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Beyond Wilful Ignorance: A British Truth-Telling Commission on Colonialism?

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Post-, anti- and decolonial scholarship and activism have long highlighted the Western imperial origins, inequalities, and violence of today's global political, economic, and cultural structures. Yet, in Britain, more than half of all people surveyed in 2014 were either proud (44%) or apathetic (23%) about colonialism and its harms, while 21% of Brits surveyed regret colonialism (Dahlgreen, 2014). The English history curriculum does not prioritise colonialism: the teaching of colonialism is a suggestion rather than a statutory requirement (Department for Education, 2013; Izzidien, 2018). The pre- and post-Brexit impetus to 'take back our borders', and return to Global Britain and a strengthened relationship with the Commonwealth is articulated by British politicians with little sense of irony or self-reflection on the past and ongoing impacts of British imperialism. The need to acknowledge and redress colonial harms is not a constitutive part of government or opposition policy. This roundtable asks what can be done in Britain to counter the wilful ignorance of British politicians and much of the British public and to facilitate a reckoning with Britain's imperial past? To orient discussions, the roundtable will begin with an initial proposition taken from the scholarship and practice of transitional justice: a British Truth-Telling Commission on Colonialism as a means of decentring the Eurocentric narrative of imperialism. From there, we will consider the following questions *et al.*: is a truth-telling commission the right option, or are there better alternatives? What should the objectives be? What should the process be? What are the potential limitations and harms? What are the potential benefits?

Track Classification: Colonial, Postcolonial and Decolonial Working Group