4   IR and the making of the white man's world

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> The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.
>
> W.E.B. Du Bois (1996 [1900])

> I went to a school modeled on British public schools. I read lots of English books there; *Treasure Island* and *Gulliver's Travels* and *Prisoner of Zenda*, and *Oliver Twist* and *Tom Brown's School Days* and such books in their dozens. But I also encountered Rider Haggard and John Buchan and the rest, and their "African" books. Africa was an enigma to me. I did not see myself as an African in those books. I took sides with the white men against the savages. In other words, I went through my first level of schooling thinking I was of the party of the white man in his hair-raising adventures and narrow escapes. The white man was good and reasonable and smart and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid, never anything higher than cunning. I hated their guts.
>
> Chinua Achebe (2009)

Introduction

The very first act of International Relations (IR) was to exclude. To understand this, we must begin with the discipline's natal story: the founding of the Department of International Politics at the (then) University of Wales in Aberystwyth – now, Aberystwyth University. It tells of the

> generous endowment of £20,000 given by David Davies, as a memorial to the students killed and wounded in the First World War. Davies was moved by a global vision, forged in the fires of war, aimed at repairing the shattered family of nations and, more ambitiously, to redeem the claims of men and women in a great global commonwealth – the League of Nations.
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> Aberystwyth University (2017)

In fact, Davies was not the only one who funded the Chair; he was only one of the three people who contributed an equal amount. The other two were women, Davies' sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret (Haslam 2000: 57). So, while crediting David alone with "redeem[ing] the claims of men *and women* in a great global commonwealth," Aberystwyth continues to erase women from its founding moment. This itself is quite revealing of a narrative of exclusion on which IR builds its disciplinary identity.

BOX 4.1 LANGUAGE AND COLONIZATION

H. Rider Haggard (1856–1925) and John Buchan (1875–1940) wrote some of the most popular adventure novels of their time. Haggard is popularly remembered for *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, while Buchan's *Prester John* and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* were among the most influential novels. These books, steeped in colonial stereotypes, were widely read and recommended in public schools. Interestingly, both of these authors also spent considerable time in South Africa; Buchan was, in fact, a member of the Milner's Kindergarten (which we will discuss below) and later became Canada's governor general.

To read IR's story further is to go beyond the "great unwashed" of Victorian novelists, i.e. the common men and women IR wanted to rescue from the ravages of war. In this story of redemption, we now stumble onto the "savages" of the Edwardian novelists, Ryder Haggard and John Buchan. After all, these were also bound into IR's hope for a better world, the League of Nations. However, they were not to be treated as equal citizens of the great commonwealth for which early IR longed, but were tethered to the League's project in second- and third-class carriages. As the Darwinist language of the time, expressed in Article 22 of the League Covenant, makes clear, the "strenuous conditions of the modern world," had compelled "advanced nations" to take up the responsibility for governing those whose historical misfortune was to have been colonized by the losing parties of the "Great War."

Anthony Anghie's work has demonstrated that the League institutionalized the idea that "sovereignty could be graded, as implied by the classification of mandates into A, B and C, based on their state of political and economic advancement" (Anghie 2005: 148; also see Pedersen 2015). But there was more to this than meets the legal eye because the position a political community occupied on the Mandate ladder depended on where it stood on the plane of race. So, under the Mandate system, Asians were accorded their own "nations" – they were derivative and conjured, certainly, but they were still nations; Africans and other indigenous groups were parceled out as tribal societies – to be ruled over by the civilized. So, the ranking was not only colonial, it was explicitly racial.

Quite correctly, the institutionalized racism of the League and its Mandate system is identified with a man whose own academic writing had endorsed neo-Lamarkian "scientific racism" and who actively carried out racial segregation during his term in high office (de Carvalho et al. 2011: 750). This was America's 28th president, Woodrow Wilson, whose duplicity at the League of Nations was reflected in his approach to African Americans in the United States itself. As the African American scholar, Rayford Logan (1928: 426), caustically commented:

> it is … one of the enigmas of history that Mr. Wilson should have been so vitally interested in the welfare of Bantus, Oulofs, Manidingoes, Doualas, and other tribes of which he had never heard while he remained deaf to the pleas of black peons in the country under his direct administration.

But Logan was perhaps too generous to Wilson. The U.S. president's call for granting self-determination was restricted to the relatively civilized Eastern Europeans and excluded non-white races (de Carvalho et al. 2011: 750).

In recent years, many scholars have explored this blighted past and made a broader point about the discipline of IR: race and imperialism were inscribed into the very DNA of the discipline. The works of John Hobson (2012) and Robert Vitalis (2015) are particularly revealing in this regard. In the "historical turn" carried in the works of David Long and Brian Schmidt (2005), Nicolas Guilhot (2014), Errol Henderson (2013), Duncan Bell (2007), among others, the façade of benign internationalism of IR's founding narrative has been authoritatively exposed.

