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Who Gets to Write History? The Question of 'Legitimacy'

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Who Gets to Write History? The Question of 'Legitimacy'*

When I last spoke at the India International Centre, in 2007 after the publication of my biography of Gandhi, I was asked during the question period how anyone who was not a devotee of Gandhi could possibly understand him well enough to write a book about him. The chairman, Professor Madan, politely moved on to the next question before I had a chance to reply. But I wanted to reply and said to the questioner that Gandhi was an important historical figure as well as an object of devotion, and his life required the kind of scrutiny customarily given to such figures. I remember adding that though I had begun to think about the book while I was living in India, I had sometimes felt as I was writing it, after I had left India, that I was glad not to be experiencing the weight of Indian devotion to Gandhi as I wrote.

That was the only occasion, to date, on which the legitimacy of my undertaking a piece of writing, my entitlement to do so, has been questioned to my face, though the poor sales and few reviews of the book suggest that some other people may have found the undertaking presumptuous.

The unease, possibly indignation, prompting my interlocutor's question was a kind familiar to non-religious authors of critical books on religion. In Britain now they routinely get called 'militant atheists', even if they show no other sign of militancy than writing a book questioning the correctness of a belief in god, and it is rare, in a supposedly secular country, to see anyone spring to their defence. In the US recently there was a ridiculous attempt, in an interview on Fox television, to disparage the legitimacy of the historian Reza Aslan's production

* Lecture delivered at the India International Centre on September 20, 2013 by Dr. Kathryn Tidrick.

of a book on Jesus and the early years of Christianity. The book was not critical but presented an interpretation unsettling to believers. As a Muslim, apparently, he should have stayed away from that topic. Professor Aslan fortunately had come prepared and, explaining patiently that he was 'not just some Muslim writing about Jesus' but a highly qualified historian of religions doing 'what I do for a living', i.e., taking part in a historical debate, reduced the deeply ignorant interviewer to confusion (*Fox News* interview, 2013). In India, historians whose researches have prompted conclusions unacceptable to people promoting a Hindu view of history have felt their wrath. Hearteningly, there has been honourable resistance, notably by the distinguished Indian historian Romila Thapar. I will quote at this point Professor Thapar's observation that, at a time when India was being exposed full-on to the contemporary forces of economic globalisation, there had being been 'a turning to a sense of *Swadeshi* ... without understanding that what is really required in this process of change is to fully understand the problems of Indian society and economy' (Rediffusion interview, 1999). This observation, so admirable in its concision, is one I shall return to.

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The anger of people who believe their faith is under attack is nothing new. Unfortunately, it's perfectly familiar. They get aggressive out of fear. What I want to turn to now is something different, a development to which I am tempted to refer, following the French writer Julien Benda, as 'the treason of the clerks', 'la trahison des clercs'. Benda had in mind a different kind of treason—the intellectual's putting himself at the service of the state, which was the great issue when he was writing in the 1920s—than what I have in mind. But his larger concern was that nothing should divert the intellectual from his commitment to the defence of Truth—'Truth' in Benda's case coming very much with a capital 'T'—and failing to maintain this commitment was a betrayal.

Let us begin with the publication by the Palestinian-American literary critic Edward Said of his book *Orientalism* in 1978, in which he examined critically the writing of western scholars, travellers, and administrators on the Middle East. The book was the product of Said's political radicalisation after the comprehensive Arab defeat by the Israelis in the 1967 'Six Day War', and the first thing to be said about it is: 'We had it coming'. There is no denying how shaming is Said's collection of the racist statements of generations of western writers.

But Said didn't stop there. He developed an argument, inspired principally by the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, that western writers on the Middle East were trapped in a set of presumptions about its people arising from the west's will to dominate 'the Orient' and justify its attempts to do so. There was simply no escaping these presumptions, which were elaborated psychologically by Said, and the numerous writers to whom he alluded judged according to the extent of their corruption by the unavoidable influence of the 'system of discourse' in which they operated—though it is never clear why such a powerful force should vary in its effect. Under this influence they (to varying degrees) 'essentialised' Orientals as the feared and hated 'Other', the dark side of their own nature. This argument was to become enormously influential, and remains so today, casting its pall of illegitimacy over the work of scholars who do not accept it: 'all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact' of western domination; 'every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was ... a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric' (Said, 1978: 11, 204).

