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by

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“This Novel Social Fabric”: Genre, Liberalism, and Political Idealism in Fiction of the British Empire, 1913-1936

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“This Novel Social Fabric”: Genre, Liberalism, and Political Idealism in Fiction of the  
British Empire, 1913-1936

by

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*To my parents*

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This dissertation brings together British and Anglophone Indian novels published between 1913 and 1936 that address the conditions of economic globalization in contexts of late British imperialism. I use genre as an entry point to examine how fiction writers situated in the metropolitan administrative center of the British Empire reckoned with the liberalism informing interwar political idealism, represented most saliently by the 1919 institution of the League of Nations and its operations during the subsequent two decades. The primary novels in this study—Leonard Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), Winifred Holtby’s *Mandoa, Mandoa!* (1933), and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie* (1936)—engage tragic naturalism, satire, and the bildungsroman, respectively. Along with the novels I address in a supplementary capacity—E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924), Evelyn Waugh’s *Black Mischief* (1932), and George Orwell’s *Burmese Days* (1934)—the fiction under review vividly, and at times graphically, evokes the social, political, and economic injustices attending ostensibly “liberal” British economic and humanitarian interventions in areas of Asia and Africa.

In studies of the novel, there is a well-established alignment between the rise of the novel, the cultivation of empathy, and the establishment of liberal international

institutions. The novels in my study represent the dynamic encounter of influential non-European nationalist voices and self-determination struggles with metropolitan legal, political, economic, and cultural institutions—from the League of Nations and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society to the international progressive writers’ movement and the political economy of British imperialism. In order to understand how the novelists critically examine the functions of liberalism as the prevailing Western legal-political discourse during the early twentieth century, I consider how they manipulate literary genres with historic relationships to the institution of liberalism. Given that the novel traditionally offers an ethical education by modeling processes of identification with difference, I argue that the genre engagements under discussion de-emphasize the traditionally liberal value of empathy (premised on the belief that the other is a version of the self) and assert the value of humility (born of the realization that there are always unintended consequences of engaging with difference).



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## Introduction:

### “This Novel Social Fabric”: Genre, Liberalism, and Political Idealism in Fiction of the British Empire, 1913-1936

This dissertation brings together British and Anglophone Indian novels published between 1913 and 1936 that address the conditions of economic globalization in contexts of late British imperialism. I use genre as an entry point to examine how fiction writers situated in the metropolitan administrative center of the British Empire reckoned with the liberalism informing interwar political idealism, represented most saliently by the 1919 institution of the League of Nations and its operations during the subsequent two decades. The primary novels in this study—Leonard Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), Winifred Holtby’s *Mandoa, Mandoa!* (1933), and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie* (1936)—engage tragic naturalism, satire, and the bildungsroman, respectively. Along with the novels I address in a supplementary capacity—E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924), Evelyn Waugh’s *Black Mischief* (1932), and George Orwell’s *Burmese Days* (1934)—the fiction under review vividly, and at times graphically, evokes the social, political, and economic injustices attending ostensibly “liberal” British economic and humanitarian interventions in areas of Asia and Africa.

The novels in this study represent the dynamic encounter of influential non-European nationalist voices and self-determination struggles with metropolitan legal, political, economic, and cultural institutions—from the League of Nations and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society to the international progressive writers’ movement and the political economy of British imperialism. Working from the premise

that literary forms correspond to institutional modes of categorizing and interpreting human experience, I analyze how these authors use genre as a way to contend with their own shifting orientations toward liberalism as the prevailing Western legal-political discourse during the early twentieth century. If their fiction is understood as responding to the various forms of turmoil that beset the interwar period—including a global economic recession, the rise of fascism, and the mobilization of self-determination movements throughout the British empire—Woolf, Holtby, and Anand commonly critique liberal modes of governance premised on empathy as a principle of engagement across lines of privilege and class, race, and nation. Since the novel traditionally offers an ethical education by demonstrating processes of identification with difference, I examine how Woolf, Holtby, and Anand manipulate familiar novelistic genres to de-emphasize the traditionally liberal value of empathy (premiered on the belief that the other is a version of the self) and assert as an alternative ethical principle the value of humility (born of the realization that there are always unintended consequences of engaging with difference).

All three of the writers featured in this project worked abroad, oriented themselves critically toward British imperialism, and were optimistic about the potential of internationalism to facilitate social, political, and economic justice objectives worldwide. Woolf's tenure as a colonial administrator in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) exposed him to the exploitation attending British economic policies aimed at "modernizing" the Ceylonese economy. His experience in Ceylon caused him to question liberal justifications of British imperialism, and inspired his subsequent

participation in Ceylonese and Indian campaigns for independence. Holtby's travels in South Africa as a lecturer for the League of Nations Union cemented her commitment to racial equality and compelled her to devote significant personal resources to mustering British support for black African trade unionism. Anand, who unlike Woolf and Holtby was born in India, traveled to London in the mid-1920s as a university student. During his two decades based in England, he was troubled by what he termed the "casual anarchism of much of contemporary European liberal thought" (*Conversations in Bloomsbury* viii), which accepted the vast suffering of the laboring classes both domestically and abroad in the scheme of liberal capitalism. He intended his fiction written during this period to raise awareness in England about the exploitive realities of British imperialism. As a founding member of the Progressive Writers' Association and a participant at international leftist writers' conferences during the thirties, Anand was committed to the potential of literature to promote international socialist values.

Woolf, Holtby, and Anand bore ambivalent relationships to liberalism. These writers generally denounced the liberal imperialist "belief in a hierarchy of peoples—in the superiority of Europeans or people with European ancestry and the inferiority of non-Europeans or 'people of color,'" which Branwen Gruffydd Jones writes "was widespread and routine, a generally unquestioned assumption embedded both in the public and personal European imagination and in the formal institutions of European and international order" (2) during the interwar period. Yet all three figures retained investments in certain universalisms claimed by liberalism—Woolf and Holtby most notably in terms of liberal modes of governance, and Anand in terms of liberal

humanism. As the legal-political doctrine underpinning both British imperialism and developments in international law during the period between the World Wars, liberalism connoted “freedom, progress, development, individual autonomy, and liberty”; the “institutionalization of liberalism... has historically translated into support for democracy, markets,... and the rule of law” (Barnett and Weiss 19). Yet the settings of the novels allow Woolf, Holtby, and Anand to effectively expose how decidedly *illiberal* economic monopolies and autocratic colonial governments were cynically justified in terms of liberal economic and humanitarian intervention, while also highlighting how the most well-intentioned international socialist and humanitarian movements were at risk of reproducing the racist attitudes of imperialism.

In order to understand how Woolf, Holtby, and Anand critically examine the functions of liberalism, I consider how these novelists use literary genres<sup>1</sup> with historic relationships to the institution of liberalism. An examination of these novelists’ genre engagements offers insights into their shifting orientations to liberalism in response to the tumultuous conditions of interwar geopolitics. Each novel has a strong generic identity, yet the authors’ breaks from genre are as significant as their adherence to generic conventions. Woolf’s novel is identifiably naturalist, yet aspects of the narrative depart from realism to enter surrealist territory. Anand’s bildungsroman deviates from the progressivism of the genre by implicating the protagonist in a cycle of failed efforts at self-actualization through economic integration. And Holtby occasionally breaks from the overall satirical tone of her novel to introduce passages of earnestness and even

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<sup>1</sup> I accept the premise set out by Daniel Chandler, Amy J. Devitt, and others that “genre”

tenderness. I pay particular moments to breaks from genre in these novels in order to gain insight into each author's respectively vexed relationship to the ethics and politics of liberalism.

Following Fredric Jameson's theory in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* that historical and political interpretive frames influence literary forms, this project is premised on the notion that literary genres have important relationships to institutions, both metaphorically and, according to key theorists,<sup>2</sup> dynamically. In their *Theory of Literature*, René Welleck and Austin Warren find the institution an apt metaphor for understanding the functions of literary genre. They argue that literary genre is

an 'institution'—as Church, University, or State is an institution. It exists not as an animal exists or even as a building, chapel, library, or capital, but as an institution exists. One can work through, express oneself through, existing institutions, create new ones, or get on, so far as possible, without sharing in politics or rituals; one can also join, but then reshape institutions. (226)

In light of Tzvetan Todorov's classic essay on "The Origin of Genres," it is no coincidence that Welleck and Warren use the concept of the institution to teach genre.

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<sup>2</sup> In her study of genre not as "relatively trivial... classification system deriving from literary criticism that names types of texts according to their forms," but rather as "a dynamic patterning of human experience," Devitt points to works by Bakhtin, Todorov, and Derrida as significant precursors to her approach to genre (573-74). For more on the relationships between genres and institutions, see Fishelov's *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory* and Bawarshi and Reiff's *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*.

For Todorov, literary genres themselves institutionalize the collective values of a community.

Genres communicate indirectly with the society where they are operative through their institutionalization... Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong... It is not a coincidence that the epic is possible in one period, the novel in another, with the individual hero of the novel opposed to the collective hero of the epic: each of these choices depends upon the ideological framework within which it operates. (200)

In this project, I consider genre's mediating function between individual political idealist authors and the international institutions they feature in their fiction.

"Institutions" are variously construed here, both as entrenched social or economic practices and as incorporated public infrastructures, usually with an international identity.

I look at initiatives of many scales involving metropolitan liberal efforts to speak to, about, and for the interests of subaltern, often colonized subjects and populations.

Colonial courts, European socialism, and British humanitarianism (as represented by the Anti-Slavery Society interwar campaign against slavery in Abyssinia), and the League of Nations are a few of the institutions represented in this body of fiction. Whether or not the respective novels explicitly name an institution, all engage broadly with the complex and contradictory legacy of liberalism as they address currents in international institutionalism. Of course, as interventions go, British imperialism, the League of Nations Mandate System, and the British Anti-Slavery Society abolition campaigns are vastly different from each other in nature, scope, and impact. Yet they all start from

liberal premises, and they all are subject to consequential “dark sides” identified by scholars such as Wilson, Brown, and Samuel Moyn.

In studies of the novel, there is a well-established alignment between the rise of the novel, the cultivation of empathy, and the establishment of liberal international institutions. As Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown write in their history of humanitarianism, the coming together of large groups of people to alleviate the suffering of other people in other countries through the establishment of domestic, national, and international institutions is a relatively recent phenomenon in human history (1). Scholars including Wilson and Brown as well as Lynn Hunt, Martha Nussbaum, and Richard Rorty have tied the rise of international institutionalism in Europe and North America during the late eighteenth century to the concurrent rise of the novel. These scholars draw a causal relationship between international institutionalism and the empathetic practice the novel seeks to cultivate in readers. In *Inventing Human Rights: A History*, Lynn Hunt argues that novels challenge readers to empathize “across traditional social boundaries.” If it weren’t for this “learning process,” Hunt argues, “‘equality’ could have no deep meaning and in particular no political consequence” (40). In an essay on “Humanitarian Reading,” Joseph Slaughter profiles a selection of scholars like Hunt for whom “international relations... are as much matters of literature as of law” (104): citing Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty in particular, Slaughter highlights their emphasis on “literature’s salutary effects on... the ‘narrative imagination’” (91). Slaughter explains that “sentimental models of reading” praised by these thinkers “are imagined ... to ‘cultivate our humanity’ (in Nussbaum’s words), and to make us ‘see the



similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences' (for Rorty)" (91-92).

However, there are dark sides to the tradition of empathy as cultivated by the novel. John Marx observes such dark sides as manifest in the history of British colonial administration. Marx explains that nineteenth-century colonial administrators, keenly aware of the "desirability of profound fellow feeling... associated with the English novel since the eighteenth century," claimed "sentimental ties to the people they governed" (61) in order to justify the British colonial presence. Relatedly, Wilson and Brown note that the "language of humanitarianism" made possible in part by the rise of the novel is often perceived by critics as "laden with outmoded notions of charity, protection, sentiment, and neocolonial paternalism" (8). In a review of Hunt's history of human rights and the novel, Moyn makes the case against humanitarian empathy most forcefully: "humanitarian sentiment will seem less praiseworthy for anyone who suspects that the focus on visible forms of cruelty obscures structural wrongs that are less easy to see" (26). He concludes that "[o]mitting the longstanding imperial entanglements" of humanitarianism "simply will not do; history shows how frequently they have been offered as justifications for invasion, expansion, and annexation" (30).

In their novels, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand demonstrate awareness of the dark sides of what in contemporary parlance we would refer to as international intervention, but none of these writers opposed international intervention *per se*; in fact, all of them advocated forms of intervention that they hoped might facilitate the more even distribution of the benefits of development worldwide. For example, while Anand was

vehemently opposed to British imperialism in India, he did advocate international institutionalism premised on political idealist values. “[I]t is only the coherence and unity of the enlightened peoples in the various countries, in voluntary organizations based on a minimum basis of common aims, and a broad common philosophy,” he wrote in *Apology for Heroism*, “that can achieve the new way of life” premised on “a recognition of the duties of individuals to each other” (171). Anand, like Woolf and Holtby, perceived international institutionalism as an important avenue toward the implementation of social justice internationally. For all of these novelists, each of whom had a dynamic career in journalism, politics, and advocacy with a strong emphasis on internationalism, their novels were important sites of their career efforts to theorize ethical orientation toward ethnic, national, and class others necessary to responsibly—that is, collaboratively—pursue international social justice objectives.

By means of genre engagements and narrative techniques that reflect their own vexed relationships to liberalism, Woolf, Anand, and Holtby open up the possibility that empathy might give way to humility as an objective of the ethical education offered by the novel. By destabilizing and breaking from the expectations of their chosen novel genres, these authors complicate the notion that engagement with difference entails straightforward empathetic identification, offering instead that ethical engagement takes different forms depending on contexts and contingencies. Certainly, all three of the novelists featured in this project encourage their metropolitan readership to recognize the positionality of subaltern protagonists. But the recognition these novelists seek to cultivate is less about empathy and more about self-reflective humility. The novelists’

depictions of ethnic and class others are not always adequate (or even intended) to get the reader inside the skin of subaltern subjects, but they do effectively challenge the reader to confront exploitive conditions attending early-twentieth-century globalization.

Woolf, Holtby, and Anand demonstrate their awareness of the limits and dark sides of liberal institutionalism premised on the ethical value of empathy, which has historically been used to mask structural inequality. By means of their fiction, these novelists raise the possibility that humility might serve as an alternative principle of international institutional practice. Targeting Western metropolitan readers—the beneficiaries of imperialism—these writers forefront reflection on oneself and one’s context of privilege as a precondition to an ethical orientation toward those de-privileged by imperialism. Humility on the part of the middle-class metropolitan subject involves the recognition that he or she cannot access the experience of the subaltern subject. However, this limit does not mean that the beneficiaries of imperialism cannot engage and collaborate with those marginalized by imperialism. Humility means recognizing one’s position within legal, political, and economic structures of exploitation, while at the same time recognizing that one is not powerless. The privileged can recognize and honor the struggles of the de-privileged; the privileged can even offer their participation on terms set by marginalized communities. As a principle of international institutional practice, humility means shifting the dynamic away from the top-down imposition of policies and programming justified by liberal authority claiming universal values, and toward the authorization of marginalized communities themselves to set the terms of institutional practices ostensibly initiated in the name of their enfranchisement.

## **Historical Contexts: Anti-Imperialism, Political Idealism, and Globalization**

This body of fiction both issues from and speaks to a context of what Nathaniel Berman terms “international legal modernism,” occasioned by an intellectual revolution in international legal history (“But the Alternative” 1794). This intellectual revolution was a response to demands for recognition in international law from non-state ethnic groups, which were not entitled to status in pre-war positivist international law anchored by state sovereignty doctrine. Even though the British Empire expanded geographically between the World Wars, independence movements in the colonies and growing British misgivings regarding the imperial mission meant that the history of the interwar period is characterized by the decline of European imperialism. At the beginning of the period I examine in this dissertation, the prospect of decolonization was just beginning to emerge as a pressing international issue. During the early years of the twentieth century, the scandal of Belgian King Leopold’s brutal exploitation of rubber laborers in the Congo cast doubt on the legitimacy of the civilizing mission as a justification for imperialism, and the urgency of dealing with Ottoman and German colonial territories following World War I posed new challenges for international jurists. Following the first World War, the dismantling of the British Empire was but a distant and doubtful possibility (the Irish War of Independence notwithstanding); by the mid-thirties, at the close of the period under review, independence movements were well under way in areas of the British Raj, including India, Burma, and Ceylon. In broad terms, then, the interwar period was characterized by “slow imperial retreats” (Darwin 669), with implications for non-state claims to self-determination.

As a metropolitan theory of international relations, interwar political idealism emerged to account not necessarily for the waning of the great colonial powers, but more for what Fareed Zakaria describes as the historic “rise of everyone else” (1) in twentieth-century international law. What does it entail, Zakaria asks, to conceive of international legal and political institutions in which “countries in all parts of the world are no longer objects or observers but players in their own right” (3)? Interwar political idealism represented an early expression of this line of inquiry. In response to the exigencies of globalization as well as to demands for international legal recognition by colonized and formerly colonized territories, political idealism emerged during the interwar period to encompass investment in the potential of international law and institutions to facilitate peace and justice globally, belief in the pacific qualities of socialist-inspired economic globalization, a commitment to the integration of socialist and humanitarian values in international institutional practice. Especially in its commitment to international socialism, then, interwar political idealism diverged from liberalism in key ways, while also retaining its fundamental political and humanist tenets.