But further probing of the discipline's imperial and racial origins of IR is important for several reasons (Bell 2009; see too, Chapter 6). For one thing, as always, the past writes the present. In all academic disciplines, epistemological categories are determined on the basis of original understandings. So, IR is said to be thematically concerned with questions of world order, anarchy, security, sovereignty, state system and so on. This is because these are assumed to be central to the primary question in IR: why do wars happen? But while this may have been the discipline's core founding challenge, as more scholars turn to the archives, it is increasingly clear that "race" was another of its natal concerns. Indeed, as the African American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois had argued, "race" or "color" was one of the fault lines around which understandings of global conflict were structured.

In the U.S. case, the discipline explicitly originated from the field of "colonial administration" (Vitalis 2015). Likewise, in Britain and its white settler colonies, both academic and political understandings of the "international" were steeped in deeply racial thinking (Long and Schmidt 2005). At least in one case that we have studied, South Africa, the efforts towards institutionalizing IR nationally were driven by the desire to perfect a system of "native administration." In fact, it was the success of social anthropology as a field that supposedly studied natives and their administration objectively that inhibited the early growth of IR in institutional and political life (Thakur and Vale 2019: 43).

While the founding narrative of IR is always cast as a deeply moral tale, as many thinkers including Achebe remind us, we need to constantly ask: who is telling the story? We are likely to find a different story about IR in the German South-West Africa (now Namibia), which was mandated to (the then Union of) South Africa, than in London, which (certainty formally) saw the move as enhancing the prospects for peace. As the old adage – often called Miles' Law points out – "Where you stand depends on where you sit."

Thus, critical thinking begins with thinking about the world in different ways. So, perhaps we should look at IR's natal moment not by the purported high-mindedness of building international peace but through a prism which was located not in the high corridors of global power but at the grubby, dusty rock face of a gold mine in Johannesburg. And this is the task we set for ourselves in this chapter.

Unlike most discussions which begin with World War I as the setting for the emergence of IR as a disciplinary field, we begin with the Anglo-Boer war. This war, we would argue, set the stage for an ideational and institutional reformulation of the British empire. For imperial enthusiasts, we will focus in particular on Lionel Curtis and on how South Africa became a laboratory of the empire where new ideas and institutions could be fleshed out. The South African model of a segregated state was then "kicked up," first to the level to the British empire (or the British commonwealth, as it was now called), and eventually to the world state. These ideas were then circulated, molded and formalized through networks of people and institutions across the British empire. Indeed, IR as a "scientific study" emerged

primarily through the same networks. In noting the racial character of the discipline, we also discuss how E.H. Carr's framing of the "first great debate" invariably erases race from disciplinary memory, giving us a racially sanitized version of IR.

"The romance of the veld"

The first war of the twentieth century, the Boer war (1899–1902), was fought over access to the gold mines of Johannesburg in the country which would come to be known as "South Africa." The South African War (as the war was also known) inaugurated the decline, if not the end, of *Pax-Britannica*, the glorious Victorian phase in which Britain's empire had commanded the globe (see Box 4.2). Although Britain emerged victorious from the war, it was weakened and felt increasingly insecure about its power and moral authority. Joseph Chamberlain, the secretary of state for the colonies, had stated just prior to its outbreak that the Boer war posed a question about Britain's continued existence as a great power in the world. But, as it turned out, the most industrialized nation in the world took three long years to defeat a largely peasant population, despite pouring in 450,000 troops into the war from the length and breadth of its empire. The war, the largest that Britain fought between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I, exhausted Britain militarily, financially and morally (a liberal journalist G.P. Gooch (1907 [1901]) asked, "what ... does it profit a state if it gain[s] the whole world and lose[s] its own soul?").

BOX 4.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

The Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), also called the South African War, was fought between the British empire and the two Afrikaner republics – Transvaal and Orange Free State. Known as the first war of the twentieth century, this was also the last war among the white settler colonial communities within the British empire. It had a tremendous global significance, as it informed narratives of nation-building not just in Britain and South Africa, but also New Zealand, Australia, Canada and India.

"Imperialism," the term that until the Boer war had been considered a noble force for both peace and progress, had morphed into something increasingly intolerable. The left-liberal journalist John Hobson's book, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), was the first sustained critique of naked imperialism and helped to turn the idea of imperialism "[in]to a status of partial abuse" (Koebner and Schmidt 1964: 221–249).

Anxieties over military weakness and a resulting ideological vacuum generated fears about the decline of the British "race." So, for instance, the reverses in the war were attributed to the industrialized, emasculated British soldier. A notion grew that the slums and squalor of industrial Britain had produced "a stunted, narrow-chested, easily wearied [dweller] ... with little ballast, stamina or endurance" (Masterman 1907 [1901]: 8). This had emerged, so the argument went, during the same period as the best Britons had sailed to the "other Englands," as the Oxford historian and empire enthusiast J.A. Froude (1886) called the settler colonies.