There has been no shortage of criticisms of *Orientalism*. To mention a few: there are many factual errors in the book which undermine its general credibility; the question is begged whether having a patronising (or worse) attitude to Orientals affects the value of the massive amount of painstaking research done by people with such an attitude; western scholars of 'the Orient' did not march in step but often disagreed with each other; the contention that scholarly activity 'delivered' the Orient to the west before actual occupation is nonsensical—the disasters

which befell the modern Middle East at western hands were the work of politicians reading the geopolitical tea leaves (as happens today) and pursuing what they believed to be national advantage.

These criticisms have force, but have not had much if any effect on the book's popularity.

Orientalism was published as I was completing my first book, a study of the fascination exercised upon certain Englishmen by the Arabian desert and its inhabitants. I focused on four well-known English travellers of the second part of the nineteenth century who produced accounts of their journeys: Richard Burton, Gifford Palgrave, Wilfrid Blunt, and Charles Doughty. I also tried to describe the context of literate public opinion in which their writings were received, and how they contributed to the belief which later developed that Britain had a special expertise on the Arabs.

What was striking to me about these men and their writings was not how representative they were of existing opinion (which possessed little coherence but did fitfully involve beliefs that the bedouin Arabs were proud, free, faithful and hospitable), but how clearly their personal preoccupations with topics not obviously related to 'the Orient' were reflected in what they wrote about it.

Richard Burton, who reached Mecca, disguised as a pilgrim, in 1853, and had sufficient mastery of Oriental languages to translate the *Arabian Nights* and the *Kama Sutra*, was a lifelong wild man who could never stay out of trouble but longed for fame and (even) respectability as a member of the British scholarly establishment. His accounts of his travels, which included long journeys in North and South America and in Africa, were packed with information (footnoted) and remain of interest. He was a straightforward imperialist: empire made Britain top nation. He detested democracy and admired the bedouin because they lived in a society 'in which the fiercest, the strongest, and the craftiest, obtains complete mastery over his fellows' He sought and believed he received their respect: 'in the Desert man meets man' (Burton, 1964, II: 86; I: 148). He was obsessed with race and admired the purity of physical type of the Hejazi bedouin.

Gifford Palgrave was in succession an Indian Army officer, a Jesuit priest, a spy for Napoleon III in aid of plans for French control of Syria and Egypt, and a significant traveller in Central Arabia, where he went disguised as a Syrian doctor and collected much information on the province of Nejd, the stronghold of Wahhabi Islam. He loathed the bedouin—predators, men without honour and without religion, racial degenerates who were not to be confused with the Arabs of true type. These were to be found in the settled areas of Nejd, and, just like Englishmen, were patriotic, freedom-loving, free of 'caste feeling', and capable of personal restraint (Palgrave, 1865, I: 70). Palgrave greatly admired Telal ibn Rashid, the ruler of Nejd, as 'an Arab governing Arabs after their own native Arab fashion' (ibid., I: 142), and forecast a bright future among the nations for the Arabs once they were rid of Islam. He wished to see the rise of an Arab nation free from Ottoman rule. The son of a Christian mother and a Jewish father who converted to Christianity, he was visibly concerned all his life with problems of personal, religious and national identity. When he became a Jesuit he changed his name to Cohen, his father's name before his conversion. Later in life, living in Japan, he was attracted to Shinto, seeing it as the ritual expression of the Japanese experience of unity with the land.

Wilfrid Blunt[1] was an English aristocrat who felt keenly that his class was losing ground to a bureaucratic form of government, which would eventually sweep away the good old system of rule by men of breeding in hereditary possession of broad acres—a concern apparently heightened by family disasters entailing loss of property and income. He too travelled to Nejd and found there pure Arabs with the right kind of social arrangements, which he labelled 'shepherd rule'. He described the system as a democracy, but it was in fact a primitive form of aristocracy. The ruler, Mohammed ibn Rashid, presided over a community which obeyed him without compulsion because he embodied, in his high breeding, the principle of honour fundamental to it. Blunt agitated for Arab independence from the Ottomans and revival of an Arab caliphate. He himself would lead the movement. His wife, a scholar, translated the pre-Islamic odes of Arabia.