The years between 1913 and 1936, the first and last publication dates of the novels in this project, correspond to the rise and fall of political idealism as a discrete period in the history of international political theory. As a theory of international relations it was primarily characterized by the hope that a centralized but comprehensively representative international government, anchored in the principle of cooperation rather than capitalist competition between sovereign states, might pre-empt abuses of state power. Early-twentieth-century liberal U.S. and European legal and

political thinkers who set the political idealist stage included Leonard Woolf, whose *International Government* (1916) laid the groundwork for the League of Nations—the institution of which was unprecedented in the history of modern international law and relations. Political idealist thinkers were optimistic about the potential of collective security to bring about wide-ranging social, political, and economic benefits to the human population. However, political idealism would face major challenges over the course of the interwar period. It became increasingly clear that the “international interests of modern life” Leonard Woolf celebrated in *International Government* (1916) were as likely to include fascism as the international socialism that political idealists (including the novelists under review) hoped might ameliorate global economic inequality. By the mid-1930s, the League was compromised by a series of conflicts leading up to World War II, including the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, and the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. These conflicts and the onset of the Second World War indicated the failure of the League, which resulted in disillusionment with political idealism as a viable theory of international relations. According to Peter Wilson’s authoritative text, *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed*, political idealism during and following World War II was “almost universally denigrated” (“Introduction” 1) as a utopian perspective inadequate to contend with the realities of power determining geopolitics.

All of the novelists in my study were alert and responsive to the trajectory of political idealism during the interwar period. As political idealists themselves, at pressure points between metropolitan and colonial contexts, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand

shared an impulse to respond to the geopolitical contexts of early-twentieth-century globalization and strongly emergent self-determination movements by setting their fiction in areas of colonial contention in Asia and Africa. Notably, all of the figures in my study lived or traveled extensively in areas of the British Empire including India, Burma, Ceylon, South Africa, and British East Africa. They bore witness to the mechanics of imperialism both on English soil and in the colonies. Dramatic, often violent confrontations between British state power and local anti-imperial resistance movements abounded during the period under review, which saw the British imposition of martial law in Ceylon in 1915, the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre of 1919 and ongoing *swaraj* (“home-rule”) agitations in India, the Irish War of Independence, and the rise of the anti-British nationalist Wafd party in Egypt. Published at a moment when Anglo-European imperial expansion was authorized and enacted by international law, yet also implicated in some of the worst instances of political disenfranchisement and economic exploitation in twentieth-century history, the novels I feature raise the question of whether political idealism with its attendant international institutions can be the best hope for global political and economic justice even as such institutions are steeped in the legacy of imperialism.

Peter Wilson explains that interwar “political idealism” is often interchanged with “liberalism” by historians of international law and relations, despite the fact that idealism implies “a critique of liberalism, especially nineteenth-century doctrines of *laissez-faire*” (Wilson 3-4). Still, while many British leftist internationalists “thought of themselves as socialists” and “were members of the Labour party and other socialist organizations,”

Wilson points out that such figures were often “liberals in socialist clothing” (4), retaining a commitment to the paradigm of “benign imperialism” characterizing League of Nations principles and initiatives.<sup>3</sup> In her history of interwar political idealism and anti-imperial resistance in Britain and Africa, Barbara Bush further refines this dichotomy. She explains that “liberalism” in this context might be most broadly understood to “define all non-communist British initiatives, yet she distinguishes between “the paternalistic, but implicitly racist, ‘protective’ liberals, including missionaries and philanthropists, and the reformist socialists, who developed a more incisive economic and political critique” (182). Bush concludes that an important distinction must be drawn between anti-imperialists associated with Marxist leftism and “liberal and reformist critics of colonialism”—that is, between anti-imperialists who “opposed imperialism *per se*” and “critics of colonialism who directed their energies to reforming rather than abolishing colonial rule” (16). In terms of their fiction, the historical and colonial contexts of their fiction, and their own advocacy biographies, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand

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<sup>3</sup> As the primary institution of interwar political idealism, the League of Nations represented a significant effort to create a place in international law for ethnic collectives that had hitherto been explicitly excluded. Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant outlined a system of international tutelage whereby formerly colonized territories might gradually achieve independence. Despite the fact that it represented an unprecedentedly progressive development in the international law of the period under review, in practice the Mandate System ultimately functioned to extend the legacy of imperialism as a determinant of international law, in that it classified populations according to categories of civilization (Class A, B, and C mandates) that were clearly based on race. In practice, the Mandate System was an arrangement for dividing up the spoils of war among the colonial powers that emerged victorious from World War I. For a comprehensive study of the historic relationship between imperialism and international law, see Antony Anghie’s *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*.



highlight this distinction through multifaceted representations and evocations of metropolitan political idealist recognition of ethnic, racial, and class alterity.

The broad phenomenon of early-twentieth century globalization forms an important context of the novels, and significantly influences the ethics of political idealism that emerge from this body of fiction. Citing in his 1915 work *Towards International Government* the “powerful, varied, and distinctive growth of recent times” of the “railroad, shipping, postal, telegraphic, financial, [and] journalistic apparatus[es]”—all “unique achievement[s] in the history of our age”—J.A. Hobson spoke for many of his political idealist cohorts, including the novelists in this study, when he declared that the

elaborate... arrangements by which men, goods, letters, money, news are carried by a single continuous process, by land and sea, from any town or village in the world to any other, across many different countries occupied by peoples of diverse races, colours, tongues, and grades of civilization... have been educating an international mind. (193-94)

As political idealists, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand were compelled by the observation, articulated by Hobson, that the growing “web of international relations, economic, social, scientific, philanthropic,... everywhere testifies to... a community of interests and purposes transcending the limits of country and nation” (193). Agreements among multiple nations to facilitate peace and justice—including the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the League of Nations Covenant of 1919, and the 1926 Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery—were prominent developments in international

law during the early decades of the twentieth century. Taken in consideration with these legal conventions, international humanitarian organizations also evidenced (as a distinct sign of the times) a political idealist investment in the potential of international institutionalism to facilitate peace and justice: among other organizations, the Congo Reform Association, established in 1904, raised awareness about European-perpetrated atrocities in the Congo; the American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief, founded in 1915, responded to the Armenian Genocide of 1914-1918; and the Anti-Slavery Society merged with the Aborigines' Protection Society in 1909 to initiate a series of dynamic abolitionist campaigns during the interwar period targeting slave trades based in (among other countries) Abyssinia and China.

Following Hobson, Woolf observed in 1916 that the “voluntary associations of individuals and groups of individuals of different States” operating at the time represented the complexity of the “ever-increasing international interests of modern life”: even a basic understanding of “this novel social fabric,” he argued, could “throw much light upon the future of international organization” (*International Government* 311). If Britain was the administrative center of the most comprehensive empire operating during the twentieth century, it was also a particularly important site of early twentieth-century internationalism and political idealist institutionalism. International organizations such as the All-India Progressive Writers' Association and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society were headquartered in London, and many international conferences, such as the International Conference of the Press, the Conference of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, and the Conference of the

International Law Association convened in London<sup>4</sup>. These associations evidenced what Hobson, Woolf, and others perceived as that “internationalization of the mind” (Woolf, *International Government* 303) occurring in Britain and beyond that was specific to the historical moment and that stemmed in large part from increasing international lines of communication and commerce. As fiction writers and political idealists, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand were optimistic that the “internationalization of the mind” Woolf identified would contribute to the development of an ethics (a theory of “what it is to live well”) that might inform morality (a theory of “how we ought to treat others” [Dworkin 1-2]) in conditions of globalization. Their optimism on this front determines their unique situation in postcolonial studies of modernism and imperialism.

### **Modernism, Imperialism, and Postcolonialism**

This project contributes to an ongoing evaluation of the legacy of the modernist era (commonly understood to span the years 1890-1939) that attempts to account for the influence of imperialism on British cultural production. As a movement, literary modernism is most saliently distinguished by the innovations in form produced during the interwar period by such writers as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, in response to unprecedented developments in industry, medicine, religion, and military technology. Through the 1980s, studies of this era typically presumed a disconnection between modern British literature and its imperial context. Paraphrasing this presumption, Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses ask in their introduction to

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<sup>4</sup> The *American Journal of International Law*, available from 1907, includes in each issue a comprehensive chronicle of international events and public documents. As such it is a useful resource for examining currents not only in international law but also in many other forms and expressions of transnationalism during the decades under review.

*Modernism and Colonialism*, “What, after all, could modernism—reputedly that most aestheticized and rarefied of literary movements—have in common with the brute realities of conquest and empire?” (1). Frederic Jameson’s influential 1990 essay “Modernism and Imperialism” helped turn the tide in studies of modernism by situating European imperialism as yet another unprecedented development determining modernity. Certainly, there are multiple histories of globalization that predate the twentieth century, but Jameson distinguishes British imperialism as ushering in unprecedented forms of economic globalization, with significant implications for modernist aesthetics. He first lists the “more commonly held stereotypes about the modern” against which he is working:

its apolitical character, its turn inward and away from the social materials associated with realism, its increased subjectification and introspective psychologization, and, not least, its aestheticism and its ideological commitment to the supreme value of a now autonomous Art as such. (45)

Jameson concludes that the unique formal innovations of modernist literature, far from “scarcely evok[ing] imperialism as such at all” (45), are in fact oblique responses to challenges and dilemmas posed by unprecedented conditions of imperialism and economic globalization:

colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world—very different from that of the imperial power—

remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they may belong to. Such spatial disjunction has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole. (50-51)

According to Jameson, the formal innovations of modernist literature do not ignore, but on the contrary *exist* to address this “new and historically original problem”: “it is only that new kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place” (51).

But what about literature from this period that explicitly addresses conditions and contexts of imperialism? Consistent with Jameson’s argument that modernism engaged globalization, but in contrast to his emphases on the “spatial disjunction” (51) between metropole and colony and the incomprehensibility of imperialism’s manifold impacts to those in its administrative center, Elleke Boehmer argues that “colonized resistances *were* visible within European horizons” (171). Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal pick up this point more broadly:

‘Although it can be argued that the centre-periphery model is difficult to sustain in a [contemporary] world structured by transnational cultural flows and multinational corporations, it is also problematic to think that this model worked well during the colonial, industrial period.’ (qtd. in Regan 126-27)

Woolf, Holtby, and Anand set their realist fiction in areas of colonial contention, but their novels do not constitute the “noncanonical adventure literature of imperialism”<sup>5</sup> in which Jameson argues that the “radical otherness of colonized, non-Western peoples tends to find its representational place” (49). Rather, the novelists in my study share with their formally innovative counterparts the tendency to (as Sara Blair puts it in her definition of modernism ) “register distance and hesitation” issuing from “awareness of [the] inability to master racial, ethnic, and broadly social alterity” (830). Furthermore, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand share the modernist impulse to “resist the society represented by the nation-state in favour of alternative cosmopolitan models of community” (Regan 21).

In accordance with recent scholarship by Boehmer, Jessica Berman (*Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community*), John Marx (*The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*), and Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (*Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*), all of the novelists I address in this dissertation demonstrate awareness of their individual positions as well as Britain’s position in a globalized world as nodal rather than central. Boehmer writes that “Globalized empire at the turn of the twentieth century... had for the first time in history made of the world an intermeshed, criss-cross network of communication link-ups” within which “Britain formed *one* nodal point, even if an influential one, amongst others” (172); in this context, the writers in my project variously bear out Boehmer’s contention that the “cultural and political *exchanges*” made possible by these networks “between the conventional colonial

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<sup>5</sup> As key authors of this body of literature, Jameson cites Kipling, Wells, and even (if qualifiedly) Conrad, whose fiction “explicitly draws on more archaic storytelling forms” and “is by and large not modernist in any formal sense” (44).

centre and periphery... impinged in different ways on the cultures of the centre” (171). Woolf, Holtby, and Anand largely forego the formal innovation that characterizes high modernist literary experimentation. Rather, drawing on their own experiences living, working, and traveling in colonial settings, these writers deliberately engage familiar genre conventions to confront a British metropolitan readership with the material consequences of British-imposed, ostensibly liberal economic, legal, and political policies and practices in colonial contexts.

If contemporary scholars of modernism and imperialism now take it as commonplace that modern literature emerged as “part of a much wider international (and imperial) formation” (A. Thompson 4), the question remains open of whether novels—such as those in my study—depicting non-European subaltern protagonists ameliorate or aggravate imperialist subordination. Shameem Black, who seeks to contend with the “anxiety about the ethics of representation in an era of globalization” (7), cites Said’s theory in *Orientalism* that narrative representations of the colonized other reproduce the violence of imperial appropriation in their claims (whether implicit or explicit) to “know” the other. Jane Marcus delineates the ways in which the representation of non-Europeans in the writings of liberal moderns (including, in her study, Virginia Woolf, Forster, and Conrad) reinforced discriminatory imperialist ideology, despite these writers’ variously critical perspectives on empire. In *Modernism and Empire*, Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby take less of a hard line on the issue, suggesting that “colonialist tropes” may have “co-existed with the ideas and narratives that questioned, and in time helped to end, formal British imperialism” (2). Yet Booth and Rigby concede that the big questions

driving postcolonial studies of British modern literature remain open: since modern literary figures “found ways of producing texts that allowed for multiple voices and a respectful relation to alterity and difference,” might they be praised for supplying “a diagnostic understanding of the colonial mentality” (5)? Or do the chauvinistic undertones one can discern in their fiction overwhelm the well-intentioned heterogeneity of these texts?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s question of whether the subaltern can “speak”—that is, whether there is a place for her voice in elite legal and political institutional spaces—is undoubtedly pertinent to my project, since Woolf, Holtby, and Anand represent in their fiction protagonists and other characters who have been acutely deprivileged by their ethnic, racial, class, and/or gender identities. However, more central to this project is the question of what such representations reveal about the ethical orientation of each author, respectively. This dissertation shares with postcolonial studies by Black, Leela Gandhi, and Neil Lazarus a skepticism about the view that metropolitan literary depictions of subaltern protagonists are irredeemably appropriative. Gandhi notes that postcolonialism has “remained tentative in its appreciation of individuals and groups that have renounced the privileges of imperialism and elected affinity with victims of their own expansionist cultures” (1). Black offers a partial explanation for this hesitation by conceding that “fiction can do real damage through its representations” (33), yet she also asks whether it might be “possible to imagine another without doing violence to one’s object of description” (1). In his theory of postcolonialism, Lazarus warns that the critique of Eurocentric representation should not slip into a critique of



representation as itself necessarily Eurocentric (127). Therefore I read the novels' representations of subaltern protagonists for evidence of each novelist's ethical blindspots. However, reading the novelists' representations of subaltern protagonists exclusively or even primarily as ethically problematic attempts to "give a voice" to the ethnic or class "other" forecloses the possibility that such representational practices might provide insights—for example, into the shifting ethical orientation of interwar metropolitan political idealists towards those marginalized and disenfranchised by imperialism. In light of Black's contention that we must consider whether fictional representations possess "the latent power to propose new forms of expression" (33), I also read the novelists' representational practices for evidence of reflection on their own ethical subject positions.

### **Woolf, Holtby, and Anand: Novelists of Political Idealism**

Each chapter relies heavily on history and biography in order to draw out how the fiction under discussion highlights the complexities and contradictions of international interventionism and institutionalism. That the fiction of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand has been largely neglected in studies of modernism/modernity is a testament to the preoccupation of the field with innovations in form. Considering the novels in my project in relation to interwar political idealism, including socialist and humanitarian movements, enriches and expands their legacy in contemporary studies of British literary modernity: collectively, the novels under review share concerns expressed in the literature of formally experimental modernists, yet the featured novels convey and address these concerns through direct, deliberate appeals to familiar genres. Given the

historic relationships of these genres to liberalism as well as the colonial settings of this body of fiction, the novels under review invite their readers—both contemporaneous and contemporary—to reflect on the theory versus the practice of liberalism as an ideological perspective justifying Western interventionism in Asia and Africa.

Reading each novel in terms of the author's political biography shows that despite the critical perspectives on intervention evidenced in their fiction, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand retained political idealist commitments to the potential of international institutionalism—both to revise the terms of international intervention hitherto dominated by liberal imperialism, and ultimately to resolve issues of injustice and inequity worldwide. In her article on modern fiction issuing from colonies, Jessica Berman theorizes a “regional cosmopolitanism” developed by writers who “responded to local traditions and the writing they knew from abroad..., which in turn contributed to literary development both at home and abroad” (149). Taking Anand's fiction as an example, Berman contends that his literary career “highlights the possibility of the development of important loyalties beyond strict national boundaries” (148). Indeed, Anand defined modernity itself as

the recognition of the need for the new, through the struggle... to understand the whole man and interpret him, in the light of the various strains of illumination, ‘inner and outer,’ which have emerged in the whole world through the breaking down of national frontiers and by the confrontation of each man of his own destiny. (“Modern Indian Fiction” 44)

Berman writes that the cosmopolitan “focus on the individual psyche amidst growing recognition of the political constraints on his or her freedom in the modern world... arise[s] out of both local and global influences” (150). For Anand, Woolf, and Holtby, substantial time spent abroad in areas of the British Empire (Woolf in Ceylon, Holtby in South Africa, and Anand in England) significantly determined internationally collaborative relationships and institutional affiliations; these affiliations created in each writer a cosmopolitan ethical identity attaching to international political idealist institutions (though not to the exclusion of their national identities). By closely engaging with each writer’s politics with regard to liberal imperialism, I demonstrate that while these writers nominally extend liberalism by assuming the possibility of universal values and emphasizing the individual, they also significantly diverge from liberalism in imperial practice by denaturalizing Anglo-European privilege. Their novels, then, critique the ethics of liberal imperialism, and model alternative ethical processes applicable to a world where participation in global affairs is increasingly diverse, where the nodal network is a more accurate metaphor for international relations than is the imperial divide between metropolitan center and colonial periphery.

