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The British Empire in History and Memory: Britain's Relations with Ireland and India from the Early Twentieth Century to the Present[1]

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In the early 2010s, the British monarch and the British prime minister undertook two "historic" overseas visits. Queen Elizabeth II made a state visit to the Republic of Ireland in May 2011, and David Cameron, the prime minister of the Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition government (2010–15), went to India in February 2013. This article examines history and memory related to the British Empire using the cases of Ireland and India. Ireland was Britain's oldest and geographically closest colony (often one of the most difficult colonies to deal with for the British), whereas India was arguably Britain's most important colonial possession that provided the largest economic and human resources (often referred to as "the crown jewel of the British Empire").

Elizabeth II visited Ireland for the first time as a British monarch since 1911. It was one hundred years after the visit of her grandfather, King George V. At the turn of the twentieth century, in April 1900, Queen Victoria paid a visit to Ireland, which had been under British colonial rule for centuries. She was received with icy attitudes from the Irish public in Dublin, not only because of their upsurging nationalism against Britain's imperialism, but also because of their strong criticism against Britain's involvement in the South African War (Second Anglo-Boer War) that broke out in the previous year. Queen Victoria died at the age of 81 on January 22, 1901 amid the South African War, which was prolonged in contrast to Britain's optimistic views before and at the beginning of the war in Southern Africa. Another important reason for many Irish people's cold attitudes toward the British Queen was that she had strongly opposed Irish self-government (Home Rule) until the last years of her sixty-four-year reign since 1837.

After George V's visit in 1911, a visit by a British monarch to Ireland became virtually impossible for a long time, because of a series of events from the Easter Rising of 1916 (during which the General Post Office [GPO] in Dublin was once symbolically sieged by Irish nationalists),[2] the Irish War of Independence (Anglo-Irish War) from 1919 to 1921, to the partition of the island in 1922. As a result of the partition, Northern Ireland remained in the United Kingdom and its attribution issue made Anglo-Irish relations even thornier. Northern Ireland is a remnant of Britain's oldest colony, Ireland, and today could be considered as Britain's "internal colony"—one of the regions of the "Celtic fringe" together with Scotland and Wales—that needs to be "decolonized."[3] Under the leadership of Éamon de Valera, Ireland strongly claimed its independence from Britain and became the only neutral country within the British Commonwealth of Nations throughout the Second World War. In 1949, Ireland, which was called Eire in Irish Gaelic under the 1937 constitution that also abrogated "allegiance" to the British Crown, became the Republic of Ireland and finally left the Commonwealth. It did not join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) established in the same year and maintained its neutralist foreign and security policy throughout the Cold War era and beyond. Between 1969 and 2001, around 3,500 people lost their lives because of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, with a peak of 479 in 1972. In April 1974, the death toll from the Troubles reached 1,000 in five years.[4] The Parliament of Northern Ireland was dissolved by the Northern Ireland Act of July 1974. Gradually, the prolonged conflict in Northern Ireland between unionists and nationalists even "undermined any UK role as exemplar of stable democratic government."[5]

However, around the turn of the millennium, the Northern Ireland peace process made substantial progress (although there were setbacks sometimes) and Anglo-Irish relations improved to a large extent under Tony Blair's Labour government (1997–2007) in the United Kingdom and Bertie Ahern's Fianna Fáil (Republican Party) government (1997–2008) in the Irish Republic. The Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement) of April 10, 1998 was "the anchor of the Northern

Ireland peace process." It stipulated not only the establishment of power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland, but also free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital—"an open border" based on "the four freedoms"—across the 500-kilometer borderline between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland through membership of the single market of the European Union (EU).[6] According to Dermot Keogh, after Labour's landslide victory in May 1997, "Unionist MPs no longer held the balance of power in the [House of] Commons." The new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (from May 1997 to October 1999) under the Tony Blair government, Mo Mowlam, "laid less emphasis on decommissioning [disarmament of the Irish Republican Army] than her Conservative predecessors. Her personal commitment and political adroitness helped lay the foundation for radical change."[7]

Bill Clinton, the president of the United States from 1993 to 2001, had studied at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar from 1968 to 1970 (after graduating from Georgetown University in 1968) and had been "interested in the Irish issue since 'the Troubles' began in 1968." While he was at Oxford, Clinton traveled to Dublin for a weekend and wrote in his autobiography that "I loved Ireland, and felt at home there. I hated to leave after just a weekend." Then, during his attempt to become the Democrats' presidential candidate in early 1992, Clinton met many renowned Irish people in the United States, particularly in New York.