Charles Doughty's motives for travelling in Arabia, undisguised and penniless, proclaiming his Christianity, are far from clear. He also went to Nejd and met its

emir, Mohammed ibn Rashid, whose patience he wore out, despite a courteous welcome. Experiencing many dangers and indignities—he seems to have had a compulsion to witness to his faith—he eventually made his way back to England and spent the next six years producing an account of his travels. This was *Arabia Deserta* (1936), a masterpiece finding only a tiny public, but living on, whose expressed purpose was to rescue the English language from its present fallen state. It was full of archaisms, Arabisms, neologisms, and obscure English words; its punctuation seems arbitrary, but was probably not. 'The book is not milk for babes,' its author wrote: 'it might be likened to a mirror, wherein is set forth faithfully some parcel of the soil of Arabia smelling of *samn* and camels' (ibid., I: 29). The portrait in it, strangely fond, of the 'free-born, forlorn and predatory Beduw' who, 'at leisure and lively minds', possessed 'a perspicuous propriety in their speech', lodges in the memory (ibid., I: 394, 307). The speech of the bedouin was Doughty's model for a renovated English. His experience of their hospitality, though erratic, inspired him to perceive in them a 'natural religion', nothing to do with Islam, which was a profound consciousness that their existence depended on the grace of god. 'They see but the indigence of the open soil about, full of dangers, and hardly sustaining them, and the firmament above them, habitation of the Divine salvation' (ibid., I: 283, 306). It did not occur to Doughty that the Arabs had political virtues deserving self-government. He contemplated British occupation of Arabia to safeguard Christians and stamp out the slave trade.

If there is one thing that can be said about this crowd it is that they were *not* imprisoned in some all-powerful 'discourse'. They had attitudes to empire which were quite varied. Their personal hang-ups were well to the fore in influencing what they paid attention to. All they had in common was an obsession with Arabia. They did have a collective legacy, but it had nothing to do with how they saw the Arabs. They left the impression (despite their conflicting views) that Englishmen had a talent for understanding them. This had some influence on British Middle East policy in the First World War.

My next book was on the quite widespread belief among Englishmen that the men who ruled their empire did so at least in part by superior force of character,

acknowledged practically on sight by subject races. I studied British administration in the Punjab; the myth of General Gordon of Khartoum; the Rhodesian pioneer Frederick Selous, who was the original of Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain; the administrator and writer of short stories, Hugh Clifford, whose youthful experiences as a political officer in the Malay States were formative; the European settlers of Kenya; the administrators of the Masai tribe in East Africa, selected for their special ability to inspire Masai respect; the ideology of Indirect Rule. From 1919 when Sir Ralph Furse took charge of recruitment for the Colonial Service selection of the right type of chap was highly systematised, though informal—advertising was eschewed as 'guaranteed to attract a mass of rubbish'. Furse looked for men who were capable, in his judgement, of 'winning the trust and loyalty of their charges by their integrity, fairness, firmness, and likeableness' (Furse, 1962: 223, 263). The written records were abundant, allowing me to study directly how individuals conceptualised their work and themselves, and at times handled the use of force. Again, their tales were varied, their feelings were varied, and their views of those in their charge were varied. There could be spectacular cruelty in responding to challenges to their presumed authority, especially when the authority was believed to be personal (Kenya settlers in the 1950s; the 'Punjabis' in 1857; Rhodesian pioneers in the risings of the 1890s). There could be great devotion to 'their' people.

The records of colonial administration are full of information compiled by officials on the history, social and political organisation, and physical environment of the people among whom they lived, and sometimes it was used to protect what an official believed were their interests. The records of Masailand contain sophisticated appreciations of how the pastoral Masai used their land, which were deployed to fend off ever land-hungry settlers. Sometimes there would be a great liking for not doing much at all but 'being there'. There were surprises. Frederick Selous (1896: 64), who appeared from his writings and correspondence to have no conscience at all about taking African land or, when required, shooting down African rebels like 'a pack of wild dogs'—(Sunshine and Storm, 64) he believed in 'The Survival of the Fittest'—turned out to have had not one but

several African families, acquiring his wives as a means of allying himself with important chiefs. I asked one of his descendants, whom I met in Harare a few years after writing the book, how they had been treated. I was told—very well. Everyone was provided for, and his families accompanied him on his journeys.

