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Empire Melancholia

William S. Bradley



Afrasian Research Centre, Ryukoku University
Phase 3



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Empire Melancholia

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Introduction

Empire has been making a return of late. Or did it never really go away, along with colonialism? The history, and continuation (or not) of economic, political, spatial (or scalar) imperialist regimes, as well as imperialism as a potent social imaginary, has often coincided with the social scientific attempts to understand empire's diverse aspects, conditions, and modalities. However, it should be no surprise that clarity and controversy have been in contest with each other more often than not, even among those who share a paradigmatic and disciplinary focus. Scholarship on empire in the modern era has recurred in a cyclical pattern following the age of empire (1874-1914), in J.A. Hobson's 1902 seminal work, *Imperialism*,¹ and followed by Marxist writers such as Rosa Luxemburg, Rudolf Hilferding, and the infamous proposition of Vladimir Lenin, regarding imperialism as the "highest stage" of capitalism (see Brewer 1990 for summaries of these works; also Mommsen 1980).¹ Another round of debate on imperialism followed in the 1970s and 1980s (Brown 1972; Mommsen 1980), while the most recent interest commenced at the turn of the century, partly as the result of Hardt and Negri's (2000) postmodern treatment of empire, but also as the U.S. increased its commitments and interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan following the attacks of 9-11 (Harvey 2005; Mann 2003). Most recently, global historians have contributed to a much greater understanding of the depth and breadth of imperial connections than was hitherto possible in a pre-globalisation era.

In 1967, Hannah Arendt was able to write in a new introduction to her

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¹ 1875 is often commonly used as the starting year for the age of empire, however the Berlin conference convened by Bismarck, commenced on November 15, 1874, is also considered the opening of the "Scramble for Africa," the division into "spheres of influence" by European colonial powers, held in the same year as the charting expedition of Henry Stanley in the Congo, the last unmapped territory in Africa.

reissued study, *Imperialism*, that “rarely could the beginnings of a historical period be dated with such precision and seldom were the chances for contemporary observers to witness its definite end so good as in the case of the imperialism era” (1968, v).² The declaration of Indian independence in 1947, “the liquidation of His Majesty’s Empire” over which Winston Churchill infamously refused “to preside” (a quotation attributed to him in 1942) began the decolonization of Africa and Asia that, for Arendt writing in the late 1960s, appeared as a newly formed contradiction of the end of imperial rule, given the ongoing Cold War politics and global competition in the newly decolonized peripheries of Africa and Asia by Soviet Russia and the U.S., with China’s early emergence as a potential global power a significant additional imperializing force.

If, as Arendt wrote, citing earlier assessments, “the British acquired their empire in a fit of absent-mindedness, as a consequence of automatic trends, yielding to what seemed possible and what was tempting” (1968, vi), then the world appeared to be heading towards the same dynamic once again. Even separated by a scant 60 years (the age of high empire having destroyed itself starting in 1914, yet lingering on until 1945 or longer), Arendt points to “a certain nostalgia for what can be called a ‘golden age of security’ ...when even horrors were still marked by a certain moderation and controlled by respectability, and therefore could be related to the general appearance of sanity” (1968, 3). This version of empire is, of course, framed as co-constituent with imperialism prior to two World Wars, totalitarianism, and the holocaust.

The necessity to speak in the plural about empire and imperialism, as well as conceptualize them both through overlapping and rivalrous projects of power has led more than one set of recent observers to summarize that aspirations to empires “have been a constant of human history ... [and] have thus been a central feature of our modern globalised world” (Thomas and Thompson 2014, 142). In short, while we can and often do focus on the particularities of empire(s), it is within a globalised system of economic, political, and social relations that empire and imperialism need to be examined; imperialism is recurrent in many of the recent works on global history and while it is “transcendent” it is at the same time driven by “over-extensions to decline” (Thomas and Thompson 2014, 170, ft. 121).

Moreover, in the past ten years, such histories (Burbank and Cooper 2010;

² Arendt wrote the introduction in 1967, but the book has the publication date of 1968.

Darwin 2007; Osterhammel 2014) have challenged the standard interpretation of modern empire as a predominantly European affair (albeit with U.S. and Japan as requisite outsider exceptions). Thus, while we may focus on empire in the singular and its instantiations in a particular period of time, it seems impossible to reject the notion that any view of empire is, by nature, only partial and representative of an exceedingly small slice of what has been theorized about empire and its extension, imperialism.

To take but one example, the discussions of imperialism among Marxist authors throughout the twentieth century represent an enormous swath of material, that must be at least alluded to, if not presented in some brief outline, as I do here. In this respect, one is almost, by necessity, reduced to reliance on fourth hand accounts, since these are the contemporary authorities, based on third hand accounts of post-WW II Marxists, reflecting on second hand accounts, discussants of Marxist theory leading up to World War I and between wars (e.g. Luxemburg and others). As is often remarked, Marx never used the term imperialism, nor did his writings delve greatly into the problem of empire though notes and other writings did reflect on the expansion of capital beyond national borders, what more recent Marxist scholarship has referred to as “the spatial fix” (Harvey 1982) or “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005, 87, 137-182). The critique of Marx’s *Capital*, taken up in the prelude to WW I by Rosa Luxemburg, that exploitation of the non-capitalist spheres of the world was not adequately theorized, required extensive discussions by later Marxists as to the implications of colonial rule on the history and future of capitalism. Luxemburg wrote about the relations between the capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production that they consisted of “colonial policy, an international loan system – a policy of spheres of interest – and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment” (Luxemburg 1913, cited in Pradella 2013, 142). In this respect, Luxemburg was prophetic in ascribing a role to the imperialist expansion of capital beyond borders that often was only stopped by the excesses of war.