> They wanted me to promise to appoint a special representative to push for an end to the violence in Northern Ireland on terms that were fair to the Catholic minority. I had also been encouraged to do this by Boston mayor Ray Flynn, an ardent Irish Catholic and a strong supporter of mine. … After a lengthy discussion, I said I would do it and that I would push for an end to discrimination against Northern Ireland's Catholics in economics and other areas. Though I knew it would infuriate the British and strain our most important transatlantic alliance, I had become convinced that the United States, with its huge Irish diaspora, including people who funneled money to the Irish Republican Army, might be able to facilitate a breakthrough.[8]

After he became the 42nd US president in January 1993 and then the Conservative governments in Britain gave way to Tony Blair's New Labour government in May 1997, Clinton successfully helped reconcile conflicting parties and factions in Northern Ireland, particularly by sending ex-Senator George Mitchell as a special adviser in the peace process.

During her visit to Ireland in May 2011 (about one year before the Queen's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in June 2012), Elizabeth II laid a wreath and observed a moment of silence at the memorial dedicated to those who died for the independence of Ireland. In her speech during the state dinner held at Dublin Castle, she said, "It is a sad and regrettable reality that through history our islands have experienced more than their fair share of heartache, turbulence and loss. … With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all."[9] Although the Queen's message was somehow ambiguous and she did not formally apologize, the place where she made her speech could be considered symbolic. Britain's successive viceroys (governors-general) of Ireland were based at Dublin Castle during the centuries-long British colonial rule, and the Castle was handed over to Michael Collins on January 16, 1922 as a result of the establishment of the Irish Free State. The Irish Free State was founded as the sixth Dominion within the British Empire, following the leads of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the Dominion of New Zealand in 1907, the Dominion of Newfoundland in 1907, and the Union of South Africa in 1910. The successive governments of Ireland have continued to use Dublin Castle "for important national events, such as state dinners and commemorations. Since 1938, each one of Ireland's presidents has been inaugurated in St Patrick's Hall, the grandest of the State Apartments [which dominates the southern range of the Upper Courtyard of Dublin Castle]."[10]

At the time of the British Queen's visit, the Irish Republic experienced a serious depression due to the global financial crisis of 2008. Ireland achieved spectacular economic growth known as "the Celtic Tiger" in the 1990s and early to mid-2000s. As a result of the economic growth following the examples of the four East and Southeast Asian "Tigers" or "Little Dragons"—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—,[11] Ireland was transformed from one of the poorest countries in Western Europe to one of the richest economies in the world in terms of GDP per capita, surpassing both the United Kingdom and the United States. However, due to the severe depression from the late 2000s onward, budget deficit, and serious unemployment, the Fianna Fáil government under Brian Cowen experienced a huge defeat at the general election held in February 2011. The Fine Gael's leader, Enda Kenny, took office as the new Taoiseach. However, despite these turbulent economic and political situations and the lack of a formal apology by the Queen during her four-day visit in May 2011, the reactions of the Irish people, media, and politicians were generally positive, although there were some small-scale

demonstrations calling for separation of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom and unification of Ireland. Indeed, Elizabeth II, especially in her later years, became a major force for reconciliation between Britain and Ireland. Nevertheless, the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland emerged again as an extremely difficult issue during the prolonged and acrimonious discussions on Britain's withdrawal from the EU (Brexit), not only between Britain and the European Commission and EU member states (including Ireland, of course) but also within the United Kingdom itself.

Queen Elizabeth II died on September 8, 2022 at Balmoral Castle, Scotland, at the age of 96. According to Reuters' correspondents, Conor Humphries and Amanda Ferguson, while some nationalists in bars in Northern Ireland reportedly cheered the news of her death and some fireworks were heard in Belfast, the reaction in nationalist areas was relatively muted and "many Irish nationalists reacted to the death of a woman they once saw as a symbol of British oppression with indifference or, at most, polite sympathy." In contrast, loyalists remain "among the royal family's most devoted subjects" and many of them laid flowers by a huge mural of a young Queen in a "fiercely British corner" of west Belfast. Only a few hundred meters away, across steel and concrete "peace walls," there are distinctively nationalist areas. On the one hand, Brian Feeney, an Irish nationalist columnist, commented that the Queen's visit to the Republic of Ireland in May 2011 was "a major watershed, particularly when she went to the Garden of Remembrance and laid a wreath to the men who actually rebelled against her grandfather in 1916. So, there was a lot of stuff washed away by the Queen's visit in 2011." On the other hand, Sinn Féin, which secured the largest number of seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly for the first time in May 2022, insists that a referendum on "letting Northern Ireland join a united Irish state should be held within a decade as demographics and antipathy to Brexit boost support for the project, which polls show is most popular among the young."[12] Although the number of violent sectarian "Troubles" has decreased substantially in recent years, Northern Ireland is still a deeply divided society.