In terms of their dual commitments to literature and political idealist advocacy, it is possible to discern a loosely networked community amongst the writers in this project. Several of them crossed paths with each other over the course of the interwar period. For example, Anand and Holtby were acquainted with Woolf through their editing and publishing involvements with Woolf’s progressive Hogarth Press; Woolf and Holtby were also acquainted through their involvements with the British League of Nations

Union and the Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Affairs (Ewins 124). Forster encouraged Woolf to submit the manuscript of *The Village in the Jungle* to Edward Arnold, Forster's own publisher, which accepted and published the first edition of Woolf's novel (Ondaatje 207). Forster also mentored Anand, supporting his early literary endeavors and penning a laudatory preface to Anand's first novel, *Untouchable* (1935). By the early forties, Forster, Anand, and Orwell would work together as broadcasters and scriptwriters for the India Section at the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation).

In the process of examining these writers collectively, it is also important to note the distinctions between them. All of them were, broadly speaking, middle-class, yet aspects of their personal lives—Woolf's Jewishness, for instance, and the discrimination Holtby and Anand faced on grounds of gender and race, respectively—doubtlessly inflected both their fiction and their advocacy work. While all three writers demonstrated a commitment to political idealism, their international involvements and institutional affiliations varied considerably: Woolf devoted himself to the theorization of effective international government as secretary of the British Labour Party's Committees on, respectively, International and Imperial Questions; Holtby was a dynamic advocate for gender and racial equality, lecturing for the feminist Six Point Group and the League of Nations Union; and Anand's belief that the circulation of literature internationally had a role to play in improving the material conditions of the world's poor found expression in his work for the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). Of the writers I address in a supplementary way in this project, Forster advocated writers' civil liberties as a member

of International PEN (Poets, Essayists, and Novelists), Waugh's reportage on the "Ethiopian Question" appeared in such journals as *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail*, and Orwell's commitments to labor rights and class equality took him to the battlefields of Spain in the mid-thirties.

Born in Peshawar, Anand is the only non-British writer in my study. For the purposes of this project, I consider Anand's contributions to and engagement with British literary modernity. His work as a novelist and as a co-founder of the Progressive Writers' Association had a social justice agenda that explicitly targeted India; the PWA Manifesto, the initial draft of which was penned by Anand, proclaimed that "the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today—the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation, so that it may help us to understand these problems and through such understanding help us act" (240). Yet Anand spent much of the interwar period based in London, energetically networking his way around Bloomsbury and sowing the seeds of what would become a career-long commitment to cross-cultural, cross-lingual, and cross-class exchange. It is worth noting that in addition to appearing in the October 1935 issue of the Hindi literary journal *Hans* (Swan) and circulating during the first PWA meeting held in India, in Lucknow in April of 1936, the PWA Manifesto was published in the February 1936 issue of the British journal *The Left Review* (Coppola 8-9). Anand's ambition to appeal to British audiences and the socio-political implications of his career pursuits as an English-language novelist make him relevant to a study of British literary modernity as influenced by internationalism.

Although the novels of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand have much in common—colonial settings, native and/or subaltern protagonists, critical examinations of liberal imperialism—they are generically quite diverse. In order to understand the ethical and political implications of the novelist’s genre choice, in each chapter I consider theories of genre that shed light on each genre’s historic relationship to liberalism. I address the novels in my study chronologically, so as to chart the ways in which they narrate, respond to, and even enact the increasingly robust challenge to economic imperialism posed by political idealism. Published at the tail-end of what Mike Davis refers to as “the golden age of Liberal Capitalism”—1870-1914 (9)—the earliest novel in my study, Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle* diagnoses the exploitation attending British colonial economic policies. Woolf’s critique in this novel formed a precursor to his subsequent work during the interwar period to theorize the terms of political idealism.<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 2, “‘The Devils Which Perpetually Beset Us’: Tragic Naturalism and the Critique of British Colonial Economics in Leonard Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle*,” I analyze Woolf’s novel of colonial Ceylon. The protagonists of the novel, including the hunter Silindu, his daughters Punchi Menika and Hinnihami, and his son-in-law Babun, are Sinhalese peasant farmers and paddy cultivators based on villagers Woolf encountered during his tenure as a colonial administrator the Hambantota district of southeastern Ceylon. By

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<sup>6</sup> Along with such influential figures as J.A. Hobson and Philip Noel-Baker profiled in Peter Wilson’s histories of interwar political idealism, Woolf is credited with providing the foundational content of this political perspective leading up to and throughout the operation of the League of Nations during the interwar period. See Wilson’s *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth-Century Idealism*, as well as his chapter “Leonard Woolf and International Government” in *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed*.

putting literary naturalism in concert with elements of modern tragedy, Woolf found an apt generic frame through which to examine issues of structural economic injustice he encountered in Ceylon. He manipulates the naturalist genre—conventionally associated with determinism and inexorability—in order to elucidate the distinction between the shared, inevitable suffering that attends the human experience and the suffering created by the institutionalized economic injustice that characterizes imperialism. A study of the sinister atavism that bedevils Beddagama and establishes the novel in the naturalist genre both highlights Woolf’s effort to render the “slow violence” (Rob Nixon’s term) of economic imperialism comprehensible to Western metropolitan readers, and provides insight into how Woolf’s ethical orientation to those marginalized by empire shifted in light of his burgeoning critique of economic imperialism.

Novels published subsequently by Holtby and Anand address two significant manifestations of interwar political idealism—humanitarianism and socialism, respectively. Chapter 3 is titled “Satire and the Critique of Anti-Slavery Humanitarianism in Winifred Holtby’s *Mandoa, Mandoa!*” In this chapter, I examine how Holtby’s deployment of satire allows her to expose the internal conflicts of interwar British humanitarianism responding to slavery in Abyssinia during the 1920s and 30s. Set in the fictional native state of Mandoa, a stand-in for Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), the novel depicts a host of dynamic characters—both British and Mandoan—with varying investments and interests in the issue of slavery in East Africa. Holtby brings a satiric tone to the novel form in order to level a critique of political idealist institutions—primarily the Anti-Slavery Society, but also the League of Nations—

associated with anti-slavery humanitarianism. In part through her depictions of Mandoan perspectives on the International Humanitarian Association (based on the Anti-Slavery Society) examining conditions of slavery in Mandoa, Holtby comically reverses the Anglo-European anthropological gaze in order to expose the fissures, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies characterizing Anglo-European imperial and humanitarian impulses to “civilize” Africa.

Chapter 4, “‘When Will I Grow Up and Be a Strong Man?’: Socialism, Political Idealism, and the Bildungsroman in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie*,” examines how Anand critically engages bildungsroman conventions in order to expose as exploitive the economic relationships between British imperial metropole and colony. Writing at a juncture in the history of the Empire when self-determination movements in India were rapidly gaining momentum in alliance with international socialism, Anand problematizes bildungsroman conventions so as to bring the political economy of imperialism to the fore and emphasize, variously, the inadequacy, exhaustion, and irrelevance of a liberal value system that justifies and perpetuates imperial economic exploitation. Yet in addition to subverting conventions of the genre, Anand also retains certain features of the bildungsroman in order to imagine the horizons of political freedom in India as consisting in a socialist-inspired nationalism. Examined in terms of pertinent geopolitical developments and international socialism during the 1930s, the structure of the novel as well as the conditions of its publication and circulation evidence Anand’s investment in the potential of international socialist collectives (such as the Indian Progressive Writers’ Association and the London-based socialist *Left Review*, both of which I discuss in



relation to *Coolie*). Anand discerned the potential of such collectives to influence how both Indian and British political idealists understood the possible relationships between labor interests, self-determination movements, and international institutionalism.

Read collectively, the novels under review in this dissertation constitute a literature of political idealism. These novels both register the impact of non-European influences on international law and institutionalism, and provide insights into the uneven landscape of leftism associated with the interwar political idealism. Even as their critiques of imperialism facilitated their collaborative identification with ethnic and class others, the novelists under review exhibited some of the significant ethical shortcomings associated with political idealism. These novelists' depictions of racial and class others sometimes reproduce the power inequities and discriminatory assumptions that political idealism, as both an ethical and a legal-political perspective, ostensibly seeks to transcend. Writing of Woolf and his counterparts in "The Bloomsbury Fraction," Raymond Williams argues that the social *conscience* of this marginal (yet culturally and politically influential) group must be carefully distinguished from the "'social consciousness' of a self-organizing subordinate class" (156). According to Williams, Woolf, like his Bloomsbury peers, related to the socially, politically, and economically oppressed—whether in England or in the colonies—"not in solidarity, nor in affiliation, but as an extension of what [were] felt as personal or small-group obligations" ("Bloomsbury" 155). Woolf, Holtby, and Anand retained blind spots regarding a significant question facing metropolitan advocates of non-European self-determination movements: how can liberal international institutions (in particular the League of

Nations) be the best hope for self-determination movements, given that these institutions are steeped in the legacy of imperialism? Given the important work that Woolf, Holtby, and Anand did to facilitate the circulation of the perspectives of the colonized in British intellectual circles, but also given their conspicuous shortcomings, the body of fiction under review supplies useful case-studies in both the potentialities and the limitations of evolving metropolitan attitudes about the nature and function of international institutions during the interwar period.

### **Counterpoints: Forster and Orwell**

Ethical questions arise within social contexts where, due to external pressures, commonly agreed-upon principles of conduct dictating the relationship between self and other are no longer self-evident. The contexts under review in my project occur in areas of the British Empire during the interwar period, and the external pressure at work is the decline of British imperialism in response to uprisings in the colonies, anti-imperial sentiment within Britain itself, and the advent of self-determination as a principle of international law. Woolf, Holtby, and Anand, as writers attuned to matters of geopolitics and eager to theorize them, found familiar novelistic genres apt sites to explore questions of the ethics of international intervention. A brief consideration of two seminal modern colonial novels—E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934), published at the beginning and end of the height of interwar political idealism—illustrates the methodology at play in each chapter. Together, they provide important counterpoints to the fiction of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand. Like the novelists primarily profiled in this dissertation, Forster and Orwell take advantage of

genre as an entry point to questions of international intervention. However, whereas the novels of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand demonstrate their investment in political idealism as a principle of international relations and intervention premised on a critique of empire, the novels of Forster and Orwell comport with their skepticisms about international institutionalism, which co-existed with their ambivalence toward British imperialism.

Forster's trips to India, first as a tourist, between 1912 and 1913, and then to work as a secretary for the Maharaja of Dewas from 1921 to 1922, supplied the raw material for *A Passage to India*. Published during the Golden Age of British crime fiction, which is generally dated to the period between the World Wars from 1918 to 1930 (Knight, *Crime Fiction* 86), *A Passage* is not immediately recognizable as strict genre detective fiction in the tradition of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. Yet Forster's novel strongly, if selectively, evokes mystery novel conventions: the enigmatic Marabar caves form the enclosed setting where the alleged crime—the assault of Adela Quested—takes place; Quested's field-glasses, which turn up in the possession of Dr. Aziz with a snapped leather strap, are the incriminating evidence against him. The question of Aziz's guilt is an important driving tension of the novel, and in his level-headed determination to establish the circumstances around the accusation against Aziz, Cyril Fielding is an identifiable variation of the detective figure. In his embodiment of the “solidity [and] morality... so central to the ideal of the British gentry” (Cawelti 6), Fielding in particular and the detective figure in general affirm the values that anchor the mystery genre. Forster's transporting to India of the mystery genre has the effect of illuminating his

ambivalence about the institutions of British liberalism, including imperialism and the legal structures that bear it out.

Several critics read the mystery of the Marabar caves in terms of Forster's position on empire, but the question of what exactly the mystery evokes in terms of an orientation to colonialism remains open among critics. The sinister inscrutability of the caves is represented by their unsettling echo—"ou-boum"—which is translated as nihilism in the novel. "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value" (Forster 139). For Homi Bhabha, the enigma represented by the caves is an indication of Forster's critical awareness of the "conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth" (123). Bhabha writes, "What happened in the Marabar caves? *There...* the enactment of [the] undecidable, uncanny... enunciatory disorder of the colonial present" (126). Benita Parry concedes the novel's moderately dissident function: despite its "manifestly inadequate critique of a colonial encounter," she writes that *A Passage* nevertheless importantly depicts an India "whose topography evades colonialism's physical invasion, and whose cognitive modes elude incorporation within normative western explanatory systems" (177). However, unlike Bhabha, who reads in the unknowable-ness of the caves a recognition of the disorienting scale of the history of imperial exploitation in India, Parry reads Forster's mystery as complicit with empire's silencing of its own history. It

rehearse[s] the lacunae of British Indian texts, from which all traces of base interests—India as a source of raw materials, cheap labor, markets and investment

opportunities, and India as a linchpin of Britain's wider material ambitions—were erased. (180)

Indeed, as it chronicles the legal scandal following the incident (or non-incident) at the Marabar caves, *A Passage* contends only superficially with the liberal imperial legal, political, and economic structures that resulted in widespread impoverishment and disenfranchisement in India during the colonial era. If the novel does not offer an outright critique of imperialism, it does comment on the limited viability of British justice in India; Forster accomplishes this by playing with the mystery genre's expectations and values with regard to liberal rationality. Contrary to interpretations of the mystery as a "purely escapist" (Thompson 8) genre, Jon Thompson considers crime fiction as issuing from the historical context of "Enlightenment societies and their development of evidentiary trials... and judicial procedures" (3). He writes that "crime fiction's intrinsic interest... in the law and the violation of the law" make it particularly useful for examining the "experience of empire" in terms of the "laws, written and unwritten, that help to define, regulate, and maintain it" (8). The climactic courtroom scene in which Aziz is tried and exonerated takes a mocking tone with regard to liberal legal authority: the "flimsy framework of the court" (217) threatens to buckle under both the jeering pressure of the "mass of Indians" (219) who turn out to support Aziz and heckle Quedsted, and the hysteria of the British such as a Mrs. Turton who "scream[s] insults at Adela" when she withdraws her charges against Aziz.

In this scenario, the British do not have the corner on liberal rationality. When word initially spreads about the alleged assault on a British woman, the outraged British

in the novel reject “facts”; instead, Forster writes, “the herd had decided on emotion... All over Chandrapore that day the Europeans were... sinking themselves in their community. Pity, wrath, heroism, filled them, but the power of putting two and two together was annihilated” (154-55). Still, the emotional Dr. Aziz remains the most significant representation of irrationality in the novel. Aziz’s irrationality is not cast altogether in a poor light; he is described as “[i]ncurably inaccurate,” but “[h]e was inaccurate because he was sensitive” (148). Still, the fact that, as the narrator puts it, “Aziz had no sense of evidence” has substantial consequences for the main relationship in the novel—that is, the authentic and affectionate friendship between Aziz and Fielding. The narrator explains that the “sequence of [Aziz’s] emotions decided his beliefs.” Upon hearing the (false) rumor that Fielding has taken up with Quested during the fallout from the trial, a “tragic coolness” results “between [Aziz] and his English friend ... [A]fter the rumour about Miss Quested had been with him undisturbed for a few days he assumed it was true” (256). Aziz, therefore, is as subject to sensationalist rumors as the British of Chandrapore, and it is his “inaccuracy” that has the most significant consequences for the primary relationship in the novel.

Forster might mock the “flimsiness” of British justice transposed in India, but he ultimately consolidates his commitment to liberal rationality through the character of Fielding. Forster’s depictions of Aziz’s active emotional life (not to mention the fact that he is falsely accused) mean that he is arguably the most sympathetic figure in the novel. However, Fielding stands as the novel’s moral compass due to his ability to remain coolly and consistently rational even in the most heated confrontations within and

between British and Indian communities. While he rejects the sensationalism of the British in Chandrapore, he is also characterized as quite the opposite of Aziz in his detective-like preoccupation with evidence-based analyses of events. Following the trial, Fielding's discussion with Quested about what *really* happened in the caves is almost clinical in tone:

‘One of three things certainly happened in the Marabar... Either Aziz is guilty, which is what your friends think; or you invented the charge out of malice, which is what my [Indian] friends think; or you have had a hallucination. I’m very much inclined’—getting up and striding about—‘now that you tell me that you felt unwell before the expedition—it’s an important piece of evidence—I believe that you yourself broke the strap of the field-glasses; you were alone in that cave the whole time.’ (225)

In both form and tone, Fielding's monologue evokes the moment of truth in classic crime fiction when the detective figure reveals and details the features of the crime. As Knight explains in his history of Golden Age crime fiction, the detective figure's presentation of the facts of the case is “rational rather than... intuitional”; his identification of the crime, based on “rational analysis of determinedly circumstantial evidence,” is “cerebral and contained” (78-79). Over the course of the novel and in marked contrast both to Aziz and his British colleagues, Fielding remains admirably composed, and focused on the facts of the case.