These fears played into an increasing lack of confidence in Britain's view of itself as a global power. Britain had already been told-off from the Atlantic by the United States in the Venezuelan affair and felt increasingly threatened by the rise of Germany and Japan in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Out of this sense of military and ideological crisis emerged a new fantasy, the idea of "new imperialism," in which imperial enthusiasts saw an opportunity to tailor the Britain-centered empire into a broader white commonwealth. The drift towards this idea had begun during the Boer war when the so-called "daughters of the empire" – other settler colonies – had fought alongside the British against the Boers (see Box 4.3).

BOX 4.3 IMPERIAL ANXIETIES

Over two successive crises in 1895 and 1902–03, United States forced Britain (and other continental powers) to accept the Monroe Doctrine in the Americas, by disallowing the latter's coercion in Venezuela. Furthermore, while the Royal British Navy continued to be the largest, rapid naval modernization by Germany and Japan challenged Britain's dominance in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Between 1907 and 1909, Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet," aimed at displaying America's blue water capability, travelled across the world and received warm welcome in the white British dominions, in particular. This also worried British policy makers.

In essence, "new imperialism" called for a broader federal structure of the empire where the white settler colonies would join with Britain to strengthen the task of governance across the empire. So, instead of the emphasis falling as before on Britain as a ruling state, much was now made of the "British race." The most assiduous champion of this ideological turn was the imperial pro-consul, Alfred Milner, whose thoughts are captured in the following:

> My patriotism knows no geographical but only racial limits. I am a British Race Patriot … It is not the soil of Britain, dear as it is to me, which is essential to arouse my patriotism, but the speech, the tradition, the spiritual heritage, the principles, the aspirations of the British race. They do not cease to be mine because they are transplanted. … I feel myself as a citizen of the Empire. I feel that Canada is my country. Australia my country, New Zealand my country, South Africa my country, just as much as Surrey or Yorkshire.
>
> (quoted in Schwarz 2011: 99)

As a result, the settler colonies provided not only a hope for a stronger empire, militarily speaking, but they also buttressed various threads of thinking on the three levels of imperial being: empire, state and society. While race as a marker of identity was expressed in the idiom of the "British race" or "Anglo-Saxon race" (to use Cecil John Rhodes' phrase) to provide an imperial identity, "race" was also elevated into an issue of the emerging "British world" (to use a phrase from Leo Amery) in another way. Unlike the British state itself, the white settlers continuously grappled with the "native problem," as it was commonly called. This trope drew upon a common history of genocidal

wars, and the perennial fear of being "swamped" by the natives. In an influential book, the Oxford historian Charles Pearson captured these fears in the following words:

> the day will come, and not perhaps far distant, when the European observer will see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolizing the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the European.
>
> (quoted in Plaut 2016: 50)

With white settler colonies at the imperial table, "native administration" and "native problem" became truly imperial issues, to the extent that imperial unity was often achieved by diluting British liberal opinion and its concerns about the treatment of non-white populations (Plaut 2016).

Once the empire was reimagined as an organic union of white settler colonies, its conflicts were naturally arranged along racial lines between whites and non-whites. From being essentially an issue of domestic politics concerning the frontiers of empire, race whirled to form its central organizing principle. Accordingly, we will argue below, Southern Africa became a laboratory of the empire: where a new conception of sovereign association could be tried, tested and, finally, elevated to the international level. And hence the ideas that "birthed" IR emerged from these very frontiers. To this "romance of the veld" (as Bill Schwarz calls this imperial fascination with the frontiers and borrowing of ideas) we will now turn.

The clothes of new imperialism: Brit-Boer-Bantu

Lord Alfred Milner, the quintessential "British race patriot," was also the architect of the Boer war. At its end, he added to his portfolio as high commissioner the administrator-ship of the two conquered Boer republics, Transvaal and Orange River Colony. His task was to unite disparate entities of what was then often loosely called "southern Africa" into a single polity.

To serve this end, Milner recruited graduates from his alma mater, Oxford, in the hope of creating (what he saw) as a modern industrial state out of a medieval hierarchy (Nimocks 1968: 18). This group included several individuals who would become important players in the history of empire. But our interest will fall on only one individual: Lionel Curtis.

Although Milner was to leave southern Africa five years before the unification of South Africa, these young apparatchiks – often derisively called, "Milner's Kindergarten" – worked behind the scenes to bring the four southern Africa colonies, Transvaal, Orange River, Cape Colony and Natal, together in the form of a "closer union." For the Kindergarten, the closer union of South Africa was to be achieved through an elite-driven process of knowledge creation and its dissemination. These would later provide the seeds for the discipline of IR.

But before we see how these took root, we must traverse both political history and the career of Lionel Curtis.

In August 1906, Curtis who was then assistant colonial secretary responsible for municipal affairs in Johannesburg, set about writing a document that was to lay out the barebones of a new state in South Africa. Called the *Selborne Memorandum*, the

document appeared in mid-1907 with the aim of igniting discussions on the possibility of creating a single "sovereign" unit across southern Africa (William 1925). The *Selbourne Memorandum* was certainly not the first time such a possibility had been proposed. Indeed, British policy in the region had flirted with the same idea since the late 1850s but the context and content of its enunciation was different. In the aftermath of the Boer war, Britain controlled all of southern Africa, including the former Afrikaner republics and the African kingdoms.

Although the *Selborne Memorandum* laid out a formal case for a federal union, there was no clarity about what shape (or form) the political union in southern Africa would take. This clarity was to be provided by the deliberations of a members-only association, which was known by the moniker *The Fortnightly Club*. Organized by Curtis and others in Johannesburg, 40-odd British devotees of empire met more than two-dozen times between October 1906 and May 1908 under the auspices of The Fortnightly Club to discuss issues of empire, race and federal union and, in particular, to address the issue of statehood in southern Africa.

Some of the central questions that engaged this process were explained by Curtis himself in a paper he presented to the Club in May 1907. In it, he framed the question of South Africa in the wider context of the political form of the empire (Curtis 1907). In this paper, he called for laying a more sustained theoretical argument of political rule in the British empire. As he argued, empire building "was the result of many different causes and motives to which the sea-faring habits of the British race gave free play" (Curtis 1907). The empire was driven by contingency rather than by any grand scheme of colonization. So it was that American colonization was a result of religious persecution; Canadian colonization grew out of the fear of American republics; Australia was a dumping ground for convicts; South Africa was "acquired simply as the commercial half-way house to India," and India itself was colonized to "provide it with a government compatible with the maintenance of the great commercial interests." Consequently, rather than a unified approach to the imperial project, Britain has had to implement more practical solutions to secure the colonies from internal and external worries. The mandarins of empire, Curtis argued, were not afforded a theoretician's distance and abstractness to consider the question of political rule from a scientific and objective vantage point. In other words, the empire needed a theory of political rule (Curtis 1907).

For him, South Africa was "the microcosm in which human problems can be studied as a physicist studies the forces of nature in the test-tube of a laboratory" (Curtis 1923: 80), and thus provided as an ideal setting for experimenting on broader scheme for imperial unity. However, imperial unity was not important for its own sake. As he was to argue in his writings over a five-decade long career, the British empire demonstrated the possibility that war can be made obsolete. Indeed, from 1910 onwards, he referred to the British empire as the British commonwealth, a loose federation of dominions and dependencies which through creation of a multinational community has eliminated war as a function of politics.

War itself, according to his understanding, was primarily caused by the competition among higher races for access to resources and raw material in the non-Western world. In this, he in fact pre-empted both Du Bois and Lenin, who later made the same argument. For Curtis, the "ultimate problem of the world" was the racial one. Peace was conditioned upon finding a scheme of reconciliation among and between the three chief races of the world – Europeans, Asians and Africans – all at different stages of human

evolution. South Africa, being the country that truly represented this imperial as well as global reality, was ideally placed to provide such solutions to the world.

Hence, a theory of political rule within the empire, and eventually the world, had to be thrashed out first in the South African veld. A theory that would not only unite the white communities – Brits and Boers in South Africa – but also find a more sustainable arrangement between Europeans and non-Europeans.

In his 1907 paper, Curtis first elaborated on his view of the empire. The empire, according to him, was chiefly composed of two levels of civilization, modern and ancient. Modern civilizations were those which had developed faculties of change in human organization. Europeans came under the modern civilization category because they had adapted to change and showed significant progress in developing institutions of self-government. However, various European cultures had developed at different speeds which created an internal hierarchy. Unsurprisingly, Curtis believed that Britain was the most developed because it had perfected the art of self-government and free institutions. Other races – the Germans and the French, for instance – were on a lower scale but they were capable of self-development in order to build better institutions. Ancient civilizations, for their part, were culturally and politically static, and were without any internal capacity for political change. As a result, autocracy remained the most functionally viable and popularly accepted form of rule in these cultures. The divide was exacerbated by an understanding that there was no hope of these societies becoming modern. Unlike other social Darwinists who would argue that the non-Europeans could be pulled over to the modern era through a "civilization mission," Curtis argued here that the principles of progress – externally or internally driven – only work within modern societies (Curtis 1907).

Drawn together, these arguments were not new and expectedly collapsed any distinctions between terms such as civilizations, cultures, races and societies, but their end point departed from the Victorian liberal reasoning on one important point. Unlike others of his generation, Curtis did not suggest that the British rule was good because it would act as a civilizing influence on the non-Europeans. On the contrary, he believed that the attempts at civilizing non-Europeans were often counter-productive because instead of the civilized pulling up the non-civilized, the superior races were more likely to be pulled down if they were to co-habit with non-Europeans. Indeed, as several other papers in this Club argued, South Africa provided a different challenge from other white dominions and the United States, where non-whites were in minority and numerically insignificant because of genocidal wars. In South Africa the specter of a civilized black majority evoked sharp worries about "reverse extinction" of whites. In other words, while the colonial discourse had until now justified colonial genocides as a natural culmination of the contact of "civilized" whites with "uncivilized" non-whites in the manner of the "survival of the fittest," a black majority that had not only resisted for centuries and fought back against whites in South Africa, but also proliferated abundantly raised serious questions about the validity of this thesis. Indeed, the fears were reversed. The white minority now worried that they were the ones under the threat of extinction. Furthermore, in its racial composition South Africa approximated the empire in general, and thus pre-figured what could be expected at the imperial scale.

In response, Curtis proposed a three-tier framework for political rule in the empire. The first tier comprised colonies which were composed of purely European populations – Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The second – India, say – was a colony with an

almost wholly non-European population. The colonies in South Africa, which contained a significant European settler community together with an overwhelming non-European population, were considered as the third tier (Curtis 1907).

He argued that Canada, Australia and New Zealand which were "almost empty before they were occupied by Europeans" should enjoy full self-government (Curtis 1907). These colonies were to be encouraged to "exercise the most direct control over their own administration." There was only a negligible aboriginal population which "constitute(s) no social or political danger" and the white community "can be trusted to look after … [indigenous people] … as they look after kangaroos and elk, as a sort of national curiosity" (Curtis 1907).

Because India was almost wholly populated by non-Europeans the only form of rule that the people understood was autocracy. The problem with this, however, was that all power was concentrated in one person. In Curtis's view "the human conscience is atrophied by the exercise of unbridled … power over others," which is why this kind of autocracy degenerates into despotism which permitted no political freedoms. The solution was not democracy, but a mediated form of autocracy – the mediation was provided by an efficient colonial bureaucracy which was accountable to public conscience in Britain. This public oversight over bureaucratic rule would be "sufficiently remote to prevent constant interference but near enough to prevent free government from degenerating into despotism" (Curtis 1907). This kind of thinking married the best of Weberian bureaucracy with assumptions about Oriental autocracy.

South Africa was plainly different: not only was its "European" population significant, but its predominantly African population was also "less capable of self-government than those in India." Furthermore, within these communities there were major social cleavages which other colonies did not face. The European community was divided between the British and the Boer: a division which straddled the two extremes of "civilization" within the broad category of Europeans. Amongst the non-Europeans, to complicate matters, a significant population of Asians were relatively more advanced than the other group, the Africans. The Asians demanded rights commensurate with their position in their countries of origin, while the latter had only a rudimentary conception of political rule (Curtis 1907).

Viewed in this way, the issue of South African statehood was intricately tied to the very nature of the empire. This was because South Africa encapsulated the central concerns – peace and racial order – that the empire faced. Like the empire, peace and racial order in South Africa was contingent on bringing together different white "races" towards a single identity while at the same time confronting a majority of non-Europeans who were asserting their claims for rights. The challenge of creating a sovereign state in southern Africa, comprising of the four colonies, would require the fusion of the Boer and the Brit into a single "nation" in order to end the fissures that had caused the Boer war. It was equally important to devise a southern Africa-wide policy of native administration. Curtis's preferred solution for the latter was the idea of "segregation," i.e. a form of indirect bureaucratic rule.

The acclaimed historian, Martin Legassick (1995: 45), suggested that Lionel Curtis was the first to use the term "segregation" in South Africa. There is some debate over the initial use (Dubow 1995: 147–148), but South African historians agree that the theoretical case for segregation as a state-building ideology was only made authoritatively in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the deliberations in Curtis's Fortnightly Club article was one of the clearest theoretical expositions.

Two other crucial figures from the Club who developed segregationist ideas in South Africa were Howard Pim (later one of the founders of the South African Institute for Race Relations) and Philip Kerr (later the first editor of *The State* and *The Round Table*, more on them below). This is a crucial point because not only does this particular idea of segregation become the precursor to the later policy of apartheid, but it is also presented as a model of indirect rule across the British empire. Indeed, the League of Nations mandate system was also inspired from this idea, as we will explore below.

"Imperial chain of being": South Africa, the British commonwealth and world state

Statehood came to South Africa in 1910. Although the grunt work was done by Afrikaner politicians like Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, Curtis and the Milner's Kindergarten played an important role, or at least took sufficient credit for it. Just prior to the formation of the Union of South Africa, the Kindergarten created (what was called) the Association of Closer Union Societies in September 1908. Known as the "Closer Union Societies," its primary function was to propagate the idea of common statehood. At their peak, 64 such societies were active across the region. In addition, a bilingual journal – called *The State/De Staat* – was launched in January 1909. They also produced two different sets of books which fostered the possibility of a regional political formation. These were called *The Government of South Africa* (which consisted of two volumes) and *The Framework of the Union*. Through these initiatives, Curtis and the Kindergarten attempted to spread the "gospel" of a political union, which took into consideration their racial schemes of white unity against their African subjects and creating schemes of native administration based on segregation.

Several members of the Kindergarten, including Curtis and Kerr, left for England soon after it was clear that a political union was to be established. As Curtis wrote, the Kindergarten had "acted as an advance party of sappers[1] sent out to build a vital section of the road over which the main force will have to travel later on" (quoted in Nimocks 1968: 114). Imperial union, or a federal empire, was to be this main road.

The Kindergarten now reproduced their South African methods on an imperial scale. Over the next few years, they created an empire-wide community of imperial enthusiasts, called the Round Table movement, which replicated the South African Closer Union Societies. They started a journal of this movement, *The Round Table*, which was completely modelled on *The State*. In 1915 and 1916, Curtis produced two books titled *Problem of the Commonwealth* and *The Commonwealth of Nations*, which proposed a scheme for turning the hierarchical British empire into a federated union. Not surprisingly, he replicated his three-tier scheme of political rule, with one major difference. In these years, he had changed his ideas about the potential of Asians (Indians, in particular) to adapt to Western political institutions. He now believed that Asians could be taught self-government, and thus, they could one day become self-governing just like Europeans. However, these schemes for self-government for them still had to be designed by Europeans. Indeed, he himself designed one for India; he called it dyarchy – which was incorporated into the 1919 Montagu Chelmsford reforms designed to gradually introduce self-government in India. However, his ideas about

Africans and indigenous peoples remained the same. A 1914 internal Round Table memo, drafted initially by Curtis but then revised by Edward Grigg – then the co-editor of Round Table and later the governor of Colonial Kenya – stated:

> the salvation of the more backward races [Africans] is not to be achieved by Europeans repudiating the task of control, but only by exercising control from first to last in the interest of the lower races as well as the higher.
>
> (The Round Table Papers 1914: 20)

Curtis's British commonwealth – and it is important to remember that he was the first thinker to conceptualize this idea – not only established peace between the white dominions but also between whites and non-whites in the colonies by devising appropriate systems of governance. Consequently, the British commonwealth was not only preserving the future of the white race, but also presenting a model on which a world government ought to be based.

In 1918, he wrote an article titled "Windows of Freedom" for the Round Table where he first fleshed out the idea of mandates (Curtis 1918), which Jan Smuts supposedly picked on for his longer pamphlet, *The League of Nations*. Another crucial person in devising the mandate scheme was Philip Kerr, Curtis's Kindergarten colleague who was also the first editor of *The Round Table*, who actually drafted Article 22 which set out the mandate system. This was, in fact, an international application of Curtis's revised three-fold conception of the empire. The white nations come together as equal partners in a global scheme of governance. The equality of Asian nations (except "honorary whites" such as Japan) is deferred to a future date – consigned to the "waiting room of history," as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has argued – although notionally they are acknowledged as capable of making a transformation into modern nationhood. Africans and indigenous people are, however, considered designed for perpetual subjection. Since they were deemed capable of polluting the white race through continual contact, a more indirect and segregated rather than direct form of government required relations of trusteeship. The whole scheme is in its character very South African, which draws on the very specific experience of Curtis, Smuts and Kerr.

After the end of World War I, as his schemes of imperial unity floundered mostly because dominion nationalism pushed for further decentralization of empire, Curtis turned his attention to more global concerns. Indeed, both Curtis and Kerr became ardent champions of the world federation in the 1920s and 1930s. Curtis's own ideas were fleshed out in a three-volume study published between 1934 and 1937, titled *Civitas Dei* (1938).

Curtis here summons a heady admixture of Christian *agape* and British *noblesse oblige* and sets out a vision of a world commonwealth which, he argued, would be the final embodiment of the principles of Christianity. For him, the commonwealth was based on the principle of mutual obligation of all citizens towards others. This was in contrast to an autocratic state where the duty was only owed only to the sovereign. Hence, the latter was naturally inferior to the former.

Although an exemplary polity, the first commonwealth in Greece perished because it had refused to extend this principle of mutual duty beyond racial and territorial frontiers, such as to the gentiles and barbarians. Like an organism, as the commonwealth stopped to grow, it degenerated. In contrast, the British empire had found a way to continuously expand its boundaries to include even people of other races.

This was done through a two-way interpretation of this "sense of duty" towards others: fraternal and paternal. In the British commonwealth, members of the British race had a fraternal sense of duty towards each other, but they also had a paternal duty to uplift the lower races up on the scale of civilization. The British commonwealth, thus, provided a better model for a world state than any other form of commonwealth or empire. The U.S. commonwealth, for instance, was based on a conception of self-interest and thus, like the Greeks, refused to extend the principle of mutual duty to others. Germany and its empire were premised on autocratic assumptions of the duty of individuals only towards the sovereign.

Hence, a world commonwealth could only grow out of the British experience. The British commonwealth thus not only provided the model for the world state, but also would serve as its organic core (Lavin 1995). The world commonwealth would encourage peace among the European powers in exactly the same way that its British precursor had fostered peace among Britain and the white settler colonies. As it did this, it would also uplift the lower races by bringing them under the tutelage of the government of the world commonwealth. And in that fashion, the world commonwealth or state would fulfill both its instrumental (peace) as well as moral (racial uplifting) functions.

But South Africa, of course, remained a life-long model; it was after all the only real success that Curtis ever experienced. When asked about the putative idealism of his world state scheme towards the end of his life, Curtis reminded his critics of the successes this kind of thinking achieved in the uniting of South Africa. That was a political union formed in the aftermath of a devastating war, in which four colonies – two British, two Boer – had willingly joined forces to form a singular state. From an academic standpoint, this may seem an idealist project, but it was achieved largely, as Curtis and his friends in the Round Table often reminded each other, through the initiative and tireless work of an epistemic group, Milner's Kindergarten.

Lionel Curtis and the invention of IR?

Although a little-explored figure in disciplinary history, Curtis's imprint in how IR is studied and imagined far surpasses many others. Indeed, Curtis is perhaps known less for his ideas and more as an institutional builder. Technically, he was only one of the many recognized founders of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, but as the place which came to be known as Chatham House once admitted, he was the founder in "a special and unique way" (RIIA 1952).

It was Curtis who initially organized meetings of U.S. and British representatives on the sidelines of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 where a "joint institute" with branches in England and the United States was conceived. However, when the Americans did not show much enthusiasm for this form of association, the British members founded an independent British Institute in 1920. As Chatham House was to admit, both the "labour and inspiration for the Institute" came from Lionel Curtis (RIIA 1952). In the years that followed, Curtis sustained the work of this Institute almost single-handedly by garnering the necessary funding. He conceived of this, and a series of other institutes that were later opened across the world, as "laboratories for the scientific study of international questions" (Curtis 1945: x). These include IR think-tanks in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and India. In the words of the Canadian merchant banker, Edward Robert Peacock (1871–1962),

the greatest contribution … [of Lionel Curtis] is this conception of his that the scientific method must be applied to the study of international affairs. In founding the Institute, he did for international affairs what was done for science when the Royal Society was founded.

(RIIA 1932: 66)

Elsewhere, with our collaborator, Alex Davies, we have told how Curtis sharpened the "scientific method" in the field that he had first brought to his work in South Africa (Thakur et al. 2017).

Robert Vitalis (2005) has claimed that the journal, *Foreign Affairs* (which started publication in 1909 as *The Journal of Race Development*), was the first IR journal, but *The Round Table* could very well claim that status, too. This is because it commenced publication in the same year. Importantly for the claims made in this chapter, both the Round Table movement and its journal, were modelled on the "Closer Union Societies" and *The State*, which had begun life in South Africa.

But the imprint of Curtis – and the Round Table – on IR is not just institutional and methodological. He was also influential in the realm of ideas. We have noted above the role Curtis played in advancing ideas related to the British commonwealth, the League of Nations and the world state. He also played a pivotal role in drafting constitutional roadmaps for India and Ireland, for which a British member of parliament scathingly called him "the man who created dyarchy in India and anarchy in Ireland" (Brand 1944).

Curtis was linked not only to IR's hinterland of discourses about "race" but also to British idealism, the two of which being mutually reinforcing. Curtis indeed was the epitome of British "idealism" which E.H. Carr had criticized in his *Twenty Years Crisis* (1946 [1939]). Importantly, British idealism was firmly embedded in a racialized understanding of the world which has been written out of disciplinary narratives.

To substantiate this argument, let us consider IR's first great debate briefly. This "great debate" allegedly took placed between "realists" and "idealists." Several IR scholars have pointed to how the first great debate is itself a great myth (Schmidt 1998; Wilson 1998; Quirk and Vigneswaran 2005), but the myth itself, and its originator E.H. Carr, distort the debate in a spectacular way, whether unintended or contrived. In the *Twenty Years Crisis*, Carr had claimed that "nearly all thinking, both academic and popular, on international politics in English-speaking countries" was "idealist." Indeed, he was unrelenting in his criticism of visionary schemes such as world federation and collective security, which he called "quack remedies" (Haslam 2000: 81). According to Carr, all scientific disciplines evolve in stages of development. Idealism, which he equated with moral pronouncements about world politics, exhibited the primitive or utopian stage of development in IR, while "realism," which was based on facts and existing reality, was an advanced stage. Thus, the British idealists as they advanced their schemes of world government were guilty of preferring morals over realities, *ought* over *is*, and thus fundamentally misunderstood how global politics operated. While Carr mentioned a number of such thinkers in his book, including Alfred Zimmern, Woodrow Wilson, Norman Angell, among others, one name conspicuously absent is that of his Chatham House colleague, Lionel Curtis. It was certainly impossible for Carr to miss Curtis's book *Civitas Dei*, considering the former started writing his text just after Curtis's final volume hit the

market, was eventually reviewed in 110 papers around the world, was translated into many languages and also adorned the shelves of politicians across the globe such as the British Queen, Hitler and the South African Afrikaner politician D.F. Malan. Indeed, no other thinker of the interwar era fits Carr's description of an idealist better than Curtis (with the possible exception of Philip Kerr).

Whatever the reasons for this omission, Carr's book is in fact a direct rejoinder to Curtis and his conceptions of the world commonwealth. Importantly however, by referring to Curtis and other British thinkers as moralists or idealists, the terms of debate are set to exclude the otherwise immoral, racial dimension of this thinking. The agenda of the debate is set between idealists/realists, in which the former are christened moralists. Curtis's racialized thinking is only indicative of the broad thread that runs across the writings of the British idealists or moralists of this era, including Alfred Zimmern, Gilbert Murray, Arnold Toynbee, Philip Kerr, Leo Amery and Leonard Woolf, among others. Their implacable faith in the values of the British empire, namely liberal democracy and self-governing institutions, was always complemented by their justifications of colonialism and racism under the guise of imperial responsibility. These ideas, which were so central to the founding of both IR's most prestigious institutions and as an intellectual practice, were suffused with the goal of the creation of a global racial empire. But since the disciplinary narrative is set along moralist/realist lines, race goes missing from disciplinary narratives. From this perspective, perhaps the most relevant critique of these idealist schemes among British public intellectuals came from George Orwell.

On the eve of World War II and just around the time Carr published his book, Orwell asked of the idealists:

> what would really be happening if [the scheme of a Union of World's democracies] were put into operation. The British and French empires, with their six hundred million disenfranchised human beings, would simply be receiving fresh police forces; the huge strength of the USA would be behind the robbery of India and Africa. ... *all* phrases like "Peace Bloc.", "Peace Front", etc. contain some such implication; all imply a tightening up of the existing structure. The unspoken clause is always "not counting niggers". For how can we make a "firm stand" against Hitler if we are simultaneously weakening ourselves at home? In other words, how can we "fight fascism" except by bolstering up a far vaster injustice?
>
> (Orwell 1939)

BOX 4.4 LANGUAGE AND DECOLONIZATION

Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1938–), two of the greatest modern writers, have reflected on the role of English language and decolonization. Ngugi famously argued that language was a carrier of culture and a tool of self-definition. English as the language of the colonizer was thus a tool of control, leading to the perpetual colonization of the mind. Achebe disagreed. He argued that if "language was a weapon," it could also be used to generate new solidarities and throw away the colonizer.

Conclusion

The African philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe once famously called anthropology "the scientific advisor to colonialism," because it spoke colonial bureaucratese (on language, see Box 4.4). Likewise, IR was the scientific advisor to the "new imperialism" of the early twentieth century. It provided a language and finesse well suited to imperial desires. War, peace, commonwealth and world government became the conceptual markers through which colonialism of the past was made palatable. Disciplinary amnesia about these issues, evident in everyday renderings of the "origins" of IR in classrooms across the world, allows the discipline to present its past in a narrative of high idealism. The origins story, as Carvalho, Leira and Hobson (2011: 736) tell us, appears to be "complete and settled as if it was carved in stone." The narrative comes to us as an inherently moral one, one where finding global peace was the central driving force for the discipline's "birth."

This internal peace of the discipline can, and must, be disturbed. The question of voice becomes crucial here. Who is telling the story and whose voice is being recorded? At first glance the non-West seems absent in the "IR for world peace" narrative. But on further probing, one registers its presence as the perpetual recipient of IR's violence (see too Chapter 6). Therefore, every story has to be read with caution – nay, deep suspicion – more so in a discipline such as IR, which, as Sankaran Krishna (2001) argues, relies necessarily on an abstract way of thinking and purposely discourages ventures into archives. For students and scholars in the global South, the process of reclaiming IR would begin by not just disturbing the master narrative, but also by presenting alternative stories (on this, see Chapter 3).

Questions for discussion

1.   Why is it important to study disciplinary history?
2.   Can one understand concepts such as war, peace or world state in abstract?
3.   Are your IR course syllabi filled with white men? Can you think of why?
4.   What do adventure novels tell us about the world?
5.   Do alternative narratives of disciplinary history help us understand IR better?
6.   What are the ways in which we can decolonize IR?

Note

1   A sapper is a soldier who is sent ahead on a variety of engineering duties to create the requisite infrastructure to facilitate the advance of the army.

Further reading

Ashworth, Lucian (2014) *A History of International Thought. From the Origins of the Modern State to Academic International Relations*, London: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315772394. An excellent and readable account of the evolution of Western international thought and how it has shaped the predominantly Anglophone discipline of IR.

Dyvik, Synne, Jan Salby and Rorden Wilkinson (2017) *What's the Point of International Relations?* New York and London: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315201467. A recent edited volume which, as the title suggests, takes stock of the discipline, its history and its silences.

Guilhot, Nicolas (ed.) (2011) *The Invention of International Relations Theory: Realism, the Rocke-feller Foundation, and the 1954 Conference on Theory,* New York: Columbia University Press. A fine collection of essays that attempts to gauge the influence of a remarkable gathering of key IR scholars in May 1954.

Morefield, Jeanne (2005) *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire,* Princeton: Princeton University Press. With a focus on two "idealists," Gilbert Murray and Alfred Zimmern, Morefield interrogates the enduring tension between universalism and empire in liberal thinking.

Rösch, Felix (ed.) (2014) *Émigré Scholars and the Genesis of International Relations. A European Discipline in America?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/9781137334695. Is American IR really a German social science? This volume focuses on the contribution of German émigré scholars in the making of the field.

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