H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

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Contents

Introduction by Eva-Maria Muschik, University of Vienna

When asked to think of the United Nations (UN), many of my students picture blue-helmeted soldiers. In UN hagiography, peacekeeping is synonymous with forceful, self-sacrificial, and benevolent internationalism. The reality is, of course, more complicated.

Animated by the public and scholarly attention to the failures of peacekeeping in the post–Cold War era, Margot Tudor's important first book chronicles the invention and development of UN peacekeeping after 1945 as a specific form of conflict response on which diverse UN member states were able to agree. More specifically she focuses on the earliest armed UN missions deployed to Egypt and the Gaza Strip, Congo, West Papua, and Cyprus between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s. Tudor reconstructs the evolution of UN peacekeeping largely via UN public and archival materials: from a strictly military enterprise to civilian operations concerned with governance and development, from occupation to administration. She explores how successive peacekeeping missions built on one another and were shaped by the particular conflicts at hand, the different interests of UN member states, and the UN officials in charge.

Tudor presents three key findings: "First, UN leadership used peacekeeping missions … as a means to protect and restore the reputation of the UN and demonstrate its value to the international community" (7). Second, "peacekeeping missions were, during the height of the Cold War, primary UN instruments for pro-democratic, [anti-communist] ideological interference" (8). Third, "mid-level peacekeepers perpetuated colonial structures and took inspiration from imperial administrations" (10). Tudor concludes that these actions, which were "underpinned by a patriarchal, racialised, and technocratic sense of superiority" (6), were ultimately harmful to the "peacekept," denying them true self-determination (5).

The reviews that follow situate Tudor's monograph within a growing field of "new UN histories" that kicked off in the mid-2000s with Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga's seminal article, followed by Mark Mazower's explorations of the UN as an originally imperial project.[1] Other scholars since have explored the repurposing of the UN as an anti-colonial forum and agent and as caught between competing projects of world order.[2] Tudor's take on these second-generation "redemption stories" is decidedly skeptical, if not wholly dismissive. She cautions against making too much of the UN as a vehicle for "Third World aspirations." In Tudor's analysis, UN peacekeeping was "a conduit for the perpetuation of colonial structures within decolonising contexts" or, indeed, a "reinvention of colonialism," as the book title suggests (20).

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[1] Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations," *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008): 251–74; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (Penguin Press, 2012).

[2] Mary Ann Heiss, *Fulfilling the Sacred Trust: The UN Campaign for International Accountability for Dependent Territories in the Era of Decolonization* (Cornell University Press, 2020), doi.org/10.1515/9781501752728; Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945–1965* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

The reviewers generally very much welcome Tudor's monograph—in Vivien Chang's words, a "well-researched, compellingly written...excellent" book. According to Lydia Walker, it "promises to become a cornerstone text" on UN global governance and policing. Chang views it as an "important addition to histories of decolonization, humanitarianism, and the Cold War, contributing powerfully to larger debates on the origins and evolution of liberal internationalism." Ryan Irwin calls it a "wonderful new diplomatic history" and notes that he enjoyed Tudor's "marvelously provocative interpretation," which "held [his] interest from start to finish."

Chang and Irwin both positively highlight Tudor's analysis of UN internal records, which "[unpacks] the ethos around peacekeeping operations" (Irwin) and demonstrates how "racial and civilizational assumptions distorted the logic of peacekeeping missions" (Chang). Walker finds Tudor's work "particularly strong" in exploring the UN's "conceptions of territoriality and its relationships to time," revealing how UN officials came to favor a partition of warring parties and populations from one another and supposedly temporary, yet ongoing, truce agreements over consensual political settlements and real peace.

Irwin's review is generally very sympathetic, if critical of what he seems to perceive as an implicit assumption in Tudor's work, which was inspired by postcolonial and decolonial thought: namely, that "empire is timeless [and] everywhere" and that "the scholar's task is to foster resistance through exposition, so that future generations attain *real* liberation." As historians, we are obliged to distinguish between different kinds and instances of imperialism, he maintains, and, one might add, of the civilizing mission as well.[3] To take this a step further, what constitute colonial "continuities" and "legacies" versus "similarities" or "mirroring?" Irwin is ultimately "unpersuaded by some of [the book's] conclusions, partly because they cast down liberal internationalism in ways that feel partial and opportunistic." He pleads for the understanding of historical actors in the full context of their background and time, including, for example, their experiences of nationalisms run amok and world wars, and asking about the alternatives on offer at the time. Otherwise, one might extrapolate, scholars risk flattening UN officials, including such complex figures as Ralph Bunche and U Thant, into agents of imperialism and white supremacy, while "the peacekept" become one-dimensional victims without agency, a notion Tudor explicitly rejects (5). In Irwin's view, "the sites of interventions themselves, never feel authentically complex." What did "the peacekept" want? To what extent were they able to shape UN peacekeeping on the ground and, by extension, back in the New York headquarters?

The reviews raise other crucial questions as well. Chang wonders about UN officials' intent, and whether it would be more accurate to think of the history of UN peacekeeping as "a bumbling misadventure generated by Western liberal internationalists' overweening hubris," rather than an insidious "reactionary political project" of "liberal hegemony." As she writes, "[t]he tensions between UN peacekeeping as grand strategy

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[3] On the relationship of the history of the civilizing mission and imperialism, see Jürgen Osterhammel and German Historical Institute in London, *Europe, the "West" and the Civilizing Mission* (German Historical Institute, 2006).

and as a series of ad hoc experimental measures—and between the rarefied spaces of Geneva and New York and the field operations on the ground - … merit further appraisal." Walker, in turn, asks what the book tells us about the nature of decolonization more generally. Should we think of it as a "reinvention of colonialism" or a "separate if coexisting process"–perhaps an unfinished one?[4] She also draws our attention to the evolution and reconfiguration of peacekeeping since the 1970s, cautioning against drawing a straight line from then to the post-Cold War period.

In her response, Tudor clarifies that she set out to explore the disconnect between UN peacekeeping rhetoric and reality and the extent to which "racial hierarchies and prejudices integral to postwar liberal internationalism" manifested themselves in the high-pressure situation of largely improvised peacekeeping, as it developed from scratch. She concludes that UN interventions ultimately did little to keep peace, but instead often intensified structural inequalities and political instability and frequently made them permanent. She does not view her book as a totalizing critique of the UN, but rather as an exploration of "only one aspect of the organization's multifaceted agency during decolonization," if certainly a very consequential one.[5] She hopes that scholars in the future will "take a less exceptionalist view to UN history" and refrain from speaking about the organization as such. We should focus on smaller subdivisions and fields of UN history, she suggests, "instead of hoping to, one day, agree on a narrative conclusion—or the bottom row of a 'balance sheet'—to calculate the organisation's overall value." In her response, as much as in her book, Tudor, a key scholar of UN history, thus provides us with plenty to discuss.