Largely through the character of Fielding, then, *A Passage* ultimately retains its investment in what Cawelti terms “the values of traditional British culture” (6)—

especially rationalism, individualism, and the rule of law—despite its overall ambivalence about the imposition on India of imperialist liberal legal, political, and economic institutions. Forster’s ambivalence toward imperialism as a flawed function of liberalism is evidenced in his nonfiction essays published subsequently to *A Passage*. For example, in an essay titled “Tolerance” he drew a parallel between fascism and imperialism. Regarding the “evil of racial prejudice, he wrote, “We can easily detect it in the Nazis... But we ourselves—are we guiltless?... is there no racial prejudice in the British Empire?” (47-48). Yet despite this critique of imperialism, Forster remained a self-proclaimed “individualist” who was dismayed during the interwar period “to [find] liberalism crumbling beneath him” (“What I Believe” 76). International socialism did not have the attraction for Forster that it had for Woolf, Holtby, and Anand, as a corrective to imperial exploitation. “The doctrine of *laisser-faire*,” he acknowledged,

has led us to the black market and the capitalist jungle... One the other hand, the doctrine of *laisser-faire* is the only one that seems to work...; if you plan and control men’s minds you stunt them, you get the censorship, the secret police, the road to serfdom, the community of slaves. (“The Challenge of Our Time” 57)

In addition to determining his resistance to socialism, Forster’s commitment to liberal individualism also prevented him from unequivocally supporting political idealist institutions like the League of Nations. League-style internationalism, he argued, was at best impractical and at worst dangerous.

The idea that nations should love one another, or that business concerns or marketing boards should love one another, or that a man in Portugal should love a



man in Peru of whom he has never heard—it is absurd, unreal... It leads us into perilous and vague sentimentalism. (“Tolerance” 45)

Such sentimentalism, Forster held, precluded people from taking a hard look into the “abyss” of human character. “For politics,” he wrote, “is based on human nature,” which “lies too far back for retrospective legislation; no declarations of independence touch it; no League of Nations can abolish it” (“The Menace to Freedom” 9). In light of these nonfiction writings, Forster’s engagement of mystery genre conventions in *A Passage* might be interpreted an extension of his interwar efforts to reckon with the features and functions of liberalism, while maintaining his commitment to liberalism as preferable to the available ideological alternatives.

In terms of both his fictional and nonfictional critiques of liberalism, socialism, and political idealism, George Orwell makes for a natural comparison with Forster. In his nonfiction, Orwell, like Forster, took a dim view of political idealist institutionalism, arguing that the League of Nations could do little more than “flap... vague wings in the background” (“The Limit to Pessimism” 534) of volatile contemporaneous geopolitics. Yet he also disdained more radical expressions of leftism, complaining loudly about the “‘proletarian’ cant from which we now suffer. Everyone knows, or ought to know by this time, how it runs:... bourgeois culture is bankrupt, bourgeois ‘values’ are despicable, and so on and so forth; if you want examples, see any number of the *Left Review*” (*Wigan Pier* 166). In his considerations of socialism as an alternative to liberal capitalism, Orwell came to conclusions similar to Forster’s: “‘we ought to guard against assuming that as a system to live under, socialism will be greatly preferable to... capitalism’” (qtd.

in I. Williams 110). Recalling Forster's discussion of *laissez-faire*, Orwell wrote that "collectivism leads to concentration camps, leader worship, and war," but free-market capitalism "leads to dole queues, the scramble for markets, and war" (*Essays* 119).

In terms of his colonial fiction, as well, Orwell demonstrates similarities to Forster. Like *A Passage*, Orwell's *Burmese Days* deploys recognizable genre conventions—in this case, those associated with the bildungsroman—as part of a broader interwar-era critique of both imperial exploitation and the political idealism resisting it. Unlike *A Passage*, however, *Burmese Days* depicts British imperialism in South Asia as utterly devoid of redemptive characters such as Fielding. The imperial project as described in *Burmese Days* is explicitly about exploitation. According to John Flory, an employee at a British timber firm in Burma and the novel's protagonist, "if we are a civilising influence, it's only to grab on a larger scale. We should chuck it quickly enough if it didn't pay" (43). Flory's process of development in the novel consists as much in conflict as in integration with the imperial state; since the bildungsroman is "the paramount medium for representing the socioaesthetic construction of modern, bourgeois individualism, and the paramount model for imagining the modern nation-state as a social community" (Slaughter, *Human Rights* 92), the evocation of bildungsroman conventions in *Burmese Days* is primarily subversive, and bitterly ironic. At the opening of the novel, we meet Flory as a young man, several years into his stint in Burma. He enjoys an important friendship with the native Burmese Dr. Veraswami; since Veraswami is socially ambitious and Flory agrees that membership will advance his career, at the opening of the novel Flory is determined to get Veraswami admitted to the local

European Club as its first native member. Flory's moral decline over the course of the novel is notable: having fallen in love with Elizabeth, a British colleague's niece, he betrays his intimacies with both Dr. Veraswami and Ma Hla May, a long-term concubine he bought from her parents when she was a child, and ultimately commits suicide when Elizabeth rejects him. Flory's degradation is complete.

Critics of the novel generally agree that *Burmese Days* reflects Orwell's own experience as a member of the Imperial Police in Burma, between 1922 and 1927, and that Flory stands in for Orwell. Indeed, Flory's processes of disillusionment narrated early in the novel evoke Orwell's own transition from a "young and keen admirer of Kipling" eager to travel to South Asia, which "promised adventure," to a "bitter" critic of imperialism with a virulent "hatred of the British Empire and all it represented" (Rossi and Rodden 2). Those critics who extend the argument that Flory stands in for Orwell contend that the various ethical failures of Flory—who according to Michael Levenson enters the novel as a discerning social and political critic and exits having "los[t] his standing as a voice of reason and critique" (62)—reflect Orwell's own shortcomings as a reliable anti-imperialist. Flory's racism over the course of the novel does complicate his standing as the novel's moral compass. Although it bears noting that he is much more ruthless in his observations about the British, Flory is not above making unsettling discriminatory generalizations about the native Burmese: "'There's a touch of the diabolical in all Mongols'" (107). Flory is offensively brusque with his servants, and his ruthless "chuck[ing]" (123) of the Burmese women he has slept with is contemptible. As

a result of representations such as these, Edward Said goes so far as to question the validity of readings of *Burmese Days* as an anticolonial novel (Levenson 176).

However, a reading of *Burmese Days* in terms of its manipulation of bildungsroman conventions reveals that Flory's steady corruption over the course of the novel determines rather than compromises Orwell's critique. As a novel genre, the bildungsroman is traditionally understood to consolidate liberal values by plotting the individual's personality development as a metaphor for socio-economic "progress." Scholars of the bildungsroman locate the origins of the genre in the eighteenth-century European novel, wherein a hero "comes of age within the framework of national-historical time, in and through which he emerges as an individual, reaching his ideal in unity with the state" (Berman 119). Flory's development is at first narrated directly in terms of his integration in the imperial British state. In a satirical take on the bildungsroman narrative, Flory over the course of his boyhood graduates from being the oppressed to the oppressor. Upon entering school at the age of nine, he is nicknamed "Monkey-bum" on account of his blue-hued facial birthmark, and subjected by the older boys to "a favourite torture" in which he is held "in a very painful grip known only to a few illuminati and called Special Togo," while being beaten "with a conker on a piece of string" (64). In an ironic twist on the intrepid, resourceful bildungsroman hero, Orwell narrates Flory's triumph over the bullying as he matures into "a liar and a good footballer, the two things absolutely necessary for success at school" (64). By his last term, it is Flory who is holding younger boys in Special Togo. "It was," Orwell narrates, "a formative period" (64). In this phase of his maturation, Flory has developed in perfect

compliance with the values of his milieu, with the result that he is a “barbarous young lout” by the time he leaves school and takes his position with an exploitive British timber enterprise in Burma. Through his ironic implementation of bildungsroman conventions, Orwell mocks the ideal of the British individual’s integration in the imperial state: Flory is integrated well enough, but the terms of his integration are explicitly corrupting.

Orwell also manipulates bildungsroman conventions in order to critique the weak anti-imperial leftism he associated with political idealist institutions like the League of Nations. Given that Flory commits suicide before he manages to achieve self-actualization either as an imperialist *or* as an effective anti-imperialist, the novel might be classified as a “modernist bildungsroman.” Critics including Gregory Castle and Jessica Berman offer the “modernist bildungsroman” paradigm to account for twentieth-century bildungsromane featuring protagonists who die (or otherwise significantly self-destruct) before achieving self-actualization. As Berman puts it, these narratives “often subvert what seems to be the most salient component of the genre—development—even as [they] cling to the genre’s language, structure, process of characterization, and ethical claims” (121). The second phase of maturation narrated in *Burmese Days* involves Flory’s “developing... brain,” which leads to an “ever bitterer hatred of the atmosphere of imperialism in which he live[s]” as he “grasp[s] the truth about the English and their Empire”: he realizes that the “Indian Empire is a despotism... with theft as its final object” (68). Especially in light of his deepening friendship with Veraswami, Flory comes to be scornfully associated by his British colleagues with anti-imperial leftism. Upon his “incautious remark that Dr. Veraswami was ‘a damned good fellow,’” rumors

of Flory's betrayal of his race "had swelled before long into a whole *Daily Worker*-ful of blasphemy and sedition" (199). When he raises the possibility that Veraswami might be accepted as a member of the Club, he is accused of "[d]ownright Bolshevism" (255). Yet despite his perception as dangerously leftist, Flory never succeeds in taking a substantively resistant stand, either against imperialism in general or against the racism of the Club membership. Preoccupied with unrequited love for Elizabeth, Flory's commitment to Veraswami falters: "He had promised... to [promote] the doctor's election; though now, with his own trouble to think of, the whole business... sickened him" (225-26).

Flory can fully self-actualize neither through integration in the imperial state, nor through a robust anti-imperialism. That both imperial enterprise and anti-imperial resistance are dead-ends for Flory's development comports with Orwell's pessimism regarding both liberal capitalist and leftist-socialist modes of economy and governance. Like the writers featured in the chapters to come, Orwell set his novel in a colonial context in order to contend with interwar-era challenges posed to Western liberalism by strongly emergent self-determination movements and the rise of international socialism. These factors, which tested Anglo-European legal, economic, and political authority and challenged Britain's centrality in global affairs, crucially determine the themes and questions addressed by all the novels under review in this dissertation. The genre engagements of Forster and Orwell not only convey their critiques of imperialism, but also their skepticism about political idealism. As I demonstrate in treatments of novels by Woolf, Holtby, and Anand, these figures deployed genre in modern colonial fiction to

quite different effect: they delineate and advance political idealist ethics as a legitimate (if flawed and incomplete) alternative to the explicitly hierarchal and discriminatory ethics of liberal imperialism.

## Chapter Two:

### “The Devils Which Perpetually Beset Us”: Tragic Naturalism and the Critique of British Colonial Economics in Leonard Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle*

#### **Introduction**

Although still most famously known as Virginia’s husband, Leonard Woolf is the focus of a growing body of scholarly inquiry. Just a sampling of the titles that make up a special 2007 issue on Leonard in the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* indicates the scope and reach of the interest: contributions such as “Leonard Woolf and Psychoanalysis,” “Leonard Woolf and Fascist Italy,” “The Political Woolf,” “Woolf in Sinhala,” and “Leonard, Nature and Music” address the complexities of Woolf’s personal, political, and creative life. The details excavated in these accounts do much to expand and enrich our understanding of “Mr. Virginia Woolf.” Prominent Woolf scholars Victoria Glendinning and Yasmine Gooneratne, as well as other critics including Nick Smith and Christopher Ondaatje,<sup>7</sup> have expressed surprise at the long neglect in the West of Woolf’s colonial fiction, which he wrote in the years following his return to England after a stint as Assistant Government Agent (A.G.A.) of the Hambantota district of southeast Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka). Two recent international conferences on Leonard Woolf—one at the University of Ruhuna in Sri Lanka in 2004 and another at Cambridge University in England in 2005—addressed this lapse by considering Woolf’s fiction in terms of histories and contexts of colonialism; and several re-prints of *The Village in the Jungle*

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<sup>7</sup> See Victoria Glendinning, *Leonard Woolf: A Biography*, 152; Yasmine Gooneratne, “Editorial: Leonard Woolf in Ceylon 1904-1911,” 2; Christopher Ondaatje, *Woolf in Ceylon: An Imperial Journey in the Shadow of Leonard Woolf—1904-1911*, 250; and Nick Smith, “Introduction,” 7.



have appeared in recent years (BiblioLife published a version in 2009, the Long Riders' Guild Press in 2007, and the Edwin Mellen Press and Eland Publishing in 2005). Yet from the flurry of recent studies on Woolf as colonial administrator, novelist, editor, publisher, political writer, critic, autobiographer, secular Jew, anti-imperial activist, socialist, Labour Party secretary, and husband to a literary legend, conflicting portraits emerge, especially with regard to his orientation to empire. Written and published during a period of strongly emergent self-determination movements throughout the British Empire, are his fictional representations of ethnic Ceylonese characters and communities in such works as *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) and *Stories of the East* (1921) indicative of his unreflective and indiscriminant paternalism toward all colonized populations, despite his professed anti-imperialism? Or does Woolf successfully acknowledge and advocate the collective agency of the communities he represents fictionally through his painstaking emphasis on regional specificity?

In this essay, I analyze Woolf's novel of colonial Ceylon, *The Village in the Jungle* (1913). The protagonists of the novel, including the hunter Silindu, his daughters Punchi Menika and Hinnihami, and his son-in-law Babun, are Sinhalese peasant farmers and paddy cultivators based on villagers Woolf encountered during his tenure in the Hambantota district. The drama of the narrative hinges on the variously devastating fates of the protagonists as the novel's titular village in the jungle, Beddagama, is steadily depopulated due to British imperial economic policies. All of the major action of *The Village in the Jungle* can be traced back to Silindu's inability to secure a *chena* permit. A *chena* was a plot of land considered by colonial authorities in British Ceylon to be

generally “useless” jungle. The novel thus quintessentially evokes the economic policy approach of the British Raj in monsoonal Asia. As Mike Davis explains in his study of Victorian-era famines in regions of the empire, village economies in rural areas “augmented crops and handicrafts with stores of free goods from common lands” (326).

All classes utilized these common property resources, but for poorer households they constituted the very margin of survival... The British consolidated their rule in India by transferring control of these strategic resources from the village community to the state... Common lands—or ‘waste’ in the symptomatic vocabulary of the Raj—were either transformed into taxable private property or state monopolies.” (326)

In centering on the issue of *chena* distribution in Ceylon, the novel quintessentially evokes the economic policy approach of the British Raj in monsoonal Asia.

Since “genre represents institutional order” (Ball 9), Woolf’s critical engagement of tragic naturalism allows him to express his anxieties about the theory versus the practice of the institution of liberalism as it related to colonial economic policy in Ceylon. Published at the tail-end of what Mike Davis refers to as “the golden age of Liberal Capitalism”—1870-1914 (9)—Woolf’s novel is primarily diagnostic. *The Village in the Jungle* tells the story of exploitation resulting from inconsistencies and short circuits inherent to the value structures of liberalism. By putting literary naturalism in concert with elements of modern tragedy, Woolf found an apt generic frame through which to examine issues of structural economic injustice he encountered in Ceylon. He manipulates the naturalist genre—conventionally associated with determinism and

inexorability—in order to elucidate the distinction between the shared, inevitable suffering that attends the human experience and the suffering created by the institutionalized economic injustice that characterizes imperialism. A study of the sinister atavism that bedevils Beddagama and establishes the novel generically both highlights Woolf’s effort to render the “slow violence” (Rob Nixon’s term) of economic imperialism comprehensible to Western metropolitan readers, and provides insight into how Woolf’s ethical orientation to those marginalized by empire shifted in light of his burgeoning critique of economic imperialism.

I situate *The Village in the Jungle* as an early installment or indicator of the robust opposition to economic imperialism that Woolf would develop over the course of the twenties and thirties as an influential theorist of interwar political idealism.<sup>8</sup> His seminal 1916 book *International Government* would significantly influence the subsequent development of the operating structure and policies of the League of Nations,<sup>9</sup> the Covenant of which was drafted by a committee appointed during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Political idealism emerged during the interwar period in part as a response to demands for international legal recognition by colonized and formerly colonized territories; as a value system, political idealism entailed an investment in the potential of international law and institutions to facilitate peace and justice globally, a

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<sup>8</sup> For more on Woolf’s pioneering role in political idealism and his legacy in international relations, see Peter Wilson’s *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth-Century Idealism*, as well as Wilson’s chapter “Leonard Woolf and International Government” in *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed*.