A further example from discussions of imperialism in the 1980s, which has been expanded on into the present period, is also relevant to illustrate the necessity of looking beyond simple linear-like geographical models of dominant power and subordinated (colonial or non-colonial) entities in an enclosed time frame. An influential idea proposed by Robinson (1986) at the time referred to imperialism as excentric to draw attention to aspects overlooked in the classical accounts of

imperialism, which had been overly focused on the expansive role of the metropolises in Europe in promotion of imperialism. Instead of relegating the periphery to the role of passive recipient of empire, more recent scholarship has looked at imperial systems as “complex, overdetermined totalities in which cores shape peripheries and vice-versa” (Steinmetz 2014, 58). Thomas and Thompson (2014) focus on immigration and “overlapping, migration-based networks” which not only affected the flow of people from and to the centers to and from the peripheries, but also established relations of trust and shared values that affected imperial projects, hopes, and ideologies.

A claim of this paper, which I develop based on a preliminary reading of current events and the increasing appeal of anti-globalisation politics, is that lurking beyond the recent appeals to nationalism of the large economically advanced countries is the specter of empire. Empire lingers as a grounding for the national appeals to political formation in the bigger states, as can be clearly seen in the case of the U.S. in the twenty-first century. Such appeals are triggered not only by nostalgic reminders of greatness, but also by external pressures of fear of immigration and vulnerability from outsiders. That this would also be true of other imperial projects in the contemporary era requires further elaboration below.

This paper analyzes the vicissitudes of empire focusing on two modern polities, the U.S. and Japan. The discussion is intended to be preliminary and entails a much further analysis in both contexts as to how much and in what ways empire might be attractive to ordinary citizens. The reasons for this choice are that the U.S. is arguably (still and for the time being) the largest and most powerful imperial power in the world, while Japan, which has not formally been an imperial power since 1945, is reliably one of the key allies of the U.S., as witnessed by Prime Minister Abe’s early and eager consultation visits with the new U.S. President, Donald Trump, in mid-November 2016 and again in early February 2017. While space precludes a fuller analysis of these two nations’ complex relations to empire, both from historical and contemporary perspectives, a recognition of the desire to retain some of the accrued and residual power of empire is fundamental in assessing both leaders’ appeal to a strong national identity, in Trump’s case a “great” America and in Abe’s case a “beautiful” country (i.e. Japan as *utsukushii kuni*).

The argument of this paper focuses on melancholia as a form of nostalgic loss, a term that has been used by some authors to call attention to the structuring of

emotional belonging of the majoritarian group of citizens in a particular country. This type of argument adapts Moisi's (2009) approach to the role of structural emotions in geopolitical contexts. It also extends the discussion of Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) in which he brought together the terminology of empire and melancholia.³

What is an Empire?

Many analyses of empire exist, so it is necessary to be selective in categorizing dimensions that will add to our understanding as opposed to simply creating new inventories. Steinmetz (2014) and Zielonka (2012) provide some of the best discussions of a categorical variety so I will turn to them first, supplementing the discussion with the book length treatment by Colas (2007). However it is also important to add insights from the global histories of empire that have been published in the last decade (Burbank and Cooper 2010; Darwin 2007; Osterhammel 2014) each of which, focused on providing detailed historical narrative, simultaneously expands the understanding of empire beyond the nation-state level.

First of all, some preliminary definitional remarks; the meaning of empire varies considerably through space and time (Colas 2007, 3; Zielonka 2012, 507-509). Related to the variance is the problem of studying it, with the requirement that particularities are taken into account, specifically structures of political rule, "specific modes of social reproduction, and their correspondingly *singular forms of cultural self-understanding*" (Colas 2007, 3; italics added). According to Colas and others, there is also a relation between imperial governance over diverse populations and respect and tolerance for "beliefs in ways that presage and inspire contemporary understandings of 'multiculturalism'" (2007, 2; also Steinmetz 2014, 59). Originally empire referred to large agrarian political organizations ruled by conquest, which then offered peace in exchange for tributes and subjectification (Steinmetz 2014, 59). The Age of Empire, the forty years or so, prior to WW I, which ended with the rule and partition of most of the world outside of Europe and the Americas by eight (or nine) countries, Great Britain,

³ Gilroy's book was originally published by Routledge in 2004 in the U.K. under the title, *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*.