It is in considering imperial administration at the local level that the concept of 'discourse', meaning a set of ideas operating coercively, seems most obviously to lack useful application. Men went out to the districts with preconceptions but necessarily responded to experience: words like 'preconception' and 'experience' seem to describe adequately what was said and done. 'Discourse' is a concept which demands to be used in its entire and only meaning. This sets an automatic limit to its usefulness. And historians were writing about the interaction of preconceptions and experience long before *Orientalism.*

* * *

I would like now to turn, in this context, to the (to me) very pressing question of how the European Enlightenment came to be considered a form of oppression, and even a fount of evil in the world.

Orientalism has remained a much-consulted book because it begat the Postcolonial school of writing on imperial and post-imperial history. Postcolonialism has flourished, particularly in India, through its appropriation and transformation of the now defunct Subaltern Studies school. But its influence in western universities has also been and remains considerable. As a result of these developments it can be said, I think, that *Orientalism* was a book whose effects outstripped its intentions. Edward Said's aim was to make the case that western scholarship on 'the Orient' was hopelessly tainted by powerful preconceptions connected with the requirements of domination. He did not attempt to discredit the Enlightenment as a movement with a

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misplaced regard for reason; his objection was to the racism which denied the capacity for reason to the Oriental. But for the Postcolonialists the rationalism of the Enlightenment has itself been a matter of grave critical concern, to the point that the very act of reasoning at times seems suspect, a mere infirmity of the western mind. How this came about is not clear: a postmodern dislike of 'Enlightenment rationality' just seems to have seeped in. It was a highly consequential move, proving the *point d'appui* for an onslaught not only on the long gone British rulers of India (guilty of ramming such hyper-rationalist ideas as secularism and social reform down Indian throats), but on the Indian rulers of independent India, who failed to realise that they were prisoners of a colonial discourse which created an unbridgeable gulf between them and most of their compatriots.

The legitimate voice denied to the westernised elite was assigned to the Indian folk, the true Indians, living lives of simple unreasoning piety and respect for tradition. Opposition to secularism (sometimes, it appeared, so broadly conceived as to include thought crimes against religion) naturally followed. Such movements of thought, advocating the personally therapeutic and socially binding benefits of association with a traditional religion in the disorienting modern world, have not been unknown in Europe in the past century. The movement called, appropriately, 'Traditionalism' has rumbled along since the 1920s in vague association with the political right.

Gandhi has been approvingly singled out by Postcolonialists for his supposed freedom from the corrupting influence of Enlightenment thought, with *Hind Swaraj* providing the principal evidence. Partha Chatterjee's essay on Gandhi in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986) floated the idea, though Ashis Nandy in his *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) had already asserted that Gandhi had rejected history in favour of the higher truth of myth.

Gandhi was at times irrational, but he was not an irrationalist on principle. He saw *satyagraha* as a science whose 'laws' could be determined, and gave great importance to his 'experiments with Truth'—the controlled self-analysis which yielded spiritual knowledge. His inner voice, the voice of god, was

encouraged to speak by strict adherence to regimes of purification 'scientifically' derived. He had no real grasp of scientific method, but he did not disparage it. The voice of god of course trumped all conclusions arising from human reason. As I think I show in my book on Gandhi, he came at a formative time under the influence of Theosophy and Esoteric Christianity, which was Theosophy with a Christian slant. Theosophists and Esoteric Christians were prone to magical practices—though only ones which they felt had scientific support. *Hind Swaraj* is a reasoned book, a long argument against the modern way of living. Gandhi's rejection of this way of living is a rejection of its materialism, which he sees as arising from an inability to control the senses, the perennial impediment to the cultivation of the divinity within. He had studied, he said, 'Geography, Astronomy, Geometry, etc.', but none of these had been any use for 'controlling my senses', which was 'the main thing' (Gandhi, 1958: 54, henceforth *CW*). This is not a rejection of rationality, but merely a strong assertion of the irrelevance to spiritual development of such areas of knowledge. The remedy adumbrated in *Hind Swaraj* is a return to the simple life of the India of long ago, deemed then by 'wise Indians' to offer a sure protection against bondage to material existence. 'They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet' (*CW,* 10: 37). Here too respect is shown for reason, and for empirical inquiry. It was not simple faith which guided the wise Indians.