<sup>9</sup> See Janet M. Manson, “Leonard Woolf as an Architect of the League of Nations,” and Peter Wilson, *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth-Century Idealism*, 53-55.

resistance to economic imperialism, a belief in the pacific qualities of socialist-inspired economic globalization, and a commitment to the integration of socialist and humanitarian values in international institutional practice. Especially in its commitment to international socialism, then, interwar political idealism diverged from liberalism in key ways, while also retaining its fundamental political and humanist tenets. Along with such influential figures as J.A. Hobson and Philip Noel-Baker profiled in Peter Wilson's history of interwar political idealism, Woolf is credited with providing the foundational content of this political perspective leading up to and throughout the operation of the League of Nations during the interwar period.

However, despite increasingly nuanced readings of Woolf's fiction and career with regard to empire, critics remain divided on the question of the authenticity or extent of Woolf's progressivism, especially in terms of his orientation to racist categories of civilization justifying liberal imperialism. Judith Scherer Herz, for example, insists that "*The Village in the Jungle* is a profoundly anti-imperialist text" (82), while Gillian Workman, in direct contrast, asks, "In what way was the book symbolic of Woolf's 'anti-imperialism'? [Woolf] offers us no clues" (11). Yuko Ito calls Woolf's "mystification of the jungle" a "kind of propaganda to conquer not only the jungle but also the people and the nation" (139). Yet Yasmine Gooneratne praises the "richness and complexity" of Woolf's representation of Sinhalese protagonists, noting in particular his "extraordinary ability to capture in English the rhythms and idiom of Sinhala" ("Leonard Woolf's Novel of Sri Lanka" 398-99). Citing apparently contradictory passages—some "fashionably anti-imperial" (7) and others quite the opposite—of Woolf's diaries, autobiographies, and

fiction addressing his time in Ceylon, Workman criticizes “Woolf’s inability to hold a consistent line in relation to the empire” (13). Elleke Boehmer and Jane Marcus echo this sentiment: Boehmer writes that while Woolf set himself “in opposition to the dominant imperial culture,” he “remained to an extent complicit with its values and perceptions, especially with regard to racial thinking” (184); and Marcus likewise judges Woolf guilty of “[writing] for empire while ostensibly writing against it” (8).

These scholars are right to highlight the ethics of representation at issue in his fiction. I diverge from the emphasis in recent Woolf studies on how Woolf’s anti-imperialism was compromised by his orientalism. I start from the premise that Woolf’s representation of racially and economically marginalized protagonists undoubtedly leaves him open to charges of orientalism: his fiction risks conflating researched familiarity with intimate knowledge of the experience of members of ethnic Sinhalese cultivator communities under British imperialism. And instances of orientalism in the novel, such as the introductory description of Silindu as “more silent than the leopard and more cunning than the jackal” (1-2) clearly indicate his narrative tendency to fetishize and exoticize the East. Reading the novel in terms of its engagement with naturalism, however, allows me to examine Woolf’s subject position at a pressure point between metropolitan and colonial contexts: he is a white intellectual at once complicit and in conflict with the administration of the British empire. Analyzing *The Village in the Jungle* in terms of genre allows me to interpret it as an index of Woolf’s shifting orientation toward the logic and ethics of liberalism underpinning and justifying empire at the turn of the century.

## Woolf, Liberalism, and Empire

Coming of age intellectually in the elite milieu of the Cambridge Apostles and under the influence of the philosopher G.E. Moore, Woolf early on internalized the Bloomsbury values of forthright candor and clarity of expression. As a mentee of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, he was also influenced by early-twentieth-century British Fabianism. According to the Fabian version of liberalism, the British were entitled to an empire given their superior fitness, as bearers of civilization and democracy, to rule colonized populations (referred to by early-twentieth-century British Fabian leaders as, variously, “subject races,” “non-adult races,” and “weaker races”<sup>10</sup>). Given the “natural” hierarchy of people, vast schisms in the distribution of wealth worldwide were inevitable since the benefits of development legitimately accrue to those individuals and powers most fit to succeed in the competitive conditions of global free-market capitalism. Woolf’s time in Ceylon began to shake his faith in the impartial justice of liberal institutions as he witnessed British economic and judicial policies systematically obscure and exclude the interests of the Ceylonese. When he arrived in Jaffna, he was, by his own autobiographical account, “a very innocent, unconscious imperialist,” secure in his liberal metropolitan identity, “not deeply concerned with politics,” and comfortable with the role he expected to take on as “one of the white rulers of our Asiatic Empire” (*Growing* 25). By the time he started writing *The Village in the Jungle*, during a leave of absence from Ceylon that would finally lead to a resignation from his post, Woolf was thoroughly ambivalent about the supposed emancipatory potential of British imperialism. “The more

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<sup>10</sup> See David Piachaud, “Fabianism, Social Policy, and Colonialism: The Case of Tanzania.”

I wrote *The Village in the Jungle*, the more distasteful became the prospect of success in Colombo” (*Beginning* 48).

Fittingly, Woolf titled his autobiography of the years in Ceylon, simply, *Growing*; this time developed his orientation to anti-imperial resistance movements. Nationalist movements in the British Raj would take off during the interwar era, but even before World War I geopolitical developments were setting the stage for the emergence of self-determination as both legal doctrine and grassroots rallying cry. In Ceylon and in several other areas of the British Empire during the early nineteenth-hundreds and nineteenth-teens, native resistance to imperial authority gained momentum while among certain British intellectuals, including Woolf, confidence in the imperial mission was beginning to fray. Trade unionism among urban workers took root in Colombo during the late nineteenth century; early on, Ceylonese labor organization took on a strong partisan identity that would coincide with a powerful will to national self-determination over the course of the early decades of the twentieth century. Significant labor and legislative events during these years—including the carters’ strike of 1906, the railway workers’ strike of 1912, the Coolie Labour Reform of 1917, and the formation in 1919 of both the Ceylon National Congress and the Ceylon Workers’ Welfare League—would consolidate Ceylonese nationalism in terms of opposition to imperial economic domination.<sup>11</sup>

Although Ceylon wouldn’t achieve independence until 1948, it was the first of Britain’s

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<sup>11</sup> For more on factors contributing to Ceylonese nationalism, see Visakha Kumari Jayawardena, “Economic and Political Factors in the 1915 Riots,” Eric Meyer, “Rural Society and the Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, 1880-1940,” and Jonathan Spencer, *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*.

colonies in Asia to gain a measure of control over its domestic affairs (Meyer 40), with the introduction of the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931.<sup>12</sup>

The Ceylonese resistance to British imperial institutionalism that Woolf dramatizes in *The Village in the Jungle* was part of broader phenomenon of self-determination sweeping the colonies. Confrontations between British state power and resistance movements abounded during the nineteen-teens and early twenties, which saw the British imposition of martial law in Ceylon in 1915, the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 and ongoing *swaraj* (“home-rule”) agitations in India, the Irish War of Independence, and the rise of the anti-British Wafd party in Egypt. Woolf worked in Ceylon from 1904-1911; over the course of this period labor, temperance, and Buddhist revival movements gained momentum as salient expressions of anti-imperial resistance giving shape and identity to Ceylonese nationalism. As self-determination movements throughout the British Empire grew in conversation with the international socialism that would eventually inform Woolf’s interwar political idealism, the rise of the Co-operative Movement and the subsequent institution of the Labor Party in England gave expression to early-twentieth-century leftist British interest in alternatives to liberal capitalism. In

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<sup>12</sup> The Donoughmore Constitution introduced a system of universal suffrage premised on “territorial” rather than “communal” representation. When the Constitution was passed in 1931, communal representation in Ceylon, according to which Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim representatives were elected to national government, had characterized British rule for over a century. Elizabeth Nissan and R. L. Stirrat write that this system “substantialized heterogeneity, formalizing cultural difference and making it the basis for political representation” (29); it follows, then, “that the kind of confrontation that we see today between Sinhala and Tamils in Sri Lanka is the outcome of processes set in motion during the colonial era” (Nissan and Stirrat 39). Nevertheless, Nissan and Stirrat note that it would be a mistake to view the ethnic conflict taking place in Ceylon during the early twentieth century as a precursor to the communal violence between Sinhalese and Tamil populations that has terrorized Sri Lanka since 1956.



light of these geopolitical context factors, Woolf's critique of imperialism—a subject of controversy in analyses of his fiction—is secondary or supplementary to the dominant critique of liberal-imperial economics at work in the narrative structure of *The Village in the Jungle*.

### **Liberalism, Genre, and Ethics**

Woolf's novel taps in to the historically paradoxical relationship between liberalism and imperialism in terms of economic policy. In his etymology of the term “liberalism,” Raymond Williams establishes the deep history of class inequality associated with liberalism. “It began as a specific social distinction,” he writes, “to refer to a class of free men... of independent means and assured social position... as distinct from others who were not free” (*Keywords* 179). Williams claims that while liberalism is associated with “certain necessary kinds of freedom”—namely, civil and political rights attended by democratic citizenship—it is also developed “in terms of capitalism” and is, “essentially, a doctrine of possessive individualism” (*Keywords* 181). As Eileen P. Sullivan points out in her history of liberalism and imperialism, “the liberal position” as established by prominent philosophers such as Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and James Mill “was primarily anti-imperialist” (599). These thinkers held that “England did not benefit, either economically or politically, from maintaining an empire” (Sullivan 600). It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that liberals began to revise their position on imperialism. Sullivan identifies James Mill as

the first of the liberals to make a consistent case for England's governance of India... He was quite certain that the Indians were barbarous, uncivilized, and

incapable of governing themselves. He believed, however, that with...  
'government tempered by European honour and European intelligence' England  
would ensure order and security to the Indians and prepare them to enter  
eventually into a higher stage of civilization. (605)

According to James Mill, the road to civilization consisted in "reform of the  
Indian legal and land systems" (Sullivan 605). So began the association of liberalism  
with the aggressive imposition of Anglo-European economic policies in the colonies.  
James Mill's son John Stewart inherited his father's attitudes toward non-Europeans. He  
believed that the "people of Asia and Africa... were barbarous and uncivilized and could  
not govern themselves. In these cases, England must provide a benevolent despotism"  
(Sullivan 606). In British colonies in Asia where "[v]illage economy... augmented crops  
and handicrafts with stores of free goods from common lands" (Davis 326), J.S. Mill  
advised "a more permanent... tenure of land" (qtd. in Sullivan 610) dictated by what  
Rob Nixon terms the "developmental logic" of liberal capitalism, which "tends to treat  
any commons as an unprofitable wasteland awaiting improvement through free-market  
liberation" (596). Though inspired by liberal capitalist values, J.S. Mill advocated  
economic policies for the colonies that were quite illiberal in practice. He made an  
exception to his "general policy of laissez faire" because he believed that "the economic  
arrangements of developing societies were more crucially educative and civilizing  
influences than either formal education or political institutions." Therefore, "he  
recommended that England carefully regulate the economic systems of dependencies"  
(Sullivan 614)—regardless of resistance from the dependencies themselves. Mill

“maintained that the English were entitled to govern uncivilized peoples against their will because English government brought gradual improvement” (Sullivan 610). But of course, the results of colonial economic policy in India, for example, were devastating. According to Mike Davis,

If the history of British rule in India were to be condensed into a single fact, it is this: there was no increase in India’s per capita income from 1757 to 1947.

Indeed, in the last half of the nineteenth century, income probably declined by more than 50 percent. Moreover in the age of Kipling, that ‘glorious imperial half century’ from 1872 to 1921, the life expectancy of ordinary Indians fell by a staggering 20 percent. (311-12)

“Millions died,” Davis concludes, “not outside the ‘modern world system,’ but in the very process of being forcibly... conscripted into a London-centered world economy... They died in the golden age of Liberal Capitalism” (9).<sup>13</sup>

In his autobiographical account of his arrival in Ceylon, Woolf indicates his early-career alliance with liberalism by invoking one of the fathers of the Enlightenment: “All that I was taking with me... to prepare me for my task of helping to rule the British Empire was 90 large, beautifully printed volumes of Voltaire” (*Growing* 12). Over the course of his time in Ceylon, however, he began to question the assumed values of liberalism, and the naturalist novel was an apt vehicle for Woolf’s crisis of faith in the

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<sup>13</sup> See Mike Davis’s chapter “India: The Modernization of Poverty” in *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* for a detailed explanation of how British restructuring of native systems of land distribution and irrigation resulted in widespread poverty and famine.

capitalist foundations of liberalism. Richard Lehan explains that as a genre concerned with “atavism” and “a universe of force... that was almost always subterranean and disruptive” (xx-xxi), naturalism was the prevailing literary paradigm in European fiction from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. If we accept Lehan’s dating of the height of naturalism, it is certain that Woolf would have been familiar with and responding to realist and naturalist currents in early-twentieth-century European literature. In a letter posted to Lytton Strachey from Kandy and dated September 29, 1907, Woolf wrote that he was captivated by *Madam Bovary*, a seminal realist novel that would help pave the way for the way for literary naturalism. “[I]t seemed to me the saddest & most beautiful book I had ever read. Surely it is the beginning & the end of realism” (132). He wrote again on November 17: “I’m all for reality... in novels, even to hangings & whores” (134).

Several critics assume that *The Village in the Jungle* is tragic. Judith Scherer Herz observes that the central protagonist Silindu is, “if this were a Greek tragedy, one who is doomed by the gods” (76). Silindu’s fate arouses pity in the reader in response to his misfortune as an ““intermediate kind of character: not pre-eminent in moral excellence..., nor falling into misfortune through vice and depravity..., but through some [*hamartia*]”” (Stinton 221). Silindu is further established as a tragic hero according to the Hegelian tradition: “The hero is both innocent and guilty—innocent insofar as [he] adheres to the good by acting on behalf of a just principle; guilty insofar as [he] violates a good and wills to identify with that violation” (Roche 13). Silindu is “innocent” in that his crimes in the novel are motivated by resistance to the corruption inherent to the *chena*

system of land distribution, but he is guilty of murder. However, consistent with Hegel's definition of the tragic hero, Silindu stands stoically by the justice of his actions till the end.

Nevertheless, *The Village in the Jungle* cannot ultimately be identified in terms of classical tragedy since it centers not on aristocratic but on peasant society. The novel adheres more to the conventions of modern tragedy, theorized most famously by Arthur Miller and described broadly by Anthony Winner as “something like the experience of a minor member of the chorus or of a walk-on player who must suddenly act the entire tragedy by himself” (qtd. in Baguley 97). In both classical and modern tragedies, the hero is one who, despite the hopelessness of his cause, is ever driven to “act against the scheme of things that degrades” (Miller). There could be no better fundamental characterization of Silindu, who wages an impossible battle against the colonially entrenched *chena* system. The novel engages both modern tragic and naturalist genres in that it attributes Silindu's downfall to the structural economic injustice burdening colonial Ceylonese peasant society. Such a narrative, according to genre theorist David Baguley, “relativise[s]’ guilt and destiny and [is] thereby incapable of generating a truly tragic vision” (98). Modern tragic naturalism rejects what Baguley defines as the “fundamental characteristics of [classical] tragedy: myth and destiny” (98).

To be sure, both classical tragedy and nineteenth-century naturalism are both saliently characterized by fatalism: the former in terms of the wrath of the gods and the latter in terms of Darwinian economic and social determinism. The modern tragic naturalism Woolf puts into play reacts against both manifestations of fatalism. Woolf

demonstrates a “socialist... sense of realism... committed to the exposure of real historical... forces underlying and belieing such naturalistic illusions” (Webster 43). Yet Arthur Miller warns against “the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism.” In his study of tragedy, Terry Eagleton picks up this line of argument, insisting on its ethically generative potential: “It stresses how we are acted upon rather than robustly enterprising... What for some suggests fatalism or pessimism means for others the kind of sober realism which is the only sure foundation of an effective ethics” (xvi). Baguley similarly emphasizes “the intrinsic morality of realist fiction” (50). In telling the story of economic imperialism through the tragic story of Silindu, Woolf achieves what Miller suggests is the measure of the modern tragic narrative: the “destruction” of the hero as he contends with “an evil in his environment” assists the reader in the “discovery of the moral law.” By means of his genre engagement, Woolf opens up possibilities for a metropolitan ethical subject position resistant to the terms of liberal economic imperialism.

### **Naturalism and Colonial Economics in *The Village in the Jungle***

Woolf explicitly tied his impressions of the Sinhalese cultivators he met as a colonial administrator with British literary naturalism: “you find beneath the surface in almost everyone a profound melancholy... just as something like it permeates the scenery and characters of a Hardy novel” (*Growing* 54). The area of Ceylon where Woolf worked as A.G.A. was predominantly agricultural. With permits, villagers could cultivate designated plots using slash-and-burn techniques and sowing seeds for *kurrakan*, a grain that villagers in the Hambantota district relied upon for survival in

drought years when paddy cultivation was impossible. The slash-and-burn method of cultivation meant that the *chena* lands, once they had yielded one or possibly two crops, were depleted for a decade afterward.<sup>14</sup> *Chena* policy in British Ceylon was a source of great contention among colonial authorities. “Essentially,” writes T.J. Barron, “it was a battle between those who believed that *chena* cultivation was wasteful and economically regressive and those who saw it as a necessary—or even desirable—aspect of village life in rural areas” (57). An even more deeply-entrenched source of contention—this between the Ceylonese and the British—was the land legislation that gave rise to the permit system for *chena* cultivation. Beginning in 1897, Barron explains, “villages were surveyed and lands for which no proof of ownership could be offered, or which had been cultivated only at irregular intervals, were declared crown land” (57).

