
Book Reviews

Mark Mazower. **No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations**. Princeton University Press, 2010, Pp. 236. \$24.95. ISBN: 9780691135212.

International lawyers have long held international organizations in high esteem. Paul Reinsch, arguably the first author to write comprehensively on the law of international organizations about a century ago and largely responsible for laying the foundations for the functionalist approach to international organizations, already welcomed them as working for the common global good. The sentiment culminated in Nagendra Singh's classic statement that organizations serve the 'salvation of mankind'. States were considered bad; organizations, by contrast, were considered inherently good.

This picture has met with some revision over the last decade or two. Anecdotal evidence emerging during the 1980s suggested that organizations can be highly dysfunctional; the breakdown of the International Tin Council suggested that organizations can create financial difficulties, and NATO's bombing of Belgrade even suggested that organizations can end up killing people. The latest book by the renowned historian Mark Mazower further confirms this more realistic picture. International organizations are not the angelic creatures, somehow hovering above politics, they were once thought to be; instead, concentrating on the birth of the UN, he argues that they are themselves the results of political concerns, and not just the politics of striving for global peace and justice, but the rawer power politics of imperialism.

Many international lawyers have adhered to the thought that the US was the driving force behind the emergence of the UN, in much the

same way as it had been the *actor intellectualis* of the League of Nations. And in doing so, the unspoken premise is usually that the United States' motives were reasonably pure, and for all their similarities, the UN and the League are portrayed as distinct creatures. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt are usually praised as cosmopolitans, as men of ideals who, if anything, had to cope with parochial Senate factions. Mazower's main thesis now is that the creation of the UN owed much not just to US concerns, but also to British imperialism, and that there is a fair amount of continuity between the League and the UN. In the end, so Mazower claims, both owe much to 'the visions that emerged out of the British Empire in particular in its final decades' (at 14).

In four chapters, he addresses the role of ideas coming from four distinct angles. First, there is the universe of the South African statesman Jan Smuts, architect of apartheid, influential drafter of the League Covenant and drafter of the UN Charter's preamble. Secondly, Mazower dissects some of the writings of Sir Alfred Zimmern, one of the first theorists of the novel discipline of international relations who had also been influential in the creation of the League. Thirdly, he goes into the work of Jewish refugees in the US, in particular Raphael Lemkin, coiner of the term genocide and driving force behind the conclusion of the Genocide Convention in 1948. Fourthly and finally, he explores the thought of Indian statesman Nehru, whom he holds to have been instrumental in creating a new atmosphere in the UN General Assembly right from the start.

While Mazower's underlying claim is persuasive enough, it is not always easy to see how the four chapters connect. The role of Smuts is incontrovertible: Smuts was heavily involved in the creation of both the League and the UN, and felt strongly that the global organizations should be seen as embodying

western, white people's, values. Global organization was conceived by Smuts as a British Commonwealth writ large. While no Nazi (Smuts felt that Hitler was too divisive), he stood firm for European values: the League, and later the UN, should be devoted to a civilizing mission, spearheaded in Africa by South Africa. Thus, the creation of the League and the UN struck two birds with one stone: the world would be better off, and white rule in South Africa would be legitimized.

Zimmern too promoted British values, but in a different way. Building on ancient Greece, he felt that Britain embodied the classic Aristotelian virtues, and thus would be ideally placed to help safeguard civilization. For Zimmern, the very existence of international organizations was not enough, however important it might be; what mattered also was the kind of organization that was set up. Having written a book called *The Greek Commonwealth*, Zimmern naturally reached the conclusion that a commonwealth might be able to reconcile the local (state sovereignty) and the global (international organization), and it is this thought that would inform his writings.

Mazower's chapter on Lemkin and other Jewish refugees concentrates on minority protection. While this was arranged for in the League of Nations Covenant, it would not be replicated in the UN Charter; indeed, instead of supporting hard rights for minorities and individuals, the UN settled for only the watered down version of relying on world public opinion instead of legal rules. For Lemkin, then, such instruments as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights represented not progress, but rather a retrograde step. And to make things worse, the liberal embrace of a right to self-determination stimulated nationalism rather than anything else. In Mazower's own explosive words, 'what the Revisionists and Nazis had called for in the 1930s, the Allies now promoted – ethnic homogeneity as a desirable feature of national self-determination and international stability' (at 143).

Mazower devotes his final chapter to Nehru, statesman of Indian independence. What set the UN apart from the egalitarian League of Nations was its return to a system

of Great Powers, embodying the idea that Europeans have a right to rule the world. Nehru then is of interest as the first to challenge this, as a harbinger of the post-colonial world. And this turned the comfortable conceptions of Smuts and Zimmern on their head: they had designed the UN as a continuation of British imperial tendencies, the very tendencies which now came to be under fire.

It would seem, then, that Smuts and Zimmern embody the continuation of politics as usual, with Lemkin and other refugees cast in a legalist role and Nehru as the founding father of the post-colonial UN. One may wonder, of course, whether this does complete justice to all individuals concerned, or where this leaves other individuals, possibly hailing from other states. In that sense, the book's main characters retain a bit of a cardboard character: the book's slender format does not allow for a full and nuanced intellectual picture of the main protagonists, neither does it add up to an exhaustive or comprehensive history of the making of the UN.

Still, the main quality of Mazower's book is that it offers a very welcome corrective on the traditional narrative, which tends to highlight the role of the US and tends to think of the UN (and other international organizations) as a purely benign creature, created with nothing but the common good in mind. Mazower demonstrates that there is more than one side to the story of the creation of the UN, and does so in a highly readable style. This is a sophisticated work of intellectual history with implications for international institutional law. Mazower forces the discipline to rethink one of the premises on which the paradigmatic theory of functionalism rests: the idea that international organizations by their very nature contribute to the salvation of mankind. While this may never have been a plausible premise to begin with, Mazower's work provides a solid and intellectually stimulating basis for trying to re-think this fundamental starting point.

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doi: 10.1093/ejil/chq053