



On the death of a Queen Elizabeth II (ERII) is dead, and it appears as if the entire world – or at least that portion on social media – has something to say about her, the Crown, and the British monarchy. My own relationship with ERII is, I would like to think, cool and distanced. When I started thinking seriously about my own social location as a Goan in India I realised that the history of British India, and consequently the Indian attachments to Britain, weren't really as close to me as I had been taught. My history was more properly that of Portuguese India, and my relationship with the British, and British Indians, could also be routed through a Portuguese lens. I have found this way of looking at Britain, and all things British (including British India) hugely useful since it provided an alternate grounding, and a more dispassionate way of relating to the British, British-Indian, and Anglophone world around me. None of this is to contradict the fact that as a privileged Goan growing up in the Indian nation-state, and a British-Indian mother, I was raised up as an Anglophone, and consequently Anglophile. But in this, I realised after living in Portugal for more than a decade, I was not dissimilar to the privileged segments of Portuguese society, many of whom are substantially Anglophile.

It is this curious relationship that all of us, across the world, have with Britain, and British institutions, that has occasioned this outpouring of response to the death of ERII. One aspect of this relationship was very succinctly captured by Frank Cottrell-Boyce when writing for *The Guardian*:

“One of the reasons the Queen’s death feels so huge is that she was a living connection with that postwar consensus, that attempt to build a better nation and a rules-based world. A vision that is being demolished even as we plan her funeral. Ten years ago, we lived in a world of divided opinion. Now, we live in a world of divided reality.”

Consensus was the word that jumped out at me when I read this passage. ERII was in fact the epitome of a world that revolved around a consensus, at the heart of which, was a socio-cultural one, and perhaps this is what ERII, with her all-important dress-sense and etiquette, represented best – a way of being, and doing things that everyone agreed with.

This is not to say that the consensus was democratically reached, or that everyone who was a part of the consensus agreed with it wholeheartedly. But thanks to Britain’s couple of centuries in the sun – to put it politely – it was central to determining the way in which we all behaved, from the British-Indians who were a subject population of the British Crown, to the Portuguese, who, though not a subject population, nevertheless had a less than equal relationship with the Crown.

The consensus worked because there was something in it for all of us. Above all there was a



discourse of fairness that one could appeal to. Even if this fairness was not necessarily realised in the operation of the British Empire, the discourse ensured that one could hold Britain accountable, then, and in the future. There was also, as I suggested earlier, a socio-cultural consensus eventually rooted in western European Christianity, that made us better people. Women were treated as social superiors, there was a way one behaved at the dining table, there was a way one dressed. All these were important, because it enabled us to create a uniformity, a level playing field, that allowed us to understand one another. After post-modernism and post-colonialism, as Cotterll-Boyce rightly points out, that world has disappeared. We don't live in a world of divided opinion any more; we live in a world of divided reality. As contemporary Indian politics itself demonstrates, we can't even agree on the reality of the world we live in since our points of departure are so radically different.

ERII's death represents the disappearance of that world that we were all used to, and we must all be sorry for her death, because the fading away of the world she embodied makes our lives that much poorer and unstable.

As should be obvious from the tangential references above, I am well aware of the critique of the continuing violence of the British Empire. However, I would like to once again stress that the Empire also built into its operation a discourse that has allowed for it to be taken to task. One can think of the way in which this was ensured in the case of the Mau Mau rebellion, or the case of the Gurkhas. I fear the same cannot be said for the dissensus that represents the alternative to ERII's world.

Take, for example, the horrific responses to ERII's death. I offer only one, particularly troubling response, that of Uju Anya, a professor at the Carnegie-Mellon University, who reportedly tweeted: "I heard the chief monarch of a thieving raping genocidal empire is finally dying. May her pain be excruciating". Just so that we don't forget the context, this vitriol was directed at a ninety-four-year-old woman, who has been a figure-head at best, and for all we know done her best to moderate things she was capable of moderating.

Sadly, Anya's response is not an aberration, but true of a good number of persons who identify as "woke". This kind of self-righteous indignation, and the willingness to inflict harm on a representative of an order one is opposed to, is becoming increasingly common, whether by persons on the right, or on the left, or centre. If this horrific incapacity to distinguish between a person and an institution, and to wish ill to a person, particularly one who is not directly responsible for the actions attributed to her, is the world that woke activists wish, then this is not a world, or better still a consensus, I would like to be a part of.

The Catholic Church teaches in its Catechism that one may *not* engage in armed resistance to oppression by political authority, if one cannot ensure that the resistance will not provoke

worse disorders. This teaching offers us a definite lesson in the current and similar cases: if you resist to colonial, or other, oppression is to justify unequal violence against often-innocent actors, and inaugurate a worse system than that which preceded it, then you are a part of the problem, not a part of the solution. There is no doubt that ERII was a figurehead not only for the genteel consensus I speak about but an Empire that has unleashed much violence that continues to wreak havoc. However, our response to this violence cannot, and must not, be to unleash more violence. Our response must be to unleash, what the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the [Catholic] Church, calls “a civilisation of love”.

It bears reminding that none of us is innocent of violence, and that we are all figures trapped within our own contradictions. I believe that ERII attempted to do her best despite the contradictions she was born into. In many ways, her heir, King Charles III represents continued attempts to do good despite the contradictions he has been born into. Let us wish him luck.

The Queen is dead. Long live the King.

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