

# H-Net Reviews

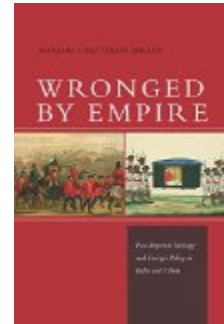
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Manjari Chatterjee Miller. *Wronged by Empire: Post-Imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China*. Studies in Asian Security Series. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013. 308 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-8843-4.

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In *Wronged by Empire: Post-Imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China*, Manjari Chatterjee Miller argues that it is impossible to understand India's and China's foreign policy without understanding the impact of their colonial past on their respective self-perception and identity. Miller uses trauma theory drawn from psychology and shows that colonialism was a "transformative historical event" that caused a "collective trauma" (historical, cultural, and social) to these societies. As a consequence, "post-imperial ideology" or PII is an essential component of their national identity and international outlook (p. 7). Miller prefers to use the term "post-imperial" to set her work apart from postcolonial theory.

Miller contends that PII influences state behavior in three important ways in post-imperial polities. The dominant goal of these states in international relations is that of victimhood which leads these states to position themselves as victims and cast states that are harming them or causing suffering as victimizers. Additionally they also want to be recognized and empathized with as victims in the international system. This mentality of victimhood leads these states to seek two other subordinate goals: maximizing territorial sovereignty and maximizing status. According to Miller, the impact of PII is most apparent when states perceive a threat to their sovereignty, when borders viewed as nonnegotiable are contested, and when a state's prestige is at stake.

Miller argues that the dominant theories of state behavior that come from realism (and its variants), liberal theories, and even norm-based theories are either drawn from European/Western history or do not ad-

equately analyze the behavior of non-Western states. Even when non-Western states do receive attention in these traditional approaches, they are differentiated from their Western counterparts on the assumption that economic and material capabilities are the sole basis of distinguishing them from the more developed nations. Consequently, Miller argues that her PII-based approach offers a systematic way to treat history (specifically colonial history) as an explanatory (and therefore as a causal) variable. Miller's work deserves credit simply because this point is often overlooked in the traditional theories of international relations. Therefore, Miller's assertion that the behavior of post-imperial states will be different from their counterparts in the international system that were not colonized is a useful contribution to the literature.

However, Miller is somewhat unclear (and even tautological) about the relationship between her concept of PII and the goals that this ideology generates. To be sure, Miller does discuss how societies remember their past, who the agents of this collective remembrance are, and why this past is remembered. While the dominant goal of victimhood logically emerges from this memory of trauma, it is not clear where the subordinate goals come from. On the one hand, Miller asserts that the dominant goal of victimhood and the subordinate goals of maximizing territorial sovereignty and status "constitute" a PII (p. 8). On the other hand, she argues that the influence of PII becomes apparent when states feel a threat to their territorial sovereignty or prestige. This is problematic because while building the maximization of territorial sovereignty and prestige into the concept of PII, we are told that the impact of PII can be tested under exactly

these very conditions.

It is curious why these traumatized states do not seek other goals, such as an apology from their former colonizers or reparations for the material trauma caused to them. Arguably, an important goal that any victim should seek is an apology. Furthermore, given that Miller's focus is on states that were the victims of "extractive" as opposed to "settler" colonialism, why should these states not demand what they think that the colonizers owe them economically? In other words, it is not adequately explained why the dominant goal of victimhood theoretically leads to the two subordinate goals that Miller claims and not others.

The empirical part of Miller's work is a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis. In the quantitative section of her work, Miller aims to show that even though decolonization was largely complete by the 1960s, the post-imperial states still exhibit a sense of victimhood. To demonstrate this, Miller statistically analyzed 2,545 United Nations General Debate speeches from 1993 to 2007 to show that the discourse of states that were once colonized was very different from those that were not, and that the speeches of the post-imperial states exhibited a strong sense of victimization. Miller's decision to use these speeches stems from the fact that the United Nations is the largest forum of recognized states in the world and that the top leaders from all over the world (prime ministers, presidents, foreign ministers, etc.) participate in the General Debates.

Miller statistically analyzed the words used by the colonized and non-colonized states in these speeches and then compared her analysis with two hundred alternative ways of randomly partitioning all the countries in the world (other than by their colonial status) to demonstrate that the difference between the words used by colonized and non-colonized states was statistically significant. Miller is largely successful in this task and it is interesting to note that this sense of victimhood has persisted even decades after decolonization.

Miller focuses on India and China in her substantive cases. She also uses data crunching of print and online media in these countries in her analysis. In particular, she looks at three cases: the 1960 border negotiations between India and China (their last set of negotiations before the 1962 Sino-Indian War); India's decision to declare nuclear weapons status in 1998; and the Chinese decision to oppose Japan's entry into the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2005 (which continues until this day).

Miller's choice of India and China as the most important postcolonial states is interesting given that they are both rising powers in the current international system. Miller argues that we need to move beyond simple security explanations of their behavior and include their sense of victimhood (and recovery of status in international relations) if we are to adequately understand the behavior of Asia's rising giants. However, Miller's discussion of the impact of colonialism on India and China leaves the reader with an important (but unanswered) question: why does India lack an equivalent of the Chinese discourse of "national humiliation" or "century of humiliation" (p. 13)? In fact, as Miller notes, India's current prime minister, Manmohan Singh, has even spoken about the beneficial legacies of colonialism (in Britain, no less)! While it is true that this is not the only Indian response to colonialism, and that a sense of victimhood certainly does exist, how can we explain the difference with China especially given that India was a formal colony while China was never formally colonized? Could it be that there are different types of victims leading to different perceptions of victimhood? Could these different perceptions of victimhood lead to different international behaviors? These are some important questions that Miller's work raises for the future.

However, and more problematically, Miller does not theoretically explain the choice of her three substantial cases: the 1960 Sino-Indian border negotiations, India's nuclear decision in 1998, and the 2005 Chinese response to the issue of Japan's UNSC membership. While the first two cases (all three are discussed below) are not directed against the former colonial power, China's ire in 2005 was directed against Japan, which had successfully converted large parts of China into a (semi-)colony in the first half of the twentieth century. It would have been helpful if Miller had discussed why India's relationship with Britain is so different from China's relationship with Japan, and why India has never reacted as angrily and passionately against Britain since independence as China's response to Japan in 2005.

Miller argues that even as colonizing powers receive considerable blame by the post-imperial states, new victimizers not related to colonial-era exploitation readily emerge as a consequence of PII. Therefore by 1960, both China and India perceived themselves as victims and the other as the victimizer and refused to budge on the issue of territorial give-and-take (given that PII leads to the aim of maximizing territorial sovereignty). More specifically, Miller states that it was not security issues per se, but PII that led to the breakdown of the 1960 negotiations. She

raises three specific issues to support her argument that the security rationale was not dominant. Firstly, why did India undertake an extremely risky military action—the forward policy—during and after the negotiations instead of being more conciliatory? Secondly, if security issues had been paramount, then China would not have offered the trade between the eastern and western sectors of the border. Finally, if security issues had been paramount then China would not have declared a unilateral cease-fire and withdrawal in late 1962 after the war. However, Miller seems to have missed the security rationale behind all of these issues.

Firstly, India undertook the risky forward policy in response to China's move westward (into the no-man's land between the Chinese and Indian military positions in the western sector) as China sought to provide defense-in-depth to the Aksai Chin Road after Sino-Indian relations deteriorated in 1959.[1] Secondly, China was willing to swap territories because the control over Aksai Chin Road—the only all-weather route between China and Tibet at this time that was open throughout the year—was central to China's control over Tibet. This was also the only road connecting any part of China with Tibet that was not attacked by the Tibetans after the beginning of political unrest in Tibet in the 1950s. However, the regions in what today is India's Arunachal Pradesh (in the eastern sector) that are claimed by China are not militarily important for China's control over Tibet. Thirdly and finally, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrawal for military-security reasons. As just noted, control over the territories in the eastern sector was not militarily important for China's control over Tibet (the region from where China withdrew its forces). Furthermore, China also faced a military-logistical challenge in controlling territory south of the Himalayas. Finally, the United States had also begun to provide military support to India (as India had approached Washington and because the Cuban Missile Crisis had ended by this time), and therefore China may have feared a long-drawn war and perhaps even an escalation of military hostilities because of the American support to India. It seems like the security rationale can explain the questions raised by Miller.

On the issue of India's 1998 nuclear decision, Miller argues that a rising India was worried about the status that was being denied to it by the U.S.-led nuclear order created by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Given PII, India thought of itself as a victim of the nuclear club led by the United States. Miller raises an important

and still disputed question: if security was India's prime concern, then why did India not test for more than two decades after its 1974 nuclear test? According to Miller, it was the force of the nuclear treaties in the 1990s—the indefinite extension of the NPT and the signing of the CTBT—at a time when India began to perceive itself as a rising power that fueled India's sense of victimhood and resulted in the 1998 nuclear tests to defy institutionalized discrimination.

However, Miller again underappreciates the role of security factors in India's decision. Miller's analysis of security factors misses the nuclear and missile cooperation between China and Pakistan that began in 1976. This cooperation is even believed to have resulted in the transfer of a nuclear weapon design by China to Pakistan in 1983.[2] Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the Indian government was openly complaining about the China-Pakistan nuclear and missile relationship. Under American pressure, India was forced not to test its nuclear weapons in 1983 and 1995. Furthermore, China continued to conduct nuclear tests until 1996 (even when the CTBT talks were underway). While PII may be able to explain the timing of India's nuclear tests in 1998, the decision to go nuclear was clearly rooted in security-related factors.

Miller's final case is about the 2005 protests in China on the issue of Japan's membership in the UNSC. Given PII, China did not wish for Japan to achieve a status equal to that of China in the world's premier international (security) institution, especially because China was concerned that Japan had not come to terms with its imperial past and therefore it must not be rewarded. PII seems like a plausible explanation in this regard. However, as noted earlier, the Sino-Japanese case actually represents the colonized-colonizer dyad unlike the other cases in Miller's study.

At the same time, Miller claims that China first supported the German and Brazilian bids for UNSC membership in 2002. Furthermore, China also supported India's bid for a permanent seat in 2005 when the anti-Japanese riots were ongoing. If true, then can it be concluded that China no longer views India as a victimizer? Or is the victim-victimizer relationship issue-specific (and therefore cannot be extended to the Sino-Indian border)? If it is issue-specific, then the relationship between Miller's "dominant goal" of victimhood and the subordinate goals of maximizing territorial sovereignty and maximizing status needs to be redefined because it means that while China will try to maximize territorial sovereignty with

India, it will not try to maximize status (as China seems to be willing to give India the same status at the UNSC according to Miller). However, the Sino-Indian border issue has remained intractable.

There is yet one more important issue that must be raised. Do post-imperial states always see themselves as victims? Was India acting as a post-imperial “victim” when it blockaded Nepal or when it militarily intervened in Sri Lanka in the late 1980s? Is China’s support of the North Korean regime or its foreign aid to several African nations in recent years being driven by a sense of victimhood? In other words, against who is PII actually invoked? Is it always against an economically and militarily powerful “other”? If that is the case, then traditional power-based explanations may still have a very important role to play, although PII will certainly provide a richer description of the cases in question.

While Miller’s main insight—that post-imperial states behave differently in international relations than states that were not colonized—is a refreshing addition to the

international relations literature, it leaves several theoretical questions unanswered as discussed above. Nevertheless, this is an important contribution to the international relations literature for systematically treating colonial history as a causal variable. Miller should also be commended for her work raises interesting questions for future research.

#### Notes

[1]. Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 11. This was certainly not the only reason; domestic politics and civil-military relations in India were also important factors. However, the security imperative was very much a part of this process.

[2]. Center for Non-Proliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, “China’s Nuclear Exports and Assistance to Pakistan,” [http://cns.mis.edu/archive/country\\_india/china/npakpos.htm](http://cns.mis.edu/archive/country_india/china/npakpos.htm) (updated August 1999).

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