia, for example. The British were thus able in several instances to over-awe insurrectionary movements and then, as in the Indian case, seduce middle class political elites into peaceful negotiations to effect their withdrawal. Even in Ireland, the British achieved a settlement in the south (Eire) in 1922 and again in Northern Ireland in 1996, by wearing down armed insurrectionists and agreeing a settlement with more moderate political elites. The most singular exception to this approach was the case of Palestine, where the British fought and lost an anti-guerrilla war against Zionist organisations. Over-stretched by their engagement in conflicts elsewhere the British were unable to prevent the assassination in November 1942 of Lord Moyne the Minister of State for the Middle East, who was opposed to Jewish immigration. And in 1946 rival Zionist underground organisations, including Irgun and Lehi (the "Stern gang"), united to drive the British out of Palestine without any effective,
democratic political settlement for the governance of the territory being achieved. This was the worst possible outcome, which left an embittered and fatal legacy, most gravely affecting those involved in Palestine itself.

For its determination to squarely face its history, Germany has been described as the most mature within the ranks of developed, social democratic nations. It is questionable whether any of the other Western European powers have achieved a similar level of maturity. Some, such as the Netherlands and Belgians, have suffered serious difficulties (not least of all with their own immigrant communities) as a result of their failure to incorporate local elites, to decolonise effectively, and to face up to their colonial past. The latter has arguably still not been fully achieved either in Britain, why is one reason why the British government still feels obliged to spend a higher portion of its GDP on defence than any other European nation, and still feels impelled to assume a prominent role in international military operations in far-flung areas, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. This failure to fully address the past, has further hindered the development of a closer relationship with the European Union where Britain’s economic and political future ultimately must lie. Unlike Japan, there did not emerge a commitment to ‘never wage a war again’ (as described by the writer Kenzaburo Oe18) and even an ambiguous commitment to the ideals of democracy and the right of nations to self-determination. Nonetheless, through a process of compromise and negotiation at moments of often only apparent strength, it may be argued that Britain was able to achieve a better political relationship than most colonising powers with the victims of its former territorial expansionism.

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