France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the U.S., and Japan (in some analyses, Portugal is also included) into formal and informal territories and the demise of emperors (with the exception of Japan) also included an enormous expansion of territory and people into these systems of order.⁴

Steinmetz's (2014) outline of a "historical sociology of empires," in addition to problematizing the metrocentric bias of earlier research, notes that much theory to date (including, especially, Marxist attention to empire and imperialism), had focused on political (sometimes in conjunction with the military) or economic causal mechanisms, but current work has shifted to being more attentive to ideological, linguistic, psychic, and cultural factors, relations, and processes (2014, 58). In a similar vein, Zielonka (2012, 503) wishes to emphasize the missionary aspect of empire, what he refers to as its "civilising mission" or "geopolitical imaginary" (cf. Burbank and Cooper's 2010, 15 use of "imperial imaginary"). Thus it is not at all unusual that autocratic rule can be combined with visions of "securing order, combating barbarism and terrorism ... protecting human rights and freedoms" and ultimately democracy, in a mixture of moral meanings attached to policy, "however atrocious the policy may be" Zielonka (2012, 504).

Continuing with a range of descriptions, empire can be either silent, as "empires in denial," or engage in "bombastic proclamations of manifest destiny." There is also a combination of coercion and consent in attempts to impose both hierarchies and order (Colas 2007, 7-10). This leads to a distinction between theories of hegemony and empire, of which the former have been subjected to rigorous analysis by neo-Gramscian schools of international relations in contrast to more mainstream descriptions of "soft power." We can summarize this discussion, truncating due to space limitations, as empire emphasizing more of the coercive aspects, while hegemony emphasizes more of the consent aspects (Colas 2007, 165-166).

As noted above, recent work in global history has greatly expanded understanding of the dynamic, contingent, and flexible nature of empire. Michael Mann has examined the sources of power in empire and emphasizes the "accidents,

⁴ Burbank and Cooper (2010, 288) cite figures of total world territory and population colonized by Europe, the U.S., and Japan as rising from 18 and 22 percent in 1880 to 42 and 32 percent in 1914 respectively.

contradictions, and non-universal patterns” that are involved in a particular trajectory of empire (cited in Steinmetz 2014, 68). His 2003 work on the American “incoherent” empire, argues that the U.S. is a “military giant, a Back-seat economic driver, a political schizophrenic and an ideological phantom” (2003, 13). Other accounts (Darwin, 2007) emphasize the decentered aspects of empire historically, arguing that rather than focusing on Europe, focus should be on Eurasia as a whole. Furthermore, he deconstructs the idea of Europe as any kind of integrated whole, since there was (and is) obviously a core set of polities in Europe and numerous peripheries there as well.

Of all of these recent histories, Osterhammel’s *magnus opus* stands out in terms of the depth of its scholarship. Whereas the other book-length accounts of empire offer solid scholarship and theoretical probing, Osterhammel’s (2014) comprehensive chapter (Chapter 8) on “Imperial Systems and Nation-States” in the nineteenth century is too rich for a short summary here. Suffice that I will relate a few key points. First, the expansion into a global system that occurred in the 1800s took place through technology (an obvious point elaborated on by others) but detailed here through descriptions of military power, as well as industrial capacity. He summarizes the first as “every military invention was applauded by the apostles of progress and actually employed in war” well into the twentieth century and the development of ABC (atomic, biological, chemical) weapons (2014, 395). Second, he challenges the “widespread image of ‘stable nation-states versus unstable empires’” and then lists 8 typological categories for distinguishing between the two. These include, for empire, less clearly delineated boundaries, hierarchies between citizens and other inhabitants, more inclusive pluralism, and the civilizing mission mentioned above (2014, 421-424). In passing, he reserves a special analysis of “secondary empire building” for both the U.S and Japan, as removed to a greater degree historically from the internecine struggles of European countries. The final point worth remarking on is his description of the emotional value of empire for domestic populations. Pride in empire, together with propaganda was a strong component of national self-image; While “large sections of the British population gained little from the empire, millions were ‘proud of it’ and consumed it as a status good. People reveled in the imperial pomp” (2014, 456, 467).

There is much more to be written about empire, both historically and currently with regard to the twenty-first century. In this section, I have tried to do justice to a range of scholarship that focuses on empire and its meanings, while obviously

foregrounding some of the cultural and symbolic uses of empire, given that I will turn to that discussion later. Before concluding this section, it would appear prudent to at least allude also to the overall human cost in suffering that empire produced. Of course this can be measured in lives lost and dignity denied, but it is also instructive to relate this, as in some accounts, to the development of race thinking and racial hierarchies. As Burbank and Cooper (2010, 325) describe it, “the virulence of racist discourse and practices in colonial situations, the callous disregard of the humanity of indigenous people slaughtered in wars of conquest or exploited in mines and plantations, and the painful discrimination conquered people experienced” existed alongside obvious “contingencies and contradictory political imperatives” which made such practices remarkably changeable and elusive. In its arbitrariness with regard to racial politics, then, nineteenth century imperial policy, at least then if not now, was doubly cruel. It is important to keep this in mind, given the resurrection of recent calls to re-engage with empire. The question must be asked, empire for whom?

How Is Empire Connected to Imperialism?