The *chena* issue is the axis around which the novel turns. Responding to the economic hardship rampant in the Hambantota district was the main difficulty Woolf faced as A.G.A. His resistance to imperial *chena* policy—a major theme of his official colonial diaries—finds expression in Silindu, who struggles to survive in an economic system seemingly engineered to ensure deprivation. Early in the novel, the reader learns that Silindu once exchanged “bitter words” with Babehami, the village headman, a corrupt figure who leverages his exclusive authority to issue *chena* permits to extort money and other resources from the villagers. The narrator remarks that “Though Silindu

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<sup>14</sup> For further details on the *chena* issue in British Ceylon, see Judith Scherer Herz, “To Glide Silently Out of One’s Own Text: Leonard Woolf and ‘The Village in the Jungle,’” 75-76, and T.J. Barron, “Before the Deluge: Leonard Woolf in Ceylon,” 57.

soon forgot [the incident], Babehami did not” (28-29). With this, the reader is introduced to

the mainspring upon which the life of the village worked—debt. The villagers lived upon debt, and their debts were the main topic of their conversation. A good kurrakan crop, from two to four acres of chena, would be sufficient to support a family for a year. But no one, not even the headman, ever enjoyed the full crop which he had reaped... With the reaping of the chenas came the settlement of debts. (24-25)

As Babehami points out with disdain, Silindu is “a bad debtor” (27). “Babehami’s enmity,” the narrator remarks, becomes “an evil power... working against him” (33).

As Silindu’s family sinks deeper into debt, they become even more vulnerable to exploitation. When Fernando Mudalali, a boutique-keeper and money-lender from Kamburupitiya, comes to Beddagama to collect *his* debt from Babehami, he is impressed by Punchi Menika and determines to take her, forcibly if need be, from Babun: “He anticipated no difficulty; she was a mere village woman, and the husband was... in his debt” (114). When Punchi Menika, Babun, and Silindu all put up fierce resistance to Fernando, their fates are sealed. Fernando and Babehami see to it that Silindu and Babun are permanently prohibited from cultivating *chenas*. But the harassment does not end there. Fernando and Babehami plot the brutal torture and killing of Hinnihami’s beloved pet fawn, and they frame Babun and Silindu for the theft of some jewelry, which results in a court trial. Silindu is acquitted but Babun is put in jail, where he dies. At this point, Silindu is driven to desperation. He murders first Babehami, and then Fernando. By



now, Hinnihami has died, presumably of grief, after the deaths of both her child (due to illness) and the fawn. Silindu turns himself in despite Punchi Menika's heart-breaking protestations; she dies alone in the village, which has been depopulated by drought and starvation. Silindu is condemned to be hanged for his crimes, but after he has reconciled himself to his imminent death, his sentence is "reduced" to twenty years' hard labor. "A wooden mallet was put into his hand and a pile of cocoanut husk thrown down in front of him. For the remainder of that day, and daily for the remainder of twenty years, he had to make coir by beating cocoanut husks with the wooden mallet" (217).

Woolf's construction of a tragic naturalist plotline allows him to highlight, formally, the "slow violence" perpetrated by colonial economic policy. The narrative pacing of the family's demise as a feature of Beddagama's broad depopulation conveys a cruel inexorability. Such pacing enables Woolf to expose what Rob Nixon defines as "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (*Slow Violence* 2). A reading of the novel in terms of its attention to the question of *chena* policy exposes how imperial economic structures cause individuals' personal catastrophes. Indeed, at the conclusion of the novel, the reader is horrified by Silindu's fate. Despite the fact that he is now a convicted murderer, it is not Silindu who strikes the reader as "backward" or "uncivilized," but rather the chain of events and the colonial institutional structures that condemn him to beat husks into coir for the rest of his days. Naturalism, with its "critical searching-out of elements of the social environment which had hitherto... been excluded from literature" (Williams, *Keywords* 217-18) and its

demand for a “contemporaneous reality... depicted with objectivity” attending this “new range of subject matter” (Baguley 48), offered Woolf the generic tools to detail for a metropolitan readership the unique distress of a Sinhalese cultivator community within the colonial economy. The accuracy of Woolf’s depictions of the complexities of Ceylon’s rural society under imperialism is practically uncontested; even one of Woolf’s least enthusiastic critics, T.J. Barron, concedes that “the novel describes faithfully and exactly the conditions in the East Giruwa Pattu of Hambantota District in the years between 1908 and 1911... It is no exaggeration to say that *The Village in the Jungle* is one of the finest pieces of social analysis which British Ceylon produced. Its understanding of the traditional peasant society is astonishing” (57).

The ethnographic authenticity Woolf implicitly claims for his work—through, for example, his footnoted translations of Sinhalese terms and idioms—makes him the object of both commendation and censure by critics. Almost as soon as it was published *The Village in the Jungle* was praised for its accurate renderings of the life of the Sinhalese poor and the apparent neutrality of its narration. A reviewer of the novel in the October 12, 1913 issue of the *New York Times* celebrated Woolf’s “remarkable understanding of [his] theme” and marveled at the objectivity of the narration: “The book is merely a window through which the reader watches for a generation a handful of men and women struggling desperately” (“The Victorious Jungle”). Almost a century later, Woolf critic Judith Scherer Herz would be similarly impressed: the novel, she writes, “enters into this other world, other life, other consciousness, leaving no trace, or so faint a trace as to be less than no trace, of the subject position of the writer” (77). The ethnographic

authenticity of the novel is a selling point for critics like Herz, but for Anindyo Roy, as well as Peter Wilson and D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, the claim to objectivity they find implicit in the ethnographic tone is the ethical downfall of the book. Roy holds that “The novel’s orientalism is discernible in its [presumption to offer an] unmediated evocation of the sense of the ‘real’... life and struggles of the rural poor in Ceylon” (149).

As Linda Alcoff writes in her classic piece “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” “Sometimes... we do need a ‘messenger’ to advocate for our needs.” Yet there are risks associated with speaking for others, including the “possibility of misrepresentation” and the expansion of “one’s own authority and privilege” (29). Woolf’s representational practices make him a target of justifiable criticism by critics concerned about his presuming to speak for Sinhalese subjects. Still, on the novel’s publication there were some favorable outcomes of Woolf’s efforts as a “messenger.” Woolf successfully captured the interest of his target audience of Western metropolitan readers. The novel received appreciative critical reviews in the West<sup>15</sup> and underwent several British re-printings between 1913 and 1925, when a second edition was released (Herz 70). And although a frank critic of the novel’s shortcomings, D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke emphasizes that while it demands a “complex, qualified response,” it is nevertheless “a distinguished novel” and “an important book for Sri Lankan writers, critics and readers” (162). *The Village in the Jungle* would go out of print for most of the twentieth century in England and the U.S., but in Sri Lanka it is widely regarded as a

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<sup>15</sup> A review appearing in the *New York Times* on October 12, 1913, concludes with the observation that “The story is told with remarkable understanding of its theme and with a sense of proportion in its construction and of harmony in its coloring that deserve warm commendation” (“The Victorious Jungle”).

classic, the first and among the most influential Anglophone modern novels of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan critic Yasmine Gooneratne notes how effectively Woolf translated Sinhalese cultural and linguistic features (“Leonard Woolf’s Novel of Sri Lanka” 398-99). The novel was adapted for a film, scripted in Sinhala and directed by Lester James Peries, released in Sri Lanka in 1982.

Yet even apart from *The Village in the Jungle*’s reception and legacy, it is possible to contextualize the novel’s bid for authenticity by considering what Woolf’s genre engagement reveals about his shifting ethical subject position in relationship to those marginalized by colonialism. If the narrator’s subject position is obscured, the novelist’s subject position is revealed if we locate the novel generically as naturalist. The novel is less successful at representing the interiority of Sinhalese individuals than it is at registering Woolf’s gradual recognition that the distress and depopulation he witnessed in southeast Ceylon was occurring not in spite of colonial economic policies, but because of them. From this perspective, the ethnographic realism for which Woolf strives in his naturalist novel is less about speaking for southeast Ceylonese people (justifiably a provocation for postcolonialists who object to the novel) and more about exposing the economic policy conditions precipitating suffering in the region.

It is certain that the *chena* issue was a source of desperate frustration and concern for Woolf during his years as A.G.A. He wrote in his official diary as early as July 25, 1909, that he was “more than ever convinced... that the question of chenas should be faced.” In his circuit, he wrote,

there are these wretched villages scattered throughout the jungle. The people own paddy land under tanks but in 3 out of 4 years there is no water to cultivate the fields. They all say that coconut trees and garden produce of all kinds will not grow in the drought which is annual... For mile after mile one passes through scrub or low jungle without a tree of valuable timber. Unless this valueless land is given to the villagers to chena, they have no means of support in their villages... Further in many cases they have not even the ready money to pay for the Government chenas at all and so if they do take chenas from Government they have to get the money for them on (one may be certain) ruinous terms...

Government should recognise that the people who need chenas most very often are unable to take them because of the payment in advance (which is completely at variance with the customs of cultivation throughout the district)... [T]he payment in advance throws the villager who is poor and is supposed to be helped into the hands of the well-to-do or it makes it impossible for him to chena at all.

(86-87)

The *chena* issue comes up with increasing frequency and urgency in subsequent diary entries; if it is central to the plot of the novel, it was also central to his administrative career in Ceylon. Woolf wrote on November 17, 1909: “there are not a few villages in this District in which if chenas are disallowed the villages will gradually die out... by a slow process of extinction which will undoubtedly be accompanied by a considerable amount of distress” (117). And he wrote again on February 23, 1910:

Owing to the decision of Government with regard to allowing chenas in villages declared crown..., I have decided to inspect each village personally and to enquire into its circumstances on the spot with regard to chenas... The facts are that there is no work for the people in the villages, and the village tanks fill only once in 5 or 10 years... From the terms of the Government decision I do not understand that I am authorized to allow chenas in say 3 years out of 5 in these villages, and yet nothing can be more certain that that if the Government order is really carried out in the next five years, a large area must become depopulated.

(136)

Despite his feeling of helplessness in the face of what he perceived as appallingly bad government policy, Woolf was compelled to take matters into his own hands (to the extent that he could) by conducting interviews with inhabitants of the villages so as to at least establish a record of the consequences of the policy. Woolf's responses to the ongoing contention surrounding *chena* cultivation represent a telling instance of his early-career struggle with the subordinating function of liberal imperial economics. In the earlier passage, Woolf appeals to his superiors (for whose benefit these colonial diaries were maintained) on grounds of humanitarian logic: his explanation of the specific hardships introduced by British imperial *chena* policy is premised on his assumption, still intact in 1909, that the imperial Government was committed to native interests and thus would reasonably reconsider a policy at such "variance" with traditional modes of agriculture in the region.

Yet between the 1909 and 1910 entries, one can track a shift in Woolf's orientation to liberal imperial economics. The earlier passage evidences Woolf's allegiance to colonial administration—at that point, he was still willing to give British Ceylon's economic policy makers the benefit of the doubt. In this passage, Woolf makes general observations and recommendations for a more humane land-use policy in terms that indicate his abiding respect for imperial authority; he does not specifically reference himself or his feelings but instead repeatedly emphasizes "Government" as the active subject, thus indicating his deferment to imperial authority. The later entry lacks the humanitarian appeal of the previous ones; Woolf's curt tone indicates his increasing bitterness toward the colonial government in Ceylon and, more broadly, his eroded faith in imperialism's stated objective of advancing native welfare. Woolf sets himself in pronounced opposition to the colonial Government. He repeatedly deploys the first person ("I have decided," "I do not understand"), thus situating himself as an active agent and contender against colonial economic policies.

Woolf's diary entries pertaining to *chena* policy demonstrate his increasingly frank confrontation of the fact that the political economy of the British Empire had a subordinating function that did not square easily with its professed emancipatory objectives. Taken in consideration with his colonial diary, *The Village in the Jungle* is an extension of Woolf's impulse, as a result of his indignation at imperial policies that oppress and exclude, to bear witness to structural injustice. His concern in his colonial diary that villagers were forced to borrow money "on ruinous terms" and were thus thrown "into the hands of the well-to-do" finds expression in his depictions of local elites

Babehami and Fernando, who easily manipulate the rituals of the regional colonial court in order to uphold their exclusive right to *chena* administration on behalf of the empire. Even before Babehami and Fernando bring Silindu and Babun to court on false burglary charges, Babehami takes advantage of his affiliation with the colonial government to attack the family by depriving Silindu and Babun of the *chena* they had hitherto cultivated together.

[T]hey found another man, Baba Sinno, a near relation of Babehami, in occupation of [their land]. Babun went to the headman to inquire what this meant. [Babehami] was quite ready to explain it. No [*chena*] permit could be given to Babun and Silindu... It was a Government rule that permits were to be given only to fit persons. Babun and Silindu were not fit persons, therefore no permits could be given to them. (137)

Babehami cites the old liberal economic wisdom, premised on Darwinian social and economic determinism and employed by imperial authority to justify the economic exclusion of native laborers. Silindu and Babun despair:

if no *chena* were given, it meant starvation; for they had at the utmost food only for a month, and besides that nothing but their debts. They saw that Baba Sinno was but a foil; they did not dare to turn him out by force, because they had no permits which would give them the right to do so. If they felt that there was anyone in the village who would openly take their part, it would have been different; but they knew that no one would dare to side with them against the



headman and Fernando, who already held the whole village enmeshed in their debt. (138)

Woolf's narration makes it explicit that the catastrophic bind in which Silindu and Babun find themselves is the direct result of colonial economic policies that empower local elites to exploit and disadvantage native labor. Woolf presses this point in the first court scene of the novel, during which Silindu watches Babehami and Fernando ingratiate themselves to the court through their adept mimicking of European court speak and dress: Babehami, "was quite at his ease when he made the affirmation that we would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (147), while Fernando, "cool and unabashed," wore "for the occasion a black European coat" and "a pink starched shirt" (156). Both proceed to lie shamelessly, with the result that Silindu and Babun are permanently barred from *chena* cultivation. Babun, moreover, is sentenced to "six months' rigorous imprisonment" (163).

In a final and most conclusive depiction of the desperation that is occasioned by colonial economic policies, Woolf situates Silindu's pre-meditated murder of Babehami and Fernando as a direct result of his restriction from *chena* cultivation. Following the trial, Silindu makes a final appeal to Babehami: "I have come to you about this chena. I cannot live without chena. You must give it back to me." In response, Babehami invokes the authority of the court: "You heard in the court that the chena cannot be given to you" (171). Silindu repeats himself: "I cannot live without the chena. Without a chena I must starve. Even now there is no grain in my house. You must give me the chena" (173). Ultimately, Silindu is driven to murder; he shoots Babehami, then

Fernando. Following the murders, Silindu is “very tired [and] very unhappy,” because while Babehami and Fernando can no longer “hunt” him, he know he will “be hunted once again” (179) by colonial justice authorities. Nevertheless, Silindu feels “no regret for what he had done—no remorse... could trouble him. So far as [Babehami and Fernando] were concerned, he only felt a great relief” (179).

In centering on the calamitous results of the socially, politically, and economically fraught issue of colonial policies on *chena* cultivation, Woolf’s novel is, at the fundamental level of plot, a plea for justice. The unsettling and interminable beating of Silindu’s mallet with which the novel concludes has the effect of echoing Woolf’s repeated expressions of alarm in his diaries that depopulation and distress must afflict the Hambantota district as long as British colonial land-distribution policies remain in place in Ceylon. Yasmine Gooneratne points out that critics of Woolf’s novel frequently observe that the “endless struggle of the village folk to keep back the jungle, endless except for the final obliteration of their compounds and clearings by bush and scrub, seems to be a symbol of the common human situation, reflecting the human struggle” (“Introduction” 5). Such a reading misses the pointed critique of liberal imperial economics that Woolf levels by means of his engagement of the naturalist genre. By means of his ethnographic detailing of the social complexity of an early-twentieth-century rural community in British Ceylon, Woolf undoes the binary opposition between “civilized” and “savage” upon which liberal imperial ideology turns by significantly locating “savagery” in exploitive economic and social structures that are directly attributable to colonial policies. While his critique centers on British Ceylon, Woolf’s

novel makes a broader argument for the hubristic nature of the “developmental logic” of liberal capitalism in general, which, according to Rob Nixon, “tends to treat any commons as an unprofitable wasteland awaiting improvement through free-market liberation” (“Neoliberalism” 596). By centering the plot of the novel on colonial *chena* policy in southeast Ceylon, Woolf exposes the fundamental *hubris* of imperial economic policy in a region that has for centuries been managed according to local systems of land-distribution.

