

The ‘dim afterglow’ of imperialism – Postcolonialism and the United Nations in the 20th century

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The literature around the United Nations is vast – much of it produced for and by the United Nations itself. When reading this enormous trove of information, it is tempting to buy into its near-utopian, exultant characterization of internationalism, with its “heavier than usual dose of special pleading and wishful thinking”¹ satisfying in its condemnation of narrow-minded unilateralists and nationalists, and in its embrace of globalisation. However, a more critical analysis of the founding of the United Nations invites a cynicism about its purposes and origins (a scepticism that contemporary leaders often possessed themselves). At its inception, the United Nations did not embody an anticolonial, emancipatory spirit: rather, founding powers, in particular France and Britain, envisaged it as an institution to maintain peace while preserving their empire. This ‘imperial internationalism’, to adopt Mazower’s influential revisionist phrase, was not just limited to its foundational articles and ideals. Racialised, neo-colonial tropes often informed the staff and bureaucrats responsible for its environmental and developmental efforts as well. Yet, these earlier neo-imperial sentiments did not determine the UN’s character, as new discourses surrounding decolonisation emerged. This was particularly evident in the 1960s, with a global momentum towards decolonisation, as well as the growing autonomy of UN agencies and the dispersal of their functions, causing the UN to take on a markedly anti-imperial character. Where agencies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had previously imposed ideas surrounding ‘culture’ and conservation onto colonial, or even newly decolonized territories, they now seemed to sincerely espouse a turn away from Eurocentric narratives of history and identity, and towards the diverse communities within the ‘Global South’. Even within the hierarchical Security Council (UNSC) and an enlarging General Assembly (UNGA) comprised of formally equal states, the UN appeared to be more inclusive and anti-imperial. Nonetheless, the problems which the UN now had to grapple with did not stem from the empires of old, but in the eyes of some postcolonial and communist countries, a ‘neo-imperialism’ stemming from growing American hegemony and hence the recalcitrance of its most prominent, yet problematic actor. Understanding the waning of doctrines of ‘imperial internationalism’ reveals how the United Nations should be understood not as a monolithic corporate actor, but as a collection of institutions and platforms for state actors and even administrative staff. United Nations agendas and actions were

¹ Mazower 2008: 12

negotiated and developed, almost dialectically, through clashes and convergences in “competing universalisms”², not just a Western conception of security and rights.

The United Nations’ genealogical origins appear inextricably linked to imperialist thinking. Recent historiography has criticized teleological narratives of the UN, which attempt to trace its inception back to Enlightenment ideals³, or even an “idea of a universal association of humankind [going] back hundreds if not thousands of years”⁴, as Paul Kennedy’s influential *The Parliament of Man* proclaims. Instead, historians emphasize how wartime plans for the United Nations Organization (as it was then named) only envisioned a structure where great powers bore the greatest burdens of peace, while enjoying superior institutional privileges commensurate with their dominance. “Hierarchy, if not dictation would prevail”⁵. In the cynical view of Charles Webster, a civil servant involved in drafting the charter, the United Nations was an “alliance of the Great Powers embedded in a universal organization”⁶. This institutional setup preserved British and French imperialist ambitions, responding to the “constitutional reconfigurations” of these post-war empires⁷. A closer analysis of documents like the United Nations preamble, championing a universalist conception of human rights, reveals how these very ideals were undermined by the insincerity of its key architects and drafters. Mazower’s close, biographic analysis of Jan Smuts, the premier of South Africa, reconciles his genuine commitment to the United Nations with his outspoken advocacy for white settler rule. Smuts enmeshed nationalism and internationalism, treating commonwealth (per the British understanding) as a framework for international order under the aegis of white supremacy. Moreover, for Smuts, peace between the Americans and Soviets, which the UN would facilitate, meant that a white civilizing mission in Africa could continue⁸. After all, at the point of the UN’s inception, both anticolonial nationalists and colonial governments did not view colonial independence as an inevitable, or even a desirable, path⁹. The Charter was therefore conceptualized along the lines of pre-war liberal idealism and notions of colonial guidance. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that constitutional documents, written in generalities and referencing broad ideals, are intentionally left vague and their meanings

² Amrith & Sluga 2008: 253

³ As Emma Rothschild does

⁴ Quoted in Amrith & Sluga: 254

⁵ Morris 2018: 45

⁶ Quoted in Mazower 2008: 13

⁷ Mazower 2008: 29

⁸ *ibid*: 20-23, 31

⁹ This was especially the case in sub-Saharan Africa, which was not seen as strategically significant or an economic liability in the immediate aftermath of WWII. ‘Popular imperialism’ in fact seemed strengthened in France in the short-term, while the British saw Africa as the foundation of their colonial position and a source of economic and military support. See Cooper (2018) and Thomas (2016).