On this matter, much discussion has led to little firm conclusion, however most scholars agree that empire is a more general term of political domination from ancient times while imperialism is distinctly modern (Saccarelli and Varadarajan 2015, 17). The historical example of the U.S. first as an imperialist power in Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico (as well as in relation to native populations in the western U.S., and Hawaii, for example), and later in the post WW II period more generally as an interventionist now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t regime changer is a good example of the ambiguity with which to view the connection between the terms empire and imperialism, to which I return below. As Burbank and Cooper (2010, 456) have written:

The “is it or isn’t it question? [the U.S. as an empire] is less revealing than an examination of the American repertoire of power, based on its selective use of imperial strategies...The mix of ways by which the United State tries to project its authority across space reflects its own imperial trajectory – the development from the eighteenth century of a land empire, constructed on the basis of equal rights and private property for people

considered citizens and the exclusion of Native Americans and slaves.

In regard to the period after 1945, an earlier generation of scholars was satisfied with a distinction between old and new forms of imperialism. Magdoff (writing between 1968 and 1970) published a number of influential essays, describing this newer imperialism as focused on the drive for resource domination of strategic raw materials (e.g. oil and other minerals, 2003, 50-58), particularly driven by technological advances in the U.S. economy.

It is instructive to note that the term imperialism didn't enter into common English usage until the 1870s (Brown 1972, 15; Mommsen 1980, 4).⁵ In contrast, empire, deriving from the Latin "imperium," and used by Romans to refer to making laws and waging wars has a much longer history than imperialism which is limited to 150 years or slightly longer. Originally, imperialism referred to European projection of power beyond its borders and "to the frenzied struggle that had broken out for a share of the rapidly shrinking pool of territories available for colonial control" (Saccarelli and Varadarajan 2015, 7-8), the infamously but inaptly (at least as a metaphor for imperialism because of its neglect of Asia and the Americas) phrased "scramble for Africa." Overall, it is hard to disagree with the assessment that the "foundation of imperialism as a historical phenomenon is found at the economic level... a definite layer of society that seeks to advance its own interests, even, and especially as it preaches the glory and unity of the nation" (Saccarelli and Varadarajan 2015, 39).

Those who are interested in the economic aspect of imperialism can turn to a range of sources elsewhere (numerous Marxist writings as well as historical accounts in Brewer, 1990, Brown, 1972, and Mommsen 1980, and for the contemporary situation, Wood, 2003). Harvey (2005, 26, 30) extends the work of Giovanni Arrighi's two logics of power, that of territory and that of capital to define capitalist imperialism as the "contradictory fusion of 'the politics of state and empire'" and "'the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time,'" the relations between which make analysis difficult without lapsing into one-sided analysis of one or the other. This is not to suggest that all economic and/or political analyses of imperialism ignore other

⁵ However Steinmetz (2014, 59, see also Saccarelli and Varadarajan 2015, 7) points out that the original use was in reference to Napoleon III's cruel reign in the 1860s.

dimensions, most notably for the purposes of this paper, the cultural aspects. One would be remiss in a paper discussing imperialism not to mention the role of the World Bank, WTO, the IMF, UNESCO and other similar intermediary organizations that operate at a level of management, between economy and knowledge and expertise. It remains for another analysis to explore these connections, focus on the latter half of which some have also referred to as cultural imperialism, especially in relation to media, old and new.

A similar question is whether imperialism overlaps with colonialism; the answer is no, since colonialism can be said to have started before empire building with the Europeans (Spanish and Portuguese) and empire can be said to have continued without colonialism, “imperialism without colonies” in Magdoff’s (2003, orig. 1970) phrase.

Questions about what the implied differences are between empire and imperialism are also raised by some more innovative approaches to these discussions. Since the focus is on global capitalism as an all-encompassing (imperialist) system, I include discussion of one such work in this section rather than the previous one, even though it disavows a focus on imperialism *per se*.

Hardt and Negri’s (2000) work, simply entitled *Empire*, sought to remove discussion of empire from its reliance on overly deterministic Marxist categories of knowledge (e.g. class struggle) and politics (e.g. the proletariat). In particular, they argued that empire has become a supra-national category, with no “outside,” and the era of imperialism in the classical sense of being driven by a nation-state (in this case, the U.S.) or group of states has passed. States are more often forced to cooperate than they are to be able to aggressively compete in their conception.

While they argue that while imperialism is finished, “imperial” however, as an adjectival descriptor, is ubiquitous. For example, “imperial administration,” consisting of four principles entails that politics is now separated from management of bureaucracy (2000, 340). “Imperial control” operates through the bomb, money, and ether. The last requires a little elaboration, covering communication, education, and culture. The possibility of “linking an order to a space” becomes obsolete as “languages become functional to circulation and dissolves every sovereign relationship” (200, 347). Nonetheless, capitalism is still the driving force of globalisation, especially in the form of communications and information, which they describe through a terminology of a

“virtual power of labor” (2000, 358) and networks. On the negative side, capital is freed from “constraints of territory and bargaining,” while on the positive side, social reality is less related to production of things, but more about “co-produced services and relationships. Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities” (2000, 297, 302). Herein they foresee the possibilities for resistance to the brutalities of capitalism, without being more specific about where and how it will be organized; this version of empire is a more inspirational-leaning analysis than it is programmatic. Having said that, it is important to highlight some of the originality of their analysis, as in their focus on the changed nature of the global economy.

They call attention to the rise of “science, knowledge, affect, and communication” as principal powers that characterize interactions between production and life (biopower) and this implicates that “labor becomes increasingly immaterial” and innovative (2000, 365). To sum up then, there are poignant nods to a new world, while at the same time, their analysis of the existing structures of power, of contemporary political and economic empire(s) in the world seems curiously benign and suspect.

Predictably some of the strongest critiques have come from Marxist writers (Boron 2005; Wood 2003). Both claim that the analysis leaves little room for resistance, lumping as it does everyone and everywhere together as an empire. Such a stance, argues Wood means that “it is perhaps not surprising that this book received such respectful attention in unexpected quarters in the mainstream” (2003, 169, ft. 2). Boron notes that the “analysis of ‘really existing’ empire has given place to a poetic and metaphysical construction that, on the one hand, maintains a distant similarity to reality, and, on the other hand, given precisely those characteristics, offers scant help to the social forces interested in transforming the national and international structures of world capitalism” (2005, 58).

Which countries or political formations are likely to have imperial tendencies in the contemporary world? Certainly the U.S. is the strongest candidate, a renewed discussion of which has been taking place since the beginning of this century. It would also be necessary to add to the list China, Russia, and the European Union (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 455-457; Zielonka 2012, 509-514), each of which has particular constraints and interests. Zielonka describes the four as “formidable global actors in

various fields,” with the U.S. and Russia holding military power, but all four having important economic power, and interfering in their respective peripheries (Zielonka 2012, 509).⁶ Zielonka continues that the cases for empire of India and Japan are “difficult to assess,” Japan’s current lack of empire “more a function of historical memory than of military capability,” feelings that can easily evaporate if pushed by one of the other imperial powers, in this case the most likely being China or the U.S.

Now that I have provided a basic overview of empire and its historically related form of power imperialism, I turn in the next section to a discussion of the U.S. and Japan as imperial powers. This discussion is greatly abbreviated as it is subsequently linked to an attempt at exploring a geopolitics of emotion, focusing on nostalgia and melancholia.

The U.S. and Japan as Empires in the Contemporary World

There is general agreement that the U.S. qualifies as an empire in the present. If there is disagreement, it is either about what kind of empire (e.g. coherent or not, militarily but not politically, and so on) or if, as in Hardt and Negri’s formulation, it has been dissolved into a larger unit of global empire. As the citation above from Burbank and Cooper shows, regarding the ambivalence of American empire historically, there has similarly been and continues to be a corresponding misrecognition by many Americans of the role of the U.S. in the world. One example is that most do not know the extent of military bases (including clubs, gyms, golf courses, and shopping centers) that circle the globe (Johnson 2004). The location of the U.S.’s only permanent military installation in Africa in Djibouti, Camp Lemonnier, is a good illustration of this imperial reach as it is the launching point of many secret missions in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Surprisingly, it is now about to be close neighbors with China’s first overseas base (Jacobs and Perlez, 2017).

How is it that the U.S can spend more on military than the next seven largest military budgets in the world, but President Trump can refer to the “sad depletion of our

⁶ He adds that the U.S. can be considered as treating the entire globe as its periphery, having more than 700 military installations in over 130 countries.

military” in his Inaugural Address (20 January, 2017)?⁷ Such an appeal must be read not as a factual statement but as one based on its emotional appeal to a loss perceived, not only by Trump himself, but a substantial portion of his constituency. The detailed composition of military, economic, and political power that is deployed by the “new American imperialism” has been analyzed elsewhere (Mann 2003), but it is useful to call attention to the role that consensus formation plays in the wake of fragmentation, what some have called social imperialism. Citing Hobson’s reference to “empire’s medley of aims and feelings,” Nederveen Pieterse writes, in a slightly dated but still relevant overview, that a fuller understanding of the processes of imperial extension remain not well understood, “a theatrical performance still in motion ... If the contours, the silhouette of empire have been measured, documented, and analyzed, its actual character remains opaque” (Nederveen Pieterse 1989, 22)

Let us look briefly at a second example of an empire, that of Japan, and here we have to acknowledge that despite the retention of an emperor, the selection of Japan as imperialist in the contemporary era is somewhat more controversial than the case of the U.S. Space limitation precludes a longer discussion of the historical development of the Japanese empire from the late nineteenth century, what Burbank and Cooper (2010) refer to, in comparison with European examples, as a “model of imperial expansion,” alongside a quotation of Prime Minister Inoue Kaoru from 1887; “what we must do is to transform our empire and our people...we have to establish a new, European-style empire on the edge of Asia” (2010, 302).⁸

While the emperor has been denied a formal political role after WW II by the Japanese constitution (1952) he retains a symbolic role. One of the roles that the Emperor has carried out in recent years is visiting foreign countries, some of which were colonized by Japan in the twentieth century. On a recent visit (28 February to 5

⁷ I use the conservative figure of seven here although other sources cite eight or ten, depending on the calculation of military expenditures, which for reasons of security, secrecy, and overlap with other types of expenditures, are differentially calculated.

⁸ An alternative argument exists that rather than the active projection of empire implied in this quotation, Japan progressively became an imperial power, somewhat reluctantly and as a reaction, due to fears of being controlled and colonized as China was in this period.

March, 2017) to Vietnam, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko met with the surviving Vietnamese spouses of Japanese military men who remained in Vietnam following WW II, seeking to heal “some of the wounds inflicted by war” (Japan Times, 2017). In an ironic and little known twist to this piece of history, many of the soldiers (estimated at 600) had stayed in Vietnam and fought alongside the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh’s anti-colonial forces, against French imperial soldiers, subsequently marrying and fathering children, who were not allowed to emigrate to Japan, when some of the soldiers returned to Japan in 1954. In 2016 (26-30 January), the Emperor had also visited the Philippines to pay respect to those who died (both Japanese and Filipinos) in World War II.

In 2016 (26-27 December), Prime Minister Abe Shinzo became the first visit Japanese prime minister to visit Pearl Harbor, 75 years after the attack that started WW II for Japan and the U.S. On this visit, the government was clear that no apology was to be given, and that the visit was also not to be connected to President Obama’s visit to Hiroshima in 2016 (27 May), in which Obama also did not make an apology.

Such visits, while allowing for remembrances of the terrible consequences of war and providing opportunities for victims to carry on with the process of mourning, also shed light on the current government’s delicate balancing act of encouraging, within strict limits, remembrance of war travesties, but perpetuating an ideal of empire. Certainly, there is likely to be differences between opinions and actions of the Emperor himself and the Prime Minister, but Abe’s motives are clearer.⁹ His clear ties to Nippon Kaigi, which includes 289 Diet members, have been consistently documented and he is listed as a “special adviser” (Kato 2014; McNeill 2015). Among Nippon Kaigi’s political stands are respect for the imperial system, constitutional revision, normalization of the military forces, teaching of patriotism and morality in schools and an end to “masochistic” history textbooks which describe Japan’s war responsibility. These positions represent the conservative spectrum of Japanese politics, but are kept in

⁹ I think it is necessary to state that Emperor Akihito has consistently tried to promote a policy of peace and remembrance of WW II that differs from the thinking and actions of Prime Minister Abe. However, the point, for this paper at least, is that the Emperor’s visits do allow for a more conservative (and nostalgic) interpretation, on the part of many LDP politicians and their supporters, of the remembrances and forgetting of the Japanese empire and its consequences in East and Southeast Asia.

reserve, coming into the open from time to time, as Abe and other similarly minded politicians attempt to gain hegemonic consensus through the media and in popular opinions in relation to the ebbs and flows of international politics and imperial projects of China and the U.S.

These examples serve only in a preliminary way to highlight how empire works in the social imaginary of some contemporary worldviews in the U.S. and Japan. A more detailed analysis of the interrelationship of these two key allies, with the U.S as primary empire and Japan as secondary empire, or as in competition with other imperial projects, China's for example, remains for further analysis. Moreover how ordinary people conceive empire, imperial projects, and imperialism more generally should be subjected to empirical investigation. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of the geopolitics of emotions as a core support for the conceptions of empire that I have examined up to here.

Empire and Emotions: Melancholia

How does one explain the continued relevance of empire in today's world? I share the interest in a geopolitics of emotions described by Moisi (2009), as ideology being replaced by struggles over identity. In Moisi's theorization, fear, humiliation, and hope (all of them linked to confidence or lack thereof) are used to describe dominant motifs and motivations for political orientations in various regions of the world. In this respect, his theory is a little too generalized to an overly concise regional delimitation (acknowledged by Moisi himself, 2009 22-28). While it is clear, for example, that fear (located generally in "the West") is often driving political responses in Europe and the U.S (but also Japan, 49-53), it seems obvious that such emotional responses can change according to particular time frames and series of events, in other words, they are cyclical (2009, 29). He suggests, nonetheless, that "emotions have returned to the forefront of the international scene because the West can no longer rely on either its values or its fading economic supremacy and therefore reacts to global changes with a certain bitterness and a desire to protect its precious open world again hostile forces" (2009, 12).

I propose extending Moisi's argument to include a focus on melancholia, as an underlying current of longing for the past, and a fear that the present will not match

up to that more securely “remembered” past. The emotion of nostalgia, similar to melancholia, has been used by other scholars investigating post-imperial consciousness in various contexts such as the Dutch East Indies (De Mul 2010) and Portuguese Mozambique (Medeiros, 2016). Both of these authors refer to a past that is selectively remembered, parts forgotten, and therefore not adequately resolved. Medeiros calls this “longing for a past that never really existed except in our imagination” (2016, 205). Such longings or nostalgia can and do differ, as noted by Rosaldo (1989, 116) writing a generation ago about portrayals of imperialist nostalgia in the Philippines. To truncate a larger discussion and research into the multiple ways of analyzing, framing and utilizing history, we can summarize that the past serves as a resource for projects of reconstruction in the present, in other words history serves as a “strategic resource” (Foster et al., 2016). This is true, first of all, because the historical narrative has resonance to the degree that it is perceived as unique to a particular group, organization, or nation. History presents itself (and, in turn, is presented), as something that actually happened and can’t be changed, even if it is open to interpretation. Furthermore, it can be used for multiple ends, for example, identity, authenticity, or legitimacy, to name just a few of the more salient ones, of which space precludes a longer explication. Forgetting is also a resource (2016, 2, 6).

Nostalgia can be both a dreamy wistful emotional state and more of a stress-related one. However this more negative emotion is often referred to as melancholy, or in its older form, melancholia. Melancholia’s history can be traced back to the Hippocratic writings of the fifth and fourth centuries BC and became defined as a “fear or depression that is prolonged” (Jackson, 1985, 43). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it gradually became more commonly associated with a loss of a loved person or material possessions and was progressively defined as one of the numerous states of depression. Melancholia was also analyzed by Sigmund Freud, in the early twentieth century, as a concept to deal with feelings of the traumatic loss of a loved one or object. In a well-cited essay published in 1916, Freud describes grief in the acts of mourning and melancholia as related and very similar feelings, at least on the outside. However, he distinguishes between the two as follows: Melancholia is “related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness,” compared to mourning which is not unconscious. He continues by noting that melancholic individuals who feel their pain through loss of the love-object “always seem as though they have been

slighted and had been treated with great injustice.” In some cases, the feelings can also turn into “narcissistic identification” with the result that “hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer” and deriving a satisfaction in return (1917, 245, 248, 251).

The ways in which melancholia is connected to empire have also been explicitly examined by Gilroy (2005) in his analysis of postcolonial Britain of the twenty-first century. Britain has “an inability to mourn its loss of empire and accommodate the empire’s consequences” (2005, 102). This is, in part, because the empire and its loss was not “sealed off from the mainstream at the distant end of the imperial system” (2005, 44). In this respect, Gilroy follows the discussion that I noted above with regard to center and periphery not being compartmentalized. A further insight that makes Gilroy’s analysis perceptive is the threat that multiculturalism in Britain plays in driving the feeling of melancholia. While scathing in his assessment of mainstream approaches to dealing with racial injustice as “liberal innocence,” and “impotent and disinterested bourgeois reflection” (2005, 17), and academic discussions of multiculturalism and toleration made in “rarefied tones and ultratheoretical mode” (2005, 16), Gilroy also points to the result of imperial immigration and race-mixing as signaling a change in racial projects from simpler hatred to more complex, ambivalent patterns (2005, 37). He writes that many people “have come to need ‘race’ and perhaps to welcome its certainties as one sure way to keep their bearings in a world that they experience as increasingly confusing... the melancholic pattern has become the mechanism that sustains the unstable edifice of increasingly brittle and empty national identity” (2005, 106).

However, what is true of empire more generally, that the context of time and place matter intensely (as do our continuously changing historical and academic theorizations of it), is also likely true with regard to melancholia. While other scholars have come to similar assessments about the role of the lost empire as a powerful underpinning for melancholic politics, an “obsessiveness through the prism of nostalgia, not only a wistful looking-back to a mythical golden age, but as a pathology, or neurosis – a panic associated with the lack of assured foundations for action and thought” (Duncanson 2012, 24), there are other analyses which turn this viewpoint on its head. For Bonnett (2014, 115), Gilroy’s portrayal of a “morbid obsession with its own long gone days of glory creat[ing] a dismal culture of regret and fear” is contrasted with

Gilroy's and other critics' "yearning for a lost political potency." In other words, there is melancholia over empire enough to go around, both for those who would harken back to a better time, and those who may recall an obvious and necessary enemy (i.e. imperialism) against which to rally and create structures and discourses of resistance in response.

In order to understand these uses of melancholic empire more specifically, a wide range of examples should be presented. In what follows, I provide a few brief examples, aware that they are under-represented. Both the Trump presidential campaign of 2016 and the Abe re-election campaign of 2014 used slogans intended to recall a much more forceful and confident past than their respective national positions in the contemporary period. Trump's campaign of "Make America Great Again" recycled a slogan from the Ronald Reagan campaign of 1980, which he then trademarked. Accordingly, Trump has already decided his slogan for 2020 as "Keep America Great" (Tumulty 2017). Meanwhile, Abe and the Liberal Democratic Party's slogan of "Take Back Japan" (*Nihon wo Torimodosu*, Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, 2012) recalls a more secure past beyond the fears of the present decline and the nuclear meltdown of Fukushima. Certainly, these slogans can only highlight some basic tendencies in thinking, but both were on prominent display throughout the respective electoral campaigns and they provided a theme that resonated with a large number of citizens in each case.

It goes without saying that maintaining power in the contemporary political world is an engagement with spectacle and the building of images, in short an engagement with media, of all types in a media-saturated era, and presentation of readily digestible messages and narrative coherence. As noted above, this use of history both as a resource for remembering and forgetting is central to the projection of imperial nostalgic imagery. To take but one account of the recent re-making of the history of empire by those who favor a new imperial power in the U.S., Niall Ferguson's (2003) voluminous history of the British Empire begins on a personal note, of travelling around the "Empire's remains" in early 2002, from Jamaica to Australia to the Victoria Falls town of Livingstone. "Indians may rename them [Calcutta, Bombay, Madras] as many times as they like, but they remain cities founded and built by the British" (2003, xxi). Even more personal is the advantage that Ferguson admits he enjoys due to having relatives in many places around the world, the result of emigration related to the

historical advances of the empire. To overlook the benefits (law, order, governance, capital) that the British Empire provided to India, South Africa, Jamaica and so on “risks underselling the scale – and modernity – of the achievement in the sphere of economics... British rule overseas [consisted of] remarkably non-venal administrations. It was not just my family that benefited from these things” (2003, xxii). At various junctures, Ferguson admits that record of the British empire was not “unblemished” (2003, 358), yes, there was slavery (for example), yet there was always “a liberal critique” to stop the imperial powers from “behaving despotically” (2003, xxii). The ultimate goal of this history is to provide evidence to the American project of empire building, which by 2003 had finally developed into a more open debate, and which Ferguson calls “an empire, in short, that dare not speak its name. It is an empire in denial” (2003, 370).

A further question is raised here, however, as to the degree that nostalgia (or melancholy) is what is being accessed by these appeals to empire in the first place? While a sense of loss of a more secure past may be part of the dynamic, there is also a prospective nature to both the slogans of Trump and Abe and the use of history of empire in the account above; a call for action to redeem and rebuild, albeit in a model that is well understood as drawing on the lessons of history and the security of an acquired prosperous position in relation to the rest of the world, which is also of necessity recoverable to memory by a substantial portion of the constituency for such projections. This framing of the past in the service of a future goal requires a broader theorization.

Some recent work in management studies has utilized the concept of “postalgia.” In research within large organizations, Ybema (2004) has described a need to manipulate “temporal resources” in much the same way as described above with regard to strategic use of history and narratives related to the past. There is a desire “not to return, but to go forward, inspired by a certain restlessness or discontent with the present and an anxious desire to go and find out what lies behind the bend, over the mountain ... accompanied by anxious images of danger or decay, in which a future is sketched that is even darker than an already dark present” (Ybema 2004, 826). Rather than simply relying on the emotions of melancholy (as a form of more intense nostalgia), postalgia can be used a weapon against entrenched instrumental rationality and bureaucracy. This type of analysis makes clear one reason that Gilroy’s critique of

melancholic nostalgia partially fails. Blake (2007) calls attention to the problem of metropolitan intellectuals extolling the cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism of everyday life in the mega-cities, offering descriptions of loyalties to “humanity” and “civilization” what some have called “global humanity,” while at the same time finding less to celebrate about popular culture and its hybrid and consumerist forms (also Bonnett 2014, 127 on “planetary humanism” and “identity and solidarity”).

If one looks at some of the neo-conservative calls for the U.S. to re-engage with empire that appeared in the early years of the twenty-first century (Cooper 2002; Ferguson 2003; Kurtz 2003), there is a pattern of admitting the past excesses of imperialism, but highlighting the successes in keeping order, and promoting freedoms of exchanges of goods and movements of people as well. Cooper (2002) calls for a “voluntary imperialism,” Ferguson for a shift from informal empire to formal empire (2003, 368; also Ferguson 2011, 173, “here [French West Africa] as elsewhere, Western empire brought real, measurable progress”), and Kurtz a “democratic imperialism.” These proposals had their critics of course (Eland 2002) but they have been re-stated periodically, including quite recently by Robert Kaplan (2014) who baldly proclaims a “defense” of empire, based on a zero-sum choice in the Middle East of chaos or empire. Such commentators are labeled “imperialism’s realist admirers” by Danforth (2015), while the remarks of French presidential candidate Francois Fillon show the rehabilitation through sentiment that can take place regarding the imperial past. “France is not guilty of having wanted to share its culture with the people of Africa, Asia, and North America” (cited in Tharoor 2016), where the amiable “shared culture” becomes the replacement for imperialism. Here it is necessary to end the discussion, but call attention to the revival of other more regional but equally dangerous projections of imperial remembering and forgetting, from France as above but also including, but not limited to, Russia, India, and Turkey.

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to come to grips with the perennial and current return of empire. In the face of increased opposition to the neoliberal globalising tendencies of the twenty-first century political economy, a softer (or less malevolent) view of empire has appeared as a source of identity, recalling the past, while intimating

strength in the remembered and nostalgic longing for a less unstable world. Left unexamined have been the specific modalities in which this move “for empire” is pushed forward and the degree that it has effects of and through melancholic emotional attachment. I offered several examples to sketch the possibility for this type of analysis and to suggest that an alternative for a more just and internationally balanced and principled world based on human rights needs to take into account the attractions of imperial identities. Empire does not, in the end, need to be entirely power-laden and aggressively and uniformly monopolistically capitalist, as some of the passages in Hardt and Negri (2000) suggest. While their intervention is rightly treated with some skepticism, they at least have attempted to suggest ways in which the large mass of humanity has a stake in the world, in empire moreover. The alternatives represented by melancholic historical empire in the service of postalgic empire building offer less, a re-partitioning of insiders and outsiders, and a competition for the remaining resources of the earth as environmental catastrophes quicken and become exacerbated. Critics of these assaults on the shared global hopes for peace, stability and a sustainable balance of conflicting interests need to renew their analysis of the revamped projects of empire, at the same time as striving for alternatives that reinvigorate some possibility for the shared goals of utopian visions, incorporating identity and solidarity, yet also moving beyond them, an empire of the commons.

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