Contributors:

Margot Tudor is a Lecturer of Foreign Policy and Security at City St George's, University of London. She is a historian of UN peacekeeping and humanitarianism, and her work has been published in several places, including the *Journal of Global History*, *Modern British History*, and the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*.

Eva-Maria Muschik is a historian and Assistant Professor in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna. She is the author of *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945–1965* (Columbia University Press, 2022) and the special issue introduction "Towards a Global History of International Organizations and Decolonization," published in the *Journal of Global History* in 2022, and

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[4] See Martin Thomas, *The End of Empires and a World Remade* (Princeton University Press, 2024), as well as the forthcoming H-Diplo roundtable on the book.

[5] For a discussion of the various roles of international organizations in decolonization more generally, see Eva-Maria Muschik, "Special Issue Introduction: Towards a Global History of International Organizations and Decolonization," *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 2 (2022): 173–90, doi.org/10.1017/S1740022822000043.

co-editor of the forthcoming volume *International Organizations and the Cold War: Competition, Cooperation and Convergence* (Bloomsbury, 2025).

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In the 1991 Heritage Minutes episode titled "Lester B. Pearson," a Greek Cypriot man and a Turkish Cypriot man almost come to blows at the height of intercommunal violence in 1960s Cyprus. Out of nowhere, a Canadian UN peacekeeper (in a telltale beret and shoulder patch) arrives and expertly deescalates the situation. "Nobody's going to shoot anybody," he admonishes.[1] This short film, alongside others on topics related to Canadian history, was broadcast in classrooms, living rooms, and movie theaters across Canada, where peacekeeping became synonymous with an idealized national identity that assigned pride of position to an increasingly cosmopolitan society whose foreign engagements faithfully served the purposes of high-minded liberal internationalism. Prime Minister Lester Pearson's role in bringing the Suez crisis to a peaceful close, especially, marked the high tide of the country's engagement with the world—a "golden age" of peacekeeping closely entwined with what it meant to be Canadian.

Pearson is a minor character in *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats*, but the nation-building and myth-making aspects of peacekeeping often associated with his tenure loom large over the early years of the United Nations with which the book concerns itself. Margot Tudor's excellent monograph challenges conventional understandings of UN peacekeeping as goodwill missions, reframing its operations as part and parcel of a more insidious project of liberal hegemony. In pursuing three driving goals—to elevate the United Nations' stature amidst broader changes in the international system, to keep Communism at bay in the Cold War context, and to perpetuate colonial structures in a decolonizing era—UN leadership from 1945 to 1965 embraced stability and modernity in the name of Western interests and ideals, amounting to what Tudor calls "peacekeeping paternalism" (15).

Recent scholarship on the end of empire and the rise of international society has tended to center the dynamism of anticolonial politics in the United Nations. By highlighting the agency of Global South actors, scholars like Ryan Irwin, Adom Getachew, Alanna O'Malley, and Steve Jensen have illustrated the emergence of the UN as a forum for small nations to shape international politics.[2] Others, like Mark Mazower and Eva-Maria Muschik, have traced the UN's transformation from an instrument of empire into a champion of decolonization.[3] Tudor, by contrast, adopts a decidedly skeptical view of the international organization as a vehicle for Third World aspirations. By focusing on peacekeeping operations, she argues

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[1] The video and the transcript are available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lD3c--x1Qs

[2] Ryan Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019); Alanna O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain, and the United Nations During the Congo Crisis 1960-1964* (Manchester University Press, 2018); Steven Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[3] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945-1965* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

that the United Nations in the post-World War II period was characterized by more continuities than ruptures.

The emergence of peacekeeping as a signature mission of the United Nations was a cumulative process. Tudor's story begins with the 1947 partition of Israel and Palestine and its heated aftermath—a major challenge to UN efforts at fostering international peace in a nuclear era. Yet UN Secretary General Trygve Lie also viewed the "Palestine Problem" as an opportunity to cement the UN's reputation as "an expert in…post-colonial, territorial crises" (47). Sure enough, the perceived successes of UN military observers (UNTSO; United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) in the Arab-Israeli conflict—and later the multilateral military mission (UNC; United Nations Command) that the United States commanded in the Korean War—impelled the international organization to adopt a more activist position in "stabilising" recurrent postcolonial crises over the course of the 1950s and 1960s (113).

The bulk of *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* examines four case studies in chronological order: the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in response to the Suez crisis, the *Operation des Nations unies au Congo* (ONUC) in central Africa, the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) in West Papua, and the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Like their predecessors, these missions (despite some setbacks) continued to expand the functions of UN peacekeeping: from a strictly military enterprise to civilian operations concerned with governance and development, from occupation to administration.

Tudor's narrative is at its best when it parses how racial and civilizational assumptions distorted the logic of peacekeeping missions. Convinced of the "backwardness" and "ignorance" of Global South societies, international civil servants parachuted into crisis zones to impose "technocratic authority" on local populations (145-146). Postcolonial contexts, in this sense, became "blank slates" upon which UN bureaucrats experimented with models of non-governmental state-building (160). While the peacekeepers themselves hailed from countries as diverse as Ireland, India, Ethiopia, and Canada, Tudor makes clear that their presence in the same elite networks rendered them homogenous in their perceptions of host nations. Deliberate efforts to build community among peacekeeping troops, such as when the UNEF produced a weekly newsletter, *The Sand Dune*, reinforced this dynamic. Conceived to foster collegiality among mission troops, the publication ended up promoting "Orientalist fantas[ies]" of the Arab world as at once exotic and inferior (106). In adopting what Tudor calls a "tourist lens," in locale after locale, UN peacekeepers "othered" the local populations (182).