The claim that Gandhi rejected history most likely arose from a misunderstanding of his acceptance of the non-historicity of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, in line with the Theosophical and Esoteric Christian practice of subjecting religiously significant texts to historical and comparative analysis

The claim that Gandhi rejected history most likely arose from a misunderstanding of his acceptance of the non-historicity of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, in line with the Theosophical and Esoteric Christian practice of subjecting religiously significant texts to historical and comparative analysis. German 'higher criticism' of the Bible and the study of comparative religion, products of the Enlightenment, were their models. They then read these texts as inspired allegory, as did Gandhi. That did not involve a rejection of history but an attempt

to separate history and myth. Myth was approached as a source of spiritual, not worldly, knowledge.

The persistent pejorative association of 'secularism' and state-sponsored social reform with the influence of western thought suggests that part of what is objectionable about them is precisely their perceived origin in the west—reflecting, it would seem, a conflation of the historical fact of India's subjection by a western power with conspicuous developments in the intellectual life of the west which took place independently of Empire. There has also, surely, been a temptation to blame the disappointments of independence not just on the errors of those who came to power, but on the peculiarly 'western' nature of those errors. After 60 years, and India's emergence as a rising power, is it not time to leave these preoccupations behind, and focus, as Professor Thapar advised, on getting to grips with the practical problems, now of terrifying complexity, which face the Indian government and people? This is, of course, being done anyway. When needs must, who has time to worry about, let alone decry, the geographical origins of ideas? India's romance with the subjectivities of Postcolonialism will start to fade—has started to fade—as problem-solving takes centre stage. It is not possible unfortunately to be confident about a decline in the influence of organised religious emotion.

Indian Postcolonialism's antipathy to Enlightenment rationalism has not, alas, been an isolated development. Such antipathy has become commonplace in the west. What began as part of an exercise in literary theory in European universities is increasingly part of ordinary educated conversation, without any apparent awareness as a rule of where it might have come from. Obviously, there is a receptivity to the idea, connected it may be with the well-documented rise of the 'spiritual' as a religious identification. I live in Edinburgh, a city which ceaselessly promotes its connection with the Enlightenment. David Hume, Adam Smith, and other leading lights lived here. Not only that, the difference between the Enlightenment and what went before is literally set in stone. East of the castle is the Old Town, a tangle of tenements and alleyways. To the north is the

New Town, a succession of elegant Georgian terraces. I recently went on a walking tour giving access to private gardens in the New Town. The guide made a point of telling us how she felt about the Enlightenment. It put too much stress on reason, and was snobby. It's hard to imagine taking such a tour ten years ago and hearing this. The Enlightenment is routinely blamed for Stalin and Mao Tse Tung, who became mass murderers because they took rationality too far.

Serious history books for the general reader come garnished with unverifiable scene painting, down to imagined conversations. It doesn't seem to matter—it 'makes history come alive'. In the 2008 US election a personal memoir which broke new ground in overt fictionalisation made a big contribution to the victory of the winning candidate—to the perturbation, it appeared, of nobody. Such practices and the belief that they don't matter are an implicit rejection of the Enlightenment.

During that extraordinary period of European history distinguished thinkers, at personal risk, subjected the dogmas promulgated by very powerful religious institutions to reasoned scrutiny, organised the development of these dogmas through time into histories, devoured whatever information they could get about faraway places, used it to work out ideas about the nature of society, and did not hesitate to apply the new knowledge critically to social and political arrangements at home. Enlightenment thinkers were alive to the limits to men's reasoning abilities. David Hume was powerfully sceptical about the power of reason, and found himself wondering where that left him. The experience of having come adrift was deeply felt. But he did not throw up his hands in despair and embrace the irrational. Trying to find a way beyond scepticism to intelligent and ethical living, he described how we use probability in everyday thinking, generally with good enough results.

Hume was the inspiration for Karl Popper's formulation in 1934 of the 'falsifiability' criterion of the usefulness of a scientific theory. Popper learned from Hume that knowledge was 'objective', i.e., arose from experience of the real world, but also 'hypothetical or conjectural' (Popper, 2002: 96), and, through

a critical development of Hume's position on induction, arrived at the conclusion that knowledge can only be furthered by theories which can be proved wrong. Knowledge can never be final or absolute, but the application of the falsifiability criterion means we can make real and useful progress towards it, because we can reject a theory which is shown through the testing of the hypotheses it generates to be false.