contested. Even if the United Nations was intended not to end colonialism, but to preserve empire for some key figures, these ‘architects’ did not possess a monopoly over the charter’s interpretation. Anti-imperialists who participated in the San Francisco Conference in April 1945, where the Charter was drafted, recognized that security, rather than equal rights for colonized societies, underwrote the organization. W.E.B Du Bois, writing to *Foreign Affairs* after, criticized this outlook for not going far enough “in facing realistically the greatest potential cause of war, the colonial system”¹⁰. His competing internationalist vision was one where the United Nations would “make clear and unequivocal the straightforward stand of the civilized world for race equality, and the universal application of the democratic way of life ... we cannot exist half slave and half free”¹¹. Du Bois’ expression of doubt at whether (peaceful) internationalisms could genuinely be imperial at the same time drew on a very different narrative, namely the violence of the American Civil War as driven by racial injustice. In contrast, even less avowed imperialists, such as Clement Attlee, still sought in late 1944 to retain the fundamental structure of colonial relations while moving to a concept of commonwealth (that replaced ‘trusteeship’ with ‘partnership’)¹². Nonetheless, at the point of 1945, the reality of power structures meant that the new internationalism represented by the United Nations was not a complete, emancipatory revision to the imperial status quo, instead being designed to cushion existing empires.

In the post-war period, imperialist and neo-imperialist agendas were often able to persist despite, or even through, the institutional capacities of the United Nations to intervene in colonial and post-colonial politics. The UN Special Committee on Non-Self-Governing Territories, established 1946, evolved as a *de facto* supervisory system for dependent territories. This expansion of international oversight required UN representatives to define ‘dependency’ and ‘self-government’. Colonial governments like France, Britain and Belgium therefore navigated a commitment to internationalism and attempts to preserve empire amidst United Nations scrutiny (especially from Chinese, Indian and Soviet delegates), but often did so *within* United Nations bodies themselves¹³. This Special Committee became a “privileged forum for both colonial and anti-colonial delegates” in a 15-year contest over the representation of colonial delegates. The Charter’s

¹⁰ Quoted in Darian-Smith 2012: 495

¹¹ *ibid*: 494

¹² Mazower 2006: 565

¹³ Pearson 2017

vague wording¹⁴ coupled with a functioning structure for international oversight¹⁵ led to conflict over whether the United Nations engendered a contractual, inviolable obligation from colonial governments towards colonized peoples, or whether, as colonial delegations argued, a supervisory and administrative role for the United Nations was explicitly rejected with such international activity constituting an interference with national sovereignty. As the Filipino delegate argued, respecting provisions for colonial accountability was necessary to ensure a wider compliance with other obligations of Chapter XI, providing grounds for anti-colonial delegations like Egypt, India, Indonesia to further recommendations on how colonial governments could fulfil their charter obligations. Even in the 1950s, the French perceived of themselves as occupying a “position of *judge and defendant* before the tribunal that is the United Nations”¹⁶: despite being a key part of the security architecture, power was evidently also decided through a battle of international public opinion. The rhetoric of anti-imperialism was appropriated by colonial states, as Sir Alan Burns did in his 1957 treatise *In Defence of Colonies*, arguing that British empire provided “greater liberty and better conditions of living”, than the squalor and “tyranny, inefficiency, or corruption” which newly independent countries faced¹⁷. Burns rallied against the new Soviet and American “post-war imperialism” practising a new form of “internal colonialism”, where an “educated minority ... controls the indigenous population”¹⁸. This form of differentiation between ‘colonial models’, although relying on a characterisation of American and Soviet societies today’s historians may find implausible, nonetheless suggest the increasing influence of ‘developmentalist’ discourse at the international level. It was no longer tenable to defend imperialism on moralistic grounds, and Burns grounded this imperialism with some reference to the welfare of colonized peoples. Beyond the Special Committee, other bodies like the International Court of Justice did not resolve issues of racism and imperialism, although this stemmed from how internationalism was ultimately grounded in the framework of the nation-state (and concomitant values of sovereignty). Widespread criticism within the UN against South Africa’s racial discrimination began in 1946, with India setting the agenda: the Yugoslav delegate condemned the “Hitlerite frame of mind”, and, with echoes of Du Bois, the Indian delegate cautioned of the “growing disharmony between races”¹⁹. Yet, neither an exposure of the hypocrisy of Smuts’ rhetoric of equality nor public condemnation from both the

¹⁴ The relevant provision was Chapter XI (‘Declaration Regarding non-Self-Governing Territories’) and Chapter XII and XIII, with colonial governments having to recognize “the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost ... the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories”, ensure “their political, economic, social advancement, their just treatment, and their protection against abuses”. To some extent *all* charters have to operate through generalities, but it was this ambiguity which colonial governments seized upon.

¹⁵ Article 73(e) stipulated that colonial governments provide regular reports on conditions of their colonies, but formally speaking was only a set of non-binding ‘guidelines’ that colonial governments could withdraw from.

¹⁶ Quoted in Pearson 2017: 526

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *Ibid*: 538

¹⁹ Quoted in Mazower 2008: 128

communist and Afro-Asian blocs could decisively challenge the colonial injustices of the country. The complex debates emerging within various United Nations forums and bodies point to how imperial characteristics and agendas within international institutions were increasingly challenged over the 1950s, with neither side decisively able to define the internationalism of the United Nations. Yet, firm outbursts of anti-imperial condemnation suggest the inherent limitations of any United Nations-centric internationalism being *anti-imperial* – by design, national sovereignty was nigh-inviolable, and colonial countries were free to ignore, or even withdraw from anti-imperialist efforts.

Even UN agendas perceived to be benign in nature, such as conservation, entailed approaches and policy informed by racialised stereotypes and colonial ideas of sovereignty and stewardship. Julian Huxley, UNESCO's founder, at the 1947 Mexico Conference, would argue for the inclusion of nature on its agenda, contending that there was a clear culture dimension to enjoying the natural world, and for the existence of scientific obligations of preserving "rare and interesting animals and plants"²⁰. Yet Huxley himself embodied "the crossover of the old school preservationists and a younger generation of 'imperial ecologists'"²¹. Huxley's articulation of a "scientific world humanism"²² that ought to undergird UNESCO, one that was both universal and evolutionary, in some ways mirrors the arguments of colonial governors and their proponents from decades ago, and such an approach to conservation featured not just in the views of its founders but in those of its many technical experts in related organisations like the International Union for Preservation of Nature (IUPN). At the 1949 UNESCO-IUPN conference, alongside traditional advocates of nature protection were scientific experts of many backgrounds and nationalities, persuaded of nature protection as a key contribution to preserving a shared habitat for mankind. The scientific-technical idea of 'ecology' was intrinsically linked to the structure of society and governance. When environmental issues were intertwined with practical questions of politics, the colonial context cannot be ignored. The British Colonial Office often opposed the efforts of the IUPN to identify 'needy areas' requiring conservation, as it feared challenges to its authority within Africa²³. However, the IUPN also reproduced many underlying prejudices towards the capacity for self-rule within many colonial territories. Overpopulation was viewed as the biggest threat to nature, owing to a Malthusian concern over population growth, a problem perceived as embodied in the new settlements encroaching on designated 'national parks' in Africa. Delegates to a IUPN conference in Addis Ababa enthusiastically and spontaneously declared a nearby game reserve a national park, as the space matched its criteria: "fine hilly scenery, splendid trees

²⁰ Radkau 2014: 64.

²¹ Wobse 2011: 338

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid: 340

and many interesting birds, some special restricted to Ethiopia”²⁴– this disregard for existing patterns of land use had resonance with Huxley’s own proposals in 1930 to the colonial secretary for national parks in East Africa, with the framework of national parks and conservation a distinctly European way of understanding the environment. At other times this colonial mentality took the form of a flippant disregard for the well-being of local populations; as Huxley’s view on the deadly illnesses inflicted in livestock and people reveals. “Thanks to the tsetse fly, large stretches of nature were put ‘out of bounds’ and devoted to preserving nature ... Is it therefore absurd to suggest that a monument should be erected to that insect, as the saviour of Africa and its unique fauna?”²⁵ His emphasis on an imagined “wonderful hierarchy of the original wild creatures”²⁶ can be viewed in the context of wider ‘degradation narratives’ complicit in the portrayal of Africans as unsuitable stewards and sovereigns of the very ecosystems they inhabited²⁷, a (neo)colonial argument originating before, and surviving after, its manifestation in UNESCO.

The diversity and evolution of the UN from a neo-imperialist actor in its own right to one increasingly cognizant of its earlier imperialist assumptions and categories is visible in UNESCO’s efforts to tackle the ‘race question’. Certain universalist values within European humanist thought were transformed through the intellectual efforts of radical nationalists, who jettisoned ideas of racial exclusion. As Benedict Anderson argues, a dichotomy between ‘indigenous’ and ‘foreign’ ideals in the view of anti/postcolonialism made a United Nations framework grounded in universal, equal rights (albeit one that great powers weakly committed to, as I have argued) more plausible to postcolonial countries. The opening of UNESCO’s constitution reminds us of the belief that the UN’s mission of keeping the peace could not be divorced from dismantling racist, imperial hierarchies: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”²⁸. The Non-Aligned Movement sought to bridge ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ cultural values amidst the rapid decolonization of the 1950s with the East-West Major Project (from 1957-1966), an unprecedented international effort to discuss cultural identities amidst a shift in the symbolic, political and *realpolitik* meanings of ‘East’ and ‘West’²⁹. Asian and Arab states could define their national identities and present their cultural values on equal grounds, although contentious terms like ‘cultural values’ remained purposively undefined and attributed not to

²⁴ Radkau 2017: 71

²⁵ Quoted in *ibid*: 67

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ McNeill 2010: 360

²⁸ This is still visible on the UNESCO website today, and is a clause that has survived numerous amendments. As Amrith & Sluga (2008) point out, its architects had the racialism of Nazism in mind, but its implicit referents have shifted over the years – ranging from Israel to South Africa, or even the discipline of ‘racial science’ and testing.

²⁹ Wong 2008: 350

‘nations’, but to ‘groups’. Thus, the heterogeneity of ‘East and West’ or ‘Orient and Occident’ as “two halves of a whole and in terms of the ideas they hold about each other”, could be affirmed by the 1958 Joint Declaration made by UNESCO³⁰. The significant intellectual challenge to the scientific and ethical premises of racial thought was crucial in undermining some foundational premises of imperialism, but more importantly provided a forum for such questions to be publicly raised³¹. If the success of the UN across its various agencies and functions has depended on how acceptable the organization as a whole has been to member states, then such intellectual and cultural currents have gone a long way in increasing perceptions of the UN’s inclusivity in the eyes of postcolonial countries. As Nehru warned the UNGA in 1952 (amidst French-led attempts to remove North African independence from the agenda), “the time may come when the Asian and African countries will feel that they are happier in their own countries and not in the United Nations”³². As we have seen, this vision of global fragmentation, echoing the very fears of the UN’s architects that the world would divide itself into multiple conflicting camps, did not come to pass – at least not in the 1960s. More broadly speaking, UNESCO itself has been a historiographical actor in its own right, legitimizing Asian and African histories in ways not possible under colonialism. Its push towards ‘world history’ by recovering and restoring societies dispossessed of their history took the form of a ‘grand project’ on mankind’s scientific and cultural progress facilitated by each ‘civilization’, culminating in volumes like the UNESCO General History of Africa³³ written by commissioned specialists. This process actively criticized colonialist mentalities even within history education, a scope of inquiry within individual member states impossible for other UN agencies. “Inaccurate”, “unfortunate” and “undesirable” terminology in history textbooks were criticized for potentially bolstering “pride of race” or unfairly crediting the West with “the monopoly of cultural, industry, and scientific knowledge and progress”³⁴. The process of decolonization supported by the UN was not just political, but an intellectual and cultural effort that sought to de-obscure colonial abuses and challenge notions of Western supremacy.

Furthermore, we can discern a clear ‘anti-colonial turn’ within the United Nations’ general agenda, driven by significant increases in UN membership from decolonisation and resultant newly-independent states. This ‘Afro-Asian’ bloc was able to lobby for post-colonial, anti-imperial interests. In 1960, the UNGA voted on a Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People. It was not the draft resolution not of the USSR (who proposed the idea) that was adopted, but a rival draft from a

³⁰ Quoted in *ibid*: 359-60

³¹ Amrith & Slughra 2008: 258

³² Quoted in Wong 2008: 352

³³ Amrith & Slughra 2008: 257

³⁴ Wong 2008: 364

group of 26 African and Asian countries (largely stemming from the Bandung principles adopted at the eponymous conference in 1955). Despite a general European and American abstention from the vote, the American ambassador's anxiety at this increasing autonomy of the 'Third World' in the UNGA is evident: "For the record, I am shocked and disheartened", he wrote³⁵. In that same year, the swift UNSC authorization of peacekeeping operations (the United Nations Operation in the Congo, or ONUC) in response to Katangan separatism and political instability in Congo was driven by this bloc: "the first time that Africa had succeeded in imposing its authority on the Great Powers", as the journalist Colin Legum reported at the time³⁶. Such an unprecedented mission, with a correspondingly ambitious mandate, faced the challenges of dealing with the vestiges of imperialism: despite a formal Belgian withdrawal in the unstable Congo a few months into ONUC, a militarized Belgian presence in the form of *gendarmarie* supporting Katanga remained³⁷. Although ONUC's legacy was tainted by several dramatic developments – UN inability to prevent the murder of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba at the hands of Katangans, Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's death under mysterious circumstances³⁸, and the siege at Gadotsville – the operation was more generally unable to stabilize the country. The limited effectiveness and scope of the mission was in part due to two competing attitudes towards UN objectives and authority. (Neo)colonial countries favoured a doctrine of peacekeeping and non-intervention, while the socialist bloc pushed for more assertive collective security action to protect Congolese sovereignty³⁹. As Franz Fanon damningly asserted: the United Nations was the "legal card used by the imperialist interests when the card of brute force has failed"⁴⁰. Although Belgian interests were closely connected to Katangan separatism, Britain also fought a defensive battle against UN intervention while remaining part of the UNSC that authorized the mission (Britain and France abstained from most positive resolutions). The Katangan secession reveals how the UN was comprised of state actors, each with varying views on these postcolonial, 'Third World' crises, while the various sub-institutions like ONUC that also comprised the UN could come into opposition with these state actors. Within the complex, consensus-dependent political operations undertaken by the UN, neo-imperialist efforts could be thwarted by anti-imperial lobbying, but the inverse could also hold true.

³⁵ quoted in Mazower 2012: 263

³⁶ quoted in Rich 2012: 359

³⁷ Aksu 2018

³⁸ Much conspiracy surrounds the plane crash that caused Hammarskjöld's death, to some extent overshadowing the political and legal analysis of ONUC and the Congo Crisis itself. For a more intriguing filmic treatment of the subject, see the recent Cold Case Hammarskjöld (2019)

³⁹ I refrain from deeming the operation a complete 'failure', noting the unprecedented extent of intervention and the number of military successes that ONUC commanders achieved, repelling Katangan separatists and retaking Congolese positions. Nonetheless, the Congo Crisis, when viewed in the *longue durée*, was part of wider civil conflict not solved upon ONUC withdrawal in 1964.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Rich 2012: 362

Finally, the ‘international imperialism’ of the United Nations can be analysed through the lens of bureaucratic and administrative staff themselves: although much has been written on knowledge-production and the social strata occupied by colonial bureaucrats, there have been far fewer socio-historical analyses of whether such a dynamic existed between indigenous societies and UN representatives. However, a few similarities can be discerned; the ‘late colonial state’ was (at least in public) focused on ‘developmentalism’⁴¹, albeit one without commitment to the self-governance explicit in UN developmentalism, and both groups of administrators were often Western-origin, highly-educated (again in Western schools) technocrats transferred into societies they had little prior experience in. UN ideas of ‘development assistance’, such as the Mission of Technical Assistance launched for Haiti, still contained a political and historical narrative of the island nation’s ‘underdevelopment’. The report framed Haiti as a “parable of pitfalls of misguided nation-building” when governments departed from rational, efficient and technical ‘development’ frameworks⁴². Shades of colonial ethnography are evident – Port-au-Prince’s residents live “crowded together in a great number of small rooms”, disease-prone and unsanitary, and there is a particularly vivid image of men, women and children pathetically crowded around drums of water. Even the critical theorist Claude Levi-Strauss, who wrote *Race et Histoire* for UNESCO to deconstruct the colonial genealogy of the UN, still exhibited a “colonial fascination with the alterity of colonized societies”, with his calls to preserve a “pure” native culture from modernity⁴³. My own research in the UN Career Records Project⁴⁴ reveals the diversity of thinking that officials possessed, some more reminiscent of colonialism than others. A 1958 ECAFE handbook, distributed for Bangkok staff, seems to echo the administrative orientation of internal colonial structures, with great ethnographic detail and recommendations suggestive of the well-heeled, compartmentalized lives that they led. (“Chinese are usually more experienced in preparing foreign foods than Siamese, and more expensive ... Servants generally get a salary and are not expected to eat any of the food you eat. It is recommended that you do not furnish rice”)⁴⁵. In many cases, they could hold both neo-imperial, almost nostalgic, sympathies, while also sincerely disassociating themselves from condescending, paternalistic attitudes. Anthony Gilpin, in 1947 whilst working for the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, was impressed by a lavish banquet hosted by the (British) governors of Madras; cognizant of how colonial opulence belonged to “a quickly vanishing age”, he nonetheless gives a detailed picture of “colourful costumes ... scarlet-

⁴¹ See Saada 2018 for an overview of French colonial doctrine in the immediate post-war period, and Robb (2011) for the Indian context.

⁴² Amrith & Slughra 2008: 263

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ The project’s origins lie in Richard Symonds’ (then-head of St. Antony’s College) efforts to collect the memoirs of high-ranking British officials in the UN, and the collection is currently accessible via the Weston Library. Consisting mainly of oral history records and autobiographies, there are fascinating glimpses into the everyday life of UN officials in postings which many of them found far-flung, and exotic.

⁴⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, United Nations Career Records Project, MS. Eng. c. 4660, fols. 16-25

coated turbaned bearers, ... rich food, a small orchestra in an alcove, and the whole scene surveyed by massive portraits of British royalty from George III onwards. I was surprised to find myself *quite nostalgic for the feudal pageantry of which this was a dim afterglow.*"⁴⁶ Yet, his impression of Colonel James Keen, a ECAFE administrator more akin to the colonial archetype being discussed, is unfavourable: "To my embarrassment, he talked to me very much as a 'fellow Brit', obviously assumed to be superior to all these lesser breeds ... his sense of superiority vis-à-vis the East betrays him in various ways ... he has trodden heavily on a number of Eastern toes"⁴⁷. Although we should avoid reading into the views of a single man, his particular worldview exemplifies the many contradictory attitudes within the administrative staff who were sympathetic to post-colonial agendas. Recognition of the intrinsic equality of nations and their inhabitants, and the need to respect self-rule and governance, often coexisted with attitudes shared with their colonial predecessors. Neither the UN nor the human beings that comprised it had the benefit of a cultural *tabula rasa*, free from bias and prejudicial attitudes, and developmental practices often intended as 'benign' interventions (in the case of Haiti, UN assistance was provided upon governmental request) still bear the legacy of colonial intervention. In part, the 'imperial' echoes of internationalist development and administration can also be explained by how networks that transported, hosted, or educated UN personnel had imperial origins too, which a social history of the UN, far less common than diplomatic or intellectual approaches, can reveal.

Historicized understandings of the United Nations – its principles, foundations, agencies and core documents – remain essential not just for historians, but for international relations scholars, today's statesmen, and even activists and bureaucrats. Certainly, its optimistic, universalist charter belies how the UN was designed to preserve empire and 'great power dominance', at a time where decolonisation was not seen by empires as desirable (let alone inevitable). Its intellectual roots lead us to wonder whether the UN's "sense of moral community on a global scale" can be "without the rest of the conceptual baggage that accompanied it": the pro-empire beliefs of many of its paternalistic, racist architects. Although Mazower's comment has Alfred Zimmern, an outspoken advocate for commonwealth, in mind, one might extend the question to whether the internationalism of the UN ever outgrew its imperial origins. I think so. If an 'imperial internationalism' was indeed embedded in the United Nations, it was one that was largely confined to the security council, and even then, a neo-imperialism that did not last. Despite the initial vision of the UN as "helping liberal empires spread their values, and with them civilization, around the world"⁴⁸,

⁴⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, United Nations Career Records Project, MS. Eng. c. 4676, fol 33. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, fol. 31

⁴⁸ Mazower 2008: 140

the inherent contestability of broad constitutional and founding principles led to a more inclusive, Global South-centric direction for the organization. Increasingly autonomous UN bodies, representing many from the Afro-Asian bloc, would come to challenge ideas of racial hierarchy and superiority implicit in notions of empire, although it was instead an institutional hierarchy (with the UNSC's use of, or threat of using, its veto) that could undermine a more assertive agenda that some envisaged for the UN. Nonetheless, I propose that the anti-imperial internationalism that increasingly characterized an expanding United Nations marked an alignment of the UN's outlook towards both international security and its policy towards colonized people: increasing racial polarizing and anti-colonial unrest would only continue to jeopardize global peace, necessitating a shift towards anti-empire policies and attitudes. It would therefore be a mistake to characterize the UN as being enthralled to colonial great powers: doing so unfairly diminishes the role that wide variety of thinkers, staff and even agencies played in combating both old tyrannies and new aggressions.

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