Woolf’s construction of a tragic naturalist plotline allows him to highlight, formally, the “slow violence” perpetrated by colonial economic policy. The narrative pacing of the family’s demise as a feature of Beddagama’s broad depopulation conveys a cruel inexorability. Such pacing enables Woolf to expose what Rob Nixon defines as “a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (*Slow Violence* 2). A reading of the novel in terms of its attention to the question of *chena* policy exposes how imperial economic structures cause individuals’ personal catastrophes. Indeed, at the conclusion of the novel, the reader is horrified by Silindu’s fate. Despite the fact that he is now a convicted murderer, it is not Silindu who strikes the reader as “backward” or “uncivilized,” but rather the chain of events and the colonial institutional structures that condemn him to beat husks into coir for the rest of his days. Naturalism, with its “critical searching-out of elements of the social environment which had hitherto... been excluded from literature” (Williams, *Keywords* 217-18) and its demand for a “contemporaneous reality... depicted with objectivity” attending this “new

range of subject matter” (Baguley 48), offered Woolf the generic tools to detail for a metropolitan readership the unique distress of a Sinhalese cultivator community within the colonial economy.

### **Woolf’s Identification with Ceylonese Resistance in *The Village in the Jungle***

The ethnographic authenticity Woolf implicitly claims for his work—through, for example, his footnoted translations of Sinhala terms and idioms—makes him the object of both commendation and censure by critics. The accuracy of Woolf’s depictions of the complexities of Ceylon’s rural society under imperialism is practically uncontested; even one of Woolf’s least enthusiastic critics, T.J. Barron, concedes that “the novel describes faithfully and exactly the conditions in the East Giruwa Pattu of Hambantota District in the years between 1908 and 1911... It is no exaggeration to say that *The Village in the Jungle* is one of the finest pieces of social analysis which British Ceylon produced. Its understanding of the traditional peasant society is astonishing” (57). A reviewer of the novel in the October 12, 1913 issue of the *New York Times* celebrated Woolf’s “remarkable understanding of [his] theme” and marveled at the objectivity of the narration: “The book is merely a window through which the reader watches for a generation a handful of men and women struggling desperately” (“The Victorious Jungle”). Almost a century later, Woolf critic Judith Scherer Herz would be similarly impressed: the novel, she writes, “enters into this other world, other life, other consciousness, leaving no trace, or so faint a trace as to be less than no trace, of the subject position of the writer” (77). The ethnographic authenticity of the novel is a selling point for critics like Herz, but for Anindyo Roy, as well as Peter Wilson and

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, the claim to objectivity they find implicit in the ethnographic tone is the ethical downfall of the book. Roy holds that “The novel’s orientalism is discernible in its [presumption to offer an] unmediated evocation of the sense of the ‘real’... life and struggles of the rural poor in Ceylon” (149).

Woolf’s representational practices make him a target of justifiable criticism by critics concerned about his presuming to speak for Sinhalese subjects. Still, on the novel’s publication there were some favorable outcomes of Woolf’s efforts as an intermediary. Woolf successfully captured the interest of his target audience of Western metropolitan readers. The novel received appreciative critical reviews in the West<sup>16</sup> and underwent several British re-printings between 1913 and 1925, when a second edition was released (Herz 70). And although a frank critic of the novel’s shortcomings, D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke emphasizes that while it demands a “complex, qualified response,” it is nevertheless “a distinguished novel” and “an important book for Sri Lankan writers, critics and readers” (162). *The Village in the Jungle* would go out of print for most of the twentieth century in England and the U.S., but in Sri Lanka it is widely regarded as a classic, the first and among the most influential Anglophone modern novels of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan critic Yasmine Gooneratne notes how effectively Woolf translated Sinhala cultural and linguistic features (“Leonard Woolf’s Novel of Sri Lanka” 398-99). The novel was adapted for a film, scripted in Sinhala and directed by Lester James Peries, released in Sri Lanka in 1982.

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Yet even apart from *The Village in the Jungle*'s reception and legacy, it is possible to contextualize the novel's bid for authenticity by considering what Woolf's genre engagement reveals about his shifting ethical subject position in relationship to those marginalized by colonialism. If the narrator's subject position is obscured, the novelist's subject position is revealed if we locate the novel generically as naturalist. The novel is less successful at representing the interiority of Sinhalese individuals than it is at registering Woolf's gradual recognition that the distress and depopulation he witnessed in southeast Ceylon was occurring not in spite of colonial economic policies, but because of them. From this perspective, the ethnographic realism for which Woolf strives in his naturalist novel is less about speaking for southeast Ceylonese people (justifiably a provocation for postcolonialists who object to the novel) and more about exposing the economic policy conditions precipitating suffering in the region.

Woolf was undoubtedly aware of the labor unrest and religious agitation giving shape to Ceylonese anti-imperialism even as he was engaged in colonial administration in remote areas of the Hambantota district. He hoped that *The Village in the Jungle* would stand as an expression of the "sympathy with the people" he felt due to the "austerity" and "harshness" of their lives in the Hambantota district. The "rhythm and tempo" of life there, he wrote, "crept permanently into my heart and bones" (*Growing* 32). Woolf reverses the imperial policy of instilling liberal values in colonized subjects through the imposition of English language, literature, and culture; it is *his* subjectivity that has been invaded, so to speak, by the ways of life as well as the struggles of the Sinhalese he worked with during his tenure as A.G.A. Raymond Williams writes of modern

naturalism that it interrelates with “empiricism and materialism” in such a way that the “crucial argument affecting the sense of naturalism [is] about the relation between the observing subject and the observed objects” (*Keywords* 218-19). From this perspective, one might perceive Woolf’s narrative identification with Silindu as a constitutive feature of the novel’s naturalism.

An identification between Woolf and Silindu is established when Silindu is introduced in the opening pages of the novel as an outsider. Silindu is considered by the inhabitants of Beddagama to be “slightly mad” (10) due to his obdurate unwillingness to participate in the politicking necessary to gain access to *chena* permits from Babehami. Woolf, too, stood at a critical distance from the communities of which he was part. Although he would consistently deny that his Jewish heritage had any significant bearing on his social life in England or abroad, it is safe to speculate that his awareness of his ancestry as comprised of “prisoners of war, displaced persons,” and “refugees”—“the world’s official fugitives and scapegoats” (Woolf, *Sowing*, 13)—contributed to the “carapace” he claimed to have developed very early in life (*Sowing* 71). His alienation from his wife’s social class<sup>17</sup> as well as his social disconnection after several years in Ceylon further contributed to his self-perceived outsider status:

I think the seven years in Ceylon left a mark upon my mind and even character which has proved indelible, a kind of reserve or withdrawal into myself which

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<sup>17</sup> “It was a social class and way of life into which hitherto I had only dipped from time to time as an outsider... I was an outsider to this class, because, although I and my father before me belonged to the professional middle class, we had only recently struggled up into it from the stratum of Jewish shopkeepers. We had no roots in it” (*Beginning* 74).

makes me inclined always to stand just a little to one side of my environment.

(*Growing* 246-47)

During his time in Ceylon, Woolf felt alienated from “the dreary pomp and circumstance of imperial government” (*Beginning* 48). His autobiography indicates that he was aware of impressing his colleagues as unpleasantly eccentric in his critical approach to colonial administration; in 1911, he received a reprimand from the Governor of Ceylon concerning the “nature and tone” of his official diary entries pertaining to imperial policy (Wilson, “Leonard Woolf: Still Not Out of the Jungle?” 155).

Woolf’s disillusionment with liberal imperial economic and legal institutions comes across generally in the tragic naturalist plotline of the novel, but it also comes across in the specifics of the narration. Over the course of the novel, the narrator, who is identifiably Anglo-European, gradually comes to an intimate recognition of Silindu’s distressed, resistant subject position. In early expository passages, Woolf’s narrator highlights the enigmatic, malignant forces that so strongly determine the villagers’ lives. The world Silindu and his family inhabit is

a world of bare and brutal facts, of superstition, of grotesque imagination; a world of trees and the perpetual twilight of their shade; a world of hunger and fear and devils, where a man [is] helpless before the unseen and unintelligible powers surrounding him. (17-18)

At this early point in the novel, the suffering that prevails in the village and surrounding jungle is, according to the narrator’s perception, inevitable. It transcends history; its origins are abstracted, shrouded in “twilight,” the “unseen,” the “unintelligible.” This



narration points up the Darwinian liberalism upon which naturalism is traditionally premised, according to which the suffering of certain populations is an inevitable consequence of the thriving of other populations; the structural factors precipitating suffering are obscured.

Over the course of the novel, Silindu is dogged by devils, just as his sister Karlinahami feared he would be when he initially resisted the influence of Punchirala, a *vederala* or healer of sorts specializing in charms and spells, who conspires with the village elites to harass the family. “[W]hat will become of us, brother? He is a bad man, a bad man... There is no protection against his charms. He will bring evil and disease upon the house: he will make devils enter us” (63). As it grows clearer that the family’s troubles are due primarily to colonial *chena* policies that disadvantage their demographic, the “devils” afflicting Silindu emerge not as issuing from some inscrutable subterranean or cosmic force, but rather as symbolic of imperialism at large. The devils “figh[t] against him” (88), oppressing him, sapping his energy, leaving him “weaker and more lifeless” (85). While the narrator at first situates himself as an objective observer of this “world... of superstition,” as the narrative proceeds he comes to identify ever more closely with it. In the early pages of the novel, the narrator positions himself outside of the sphere of baleful influence of the devils by attributing them to the “grotesque imagination” of the Sinhalese, but by the middle of the book the narrator refers to them as “the devils which perpetually beset us” (82). At the outset of the novel, the villagers’ suffering is cast as impossible to source and quite inevitable. However, as the narration

advances it facilitates a contextualized understanding of suffering as a result of structural economic injustice.

It is possible to trace the subtle changes in Woolf's use of devils in the novel as shifts in his ethical subject position with regard to native Ceylonese voices, perspectives, and interests. Silindu's struggle against the devils, which persists over the entirety of the novel, recalls and parallels Woolf's own interminable struggle against imperial economic policies during his years in Ceylon. An examination of Woolf's colonial diary entries regarding a murder case in Ranakeliya, echoes of which find their way into the novel, would at first glance seem to suggest that Woolf's primary identification in *The Village in the Jungle* is with the A.G.A. The diary entries correspond to the fictional A.G.A.'s discussion of his dissatisfaction with Silindu's case. On January 7, 1910, Woolf wrote in his official diary, "News of murder at Ranakeliya... spent the whole morning enquiring. I do not like the case at all as it is apparently very simple and yet I cannot get at the truth... There are many small points which show that I have not got the truth yet" (125). The next day he wrote, "Rode out to the scene of the murder... Enquired all the morning and afternoon. Case still doubtful" (125). Ultimately there was an unsatisfying conclusion to the case. Woolf wrote on January 12, "there is no real evidence" (126). In the novel, the A.G.A. confides in his assistant: "A very simple case—so [the jury will] think it. You think so, too?" His assistant believes so: "It seems to be a simple case, sir." The A.G.A. replies, "I see you would make a very good judge, Ratemahatmaya. I don't mind telling you—unofficially of course—that I'm a very bad one. It does not

seem at all a simple case to me... [H]ow did [Silindu] come suddenly to murder two people?" (190-91).

In both his fictional renderings of colonial court scenes and his diaries, Woolf sets up an opposition between the apparent "simplicity" of a case and the unsettling lack of evidence, thus emphasizing the inefficacy of the colonial court system to facilitate objective representations of truth. However, the parallels between Woolf and his A.G.A. character are surface-level and serve mostly to indicate Woolf's recognition of his own complicity in administering imperial institutions that patently deprioritize subaltern interests. A more significant parallel to be observed over the course of the trial scenes is between the processes of disillusionment with liberal imperial institutions undergone by Woolf in Ceylon and by Silindu over the course of his court appearances. Earlier in the novel, Silindu had been willing to approach the area *kachcheri* (colonial administrative center) to put the case of his family's harassment by Babehami and Fernando before the A.G.A., albeit only as a desperate (and, as it turns out, futile) final resort when his appeal to a local spiritual leader and a pilgrimage to a regional shrine fail to put an end to the persecution. Yet Silindu is thoroughly disillusioned with the court system when he and his son-in-law are framed for theft and brought to trial by the very local authorities against whom they initially sought legal protection.

In addition to favoring corrupt local elites such as Babehami and Fernando, the colonial courtroom, hardly a site of the blind administration of justice, is engineered to reinforce the hegemony of imperial authority, from the collection of lawyers at the literal heart of the court to the largely white jury tasked with determining Silindu's sentence

during the murder trial. Silindu could not feel more alienated in these court settings. Woolf plots the marginalization of the poorest demographics in Ceylon by the colonial justice system onto the individual case of Silindu; the consequences of the imposition of colonial legal, economic, and political structures in native contexts are literalized by Silindu's degradation during his sentencing and imprisonment in a "narrow bare cell, which, with its immense door made of massive iron bars, was exactly like a cage for some wild animal" (193). The adjectives Woolf narrator uses to describe Silindu's testimony—"indifferent," "bald," "bare," "passionless" (213)—emphasize Silindu's utter lack of faith in the capacity of the colonial justice system to represent his interests or deliver justice.

Woolf represents, fictionally, Silindu's refusal to be represented legally within the colonial justice system that legislates and administers his economic and political marginalization. In doing so, Woolf conveys his own disillusionment with the ethics of liberalism by offering an acknowledgment of the limits of the liberal subject's prerogative to represent, and thus to dominate, the subaltern. The drama of the novel, involving miscarriages of justice that expose fissures in liberal justifications of imperialism, evokes the major drama of Woolf's colonial career: his shift from "innocent" and "unconscious" Fabian (*Growing* 25) to skeptic of imperial benevolence who began to find "respectable liberalism stink[ing] in [his] nostrils" (*Downhill* 34). Woolf's naturalism enables an identification of narrator and protagonist premised not on an ethics of liberal empathy, but rather on an ethics of humility, catalyzed by an awareness of the misrecognition that is bound to bedevil any representational practice.

Rather than seeking to cultivate empathy in British readers by emphasizing the dignity of Sinhalese protagonists to an early-twentieth-century audience inclined to assume their inferiority in the spectrum of civilized humanity, Woolf's novel forces British readers to critically reflect on the exploitive imperial economic and political structures that subtend their interests and entitlements.

As ethicist Didier Fassin explains, the empathetic compassion that forms the basis of liberal humanitarianism "always presupposes a relation of inequality" (*Humanitarian Reason* 4). According to such humanitarianism, Fassin writes, "it is because we see the other as another self... that we feel sympathy for him or her and act for his or her good." Yet it is "the very conditions of the social relation between the two parties, which, whatever the goodwill of the agents, make compassion a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity" (*Humanitarian Reason* 3). *The Village in the Jungle* represents a critical position on liberal-imperial benevolent empathy as a metropolitan ethical principle. Instead, the novel seeks to cultivate in its British metropolitan readers a humility precipitated by an awareness of the consequences of economic interdependence between metropole and colony under liberal imperialism. Targeting a Western intellectual audience, Woolf's narration opens up the possibility of an ethical subject position resistant to the exploitive conditions of early twentieth century economic globalization. Humility, characterized by an awareness of histories of institutionalized injustice, emerges as an antidote to the liberal *hubris* which, in the process of insisting on a definition of modernity that does violence to colonized populations, obscures such histories. Woolf's narration thus opens up the possibility of a metropolitan ethical

subject position resistant to the exploitive conditions of early twentieth century economic globalization.

### **Beyond *The Village*: Implications for Woolf's Subsequent Career**

In his autobiography, his novel, and his official colonial diaries from this period, Woolf navigates his ambivalence toward the legal and economic structures giving shape and force to liberal imperial ideology. It is in the process of recollecting, explaining, and fictionalizing conflicts and controversies having to do with colonial institutions that Woolf seeks to establish a version of “the truth” that eluded him early in his Ceylon career—namely, that the suffering he witnessed occurred not despite liberal imperialism’s economic and legal systems, but because of them. In Ceylon as elsewhere in the British Empire, colonial authorities undertook a wholesale restructuring of native modes of political economy, with devastating results for entire classes of people in those colonies. Woolf plots his novel in order to demonstrate that such restructuring was at best irrelevant and at worst antagonistic to the interests of Ceylon’s agricultural laborers. In an introduction to a 1926 edition of the novel, Woolf pressed this point by implying the superiority of ancient native infrastructures to those introduced during the colonial era:

buried in the jungle so deep that thirty yards away you can see no trace of them, I have come upon the remains of magnificent irrigation works, giant sluices, stone work and masonry, and the great channels which—you can still trace them—brought the water miles and miles from the Walawe River to the great tanks and

reservoirs, now mere jungle. In those days... there must have been villages and rice fields. Those were the days of Sinhalese kings. (6)

These understated travel notes suggest the capacity of colonized territories for self-government in an era when even the most progressive Western metropolitan jurists were wont to indiscriminately perceive colonized populations as (to quote the League of Nations Covenant) unable “to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world” (Article 22).