Here I reach the limit of my competence in the philosophy of science, if I have not reached it already. But I want to suggest that Popper's work, which despite criticism has proved remarkably robust, shows that we can accept the conjectural nature of knowledge without embracing the irrational—or giving ourselves permission to tell whatever story we believe delivers the 'essential truth'. Contempt for 'Enlightenment rationality' is misplaced. We only need to understand that reason has its limits—and it was the greatest philosopher of the Enlightenment who first made it clear that we cannot avoid being content with approximations, with the 'good enough' in its most thoroughly examined form.

It should be emphasised that though Popper accepted that thinking is entangled with a point of view, he did not argue that point of view was determinative. The ceaseless testing of hypotheses is central to his conception of thinking, which is thus necessarily an active one. 'There is no such thing,' he wrote, 'as passive experience; no passively impressed association of impressed ideas. Experience is the result of active exploration by the organism...'; we are constantly checking our conjectures, searching 'for regularities and invariants' (ibid.: 55). Neuroscience seems to be bearing this out. And though Popper made clear that it was the nature of *scientific* knowledge he was talking about, he did not rule out the possibility of extending his approach to the study of history. An implication of such an approach would be that the inquiring, hypothesis-testing character of human

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thought does not support the ambitions of Foucauldian 'discourse analysis'. By extension, the idea that provenance can be used as an indication of the intellectual quality of an argued position receives no support either—it just doesn't make any difference.

Intellectual disciplines like science and history which turn on what is most probably the case and what is provably not the case are social enterprises. Accepting our individual limitations, we must inquire and reason together. History has to be conceived as a social enterprise in the broadest possible sense.

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Where does this leave 'the question of legitimacy' with respect to the writing of history? I have tried to suggest that it is a question not even to be asked. Considerations of 'legitimacy', of entitlement to speak, have no place in assessing historical writing.

Detailed, careful work, relying on transparent critical comparison of sources and adequate contextualisation, subject to constant review by knowledgeable persons, is the way to show that credibility not provenance is what counts. A more explicit focus on individuals, not as exemplars, or peepholes onto a larger scene, but in their category-resisting variety, would be a good idea. A greater engagement at times by historians in public debate on issues of the day would also be welcome. We have recently seen an interesting example of such engagement—the attempts by two historians, the Englishman David Anderson and the American Caroline Elkins, to bring to light the cruelties of the British fight against 'Mau Mau' and seek redress for those affected. Redress is now being attempted by the British government. But the historical evidence very publicly adduced (highly tendentious in Elkin's case) was not the only interesting aspect of the affair. The important question of whether a rebellion in fact took place in Kenya in the 1950s was not addressed, the reason quite obviously being the sensitivity of Kenyans to the suggestion that it did not—'Mau Mau' is central to the national mythology of liberation. The record suggests that what took place was worse

than the ferocious suppression of a rebellion. It was more like a pogrom. At the time the State of Emergency was declared in 1952 very little of a rebellious nature had occurred and not a single white person had been killed. And during the entire period of the Emergency there were only 32 European civilian deaths which could plausibly be attributed to insurgents. But over 10,000 Africans were killed and 80,000 detained. Long after it was clear no serious resistance was being offered, there was no reduction in the rate of committal to detention camps, and only a small reduction in committal to prison for offences under the Emergency Regulations. What are we to make of the failure to draw out the implications of these facts? There may have been apprehension in the minds of the historians about being the cause of offence to the Kenyan people whose suffering they had uncovered. But a sense of personal illegitimacy surely was also at work. It was not their place to question the national mythology of the formerly oppressed. There was engagement only up to a point.

I am also thinking again of my current home country of Scotland. As you will know, we in Scotland are going to be voting next year in a referendum on independence from the United Kingdom. Scottish historians have been very quiet about this, seeming reluctant, in a country where there is a tremendous popular romanticisation of the past, to make known their views. The debate has focused on the economic prospects of an independent Scotland. Historians could have made a useful contribution by publicly asking whether the historical record of the Union supports a decision to leave. Perhaps they still will.

Note:

1 Though the book was published under his wife's name, Wilfrid Blunt and his wife Lady Anne Blunt were co-authors of this account of their journey to Nejd.

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