On February 20, 2013, David Cameron called at the site of the Massacre of Amritsar of 1919 for the first time as a British prime minister in office. The site has now become a park in which the Jallianwala Bagh memorial for those who were killed during the massacre was erected. Cameron put a wreath of flowers on the memorial for the victims and took a moment of silence, and wrote in the visitors' book at the memorial, "This was a deeply shameful event in British history, one that Winston Churchill rightly described at that time as 'monstrous.' … We must never forget what happened … we must ensure that the UK stands up for the right of peaceful protests around the world."[13] However, Cameron voiced regret but did not make a public apology for the mass killing by British-led troops and received a certain amount of criticism from the Indian public.

On April 13, 1919, one of the bloodiest incidents in colonial India—arguably even in the entire history of the British Empire—happened at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. Tens of thousands of unarmed civilians gathered to protest against the Rowlatt Acts (enacted in February 1919 and allowed certain political cases to be tried without juries and permitted internment of suspects without trial) and held a peaceful meeting there. However, even such a peaceful meeting was illegal according to the law at that time and Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, hearing that a meeting of 15,000 to 20,000 people was taking place at Jallianwala Bagh, ordered his men to shoot at the crowd. While it was officially reported that 379 people lost their lives, a plaque inside the memorial complex reports that 1,500 Indians died. The killing ground in Amritsar, together with other sites such as the aforementioned GPO in Dublin, Calcutta University's Coffee House in College Street, and the Shanghai YMCA common room, became "potent symbols of the emergence of anti-colonial politics."[14]

The repeated reference to the Massacre of Amritsar not only in academic books, articles, and textbooks but also in novels, movies, and plays shows that it has been deeply embedded in the history, imagination, and collective memory of India and beyond. For example, Salman Rushdie dealt with the massacre in *Midnight's Children*, which was published in 1981 and awarded the Booker McConnell Prize for Fiction. In *Midnight's Children*, Doctor Aadam Aziz and Naseem Aziz (*née* Ghani), grandparents of the chief protagonist and narrator Saleem Sinai, got stuck in Amritsar on the way from their native Kashmir to Agra because of the slogan *Hartal – April 7*, by which Mohandas K. Gandhi decreed that the whole of India "shall, on that day, come to a halt. To mourn, in peace, the continuing presence of the British." They were still in Amritsar a week later, as Doctor Aziz told his wife, "We can't go, you see: they may need doctors again." Actually, Aadam Aziz *was* at Jallianwala Bagh, the largest compound in Amritsar, when many thousands of Indians gathered there and the mass killing occurred on the afternoon of April 13, 1919.[15]

> There is a noise like teeth chattering in winter and someone falls on him [Aadam]. Red stuff stains his shirt. There are screams now and sobs and the strange chattering continues. More and more people seem to have stumbled and fallen on top of my grandfather. He becomes afraid of his back. The clasp of his bag is digging into his chest, inflicting upon it a

> bruise so severe and mysterious that it will not fade until after his death, years later … His nose is jammed against a bottle of red pills. The chattering stops and is replaced by the noises of people and birds. There seems to be no traffic noise whatsoever. Brigadier Dyer's fifty men put down their machine-guns and go away. They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. "Good shooting," Dyer tells his men, "We have done a jolly good thing."[16]

Sarvepalli Gopal, a renowned Indian historian who was a fellow of All Souls College, University of Oxford, and wrote, among others, a three-volume biography of Jawaharlal Nehru,[17] insisted: "Trust in British declarations about their role in India had been destroyed by General Dyer's wanton slaughter in Amritsar in 1919, and even more, by the widespread support in Britain for his action."[18] After the Massacre of Amritsar, anti-British nationalism in India became even stronger and radicalized. In addition, under the leadership of Gandhi who had come back to India in January 1915 after working in South Africa (first at Natal and then Transvaal) as a lawyer from 1892 to 1914, popular nonviolent resistance—or civil disobedience—movement (*satyagraha*) became a major tool in the Indian struggle against British imperialism.[19] Indeed, Gandhi discovered and developed the principle of *satyagraha* through his activities to defend the civil rights of the Indian minority population (including many indentured laborers as well as merchants and traders) in South Africa.