Woolf’s *International Government* was an important resource for the drafters of the League Covenant, and he was a vocal supporter of international institutionalism. As early as 1920, however, Woolf derided the League of Nations and its Mandate system (detailed in Article 22) as “shams” (*Economic Imperialism* 105). The League Covenant aimed to facilitate the independence of former German and Ottoman colonial territories through a process of “tutelage” by “advanced nations”—the Great Powers that emerged victorious from World War One. Galled at what he saw as the interpretation of the Covenant as an opportunity “for grabbing a profit from the oil of Mosul or for obtaining cheap land and cheaper labour,” Woolf wrote bitterly in *Economic Imperialism* that “Article 22 is simply being used to obscure the fact that France and Britain are obtaining large accessions of territory for economic exploitation in Africa and Asia” (105). Yet, Woolf continued,

This is not surprising. The States which are members of the League are capitalist States, organised on a basis of capitalistic imperialism; the statesmen who signed the Covenant are capitalist imperialists; the peoples in whose name they signed

accept the beliefs and desires of capitalism as the principles of their private lives and of their public policies. (105)

If, as Tzvetan Todorov theorizes in his classic essay “The Origin of Genres,” genres “institutionaliz[e]... the constitutive features of the society to which they belong” (200), Woolf’s use of tragic naturalism in *The Village in the Jungle* represents his bid to institutionalize an anti-capitalist ethics. In the process of denaturalizing the capitalist logic of imperial economics, Woolf denaturalizes the unconditional authority of the imperial center to govern the colonies; he hoped that the move away from capitalism as an absolute value might inspire alternative modes of international relationship not contingent upon the metropole-colony binary. Woolf’s activism and writings subsequent to *The Village in the Jungle* advocate an international institutional culture that takes human solidarity rather than capitalist determinism as its normative foundation. According to ethicist Didier Fassin, unlike an “ontology of inequality,” which functionally “differentiates in a hierarchical manner the value of human lives” and which is at work in too much of the history of international relations, an ontology of solidarity “give[s] equal value to all lives” (“Humanitarianism” 519).

By means of his novel, Woolf elucidates the distinction between these ontologies in the context of late British imperialism. In the process, he shifts his own orientation to those marginalized by capitalist imperialism, with implications for his perspective on the representation of Third World voices and actors in metropolitan international institutions. Woolf’s experience in Ceylon and his subsequent process of fictionalizing this experience provided him with an awareness of the misrecognition that is bound to bedevil



any representational practice, whether literary, legal, or political. He nevertheless continued to represent ethnic and class others in a variety of metropolitan institutional contexts through his work during the twenties and thirties with the League of Nations, the Co-operative Movement, the Labour Party, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, and the Hogarth Press. However, he approached the task of representation in a spirit of deference to the wishes and interests of those for whom he took it upon himself to speak. In "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Alcoff stresses that "rather than speaking for others... [w]e should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to [others]" (23). Woolf's correspondence with Ceylonese lawyer and activist E.W. Perera during the late nineteen-teens offers a salient example of Woolf's efforts to facilitate such conditions.

In affiliation with the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, Woolf participated in a media campaign Perera engineered in England to advocate Ceylonese civil and political rights. Perera traveled to England to lobby the Secretary of State for the Colonies for an "impartial Enquiry" (letter from Perera to Woolf, 19 January 1915) into several cases of shooting and imprisonment carried out by colonial authorities in Ceylon during a period of martial law following communal rioting that broke out in Kandy surrounding Buddhist celebrations of *Wesak*, Buddha's birthday, on May 28, 1915. Woolf had been back in England for some time at this point, but he took an avid interest in the controversy over the legitimacy of the course of action taken by the

colonial government of Ceylon.<sup>18</sup> Perera hoped that since Woolf was a former colonial administrator in Ceylon, his call for inquiry and redress might effectively capture the interest of a British readership. Perera often dictated the content of Woolf's editorial pieces. In a letter dated January 17, 1918, Perera considered, "I think it would help, if you could write to the editor of Truth... It would counteract any mischief that might have been done by the 'Colonial correspondents.'" Over the course of the late teens, Perera's letters frequently express appreciation at Woolf's dedication to the campaign for justice in Ceylon: he wrote on February 25, 1916, "I am very grateful to you for... the interest you are taking in Ceylon affairs. I am sending out for the *Labour Leader*" and the "*New Statesman*" (in which Woolf had published opinion pieces). On August 29, 1917, "the *Manchester Guardian* published our letter yesterday together with an editorial supporting our appeal... Many thanks for reminding the *New Statesman* Editor of your article. I

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<sup>18</sup> To very briefly sketch the context and precipitating factors of the riots, most historians accept that the immediate trigger was that which had led to many other Buddhist-Muslim agitations during the early twentieth century in Ceylon: a Buddhist religious musical procession passing by a mosque. The Muslim community objected to the Buddhists playing music when passing by mosques, while the Buddhists maintained their right to conduct processions according to tradition. Yet there were economic factors underlying the antagonism as well. Sinhalese Buddhists resented the perceived degree of control exercised by "Coast Moors," Muslim immigrants from the south of India, over trade in food and other imports. By 1915, calamitous food shortages resulting from World War I were causing extreme distress throughout the island; historian Stanley J. Tambiah explains that "Coast Moor traders, who were prominent in Colombo and the other towns in the retail trade in foodstuffs, and who had already been negatively stereotyped among the Sinhalese, were inevitably accused of creating artificial increases in the prices of necessities" (57). The rioting that broke out in Kandy surrounding Buddhist celebrations of *Wesak* was the culmination of this escalating antagonism. From Kandy, the disturbances spread to Colombo, affecting five provinces in the southwest region of Ceylon before the riots were suppressed by June 6. At least thirty-nine people are thought to have died in the riots, but casualties resulting from the martial law proclaimed by British colonial authorities on June 2 would claim significantly more lives.

expect the *Labour Leader* article in this weeks [sic] issue. All this is bound to have some effect on the Colonial Office authorities as well as the Ceylon Government”; and on February 11, 1918, “I must thank you heartily for the two excellent paras. in the current issue of the *Nation*.”

Perera frequently noted the positive outcomes of Woolf’s participation in the media campaign. He wrote on March 11, 1918, “[a]s a result of your article in *Commonsense* I have had offers of assistance to further the cause and from all I know has quite a good circulation.” Having met several of its nominal objectives, the campaign for inquiry and redress led into a broader campaign for self-determination. If success is measured by the good will of Perera and his colleagues, a letter dated April 3, 1919 conclusively suggests that Woolf’s representational efforts in the British media were successful. Perera wrote, “I shall feel very pleased if you will dine as my guest at the Sinhalese National Day dinner to be held on the 12<sup>th</sup> April/Saturday at 7 o’clock... The [Sinhalese] Committee has elected me to preside this year, and they are most anxious that you should prepare the toast of the Sinhalese Nation.”

Woolf’s work as editor and publisher of the Hogarth Press also indicates the role he saw for himself as an intermediary between British and Third World metropolitan elites. From its inception in 1917 in the dining room of the Woolfs’ residence in Richmond, Leonard took great pleasure in using the Press to launch the careers of young writers both in England and abroad:

It was possible to help the budding (and sometimes impecunious) Hogarth author by giving him books to review and articles to write; and, if one came across

something by a completely unknown writer which seemed to have something in it, one could try him out with articles and reviews before encouraging him to write a book. (*Downhill* 130)

In addition to publishing widely on themes of socialism, anti-imperialism, and international institutionalism, the Press employed the Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand as an editor and promoted works by other Third World nationalists (K.M. Panikkar's *Caste and Democracy*, C.L.R. James' *The Case For West-Indian Self Government*, and Parmenas Githendu Mockerie's *An African Speaks for His People*, for example). By publishing and distributing such works, Woolf hoped to compel British readers to critically reflect on the implications of empire. In a foreword to *An African Speaks for His People* (1934), Julian Huxley effectively articulates what Woolf hoped his readers would appreciate about these texts. Huxley distinguishes the "intriguing and valuable opportunity provided by this book for the English reader": "It cannot be often that a native African... gives a picture of his own community and of the system of government of his white rulers as it appears to him" (7).

Of course, one must note that even in his most progressively inclusive moves, Woolf was interacting largely with elites—not subaltern figures—with roots in colonial contexts. It might be observed that despite his anti-capitalist leanings and demonstrated advocacy of cross-racial collaboration on issues of self-determination, Woolf was less able to imagine and enact cross-class collaboration. *The Village in the Jungle*, like his subsequent works of non-fiction, offers a critique of liberal economic policy, but this is not an indication, as some scholars would have it, of Woolf's radical anti-imperialism. In

fact, as Raymond Williams explains, although liberalism's "individualist theories of man and society" are in "fundamental conflict... with socialis[m]" (*Keywords* 181), during the late Victorian period, British Fabians (under whose influence Woolf launched his career) "powerfully revived what was really a variant... in which socialism was seen as necessary to complete liberalism, rather than as an alternative and opposed theory of society" (*Keywords* 288). In light of this, Woolf's critique of capitalism serves as a revision rather than a rejection of liberal ideology assuming the superiority of Anglo-European economic, political, legal, and cultural institutions.

In the years following the publication of his novel, Woolf energetically pursued a variety of metropolitan institutional involvements in issues of self-determination, often strongly advocating the capacity of colonized territories for self-government. Regarding the League of Nations Covenant and with reference to formerly German-held territories in Africa, however, Woolf wrote in 1920 that it was "true" that the "native communities" therein were at that juncture "unable to take [their] place" in the "European political and economic system... imposed upon [them]." He located this inability not, in the mode of many of his liberal metropolitan contemporaries, in racial inferiority, but in the fact that "Europeans... seized [African] territory and incorporated it into their own States," thus fracturing "the tribal organization of government" and "depriv[ing] the African of... any chance of... either economic or political freedom" ("Mandates and Empire" 12); for Woolf, any inability or disinclination on the part of native communities in colonized territories to adapt to the "conditions of the modern world" had to do with their colonially institutionalized disadvantage, not their incapacity for self-rule. "The native of Africa is

to-day everywhere capable of local self-government,” Woolf insisted, “and this should be ensured to him in the [League of Nations]” (“Mandates and Empire” 14).

However, the fact remained that even after all he witnessed in Ceylon, Woolf still valued, albeit cautiously, skeptically, and/or ambivalently, the move toward an international institutional culture premised on the tutelage of formerly colonized nations by “advanced,” usually European nations. Although he vocally resented the general exclusion of Third World actors from participation on equal footing with imperial powers in international institutional settings, Woolf could not yet perceive what Antony Anghie describes as the “double irony” of twentieth-century developments in international law that sought to make a place for Third World participation: that “in seeking to liberate [Third World] peoples from the ‘strenuous conditions of the modern world,’ the system instead entraps [them] within those conditions” by drawing them into structurally exploitive economic relationships with powerful states and leading to “a situation whereby international institutions present themselves as a solution to a problem of which they are an integral part” (178). While Woolf was remarkably prescient in identifying the structural problems of liberal international institutions including, most significantly, the League of Nations, at least in his early career his leftism was constrained by his residual investment in liberal assumptions about the superiority of metropolitan modes of culture and education. For instance, although he emphasized the fitness of native communities for “local self-government” and advocated the “destr[uction]” of “imperialism as we knew it,” he asserted almost in the same breath the League’s “obligation of educating and developing the native” (“Mandates and Empire” 14-15). Thus, even as his critique of

economic imperialism facilitated his collaborative identification with racial and ethnic others, Woolf retained a blind spot regarding a significant question facing metropolitan advocates of native self-determination: how can liberal international institutions (in particular the League of Nations) be the best hope for self-determination movements, given that these institutions are steeped in the legacy of imperialism?

## Chapter Three:

Satire and the Critique of Anti-Slavery Humanitarianism in Winifred Holtby's *Mandoa*,

*Mandoa!*

### Introduction

Winifred Holtby's 1933 novel *Mandoa, Mandoa! A Comedy of Irrelevance* satirizes the various factions of the British left that took up the cause of anti-slavery during the 1920s and 30s. Set in the fictional native state of Mandoa, a stand-in for Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), the novel depicts a host of dynamic characters—both British and Mandoan—with varying investments and interests in the issue of slavery in East Africa. At the point when the novel opens, Mandoa, like Abyssinia, is a sovereign nation that has fiercely defended its independence over the course of the onslaught of European imperialism in Africa. Mandoa, like Abyssinia, is presided over by a charismatic leader—the Lord High Chamberlain Safi Talal, modeled on Ras Tafari,<sup>19</sup> crowned Emperor Haile Selassie of Abyssinia in 1930—who has ambitions to modernize the country by inviting foreign commercial investment. Most importantly for this study,

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<sup>19</sup> Many Holtby scholars, including Marion Shaw, Kristin Ewins, Jean E. Kennard, and Lisa Regan, claim that Holtby based Safi Talal on the South African trade union leader Clements Kadalie, but none offer compelling evidence to support such a claim. Marion Shaw describes “Kadalie’s great charm, energy and organising ability” (171) as his link with the character of Talal, while Ewins compares Talal with Kadalie as “a charming politician with a brutal streak” (131). (I have not come across any indication in the history surrounding Kadalie that he had a “brutal streak.”) Kadalie was Holtby’s closest black African acquaintance, but there is no reason to assume that he was the model for Safi Talal. Apart from the fact that there are vast differences between Kadalie and Talal (for example, Kadalie championed black African labor rights while Talal defends Mandoan slavery), Holtby’s depictions of Safi Talal’s appearance, attitudes, and leadership style align him closely with Emperor Haile Selassie.



Mandoa, like Abyssinia, is the object of international controversy because its bid for participation as a sovereign nation in international politics is compromised by the fact that its economy relies on the slave trade. In 1923, Abyssinia was granted membership to the League of Nations on the condition that measures were taken “to secure the complete suppression of slavery in all its forms and the slave trade by land and sea” (Simon 39). Subsequently, however, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (referred to as the Anti-Slavery Society throughout this chapter), a small but tenacious London-based pressure group, launched a major campaign to expose conditions of slavery in Abyssinia. “Ludicrously small and underfunded as it was,” writes Suzanne Miers in her study of interwar British humanitarian abolitionism, the Anti-Slavery Society “proved its power to make trouble out of all proportion to the size of its membership” (“Britain” 264). The Anti-Slavery Society’s unique emphasis on slavery in Abyssinia during the twenties and into the thirties ensured that Abyssinia’s status in the League would remain contentious over the course of the interwar period.

Given these contextual factors, Abyssinia—or Holtby’s fictional variation of it—is an appropriate setting for a novel satirizing the British anti-slavery humanitarianism that characterized League of Nations political idealism between the World Wars.

*Mandoa, Mandoa!* both opens and closes with evocations of forced labor. At the outset of the novel, dawn breaks upon a public square in Lolagoba, Mandoa’s capital, occupied by a caravan of slaves “bound wrist to ankle by thongs of hide, droop[ing] limply after a sleepless night of terror... Torn from villages beyond Mandoa, driven and bullied across the inimical hills, starved, beaten, dazed and terrified, they stood like herded beasts” (4-

5). The novel culminates in a visit to Mandoa of a commission appointed by the British International Humanitarian Association (IHA), modeled on the Anti-Slavery Society, to examine the conditions of slavery in Mandoa. But despite the energetic efforts in the novel of several well-intentioned Britons occupying various positions on the humanitarian spectrum (radical communist, Fabian liberal, socialist reformer), forced labor in East Africa remains as prevalent at the conclusion of the satirical novel as it was at the outset. At the end of the novel, “the ‘freed’ slaves from Mandoa marched to forced labour on the Congo” (384). Holtby indicates her awareness that the introduction of international anti-slavery legislation during the interwar period produced new forms of slavery.

In this chapter, I examine how Holtby’s deployment of satire allows her to expose the internal conflicts of interwar British humanitarianism as it responded to slavery in Abyssinia during the 1920s and 30s. Satire, in its role as “mediator between the real and the ideal” (Ball 9), allows Holtby to express her anxieties about the theory versus the practice of liberalism as it related to interwar humanitarianism. Many scholars of satire emphasize its material concerns: Charles A. Knight notes satire’s “concern with the actualities of history” (5); Edward Rosenheim defines satire as “an attack by means of a manifest fiction upon discernible historic particulars” (qtd. in Ball 1). Theorists debate whether satire is a tone or a form—in other words, whether it is a mode or a genre (Ball 6). Illustrating this debate, Knight considers whether satire is a “genre in itself” or an “exploiter of other genres” (4). Although the question of how to classify satire remains open, there is consensus that “Beyond the pages of every satiric fiction... is a targeted

victim—a person, institution, or practice—with at least some degree of historicity and... individuality, specificity, or identifiability” (Ball 2). Most scholars read *Mandoa, Mandoa!* as first and foremost a satire of British imperialism; by contrast, I emphasize the novel’s treatment of humanitarianism, giving particular attention to the correspondence between interwar feminism and abolitionism. In acknowledging the historic relationships between humanitarianism and imperialism through their common origins in liberalism, my study of *Mandoa, Mandoa!* builds upon the prevailing reading of the novel. However, reading the satire in terms of its critique of political idealist institutions (primarily the Anti-Slavery Society, but also the League of Nations) associated with anti-slavery humanitarianism offers particular insight into Holtby’s feminist agenda.

Holtby, like the other novelists in my dissertation, was herself a political idealist at a pressure point between metropolitan and colonial contexts. She was a middle-class intellectual at once persuaded by and in conflict with the liberal justifications behind British intervention in Asian and African affairs. