

*Imagining the  
'Global'? National  
Europe, Imperial  
Ideology and the  
Legacies of Rome in  
Nineteenth-Century  
Britain*

**Margarita Miliori**

Historian

*I. Visions of Europe: Liberal and National*

In Britain, the mid-nineteenth century was a period of triumphant liberalism. The adoption of free trade ideology as the main means for attaining social and economic progress and an individualist ethos of self-improvement were the basic components of this political and social atmosphere. Nevertheless, these shibboleths of liberalism were supplemented by a host of other liberal principles and demands: the gradual extension of education and of political representation, the abolition of social exclusion based on religious differences, the defense of free speech and association, and support for legal and civic equality.

As such issues became repetitive motives of ideological negotiation within public discourse, they also constituted a rhetoric inseparably linked with the contemporary transformation of British national self-definition. In the eyes of the rapidly expanding liberal public opinion from the eighteen forties to the eighteen sixties, British identity and British 'patriotism' started to appear as synonymous not only with the reassertion of the above-mentioned principles within the boundaries of the national community, but also with their propagation abroad. Gaining momentum from internal political and social debates, but adopting a characteristically 'extrovert' national persona, mid- and late nineteenth-century British liberalism attempted to define and to substantiate a particular, authentically 'British' contribution to the modern ideal of universal progress.

The ambition stemmed from both the ecumenical theoretical pretensions of liberalism and the actual involvement of Britain with the world. Such a project, however, inevitably required the construction of a hierarchically-structured topography of the universal (including 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' areas) within which a particular British 'national mission' could find its proper place.

Throughout the nineteenth century, two sorts of 'peripheries', geographical and imaginary, were most pertinent to such topography.

First, and more traditionally, there was 'Europe': the liberal image of nineteenth-century Britain as a member of a larger 'family of nations' was built largely through British discourse on European politics. It is indicative in this respect that the most prominent liberal parliamentary leaders of the nineteenth century – the 'Tory liberal' George Canning and, later, Lord Palmerston and William Gladstone (both of whom claimed the 'Canningite' legacy) – had all derived a significant amount of their popularity from their European policies.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, many European national liberation movements found active support in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century; close contacts were established between British radicals and political émigrés who arrived in Britain between the eighteen thirties and fifties, while prominent personalities from the continent such as Mazzini, Garibaldi and Kossuth became objects of hero-worship amongst a significant section of the British public during the same period. Such phenomena indicate a dense interaction between political events on the Continent, contemporary liberal and radical representations of these events and domestic political and ideological developments.<sup>2</sup>

Thus in mid-nineteenth century liberal Britain, 'Europe' functioned as a quasi-universal mirror upon which to chart the exceptionality of Britain's political stability, as well as Britain's special 'mission' to promote ordered freedom throughout the world. More specifically, this perspective reflected mid-nineteenth century liberalism of a Palmerstonian hue. Later on, Gladstonian articulations of the notion of a European 'family of nations' differed in some respects from this triumphalist perspective, since Gladstone's 'Europe' encompassed Britain's 'mission', but was also something larger than this: it was a moral entity composed of essentially equal nations, nurtured from common Christian and classical traditions and buttressed by semi-providential notions concerning the existence of a supranational moral plane. In broad terms, nevertheless, the importance given to 'Europe' as a supranational and quasi-universal point of reference was an element of continuity between earlier and later versions of nineteenth-century British liberal ideology.

## II. *Visions of Empire*

The second 'periphery' of particular significance for nineteenth-century Britain, liberal and conservative alike, was the Empire. The heyday of British liberalism was also the time when the national image of Britain was being recast in imperial terms. The term 'imperialist' may not have gained widespread currency in Britain until 1876, when the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India by Prime Minister Disraeli, provoked intense criticism of his 'imperialist' policies.<sup>3</sup> Yet, imperial images had already figured in British discourses of self-identification by the middle of the century.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the elevation of 'the colonies' to the status of an important

British *alter ego* dated from much earlier, from the time of the American Revolution and from the time of the impeachment of Warren Hastings in the seventeen eighties.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, what exactly was involved in such images? At least two different perspectives on the 'British Empire' seem to have coexisted throughout the nineteenth century. According to the first and most common perspective, the term referred mainly to the Anglo-Saxon communities established beyond the island borders of the United Kingdom, such as the colonies of Australia, South Africa and Canada, or the 'lost' colonies of the United States of America. Authors adopting this perspective discussed primarily the relationship between the colonies and the mother country – organic or otherwise; the rights of self-government that the colonies may, or may not have possessed; the obligations of the metropolis towards them, either in terms of defense or in terms of economic policies, especially taxation; the contribution of the colonies to British economic pre-eminence, military might and international standing; and finally, the role played by the formation and the maintenance of the colonies in respect to the historical evolution and progress of the British nation as a whole.

The large majority of British authors debating 'issues of Empire' during the mid- and the late nineteenth, as well as in the early twentieth century adopted this perspective, giving priority to the relationship of the colonies of 'white settlement' to Britain and relegating the 'tropical colonies' and racial issues to a secondary order of importance. For example, such was the perspective of the political economist and ardent colonizer of South Australia and New Zealand, Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796–1862) in his *England and America* (1833),<sup>6</sup> but also of a number of well-known participants in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century imperial debates: such as the radical Charles Dilke in *Greater Britain* (1869); the 'Tory Protectionist' James Anthony Froude in *Oceana, or England and her Colonies* (1886);<sup>7</sup> and the 'new imperialist' and protagonist of the Second Boer War (1898–1902), Alfred Milner, in *The Nation and the Empire* (published in 1913, but containing a collection of his speeches going back to 1897).

All these authors, despite their significant ideological differences, were primarily concerned with the constitution and the interests of Britain as a national *cum* imperial body. They considered 'the Empire' as an offspring of 'the Nation' and not as an external theatre of British action, comparable to the international domain. Their tendency to impose a certain invisibility on Britain's colonial subjects on the level of their texts – either by not mentioning them at all, or by delegating race issues to a mere aspect of local colonial politics – may be seen as part of their strategy in promoting such visions.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, from quite early on, a separate debate on India emerged, pointing towards a different direction. The main issue discussed in relation to India was how to rule over an *a priori* 'alien' society; an alienation measured either racially or culturally and always in relation to the society of the metropolis. Thus, since the time of Warren Hastings' impeachment, but especially after 1830, when the British government undertook the project of 'rationalizing' and Westernizing India in earnest, is it possible to chart the development of an imperial discourse which is much closer not only to present-day understandings of imperialism, but also to mid-nineteenth century liberal notions of a British 'mission' to promote order and freedom abroad.

The discourse that evolved in relation to India had a legitimizing function, as it aimed to justify colonial domination by means of a persuasive description of the civilizational inferiority of the 'natives', but also by elaborating upon the idea of a British duty to educate the Indians towards modern civilization and freedom. From the eighteen twenties to the eighteen forties, central figures of British liberalism, such as the utilitarian James Mill and his son John Stuart Mill, and the liberal politician and 'Whig' historian Thomas Babington Macaulay,<sup>9</sup> contributed heavily both to actual empire-building and to the development of this discourse, while personally holding important colonial posts in India.<sup>10</sup>

In the long run, this strand of imperial thought that focused on the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized was not confined to the Indian context, neither did it retain a liberal idiom. Later in the century, discourse on the 'natives', hardened and emboldened by explicit racial terminology, was incorporated in integral rather than liberal visions of Empire.<sup>11</sup> The exact timing of this process need not detain us here. Suffice it to say that after the major clash between Gladstone and Disraeli in the late eighteen seventies – a crisis that naturalized the term 'imperialism' within the British political vocabulary, associating it for the first time with 'patriotism', 'jingoism' and the Conservative Party – the fundamental terms of the debate concerning imperial politics shifted irrevocably, gradually leading to novel constellations of imperialist ideology.<sup>12</sup>

Fierce imperial antagonism, especially with Germany, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, as well as actual territorial expansion, mainly in Africa, enhanced these ideological developments. By the turn of the century, the notion that Britain had a duty to educate its colonial subjects towards political freedom may have survived within certain strands of the liberal political tradition. Yet, in the context of what was considered at the time as 'imperialist' ideology proper, the emphasis had already shifted to the duty of British subjects to uphold an integral, racially-segregated and militarist version of the Empire for its own sake.<sup>13</sup>

Many proponents of the Empire during the high noon of 'new imperialism' were also ardently in favor of further imperial integration, promoting either federalist schemes or a customs union.<sup>14</sup> At this stage, and amongst these circles, the idea of a self-sufficient and self-reliant British (Anglo-Saxon) Empire seems to have had completely eclipsed the more traditional idea of a European 'family of nations'. In one of his many speeches in favor of imperial integration, Alfred Milner used the phrase "British family of nations"<sup>15</sup> to describe the Empire, thus indicating that even on the level of terminology 'Empire' and 'Europe' had become not only antagonistic, but truly antithetical notions.

This, however, was an extreme example of a particularly 'introvert' worldview.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the visions of imperial federalists like Milner never became official policies of either British political party, while 'foreign policy' remained almost exclusively concerned with Britain's relations with the traditional European powers. After all, the enhancement of Britain's prestige vis-à-vis its European rivals had been an important aspect of imperialist ideology ever since the time of Disraeli, who viewed his colonial policy as subordinate to his foreign policy aims.<sup>17</sup> Thus, visions of 'Europe' and visions of the 'Empire' should be considered not as mutually exclusive registers of reference, but rather as imagined alternative theatres of action within which Britain's mission on the world stage would be enacted.

### III. *Fragmented Roman Legacies and Conceptualizations of the 'Global' in the Age of Empire*

Would what has been argued above also warrant the claim that towards the end of the nineteenth or at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'Europe' and the 'Empire' had become, in British eyes, complementary peripheries of the 'global'? Or, to put the question differently, could it be argued that the British discourse on Europe, combined with the British discourse on the Empire, had developed to such a stage by the turn of the century as to make possible the conceptualization of a global space, incorporating and transcending both peripheries?

In view of providing some insight to this issue, the remainder of this article will explore the interaction between Europe and the Empire in British eyes by focusing on the symbolic repertoire deployed by the two discourses. In particular, it will compare the deployment of the traditional *topos* of imperial Rome in the discourse that constructed Britain's imperial *persona* to the deployment of the same *topos* within British liberal discourse on Europe.

Thus this article will try to show two things: first, that the connotations of the Roman legacy in the two discourses were different, and even antithetical, throughout the nineteenth century. 'Rome' in the European context signified different things than 'Rome' in the imperial/British context. This indicates that the two 'peripheries' in question were kept conceptually apart during most of the period under discussion.

Second, the deployment of the Roman paradigm as a means of understanding and describing the modern world could lead towards interesting conceptualizations of 'the global'. This could happen either in the 'European', or in the 'imperial' discursive context, but most effectively through a juxtaposition of the two. Thus, the article concludes by bringing to the fore the intensely modernist and quasi-global aspects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century world, as it emerges from the pen of two important intellectuals writing on the modern empire and its Roman antecedent at the dawn of the twentieth century: the historian and diplomat James Bryce (1838–1922) and the economist and prominent critic of imperialism John Atkinson Hobson (1858–1940).

### IV. *The Deployment of Rome in National/Imperial Debates*

The symbolic importance of ancient Rome within the traditional repertoire of British national and political rhetoric had always been significant. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Roman *virtù*, political and military, represented the core of the republican ideal. Furthermore, the political world of Augustan Britain actively participated in a traditional and ongoing discussion concerning the relationship of the two political *personae* of ancient Rome, the Roman *res publica* and the Roman *imperium*. In particular, the theme of Roman republican 'corruption' and 'decline into Empire' was frequently used critically in British political discourse as a comment upon modern British experience.<sup>18</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the political and ideological uses of Roman history in Britain were deeply influenced by the French Revolution and closely linked with the liberal re-orientation of national self-definitions. Republican rhetoric as a whole was discredited during this period – at least beyond radical and revolutionary circles – as it was considered closely linked

with French political excesses and with the negative aspects of revolution. Up to a point, classical references in political commentary were substituted by appeals to examples drawn from British national history.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, to the degree that the rhetoric of classical parallelism survived, the republican rhetoric associated earlier with Rome gradually gave way to a liberal rhetoric that glorified the ethos of a commercialist and philosophic Athens.<sup>20</sup>

During the second half of the century, however, a revival of British parallelisms with Rome took place; yet, this time this was not with the Roman republic, but with Rome in its imperial guise. References to the Roman *Imperium* and its analogies with the British Empire became denser within the general literary output, as well as within the narrower limits of political discourse, especially as imperial assertiveness increased during the last quarter of the century.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the supporters of Disraeli's policy in the eighteen seventies did not merely compare Rome and Britain as 'civilizing' powers, but frequently went further, using the Roman-British analogy to argue that the British (like the Romans) had a God-given right to rule over other nations. Thus defending Disraeli's 'imperial' policy against Gladstone's scathing criticism, Edward Dicey argued in 1877:

*I do not dispute for one moment that as a nation we do honestly wish to benefit the natives of India ... But, as a matter of fact, we rule India, not because we wish to benefit the natives, still less because the natives are conscious of the benefits we confer upon them, but because we have got it and intend to keep it, because to us has been given a mission like that of ancient Rome, because we too might well be bidden to remember that regere imperio populos is the talent committed to us.*<sup>22</sup>

This cynical rehabilitation of the imperial legacy of Rome was also reflected, as Norman Vance has noted, in a renewed interest shown both by professional historians, like J. A. Froude, and by the public at large, in the personality of Julius Caesar.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, the respect that the prominent historian of early Roman history B. G. Niebuhr enjoyed amongst British academics in the first half of the century<sup>24</sup> was now superseded by Theodor Mommsen, who, in his *Römische Geschichte*, had glorified Julius Caesar and had treated Rome's transition from republic to empire in a positive manner.<sup>25</sup>

Appeals to the Roman paradigm did not come solely from quarters friendly to the Empire, but also and in equal measure from its detractors, who continued to propel the traditional argument that the acquisition of Empire had been the main cause of the downfall of Rome. For example, criticizing British imperialist ideology at the turn of the nineteenth century, John M. Robertson condemned "the uncomprehending way in which the British imperialist always scans the story of ancient Rome", and entered upon an extensive overview of Roman social and political history in order to emphasize "the truth that the special cause of decay is just empire". Like many others before him, Robertson insisted on the demoralization of the Roman aristocracy due to luxury bred by excessive success in foreign conquests; on the corruption of the body politic through the destruction of the class of small agriculturists; and on the adulteration of the character of Roman society through the excessive importation of slaves.<sup>26</sup>

Irrespective of the positive or negative rhetorical functions it could be made to fulfill, this classical repertoire, linking Rome and Britain together on the basis of their common imperial 'destiny', was the product of a partly traditional and partly novel 'classicizing' strategy. By this is meant

that the national *cum* imperial analogy between Britain and Rome was construed on the basis of certain ostensibly common sociological, political or cultural characteristics, which, in order for the comparisons to work, had to be completely de-contextualized from the multidimensional historical temporalities within which they were originally inscribed. It was a highly ideological procedure, readapting a centuries-old vocabulary, so as to facilitate the restructuring of British national identity in an unprecedented imperialist age.

### ***V. Rome and Europe in Liberal Propaganda and Historiography***

In the context of British discourse on Europe, the situation was rather different. This discourse, and especially its mainstream liberal strands of the mid- and late nineteenth century, drew from an alternative imperial repertoire of another Rome; a Rome that was construed as the common origin – as well as the political and historical antithesis – of modern 'national' Europe. Not only in nineteenth-century Britain, but also in the context of modern European political traditions in general, notions of 'Continental' or 'European' Empire were highly mediated concepts, first through medieval reinterpretations of the Roman *imperium*, and secondly through the reassessment of medieval notions of Empire that had taken place across Europe since the Reformation. In particular, according to scholars dealing with early modern political theory, many of the major debates that preoccupied Western jurists and philosophers in the early modern period, such as the debate on 'universal monarchy', on defensive and offensive federations, confederations and monarchical unions, or the debate on international law, had their root in the traditional discussion concerning the legitimacy of universal Empire and the legacies of Rome.<sup>27</sup>

It may be an overstatement to claim that these traditional debates were still being conducted in nineteenth-century Britain, or that they directly influenced the contemporary discourse on the modern European 'family of nations'. Yet, these notions enjoyed a significant afterlife on the level of popular symbolism, as well as in the context of historiography.

The most prominent and persistent legacies of this traditional discussion on Empire were, on the one hand, the idea that any expansive European 'despotism' would pose a serious threat for the liberties of the 'nations of Europe', and on the other, the notion that the only means of safeguarding European peace was the preservation – or, at least, the diplomatic and political reformulation – of some sort of 'balance of power' amongst the major European nation states.<sup>28</sup> Both notions had a very significant impact on nineteenth-century British discourse on European politics.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the threat of Empire had been identified with Napoleon's despotic militarism. Despite its obvious modernity, Napoleonic France was frequently viewed at the time as a regressive and destructive force, threatening the modern values of liberty and nationality across Europe.<sup>29</sup> After the Napoleonic Wars, liberal opinion gradually became focused on more plausible and convenient enemies: the remaining multi-national European Empires, and especially Russia, which came to be viewed as the typical modern reincarnation of the traditional imperial threat.

In run-of-the-mill mid-nineteenth century popular propaganda – which envisioned concerted struggles of 'national and liberal Europe' against the 'despotic Continental Empires' –, modernity,

as well as its indisputable goddess, progress, were seen as the sure allies of nationality and political freedom, while the 'Roman' legacy of Empire was considered as an relic of a dying past. For example, Carl Retslag, a German political refugee and professor of philosophy influenced by Hegel, argued thus at the beginning of the Crimean War:

*Since the destruction of the Roman Empire there has been a continual struggle between this principle of individualism – which prevents nations, different in habits, by language, by religion, by character, from being formed into one great uniform nation – and the hereditary idea of universal empire, which attempts over and over again to establish one united rule of law, custom and religion. But the spirit of difference, of individualism, is too deeply rooted in the life of modern Europe – it is the fundamental principle of the modern ages, and as such, too strong to be overturned.<sup>30</sup>*

And yet, in the eyes of a number of nineteenth-century British historians, interested as much in the exploration of a shared European past as in contemporary European developments, the simplistic binary identification of 'Empire' with the past and of 'national liberty' with the future did not adequately describe the emergence of European modernity. For example, the historian and educationalist Thomas Arnold (1795–1842) viewed the study of Roman legacies after the conventional dissolution of the Western Roman Empire in 476 as the key to the understanding of European history as a whole.

Arnold's own contribution to the development of relevant historiography was only programmatic, as despite his intention to write a history of Rome up to the crowning of Charlemagne in 800, his work remained unfinished, covering only the period up to the rule of Augustus.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, a student of his, the Oxford historian E. A. Freeman (1823–1892) produced an interesting and diversified oeuvre, propagating through various treatises the idea of a dynamic dialectic between 'Roman' and 'national' elements within the history of Europe.

Freeman's most characteristic work in respect to the promotion of the centrality of Rome in European history was a series of lectures delivered at Oxford in the spring of 1885, which were subsequently published the following year under the title of *The Chief Periods of European History*.<sup>32</sup> Despite its rather schematic nature, this work reflects with great clarity the author's views on the relationship between antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity.

Freeman divided European history into three periods: the period before the establishment of Roman rule (a period he identified with the ancient Greek world), the period during which Rome and its legacies determined the fate of Europe (up to the final dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806), and, finally, when Europe had once again become 'Rome-less'. Thus, the modern period acquired a very narrow historical and political horizon, while the sense of an abrupt disruption, separating modernity 'proper' from its immediate historical past, was significantly sharpened.

This projected sense of an abrupt disruption with the recent past allowed Freeman to draw instructive analogies between the modern ('post-Roman') and the ancient Greek ('pre-Roman') world. In particular, he claimed that the modern nation-states were in a similar position to the city states of late Greek antiquity, as similarly, they belonged to a world without a center. Before the rise of Rome, as well as after its 'fall', the world was lacking a gravitational pole able to co-

ordinate and to systematize disparate interstate relations. For Freeman, the post-Roman world needed to create institutions of international law, the only possible means of substituting the mediating and superintending role that Rome had once played in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

## ***VI. European and Colonial Contexts of Empire in James Bryce's Reassessments of the Roman Legacy***

This kind of argument is strongly reminiscent of the first historiographical attempt of yet another important British scholar of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Oxford jurist, historian and diplomat James Bryce (1838–1922), who wrote *The Holy Roman Empire* for a student competition in 1864.<sup>34</sup>

This treatise offered a well-balanced historical and political interpretation of the evolution of the idea and of the institution of Empire through the long centuries of European history.

Here Empire did not signify a centralized and absolutist form of government, but rather an evolving system of relationships established between a supreme authority, founding its legitimacy upon the Roman tradition and the Christian Church, and a host of other, particular and territorially bound civil authorities. According to Bryce, the Empire itself was not defined in territorial terms; it was primarily an idea. Furthermore, from the moment that the center of the Empire was transferred to Constantinople:

*... the idea of Roman monarchy became more universal; for, having lost its local center, it subsisted no longer historically, but, so to speak, naturally, as a part of an order of things which a change in external relations seemed incapable of disturbing.*<sup>35</sup>

Thus, by relinquishing its territorial character, the Empire had become the emblem of an idealized civil 'ecumene', which, originally at least, directly corresponded to the realm of the Divine.

Further on, writing about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Bryce described how, at this stage, the Empire assumed the mantle of the supreme judge of mankind and came to be seen as the supreme protector of universal spiritual unity and peace. At this point, Bryce drew a parallel between this imperial persona and the more recent attempts of humankind to construct a system of international law.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, in his conclusion, Bryce attempted an interesting comparison between the first Roman version of Empire, and its subsequent German revival. According to Bryce, the original Roman theory of Empire demanded "the sacrifice of the individual to the mass, the concentration of all legislative and judicial powers in the person of the sovereign, the centralization of the administrative system, the maintenance of order by a large military force, the substitution of the influence of public opinion for the control of representative assemblies ..."<sup>37</sup> This type of Empire, he claimed, better suited the French, "the Romans of the modern world", than the Teutons. The 'Germanic' theory of Empire, on the other hand, was much less absolutist than the Roman-French version. It was a despotism "not of the sword but of the law"; a despotism which "... looked with favor on municipal freedom, and everywhere did its best for learning, for religion, for intelligence".<sup>38</sup>

Thus Bryce built in this work an imperial image that completely subverted the negative connotations 'traditional' Empire carried in the context of the liberal mid-nineteenth century worldview. European Empire, in his analysis, was not linked with absolutism, but quite the contrary: it pointed towards local democracy, the federal ideal and forms of international negotiation that liberal intellectuals of his ilk were so strongly drawn to in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note that in order to achieve this subversion, Bryce deployed two rhetorical strategies, which partly contradicted each other. First, he introduced an essentialist racial distinction between 'Latins' and 'Germans' in order to justify the existence of two different historical versions of imperial theory. This was a popular liberal prejudice of the mid-nineteenth century: "despotic" (French and) "Latin" peoples were pitted on one side, "democratic Teutons" on the other. Second, Bryce utilized to the extreme the notion of historical relativism, arguing, for example, that whatever elements of 'despotism' existed within the traditional theory of Empire were a product of the immaturity of the human spirit during the Middle Ages.<sup>40</sup>

Turning to Bryce's understanding of the notion of Empire within the colonial context, later in his career he wrote another, but shorter and better-known treatise on the theme of Empire, entitled *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India*, originally published in 1901 in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence*, the first volume of an edition of his essays.<sup>41</sup> Here, Bryce adopted a completely different strategy for dealing with the imperial legacies of the classical past than the one deployed in his earlier history of the Holy Roman Empire.

Here he listed – almost in a functionalist way – "similarities" and "differences" between the two Empires: they were similar in that they were both based on military conquest and consequently retained their military character;<sup>42</sup> in that both the British and the Romans preferred to rule in a despotic manner, but preserved a high public spirit, imposed law and order and safeguarded peace;<sup>43</sup> in that both *imperia* facilitated communications and promoted the homogenization of the subordinate populations through works of infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> Correspondingly, according to his analysis, the two Empires were different in that the Roman metropolis had submerged and effaced itself within the Empire, while in the case of the British *imperium* complete social assimilation between the colonists and the colonized was impossible due to religious, cultural and – above all – racial reasons.<sup>45</sup>

In this treatise it may be noted that there was no trace of the thoughtful deployment of historical relativism that characterized Bryce's earlier analysis in *the Holy Roman Empire*. While the elegance of the earlier work derived precisely from the masterly way in which the author negotiated the slippage of imperial signification through historical time, here there was hardly any conceptual space available to entertain a longer temporal perspective. Furthermore, if we choose to bring Bryce's earlier distinction between a "Latin" and a "Teutonic" version of Empire to bear upon his assessment of the British Empire in his later treatise, it would appear that the British, as imperialists of the "Roman" type, had perverted the proper mission of their "Teutonic" origins.

Yet, focusing on this apparent incongruence is beyond the point. What ultimately justified the comparison between the two Empires in the later treatise was not the historical or national affinity of Britons and Romans, but rather the contemporary contingency within which the historical comparison was undertaken: that is, the condition of world affairs at the dawn of the twentieth

century as they appeared in the eyes of the author. Indeed, from the very first pages of the essay we can sense Bryce's expectation concerning the prompt fulfillment of a radically novel future:

*Europe – that is to say the five or six races which we call the European branch of mankind – has annexed the rest of the earth, extinguishing some races, absorbing others, ruling others as subjects, and spreading over their native customs and beliefs a layer of European ideas which will sink deeper and deeper till the old native life dies out ... Thus a new sort of unity is being created among mankind. This unity is seen in the bringing of every part of the globe into close relations, both commercial and political, with every other part. It is seen in the establishment of a few 'world languages' as vehicles of communication between many peoples ... It is seen in the diffusion of a civilization which is everywhere the same in its material aspects, and is tolerably uniform even on its intellectual side, since it teaches men to think on similar lines and to apply similar methods of scientific inquiry. The process has been going on for some centuries. In our own day it advances so swiftly that we can almost foresee the time when it will be complete. It is one of the great events in the history of the world ...<sup>46</sup>*

Progressive material and intellectual uniformity under the auspices of a common culture, the extinction of cultural particularities and local traditions, close political and commercial interdependence throughout the world, unity fostered by the growth of communications and the advances of technology: the prediction concerned a future not merely 'imperial', but also intensely modernist and 'global'.

We may argue that this global vision was the product of the coming together of Bryce's conceptualization of Europe and his considerations concerning the Empire. Alternatively, Bryce's global vision may provide us with a key for understanding why he approached the medieval/European and the colonial/British versions of Empire (and consequently the significance of Rome within each context) in such a contradictory manner.

In the European context, where continuities with the medieval and the early modern past were still alive and functional, the methods of academic history appeared to be the appropriate way for restructuring national, peripheral and quasi-universal visions. Within and around the spectrum of the modern British Empire, however, especially at the turn of the century, the possibility had dawned of an unprecedented version of the universal (or of a world completely devoid of 'barbarians' to describe the 'global' in yet another way). Interestingly, under this circumstance it was the 'classicized' rather than the traditional/historical version of the Roman legacy that provided more appropriate tools for national, European and 'universal' redefinitions.

## **VII. 'Pax Europea' and 'Pax Romana': J. A. Hobson's Assessment of the Prospects of the Early Twentieth-Century Imperialist World**

Bryce's perspective on the British Empire, the Roman imperial legacy and its modern 'global' aspects may be fruitfully compared with the vision of the modern imperialist world at the dawn of the twentieth century, as it emerges in J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), a seminal text of the twentieth-century critique of imperialism. Although Hobson was an active liberal academic and a prolific essayist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,<sup>47</sup> his work is considered to prefigure the classical Marxist analysis of imperialism as exemplified in V. I. Lenin's

*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). It is also considered to have influenced the Marxist tradition ever since.<sup>48</sup>

In *Imperialism*, Hobson provided an economic and political analysis of “new imperialism” (as he saw the imperialism of his times) that linked the rise of monopolies and financial capital with an economic theory of under-consumption.<sup>49</sup> Since the eighteen seventies, Hobson argued, these economic developments had led to the adoption of elite-inspired militarist policies across Europe. These, in turn, had enhanced nationalist competition across the globe, had corroded traditions of popular self-government in the colonizing countries and had imposed ‘despotism’ upon subordinate peoples.

Without going into further detail about the economic core of Hobson’s theory, it is worth noting some of the major characteristics of his perspective, in order to place him in the context of the discussion above. First, Hobson was clearly an internationalist, while he subscribed to a classical liberal interpretation of nationalism as “a plain highway to internationalism”. He juxtaposed imperialism with both these ideas, arguing that imperialism was “a perversion” of the nature and the purpose of nationalism, as well as an impediment to “the movement towards internationalism”.<sup>50</sup>

Second, Hobson distinguished very clearly between the actual “despotic” British Empire of his time, ruling over “sub-tropical territory, with large populations of savages or ‘lower races’”, and the dreams of contemporary imperialists concerning a federation of self-governing white colonies.<sup>51</sup> He did not raise the issue of possible alternative choices between a benign, federalist version of Empire and an absolutist one. In his work, “undemocratic” and even “despotic” government appeared as an intrinsic characteristic of all imperialism, both in the sense that the colonies were ruled in an authoritarian manner, and in the sense that imperialism, fostering militarist policies and mentalities, had already become a formidable enemy of democracy and social reform *within* the mother countries.<sup>52</sup>

In an analysis so focused on the interdependence between economic, social and political phenomena taking place in the domestic, national domain and corresponding phenomena taking place in the imperial/worldwide context, it is not surprising that there was no clear-cut conceptual barrier between ‘Europe’ and the wider world. The arguments and the terminology of *Imperialism* indicate that Hobson’s understanding of the ‘global’ was an elaboration of his conceptualization of Europe. More specifically, what connected Europe and the wider world in his text was not the notion of a dynamic dissemination of European civilization, conquering and amalgamating the whole in virtue of its material and intellectual superiority (as it was for Bryce), but rather a dark vision of the future, according to which imperialism and militarism, emanating from the European colonial powers, would gradually engulf the whole world in relentless war. “The present tendencies of imperialism, plainly make in this direction”, argued Hobson, “involving in their recoil a degradation of Western states and a possible *débâcle* of Western civilization.”<sup>53</sup>

Hobson applied to the ‘global’ domain thus construed a theory about the nefarious consequences of imperialism that was originally conceived in relation to a national (in this case a British) frame of reference. Consequently, his critique evolved simultaneously on two levels: on a national *cum* imperial plane and on a collective ‘Western’ plane, the latter incorporating within its pale the dependencies and colonies in virtue of their particular relationships with their respective colonial centers. What ce-

mented the whole was a notional analogy: as imperialism corroded and endangered each national body, so it corroded and endangered "the civilized world" as a collective whole.

This duality was also born out in his deployment of the Roman imperial paradigm, which played a significant role in his narrative. First, Hobson deployed certain central themes of the traditional critique of the Roman Empire in order to corroborate his own arguments. Most prominently, he transcribed the traditional critique of luxury as a destroyer of public virtue to a modern idiom, in order to denounce the economic and social "parasitism" on subordinate peoples fostered by imperialism, and its consequences upon the metropolis. In a similar vein, he also raised the spectrum of an ultimate loss of Western autonomy, in virtue of metropolitan military dependence upon mercenary armies drawn from the colonies. In all instances of this critique by way of a 'Roman' analogy in his text, the parallels drawn between Rome and modernity worked simultaneously within a British (i.e. national) and on a collective 'Western' frame of reference.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, and at a deeper level, images of Rome as the common ancestor of the European or Western collectivity played an important role in Hobson's conceptualization of the 'global'. It is indicative in this respect, that whenever Hobson discussed the prospects of a future 'Western' or global 'federation', he made references to the paradigm of Rome. His perspective on this issue was ambiguous. Although he was not opposed to "an experimental and progressive federation" amongst the "civilized" nations built on the basis of "common experience",<sup>55</sup> he warned against the prospect of a federation "of Western nations and their colonial offspring" that would follow the Roman example. He believed that all such projects were doomed "if the strength of their combination was used for the same parasitic purposes, and the white races, discarding labour in its most arduous forms, live a sort of world aristocracy by the exploitation of 'lower races', while they hand over the policing of the world more and more to members of these same races".<sup>56</sup> And he concluded:

*These dangers would certainly arise if a federation of European States were simply of a variant of the older Empires, using a pax Europea for similar purposes and seeking to maintain it by the same methods as those employed under the so-called pax Romana. The issue is a great one, furnishing, in fact, the supreme test of modern civilization.<sup>57</sup>*

In concluding this article, we should note that at the dawn of their own 'new' century (a century which, in our early twenty-first century eyes, seems heavily burdened with 'history'), intellectuals like James Bryce and J. A. Hobson turned once more to the legacies of ancient Rome in order to find intellectual and conceptual support in negotiating the present and the future condition of their late nineteenth-century world. In their discourses, Imperial Rome appeared in both its guises: in its quasi-federal, 'European' version and in its 'absolutist', 'classicized' one. Nevertheless, the actual imperialist contingency of their times, as well as their premonitions concerning a 'globalized' amalgamated future, tended to shift the balance in their perspectives, as well as the thrust of their critical arguments towards the 'classical', absolutist version of the 'Roman Imperial Legacy'.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Canning's 'break' with the reactionary policies of the Holy Alliance, its positive repercussions for his popularity in Britain and the construction of the notion of a 'Canningite legacy' in British foreign policy is well described in the Harold Temperley's classic work, *The Foreign Policy of Canning 1822–1827: England the Neo-Holy Alliance and the New World*, London: Bell, 1925. On the importance of Palmerston's liberal rhetoric on European politics, especially during the revolutions of 1848 and the Crimean War, see in particular Donald Southgate, *The Most English Minister ...': The Policies and Politics of Palmerston*, London: Macmillan, 1966; and also Kingsley Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston: A Study of Public Opinion in England before the Crimean war*, London: Hutchinson, 1963. For an excellent exposition of the language of Gladstonian liberalism, see Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992, pp. 31–83, while for detailed analyses of his European politics see the biography by R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone, 2 vols*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982–1999.
- 2 See in particular, Henry Weisser, *British Working-Class Movements and Europe, 1815–1848*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1975, *passim*; Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics 1848–1874*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993, *passim*; Derek Beales, "Garibaldi in England: The Politics of Italian Enthusiasm", in John A. Davis and Paul Ginsborg (eds.), *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, pp. 184–216; Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy 1860–86*, London: Allen Lane, 1976, pp. 100–105; Biagini, *Liberty Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 41–50.
- 3 Opponents considered his policy as an attempt to enhance the military establishment and the power of the Crown at the expense of Parliament. The term 'imperialism' was introduced to establish a parallel with French 'imperialisme', i.e. the kind of policy propagated by Napoleon III after 1852. See Anon, "English Imperialism", *Spectator*, 8 April 1876, pp. 457–458, and Robert Lowe, "Imperialism", *Fortnightly Review* 24 (1878), pp. 453–465, both reprinted in Peter Cain (ed.), *Empire and Imperialism: the Debate of the 1870s*, South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1999.
- 4 An early example of this was Palmerston's famous parliamentary speech on the *Don Pacifico* affair, the well-known Anglo-Greek diplomatic episode that led to the blockade of Piraeus in 1850. In this speech he attempted a wholesale defense of his foreign policy and concluded with the adage, '*civis romanus sum*', thereby stating that, following the example of Rome, his policy aimed at securing the rights of all British citizens, wherever they may be, according to the principles of British law.
- 5 Warren Hastings, Governor General of the East India Company in Bengal from 1772 to 1783, was accused of systematic and rapacious abuses of authority during his tenure in office. Edmund Burke, who was an MP at the time, was instrumental in bringing formal impeachment charges against him in 1786. The trial at the House of Lords (1788–1794) opened up a heated and widely publicized debate not only on the role of the East India Company, but also on the role of the British government in respect to India. For a recent scholarly assessment of the episode and Burke's role in it, see Unday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 115–189.
- 6 See Bernard Semmel, *The Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin*, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1993, pp. 27–33.

- 7 For a comparison between Dilke and Froude, see the introduction to Cain, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–9.
- 8 J. A. Hobson, in the early 20th century, discerned a corresponding tendency amongst the British public: “A curious blindness seems to beset the mind of the average educated Briton when he is asked to picture himself our colonial Empire. Almost instinctively he visualizes Canada, Australia, and South Africa – the rest he virtually ignores.” J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1965 (1905), p. 125.
- 9 James Mill (1819–1836) and John Stuart Mill (1823–1857) held high posts in the East India Company. T. B. Macaulay (1800–1859) was secretary of the Board of Control, which supervised the East India Company from 1832, and a member of the Supreme Council of India from 1834 to 1838. During his service, he promulgated a penal code for India and promoted an educational system based on Western principles.
- 10 The involvement of the Mills with empire building, especially James Mill’s depreciation of Indian institutions and cultural traditions in his *History of India* (6 vols, 1917), has provoked significant scholarly interest, leading to critical reassessments of their utilitarian and liberal ideas. Cf. Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959, pp. 47–80; Mehta, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–114 and *passim*.
- 11 Protagonists at this stage, both on the level of discourse and on the level of action, were pioneers of colonial expansion like Cecil Rhodes in Africa (from 1880) and colonial administrators like Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer, Consul General in Egypt, 1883–1907), Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India, 1898–1905) and Alfred Milner (High Commissioner of South Africa, 1897–1905). On the relationship between their visions of Empire and racism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 3rd ed., London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 206–216; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism (Part Two: Imperialism)*, new ed., Orlando: Harcourt, 1976, pp. 207–221.
- 12 See C. C. Eldridge, *Disraeli and the Rise of a New Imperialism*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996, *passim*.
- 13 See Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1983*, London and New York: Longman, 2nd ed., 1984, pp. 129–139.
- 14 Most prominently, Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1895 to 1903, and the South African colonial administrator Alfred Milner. See in particular, Alfred Milner, “Introduction”, in *idem*, *The Nation and the Empire* (1913), pp. xi–xlvii and “The Imperialist Creed”, *ibid.*, pp. 135–152. Milner’s *The Nation and the Empire* has been reprinted in Ewen Green (ed.), *The Ideals of Empire: Political and Economic Thought, 1903–1913*, vol. 6, London: Routledge, 1998.
- 15 Milner, *The Nation and the Empire*, p. 121 (from a ‘Speech in London on Empire Day’, 1906).
- 16 Introvert in the sense that, for Milner and imperialists of his ilk, the imaginary ‘interior’ space of the British nation was so expansive, that it appeared almost to engulf the very notion of ‘the universal’.
- 17 See Eldridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–67.
- 18 On republicanism and civic humanism in Britain and America, see mainly J. G. Pocock, *The Machiavelian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003 and Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

- 19 See J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981, and especially his comments on T. B. Macaulay, pp. 36–93.
- 20 See mainly, Frank Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981 and idem, "Why the Greeks and not the Romans in Victorian Britain?", in G. W. Clarke and J. C. Eade (eds.), *Rediscovering Hellenism: The Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, pp. 61–81.
- 21 See Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, pp. 228–235.
- 22 Edward Dicey, "Mr Gladstone and our Empire" [from *Nineteenth Century* 2 (September 1877)], pp. 292–308], reprinted in Cain (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 225.
- 23 N. Vance, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–79, J. A. Froude, *Caesar. A Sketch*, London: Longman & Green, 1879.
- 24 Barthold Georg Niebuhr's 3-volumed *Römische Geschichte* (1811–12, new ed. 1827–32), was translated in English by Julius Hare, Connop Thirwall and William Smith between 1828 and 1842. The issues raised by Niebuhr were mainly methodological, concerning the status of mythical narratives in relation to historiography and signaling the gradual turn of German historians towards oral traditions and the culture of the Germanic Volk. Niebuhr's method and spirit of influenced a number of British historians and encouraged them to develop a critical historiography of Rome. Most prominent among them were Thomas Arnold, who wrote a *History of Rome*, 3 vols, 1838–43, and T. B. Macaulay, who published his less scholarly, but immensely popular, *Lays of Ancient Rome* in 1842.
- 25 Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, 3 vols, Leipzig and Berlin, 1854–56. On his reception in Britain, see E. A. Freeman, "Mommsen's History of Rome", *National Review*, April 1859 and Appendix to *Saturday Review*, 28 March 1868, both in E. A. Freeman, *Historical Essays*, second series, 2nd ed., London 1880, pp. 290–317, 318–323.
- 26 John M. Robertson, *Patriotism and Empire*, 3rd ed., London: Richards, 1900, pp. 151–157 (151).
- 27 See, in particular, John Robertson, "Empire and Union: Two concepts of the Early Modern European Political Order", in John Robertson (ed.), *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, pp. 3–36; John M. Headley, "The Habsburg Empire and the Revival of Ghibellism" in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1978), pp. 93–127.
- 28 For an account of the roots of these ideas, see Franz Bosbach, "The European Debate on Universal Monarchy", in David Armitage (ed.), *Theories of Empire, 1450–1800*, Burlington: Ashgate, 1998, pp. 81–98.
- 29 In fact, criticism of the Napoleonic Empire drew from both the 'universal monarchy' tradition and the 'classical' repertoire concerning the corruption and the fall of the Romans. Occasionally, Napoleonic France was also compared with Athens during the Peloponnesian War.
- 30 Carl Retslag, *Political Sketches: Twelve Chapters on the Struggles of the Age*, London, 1954, p. 13.
- 31 Thomas Arnold, *History of Rome*, 3 vols, London: Bickers, 1838–43, and a new edition, 1849.
- 32 E. A. Freeman, *The Chief Periods of European History: Six Lectures Read in the University of Oxford in Trinity Term, 1885*, London: Macmillan, 1886.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 176–185.

- 34 After a successful academic career in Oxford, where he was Regius Professor of Civil Law from 1870 to 1873 and cofounder of the *English Historical Review* with Lord Acton in 1885, Bryce entered into an interesting political and diplomatic career with the Liberal party. He wrote *The American Commonwealth* (3 vols) in 1888, he publicly opposed the Second Boer War, he served as ambassador to the US between 1907 and 1913, and finally became a member of the Permanent Court of Justice at The Hague in 1914 and one of the most active promoters of the establishment of the League of Nations.
- 35 James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 8th ed., London: Macmillan, 1889, p. 8.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–239.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 361–363.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 163–164.
- 39 On the general ideological and political outlook of Bryce and other university liberals of his generation, see Harvie, *op. cit.*, pp. 141–173.
- 40 Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*, p. 364.
- 41 Here I have used James Bryce, *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India*, published together with idem, *The Diffusion of Roman and English Law Throughout the World*, London: Oxford UP, 1914.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–19.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–31.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–78.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
- 47 See Philip Siegelman's introduction to J. A. Hobson, *op. cit.*, pp. v–xvi.
- 48 See Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey*, 2nd ed., London and New York: Routledge, 1980, p. 73, Semmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 110–121, Siegelman, *op. cit.*, p. v.
- 49 For a summary of Hobson's theory, see Brewer, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–87. Hobson distinguished this new imperialism from earlier versions of imperial politics thus: "The new Imperialism differs from the older, first in substituting for the ambition of a single growing empire the theory and the practice of competing empires, each motivated by similar lusts of political aggrandisement and commercial gain; secondly, in the dominance of financial or investing over mercantile interests", Hobson, *op. cit.*, p. 304.
- 50 See Hobson, "Nationalism and Imperialism", in *op. cit.*, pp. 3–13 (11).
- 51 Hobson, p. 124 and also p. 125 where he wrote: "Imperialism is the very antithesis of this free, wholesome colonial connection ..."
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 133–152.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

- 54** *Ibid.*, pp. 150–152 and 364–368.
- 55** *Ibid.*, pp. 168–171 (169). Hobson believed that the accelerated intercommunication of persons, goods and information amongst the peoples of Europe had already fostered the common experience that was necessary for overcoming national antagonisms. He considered imperialism and “class government” as the main impediments to internationalism and federalization in the European context.
- 56** *Ibid.*, pp. 194–195.
- 57** *Ibid.*, p. 195.