On August 15, 1947, India and Pakistan became separately independent from British India. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai was born at midnight of Indian and Pakistani independence with 1,000 other children, each of whom was endowed with an extraordinary talent. Regardless of whether *actual* midnight's children were extraordinarily talented or not, the partition in the Indian subcontinent caused extremely disastrous situations, in which millions of people became refugees and about one million lost their lives. Both Bengal and Punjab were divided into Indian and Pakistani territories, and Amritsar was allocated to India (another large city in Punjab, Lahore, became a Pakistani city), according to the awards by the Boundary Commission created in July 1947 and consisted of four members from the Indian National Congress and four from the Muslim League and was chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe. Thereafter, Amritsar, the holy city for Sikhs with the famous Golden Temple and the tragic site of the 1919 massacre, developed as an Indian city close to the border between India and Pakistan. On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was assassinated at the age of 78 by a Hindu fanatic, Nathuram Godse, who criticized Gandhi's efforts for rapprochement among different religious groups (particularly between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent).

Harold Macmillan, who served as British prime minister from 1957 to 1963, toured the Commonwealth countries in Asia and the Pacific from January 7 to February 14, 1958. He visited India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Singapore, New Zealand, and Australia for the first time as a British prime minister in office. During his visit to India on January 8–12, Macmillan visited and laid a wreath at Raj Ghat, the place where Gandhi was cremated on the banks of the Jumna River in Delhi. He also toured Old and New Delhi and visited some of the city's historic monuments, including those associated with Mughal emperors and the siege of Delhi in 1857. Macmillan attended the state banquet held on the evening of January 9 at the President's House (former Viceregal Lodge) "amid all its historic significance," which he had visited in the final phase of the viceroyship of Lord Wavell in 1943–47. At the state banquet, Indian prime minister Nehru said that "the British had left a basic impress on India in institutions, language, literature and other ways, which had survived even the radical change of relationship. The chief thing about this change had been the manner in which it had been brought about. The spirit of conflict had come to an end and in its place came a desire to co-operate. It was a pattern from which others might profit".[20]

When Macmillan had long private conversations with Nehru, the Indian prime minister explained the economic situation of India and "the need to get on at all costs" with the Second Five-Year Plan (1956–1960). Macmillan recalled:

> It is clear to me from what Mr. Nehru said that the Five-Year Plan is absolutely essential for two reasons: first, Five-Year Plans are an essential feature of a developing community to-day. He is faced with the Communist pressure, which is undoubtedly growing in India. … The second reason is that the Congress Party is in a sense in the position of the Irish Party after Home Rule – it cannot just live on the claim that it made the revolution. … The Five-Year Plan is part of the new political attraction the Congress Party is putting before the people and since it is in our interest to prevent Communism, I think we ought to do everything we can to help them with the Five-Year Plan and encourage America and Germany to do the same.[21]

However, while Macmillan expressed to the representatives of the British community in India his recognition that "the battle

for the uncommitted nations of Asia would be decided in Delhi"[22] and stressed to Indian journalists that British investment in India at the end of 1955 amounted to 82% of all foreign investments,[23] India's neutralist and non-aligned foreign policy was difficult for the British to deal with during the Cold War and beyond. Mainly in the face of US support for Pakistan and India's deteriorating relations with China, the successive Indian governments even leaned toward the Soviet Union and (after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991) Russia for military support and arms supply.

In February 2013, Cameron made a three-day visit to India with the largest overseas trade delegation ever assembled by a British prime minister. He remarked in Mumbai—India's commercial (especially financial as well as Bollywood movies) capital—on the previous day of his aforementioned visit to Amritsar that Britain had to work hard to forge a "special relationship" with India.[24] However, his three-day tour in India also revealed difficulties deeply rooted in the history and memory of the British Raj. Controversies on the Massacre of Amritsar raged anew in 2019, as one hundred years had passed since the tragic incident occurred under British colonial rule in India.

The successive British Conservative governments under the premiership of Theresa May (July 2016 to July 2019), Boris Johnson (July 2019 to September 2022), and Liz Truss (September to October 2022) tried to forge closer economic and military ties with countries such as India, Singapore, Australia, and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region, in which the so-called "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy is pursued by the United States, Japan, Australia, Canada, and so on, with grandiose slogans such as "Global Britain" and "Unleashing Britain's Potential." However, in a widely quoted radio interview, Indian MP Shashi Tharoor bluntly maintained that any plan resembling "Empire 2.0"—it became known that Whitehall civil servants cynically referred to "Global Britain" as such after the 2016 Brexit referendum—would "go down like a lead balloon" in countries like India, which would be essential to the success of the "Global Britain" strategy. As Simon Tilford at the Centre for European Reform (whose founding director, Charles Grant, was once widely known as one of Tony Blair's closest advisers) put it, India was "bemused" by Britain's post-Brexit plan to lead the Commonwealth.[25] The history and memory of the British Empire not only seem (at least to Brexiteers in Britain and some conservative, rightwing, or populist politicians across the Indo-Pacific region) to provide post-Brexit Britain with opportunities for extra-European commitment, but also pose a barrier against such a rosy prospect based on the "Global Britain" ideology.

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[1] This article is an expanded and updated version of my paper presented at 5. Ostasiatische DAAD-Zentrenkonferenz held online on November 6–7, 2021. This article reflects the situation until the end of November 2022.

[2] Clair Wills, *Dublin 1916: The Siege of the GPO* (London: Profile Books, 2009).

[3] With regard to "internal colonies" or "domestic colonies," see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, with a new introduction and a new appendix by the author (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999); Barbara Arneil, *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[4] David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 219.

[5] Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom*, *1970–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 547.

[6] Mary C. Murphy, "Brexit and the Irish Case," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*, ed. Patrick Diamond, Peter Nedergaard, and Ben Rosamond (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 31.

[7] Dermot Keogh, "Ireland 1945–2001: Between 'Hope and History,'" in *The British Isles since 1945*, ed. Kathleen Burk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 221.

[8] Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 163, 401.

[9] "Full Text of Speech by Queen Elizabeth II," *The Irish Times*, May 18, 2011, accessed November 2, 2021, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/full-text-of-speech-by-queen-elizabeth-ii-1.876770. The Queen used a few words in Irish in her speech at Dublin Castle.

[10] "History: A Short Introduction to the History of Dublin Castle," accessed November 2, 2021, https://www.dublincastle.ie/history/.

[11] Ezra F. Vogel, *The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[12] Conor Humphries and Amanda Ferguson, "Northern Ireland Loyalists Anxious as 'Stalwart' Queen Passes," Reuters, September 13, 2022, accessed September 14, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/northern-ireland-loyalists-anxious-stalwart-queen-passes-2022-09-12/.

[13] "Jallianwala Killings Deeply Shameful, Says Cameron," *Hindustan Times*, February 21, 2013, accessed November 3, 2021, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/jallianwala-killings-deeply-shameful-says-cameron/story-uWLrnSyAI3JqwxzpIV2siL.html.

[14] C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 195.

[15] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 33–37.

[16] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 36.

[17] Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, 3 volumes (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975–84).

[18] Sarvepalli Gopal, "All Souls and India, 1921–47," in *The Statecraft of British Imperialism: Essays in Honour of Wm. Roger Louis*, ed. Robert D. King and Robin W. Kilson (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 88.

[19] On Gandhi and *satyagraha*, see for example William E. Scheuerman, *Civil Disobedience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), chap. 1. Gandhi had studied law for three years in order to become a barrister at the Inner Temple, one of the four Inns of Court in London, since he was eighteen years old. After briefly going back to his native Gujarat, Gandhi spent more than twenty years in South Africa as a lawyer mainly to defend the rights of the Indian population there.

[20] Dispatches from United Kingdom High Commissioners, "India," from the Acting United Kingdom High Commissioner in India to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, New Delhi, January 17, 1958, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter NA], CAB129/93, C (58) 120, June 4, 1958, Appendix C; D. R. Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmilla*n (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010), 408.

[21] Note by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of his Two Conversations with Mr. Nehru on January 8 and 11, 1958, NA, CAB129/93, C (58) 120, June 4, 1958, Appendix B.

[22] Note of Meeting, undated (but January 11, 1958), NA, PREM11/2219.

[23] British Premier Addresses Indian Journalists, Press Conference in New Delhi, in Fortnightly Review of News and Events, January 5 to January 18, 1958, issued by the British Information Services, Eastern House, Mansingh Road, New Delhi, NA, DO35/9619.

[24] Nicholas Watt, "David Cameron Seeks to Recast 'Special Relationship' with India," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2013, accessed November 3, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/feb/19/david-cameron-relationship-india.

[25] Oliver Daddow, "Brexit and Britain's Role in the World," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*, ed. Patrick Diamond, Peter Nedergaard, and Ben Rosamond (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 214.