In contrast to the neutral, apolitical, and meritocratic narratives in which UN officials packaged their interventions, Tudor argues that UN peacekeeping was in fact both personal and ideological. It was such high-ranking officials as US diplomat Ralph Bunche, UN Secretaries-General Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjold, and others who ultimately shaped the UN's approach to questions of state-building and development in a decolonizing world. And these elites were not above hubris, pettiness, and prejudices. Lie, for instance, reported feeling "personally insulted" by North Korea's crossing of the 36th parallel (69). Hammarskjold, for his part, often resorted to "cronyism" in his recruitment choices (135). More consequentially, Bunche's impressions of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba as an "angry young

man" upon the Congo's independence soured the UN leadership on Lumumba, dooming the Congolese National Movement from the start (122-123). And it was the passing or resignation of this group of UN officials that ultimately drew this era of peacekeeping to an end in the early 1970s.

Admirably, Tudor does not gloss over the nuances and ambiguities undergirding the processes of decolonization, notably the UN leadership and the Afro-Asian bloc's delegitimization of minority and secessionist claims, as well as the imperialist ambitions of Global South countries, including some former colonies. Tudor's is therefore not simply a story of Western colonialism reformatted as internationalism, despite what its arguments appear to suggest.

Tudor's argument raises but does not fully resolve questions of power and agency. After all, it is hard to imagine that the UN bureaucrats who were at the center of Tudor's story viewed their ability to conceptualize and realize a specific vision of peacekeeping as so unencumbered. The tensions between UN peacekeeping as grand strategy and as a series of ad hoc, experimental measures—and between the rarefied spaces of Geneva and New York and the field operations on the ground—thus merit further appraisal. In the Cold War context, perceived threats to domestic stability and international security galvanized UN action in favor of further entrenching Western power and influence in the decolonizing world. Much of the decision-making thus took place, as Tudor puts it, in an "atmosphere of institutional anxiety and escalating external pressure" that the unprecedented nature of most of these crises compounded (162). In practice, these missions also struggled with such workaday issues as rapid staff turnover, communication failures between staff and soldiers, and a suspicious plane crash that killed Hammarskjold. In this frenetic atmosphere, to what extent was UN peacekeeping a tactic of a coherent, reactionary political project rather than a bumbling misadventure generated by Western liberal internationalists' overweening hubris?

Regardless of their intentions, the history of UN peacekeeping missions is one with unintended, far-reaching consequences. One lasting result is the proliferation of colonial-era "patchwork states" anchored by artificial borders and the perpetuation of partitions "as the best form of conflict response" (130, 65). More preoccupied with UN empowerment than with postcolonial political evolution, displaced host populations, and indigenous claims to self-determination, UN peacekeeping missions forged at best a mixed legacy—one that was infinitely darker than that suggested by the black-and-white panegyrics featured in "Lester B. Pearson." Well-researched and compellingly written, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* is an important addition to histories of decolonization, humanitarianism, and the Cold War, contributing powerfully to larger debates on the origins and evolution of liberal internationalism.[4]

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[4] Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2016); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Glenda Sluga: *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (Penguin Books, 2013).

When Margot Tudor raises the curtain in *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats*, the reader finds a scene that feels immediately suspicious. The year is 1966. The location is Cyprus. After a long day of meetings, Ralph Bunche, visiting the island in his capacity as the UN secretary-general's special representative, turns casually to brigadier Michael Harbottle, the British national who was leading the UN's peacekeeping mission, and quips, "You know, Brigadier, if it had not been for your country, I should have been out of a job eighteen years ago" (1). The observation hangs malevolently in the air, and before the reader gets to Tudor's second paragraph, she has unpacked its significance. The United Nations, she explains, perpetuated imperialism. Within politically unstable spaces like Cyprus, bureaucrats like Bunche made peacekeeping into a cottage industry. These bureaucrats—like so many of their gray-suited counterparts— used their expertise to stick their noses into other people's business. In places they could never truly understand, UN officials bludgeoned locals with foreign jargon, propping up friends and striking down strangers, and this labor, Tudor argues, reinscribed colonial hierarchies that led to a form of decolonization where marginalized people could not attain genuine self-determination.

This is a bold thesis, and *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* held my interest from start to finish. The book is a wonderful microcosm of new diplomatic history. Like so many scholars, Tudor blasts the perfidy of methodological nationalism, reiterating the familiar refrain that the nation-state is not "the natural social and political form of the modern world" (21).[1] But Tudor guides this thesis in an unexpected direction, arguing that UN peacekeepers *imposed* the nation-state onto decolonizing peoples. The nation-state was an instrument of neocolonial domination. To substantiate this provocation, Tudor pushes against the idea that the United Nations was just a forum for diplomacy. The United Nations was an autonomous decision-making actor, she argues. Tudor's eyes are fixed on mid-level UN officials, or the people who implemented the UN's peacekeeping missions, and she is impressed by neither their actions nor their assumptions. Like Bunche, these individuals, she writes, cared first and foremost about their careers. They talked of the UN's "reputational value," an aphorism that merely justified their self-importance. They were arrogant, insisting that their intentions were pure even as they assumed they knew more than the people they claimed to be helping. They were biased, adopting liberal solutions to problems of law and order, evincing an unsubtle hostility toward Communism that reinforced *structural* forms of racism and paternalism. And worst of all, the UN's blue helmeted bureaucrats were unoriginal. They recycled the orientalist assumptions of their imperial predecessors, infantilizing local populations in ways that fueled ever more racism and paternalism.

Tudor tells this story by charting the road to and through the UN's Congo mission. The first chapter opens with a wide-angle lens, explaining how peacekeeping became part of the UN's mission during the Israel/Palestine conflict and the Korean War. The United States, which provided the UN with a

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[1] For a foundational intervention, C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111:5 (December 2006), 1441-1464.

headquarters and staffed significant parts of the organization's bureaucracy, looms over this chapter, but its motives are never fully in focus. The reason becomes apparent in the second chapter, where Tudor presents India and Canada as her book's key players. Indian and Canadian diplomats enlarged peacekeeping to gain leverage in the UN. For Tudor's purposes, US power was irrelevant since US officials were aloof to conversations about peacekeeping's form. With considerable skill, she then digs into the UN's internal records, unpacking the ethos around peacekeeping operations. This was my favorite part of the book, where her thesis and evidence felt fully aligned.

Tudor's middle chapter covers the ill-fated Congo mission in 1960. Rather than helping the Congolese people achieve real self-determination, peacekeepers tried to circumscribe Congolese independence so that the region's freedom would be synonymous with UN authority. Sweden and Ireland show up on the margins of this effort, and I wanted to learn more about the role of small European states that presented themselves as progenitors of decolonization. They had their own definitions of self-determination. The implications get swept aside because the intervention failed so comprehensively, and *Blue Helmet Bureaucrat*'s last chapters explore the fallout of the Congo debacle. When Indonesia annexed West Papua in 1963, peacekeepers aided the effort. According to Tudor, they only wanted to reestablish their credibility. Once again, the UN did not endorse the aspirations of local freedom fighters. And when Cyprus erupted in conflict in the mid-1960s, UN peacekeepers ran the same tired playbook, positioning themselves as stakeholders with a vested interest in the region's future. By the time this effort failed, many of Tudor's protagonists had either retired or died, and she concludes her narrative with the backlash against peacekeeping, carrying this theme in her conclusions about the UN's neocolonial legacy.

Tudor's argument is fascinating. She is part of a larger group of historians writing about international organizations, and her interpretation is instantly familiar yet totally different from what has come before. Arguably, this subfield cohered with the publication of Mark Mazower's *No Enchanted Palace* and Glenda Sluga's *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*.[2] With the United States running roughshod over the United Nations in the War on Terror, those books applied the insights of legal scholars like Antony Anghie and Martti Kosekenniemi to the history of international organizations, rejecting the premise that the United Nations had tamed imperial power during the twentieth century.[3] To the contrary, the organization *was* an imperial project. Methodologically, intellectual history anchored this early work, and the authors who followed Mazower and Sluga tended to build narratives around the political movements that tried to change the United Nations. Some scholars explored how decolonization affected the organization; others examined why the organization helped incubate so many rights movements.[4] But this literature reinforced

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[2] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
[3] Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2005); Martti Kosekenniemi, *The Politics of International Law* (Bloomsbury, 2011).
[4] For sampling, Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Steven Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of*

the premise that the United Nations, which had been born to legitimize great power, evolved with the efflorescence of decolonization.

Tudor is moving this conversation in a different direction. She uses the UN's archives as Susan Pedersen used the League of Nation's archives in *The Guardians*, and *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* should probably be read alongside Eva-Maria Muschik's *Building States*, which analyzes the UN Secretariat as a state-making institution.[5] Together, Tudor and Muschik's books uproot the premise that the UN transcended its imperial origins. They shift attention to the bureaucrats who did the UN's work. These officials, Tudor and Muschik argue, sold UN membership as an alternative to colonial rule, and this move—the original sin of our times—married decolonization to the United Nations, which stymied postcolonial freedom and led to neocolonialism. The conclusion puts the history of the United Nations on different footing. Perhaps the organization nurtured new kinds of antiracist and anticolonial political movements, but the nation-state system—so crucial to world politics today—undercut the possibility of transformational redistributive justice. The UN's evolution is less significant than its imbrication with this transgression.

To flesh out this provocation's implications, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* communes with the New Imperial History. Tudor uses this literature more explicitly than many other historians of international society.[6] A quarter century ago, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler called on scholars to treat the so-called periphery and metropole as a single field of study. Too often, Cooper and Stoler argued, historians handled these spaces as separate and autonomous, which distorted how colonial entanglements shaped notions of national difference and identity.[7] This insight has now transformed European history.[8] It has also changed fields like US foreign relations history.[9] For those working in this space, imperialism is both an object to study and a method of study, especially in conversations about citizenship, sovereignty, and rights. Empire is timeless, operating in the sinews of power everywhere. Therefore, the scholar's task is to foster resistance through exposition, so that future generations attain *real* liberation.[10]

Global Values (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Amy Sayward, *The United Nations in International History* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

[5] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945-1965* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

[6] Erez Manela, "International Society as a Historical Subject," *Diplomatic History* 44:2 (2020), 184–209.

[7] Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (University of California Press, 1997).

[8] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (University of California Press 2005); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press 2008).

[9] Paul Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116:5 (2011), 1348-91.

[10] For reflections, Naoko Shibusawa, "U.S. Empire and Racial Capitalist Modernity," *Diplomatic History* 45:5 (2021), 855-884; Ryan Irwin, "Requiem for a Field: The Strange Journey of U.S. Diplomatic History," in *Bloomsbury History: Theory and Method* (Bloomsbury, 2022), 1-30.

Tudor applies this insight to UN peacekeepers. In Suez, the Congo, West Papua, and Cyprus, she dissects their efforts, showing how officials used institutions and expertise to reinforce their own authority. Persuasively, Tudor characterizes these peacekeepers as meddlers. Their disdain for absolute sovereignty jumps from the page. Clearly, they believed that sovereignty must be circumscribed by international institutions. Less persuasively, Tudor suggests that the UN's critics—people who opposed these efforts by equating self-determination with absolute sovereignty—enjoyed widespread support in the places where peacekeepers worked. To make this interpretation persuasive, Tudor should have provided evidence from her intervention sites, but her narrative relies on UN documents, and despite her superb efforts to read these sources along the grain, the sites themselves never feel authentically complex. In some spots, the argument seems to imply that people supported the UN's critics because UN peacekeeping was so obviously flawed (147-158, 198-211, 247-256). This is a slippery slope. The move accentuates the closeness between her argument and the argument of left-leaning anti-imperialist intellectuals from the 1960s and 1970s. These activists also blasted the United Nations as an imperial project. They characterized the postcolonial nation-state as an instrument of neocolonial oppression. And their tropes, like the tropes of blue helmeted bureaucrats, did political work, begging the question: What happens when our arguments converge with the arguments of people we write about?

My critique of *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* has two parts, and both flow from this question. First, the UN's critics were humans too. They were as flawed and warty as their liberal counterparts. If our goal is to chart genealogies of thought and action, we are obliged to handle every perspective with the same critical rigor, even the ones that anticipate our own prejudices. Tudor's narrative stumbles on this front, despite her obvious skills as researcher and analyst. And this critique cuts deeper than the specific interpretative choices of *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats*; it is about New Imperial History, and the way historians use its insights to liberate readers from liberal assumptions. To paraphrase William Shakespeare, methinks we deconstruct too much. Perhaps one solution is to build a bridge between historians of international organizations and historians of Third World radicalism.[11] This bridge would not cancel any part of Tudor's marvelously provocative interpretation. But it will add some balance to the historical record, which may temper our claims about sovereignty during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Second, most prosecutors let the accused to defend themselves. A self-defense of peacekeeping would probably begin with periodization. By 1945, most peacemakers were halfway to the grave, and they had lived through a war that had just killed 70-85 million people. Most victims died in the bloodlands where absolute sovereignty flourished unchecked.[12] So, Tudor is correct; the United Nations, which was invented to discredit absolute sovereignty, tried to prevent that idea's resurrection during decolonization. And she is right; most UN workers had little enthusiasm for nationalism, collectivization, autarky, or revolution.

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[11] Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence, eds., *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter, eds., *The Anticolonial Transnational Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

[12] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic, 2010); Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (Penguin, 2015).

Unquestionably, peacekeepers *were* biased. But they probably believed that they had earned their biases— and the right to guffaw at panaceas that assumed the planet would work better when all marginalized persons had unchecked sovereignty and total equality.

Good arguments start with evidence. They become persuasive by engaging with counterarguments. Tudor's narrative checks the first box confidently, and *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* exploits the UN's archives with wonderful aplomb, advancing a thesis that grabs the reader by the shirt collar and holds tight until the last page. Nevertheless, I am unpersuaded by some of its conclusions, partly because they cast down liberal internationalism in ways that feel partial and opportunistic. Imperialism *is* the alpha and omega of our interpretative times, but we are still obliged to distinguish between different kinds and instances of imperialism. As I finish this paragraph, the evening news is playing in the background. Former US president Donald Trump is raging about the deep state, characterizing bureaucrats as arrogant, biased, and unoriginal. He is promising his supporters something that sounds a lot like *true* self-determination—if they give him their total devotion. The crowd is screaming ravenously, and as this curtain falls, my mind drifts back to Bunche. He was not perfect. He was just preferable to many alternatives.

Review by Lydia Walker, The Ohio State University

Margot Tudor's *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats: United Nations Peacekeeping and the Reinvention of Colonialism, 1945–1971* promises to become a cornerstone text in the history of the United Nations as a force and form of global governance and policing.[1] Tudor writes an interconnected account of the first three decades of UN peacekeeping: from its "birth" in the Middle East—the "Land of Blue Helmets"[2]—to the end of the Ralph Bunche years at the UN Secretariat (1971). Bunche won the Nobel peace prize for his mediation work in Palestine, was an architect of UN Trusteeship as a pathway to decolonization, and oversaw peacekeeping at the UN as Under Secretary for Political Affairs. This connected approach stands in contrast to how the United Nations and its national government members tend to narrate the history of UN peacekeeping, as distinct, separate, time-limited endeavors, since they have significant political investment in categorizing these interventions as short-term rather than open-ended. For practical reasons, much pre-existing scholarship has mirrored the UN's own understanding of its interventions as particular rather than interlinked.[3] Tudor's book breaks this mold, tracing patterns, policy evolution, and "lessons learned" across UN missions in Israel/Palestine, Congo, Cyprus, and West Papua (165).

Tudor's work is particularly strong on the United Nations' conceptions of territoriality and its relationships to time—meaning both literal time for diplomatic negotiation and a more ephemeral desire to "slow down" the seeming political acceleration of decolonization (65). There were moments, such as the summer of 1960, when new independent states became UN members every week. According to Tudor, during the postwar period, formative UN arrangements "entrenched an organizational preference for partitions as the best form of conflict response. In combination with long-term ceasefires and truce agreements, this principle served to isolate the warring parties and populations from one another and further delineate their personal lives and political demands." From the UN's perspective, "partition slowed down a conflict for the international community creating time for negotiation…" (65). In this way, Tudor connects the overarching strategic mindset of partition—the site of two ongoing UN observer missions since 1948/1949 in Palestine and Kashmir—to the tactics of ceasefire agreements and Lines of Control patrolled by the UN. This form of territoriality created the temporality of the ongoing yet temporary truce rather than peace as peacekeeping's result.

While the synthesis of Tudor's narrative covers refreshing analytical ground, the chronological focus of *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats*—from peacekeeping's alleged promise in the 1950s to its perceived insignificance by the

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[1] Alongside Tudor's *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* are Alex Bellamy, Paul Williams, and Stuart Griffin, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, Third Edition (Polity Press, 2020) and Brian Drohan, *The Peacekeeping Project: The Rise of the United Nations as a Military Power* (in progress manuscript).

[2] Karim Makdisi and Vijay Prasad, eds., *Land of Blue Helmets: The United Nations and the Arab World* (University of California Press, 2016).

[3] Examples of individual studies include 'Funmi Olonisakin, *Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: The Story of UNAMSIL* (Lynne Rienner, 2007) and Herman Salton, *Dangerous Diplomacy: Bureaucracy, Power Politics, and the Role of the UN Secretariat in Rwanda* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

1970s—mirrors the traditional UN history narrative of political potential to practical stalemate.[4] Tudor ruminates on the seeming opportunity of the post-1945 moment, for example in her discussion of proposals for Jerusalem as an international city, with a UN Trusteeship administration as part of the partition, protected by a UN Guard (55). This project would not only have "fixed" a zone of international crises, but also increased institutional prestige. Could the United Nations act as a shield to protect the allied powers of the second world war from the violent results of decolonization (29)? The answer to that question depends upon analyzing the UN in terms of its aspirations versus limitations, or what it has accomplished versus what it set out to accomplish in 1945.[5] These constraints have trapped understandings of the UN within discussions that perceive the institution as a vehicle for imperial power projection (as Tudor's narrative outlines) in a world with national self-determination as an international norm, or a platform for the articulation of pre-postcolonial forms of global governance (as in, for instance, the work of Manu Bhagavan).[6]

It is on this point of the imperial versus anticolonial forms of the UN that I might push Tudor's argument further: what is the relationship between UN peacekeeping and what she describes in her subtitle as the "reinvention of colonialism?" Is this reinvention another name for decolonization? Or is it a separate if coexisting process? Tudor's book pays particular attention to the continuing imperial elements of UN peacekeeping. She highlights the embedded paternalism in attempts to provide order and security to regions that do not fit (or were/are deemed unfit for) paradigms of independence and self-government, and her source material demonstrates the racism articulated by particular peacekeepers towards the communities they policed. Yet UN peacekeepers—by policing and monitoring the territorial borders of new postcolonial states such as Congo, Indonesia, India, or Pakistan—supported one layer of postcolonial statehood against movements for, for example, a Kashmir, a Katanga, or a West Papua, movements that attempted to revise the borders of UN member states.[7] In this way UN peacekeeping worked to maintain the immediate result of decolonization as much as it reinvented colonialism for a postcolonial age.

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[4] Such as that of Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: History of an Idea, 1815 to Present* (Penguin Press, 2013).

[5] Alanna O'Malley and Lydia Walker, "A Revisionist History of the United Nations," *Past & Present*, forthcoming 2025.

[6] Manu Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers: India and the Quest for One World* (HarperCollins India, 2012); Manu Bhagavan, *Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: A Biography* (Penguin, 2023).

[7] Regarding the UN's attempted role to freeze conflict in Kashmir in its early years, see Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir* (Princeton University Press, 1954). Korbel, a Czech diplomat and American political scientist, was a former Chairman of the UN Commission for India and Pakistan, the eponymous founder of the University of Denver's Korbel School of International Studies, and the father of US Secretary of State Madeline Albright. Regarding the UN's role in preventing Katanga's secession from Congo-Léopoldville, see Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2016), 41-60. Regarding the UN's inability to recognize West Papuan national self-determination, see Emma Kluge, "A New Agenda for the Global South: West Papua, the United Nations, and the Politics of Decolonization." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, Vol. 13, no. 1 (2022): 66-85.

The narrative presented in *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* closes in 1971, with the end of the Ralph Bunche-directed era of UN Peacekeeping. In the decades since the end of the Cold War, the number of UN Peacekeeping missions have multiplied and their composition has diversified, with complex political and economic results: Soldiers from postcolonial states serving in UN missions while being paid by the UN are a crucial part of the political economy of countries such as Bangladesh; a military mutiny occurred in Liberia in February 2024 because a portion of the Liberian armed forces returned to the country from UN service, no longer receiving UN pay, and therefore they and their wives sought to be paid by the Liberian government.[8] These contemporary examples show that while the geopolitical shifts of Cold War and other power dynamics reconfigured UN peacekeeping, political and economic hierarchies reordered and reinscribed by decolonization remain, with UN peacekeeping playing a key role in both their continuity and evolution.

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[8] On the brief mutiny, "Some AFL Soldiers May Be Charged For Mutiny By Disrupting Amid Celebration Of Armed Forces Day," *Global News Network*, 12 February 2024, available at https://gnnliberia.com/some-afl-soldiers-may-be-charged-for-mutiny-for-disruption-amid-celebration-of-armed-forces-day/ (accessed 7 April 2024). On its less reported causes, conversation with Jacien Carr (Assistant Director, Center for African Studies, The Ohio State University), 13 February 2024.

Response by Margot Tudor, City St George's–University of London

I am grateful to Vivien Chang, Ryan Irwin, and Lydia Walker for their reviews and generous engagement with my book, as well as Eva-Maria Muschik for her thoughtful introductory remarks. Many thanks also to Elisabeth Leake and the larger H-Diplo team for kindly suggesting and organising this roundtable. As an early-career scholar publishing her first monograph, the idea of a collection of reviews about *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* was both exciting and daunting, but I am delighted by these responses to my book. I hope, one-day, to meet all my reviewers, thank them in person, and continue this conversation.

Blue Helmet Bureaucrats began as a social sciences PhD proposal in late 2016 and evolved into a history PhD project, before I expanded it into the five-chapter monograph published by Cambridge University Press during the spring of 2023. I was lucky to undertake my thesis as part of an interdisciplinary institute, the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (based at the University of Manchester), which focuses on the research and practice of humanitarianism. My book reflects this unusual training; as much as it is grounded in historical methods and historiography, it builds upon postcolonial and decolonial thought, as well as peace and conflict scholarship. Indeed, it was IR scholars, such as Marsha Henry and Sherene Razack, who first drew my attention to the colonial politics of post-Cold War peacekeeping.[1]

But the historian in me sought to return to the first armed missions and contextualise the "rise" of UN peacekeeping during the Cold War and decolonisation, before the more commonly-known controversies—or "fall"—of the post-Cold War interventions in Rwanda and Somalia. As Walker identifies in her review, "the United Nations and its national government members tend to narrate the history of UN peacekeeping, as distinct, separate, time-limited endeavors, since they have significant political investment in categorizing these interventions as short-term rather than open-ended." Although deep studies of one mission are valuable for investigating specific cultures and contexts, they inevitably exceptionalise their case study and thus often struggle to identify patterns across operations.

By taking a "connected approach" across the first four armed missions, which were deployed to Egypt and the Gaza Strip, Congo, West Papua, and Cyprus, I sought to show how peacekeeping officials did not operate in a vacuum. They were rooted in liberal colonial ideas, such as the civilising mission, as well as the structures of other informal peacekeeping experiments from the past. Chang sees my comparative approach as a point of difference between *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* and other recent scholarship on the "end of empire and the rise of international society." She argues that, deviating from works by Steven Jensen, Adom Getachew, Alanna O'Malley, and Ryan Irwin,[2] I interpret peacekeeping operations as a "cumulative

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[1] Marsha Henry, "Keeping the Peace: Gender, Geopolitics and Global Governance Interventions," *Conflict, Security & Development*, 19:3 (2019): 263-268, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2019.1608021; Sherene Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping and the New Imperialism* (University of Toronto Press, 2006).
[2] Steven Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2020); Alanna O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain and the United*

process," showing how "the United Nations in the post-World War II period was characterized by more continuities than ruptures."

Building on a wealth of experience, UN field-based staff quickly recognised their power to influence the political future of decolonising populations and developed a methodology for conflict response that prioritised the absence of visible or transgressive violence against state powers. As Walker notes, for example, I argue that territorial partitions became a preferred approach to maintain "peace"—or an absence of non-state violence—in a conflict, thus formalising the permanent separation of a population amid the temporary context of an emergency, as well as necessitating a dedicated team of international soldiers to manage the protection of the border.

By approaching the UN as a historical agent rather than just a diplomatic forum, I wanted to explore to what extent the project of UN peacekeeping was a manifestation of the racial hierarchies and prejudices integral to postwar liberal internationalism. Scholars of post-Cold War peacekeeping are familiar with the sharp end of mission misconduct, shedding light on the epidemic of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and corruption in recent missions.[3] However, this approach has framed violence or wrongdoing in peacekeeping as a tragic anomaly, a transgression from the traditional norm or so-called "golden age" of UN missions, rather than as a fundamental feature of UN military operations and logic. Instead, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* pushes beyond a SEA definition of peacekeeper violence, especially one that often slips into a "bad apples" narrative. It examines the institutional structures and practices that produced harm.

In her review, Chang compliments the book for showing how "racial and civilizational assumptions distorted the logic of peacekeeping missions" from within the organisation, identifying a "peacekeeping paternalism" that was unique to the liberal internationalist project. Inspired by Ann Laura Stoler's work, my book read "along the archival grain" in the UN archives to identify the internal manifestations of colonial continuities in the UN's field-based activities.[4] It shows how procedural and systematic forms of violence, including, the denial of self-determination, racist decision-making, civil rights violations, uneven state sovereign protections, and covert political interference, harmed the group Marsha Henry has termed

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Nations During the Congo Crisis 1960–1964 (Manchester University Press, 2018); Ryan Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[3] See, *inter alia.* Jasmine-Kim Westendorf, *Violating Peace: Sex, Aid, and Peacekeeping* (Cornell University Press, 2020); Audrey L. Comstock, "In the Shadow of Peace: Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Accountability in UN Peacekeeping," *Global Governance*, 29:2 (2023): 168-184, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02902003; Sabine Lee and Susan Bartels, "'They Put a Few Coins in Your Hand to Drop a Baby in You': A Study of Peacekeeper-Fathered Children in Haiti," *International Peacekeeping*, 27:2 (2019): 177-209, DOI: http://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2019.1698297.

[4] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

"peacekept" just as much as explicit examples of (more individualised) misconduct, such as weapons smuggling.[5]

Chang also raises the question of how far UN peacekeeping was a "reactionary political project rather than a bumbling misadventure generated by Western liberal internationalists' overweening hubris?" But I think this is one of my key findings about UN peacekeeping: that it was in moments of intense pressure, anxiety, and organisational crisis that international officials revealed a reflex towards civilisational logics and racial prejudices most acutely. While Chang's comment focuses on the question of human agency, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* demonstrates that patterns of thinking inform decision-making both implicitly and explicitly. As she notes in her review, I argue that it was a "personal and ideological" project. For the young organisation, peacekeeping missions presented a unique opportunity to demonstrate value in conflict response, promising to lessen hegemonic powers' anxieties of the Cold War domino effect as well as provide less powerful nations a multilateral alternative to superpower alignment.

This focus on organisational reputation, whether during a period of popularity or crisis, in combination with a racist civilisational logic ultimately empowered mid-level peacekeeping staff to make decisions about the political future of regions far beyond mission mandates. For a state power, this self-interest is not exceptional or surprising. What is exceptional about UN peacekeeping are the organisation's claims to be otherwise—to be more moral, rights-driven, consensual—rather than a unilateral state intervention. These disconnects, between the rhetoric and marketing of UN peacekeeping and the granular practices in the field, open the organisation up to scrutiny and questions about the structural inequalities and political instability that UN interventions intensified—and frequently made permanent—as in Gaza, Cyprus, and West Papua.

The technocratic and humanitarian guise of the UN missions often concealed the frequently improvised practices that were designed by UN staff, as well as their assumption of their expertise and "good intentions" over the knowledge of peacekept populations. As Irwin suggests in his review, peacekeepers "probably believed they had earned their biases," but—more significantly—they believed in the "blank slate" of the host territory they intervened in; their perception of their own superiority (rooted deeply in a white supremacist politics of civilisational logic) was dwarfed by their intransigent belief in host populations' racial and intellectual inferiority. Indeed, the humanitarian guise of missions was frequently useful for managing member-state criticism of peacekeeping officials' decision-making. For example, throughout 1962–1963, the Australian government refused asylum applications from West Papuans based on its assumption of the UN mission's benevolence: for the Australian government, it was paradoxical to imagine Papuans needed to seek asylum from a territory administered by the United Nations (194).

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[5] Marsha Henry, *The End of Peacekeeping: Gender, Race, and the Martial Politics of Intervention* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024).

In her review, Walker outlines how different scholars of the UN have become trapped in debating the "successes" and "failures" of the organisation. Similarly, Irwin suggests that my critique of UN peacekeeping operations risks casting the entire UN as "an imperial project." My argument about the history of the UN is not, however, a totalising critique of the organisation and is far from equivalent to "bad faith" scholarship from right-wing academics.[6] It would be wrong to ascribe any one singular motivating interest, narrative, or politics (either colonial or anti-colonial) to the UN since its establishment. It has always been a multi-functional, diplomatic, military, mediatory, legal, humanitarian, developmental, and economic institution. In studying the logics and practices of UN peacekeeping, I trace the manifestations of liberal internationalism through peacekeeping interventions and identified colonial continuities in these field-based UN activities.

Blue Helmet Bureaucrats examines only one aspect of the UN's multifaceted agency during decolonisation. As I write in the introduction, "although this book critically engages with the liberal internationalist project, it does not seek to undermine all internationalisms or achievements of the UN system" (11-12). While it acknowledges how donating troops to a UN peacekeeping mission provided important opportunities for post-colonial and/or non-aligned nations, such as India and Ghana, to attain diplomatic power in an intensely hierarchical and bipolar international community, the UN's deliberative fora are not the primary focus of my book. Other histories of the UN have already detailed how the organisation was a unique space for individuals to develop anti-colonial politics, transnational solidarity networks, legal protections, and human rights discourse during decolonisation.[7] Just as these other histories have explored the opportunities offered by the UN, a growing group of scholars have begun to investigate the organisation's structural harms and false promises of rights-based norms. These interventions have reminded us that, although activists and diplomats may have carved out spaces for anti-colonial radicalism within the organisation, the UN was established as an instrument to maintain Western hegemony in the postwar period.[8] In short: how helpful is a debate of organisational success or failure without acknowledging questions of power, perspective, and precision—for whom and by whom?

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[6] Moreover, as I have written elsewhere, this argument perpetuates the idea that critique of liberal institutions should be limited to individual transgression (or "bad apples") rather than the identification of structural patterns of inequality to prevent being undermined by illiberal or conservative groups. It's not that this threat from the right is false, it is that this response is politically weak. Ironically, the UN's inflexibility to acknowledge and response to systemic harms has only increased attacks from the right-wing. See: Philip Cunliffe, *Cosmopolitan Dystopia: International Intervention and the Failure of the West* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

[7] See, *inter alia.* Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights* (2016); Anna Konieczna, "'We the People of the United Nations': The UN and the Global Campaigns Against Apartheid," in Anna Konieczna and Rob Skinner, eds., *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid: 'Forward to Freedom' in South Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 67-103.

[8] Such as: Meredith Terretta, "'We Had Been Fooled into Thinking that the UN Watches over the Entire World': Human Rights, UN Trust Territories, and Africa's Decolonization," *Human Rights Quarterly* 34:2 (2012): 329-360, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2012.0022; Meredith Terretta, "'Why Then Call it the Declaration of Human Rights?': The Failures of Universal Human Rights in Colonial Africa's Internationally Supervised Territories," in Jean Quataert and

Due to this textured analysis of the organisation, I am "skeptical" of the UN "as a vehicle for Third World aspirations," as Chang notes. Whilst there was a growing number of anticolonial networks and voting blocs during decolonisation, many of which developed at the UN, there was not one formal anti-colonial movement, nor were there agreed definitions of key principles, such as self-determination. Just because postcolonial states had experienced colonial oppression, they were not automatically incapable of pursuing imperialist policies once independent. Although the Non-Aligned Movement and most member-states of the Afro-Asian Bloc in the General Assembly projected themselves as committed to their objective to eliminate (European) colonialism, several post-colonial states, such as Indonesia, Ethiopia, and India, simultaneously pursued their own imperialist agendas against minority groups, indigenous communities, or proximate territories during this period.[9]

Decolonisation offered a moment of opportunity, but it also provoked territorial and political disputes. Postcolonial populations became bound by ethno-nationalist political and bureaucratic constitutional systems, as well as restricted by the artificial state borders drawn by European colonists.[10] Cold War pressures compounded this shift towards nationalism and authoritarianism across the Global South—an alignment that had begun in 1930s Germany—[11]and anti-Communists invested in installing and protecting far-right dictatorships, such as in Indonesia and Chile.[12] This anti-Communist strategy was also a driving force for UN peacekeeping staff who shared US anxieties of decolonisation and Soviet infiltration in the Global South. Increased fears of Communism and secessionism prompted UN staff to engage in political

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Lora Wildenthal, eds., *The Routledge History of Human Rights* (Routledge, 2019): 203-221; Jessica Lynne Pearson, "Defending Empire at the United Nations: The Politics of International Colonial Oversight in the Era of Decolonisation," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45:3 (2017): 525-549, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2017.1332133; Emma Stone Mackinnon, "Declaration as Disavowal: The Politics of Race and Empire in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," *Political Theory* 47:1 (2019): 57-81, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591718780697.

[9] Jessica Namakkal, *Unsettling Utopia: The Making and Unmaking of French India* (Columbia University Press, 2021); Mohammad Shahabuddin, *Minorities and the Making of Postcolonial States in International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Kalana Senaratne, *Internal Self-Determination in International Law: History, Theory, and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Mattias Fibiger, "A Diplomatic Counter-revolution: Indonesian Diplomacy and the Invasion of East Timor," *Modern Asian Studies* 55:2 (2021): 587-628, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X20000025; Brad Simpson, "The United States and the Curious History of Self-Determination," *Diplomatic History* 36:4 (2012): 675-694, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2012.01049.x; Redie Bereketeab, "Eritrea, a Colonial Creation: A Case of Aborted Decolonisation," in Redie Bereketeab, ed., *Self-Determination and Secession in Africa: The Post-Colonial State* (Routledge, 2014).

[10] Jasmine Gani, "Racial Militarism and Civilizational Anxiety at the Imperial Encounter: From Metropole to the Postcolonial State," *Security Dialogue* 52:6 (2021): 546-566, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106211054901; Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

[11] David Motadel, "The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire," *The American Historical Review* 124:3 (2019): 843-877, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhy571.

[12] Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (PublicAffairs, 2020).

interference alongside covert Western colleagues, who were prepared to risk destabilisation to rid post-colonial states of their left-leaning elected officials, such as Patrice Lumumba. Thus, in response to Irwin's "slippery slope" critique, for many marginalised populations and those seeking alternative political communities beyond state sovereignty, the post-colonial nation-state was an instrument of neocolonial oppression.

By adopting a "connected approach" across several sites of decolonisation, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats* shows that activists, organisations, and states' ideas of anti-colonial politics shifted depending on a range of factors, including geopolitical alignment, regional politics, material interests, as well as internal racial hierarchies of who "deserved" liberation. Many UN staff, including U Thant and Djalal Abdoh, were engaged in anti-colonial politics and activism during the 1950s and 60s. However, once they were employed by the UN, the mid-level and leadership staff from Global South nations became part of the same elite liberal internationalist networks as their Western colleagues, which were rooted in civilisational logic and white supremacy. This shared epistemic community "othered" and exaggerated their difference from the peacekept, making officials "homogenous in their perceptions of host nations," in Chang's words. Thus, although they shared common experiences of colonisation with host populations, their anti-colonial solidarity was undermined by their elite background and ideas of racial difference.

Rejecting a "balance sheet" version of history of the UN, I do not seek to weigh up the value of the organisation by comparing—for example—Indonesia's leadership in the Afro-Asian Bloc in the General Assembly to the UN mission to support the state's recolonisation of West Papua, and, later, East Timor. Instead, in *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats*, by foregrounding the power imbalances that were inherently built into the UN system and the postwar international system, I contextualise UN field-based operations and decision-making within longer historical narratives, such as liberal colonialism, nationalism, and humanitarianism, that are rooted in field-based experiences and interventions. I argue that this militarised wing of the UN deserves analysis as its own historical agent, rather than as part of a homogenous UN with only a diplomatic function. Rather than a false binary of a "good" or "bad" UN, instead we can instead understand "the UN" as multiple, intersecting UNs—not just limited to each committee or department, but thematically, spatially, and hierarchically—each with their own agency and power, as well as part of shared organisational cultures, interests, and procedures.

This way we take a less exceptionalist approach to UN history—as a category of its own in international history—and instead move behind the curtain of its operations, breaking it down into its different functions, personnel, and often competing interests. Rather than accepting its homogeneity, we can contextualise these smaller UNs into other subfields, such as colonial history or medical history, and seek out intra-organisational tensions, instead of hoping to, one day, agree on a narrative conclusion—or the bottom row of a "balance sheet"—to calculate the organisation's overall value. I believe all these histories of the UN can exist in conversation with one another in generative debate about how these smaller UNs in combination help to shed light on the organisation as part of more than just one thread of modern history.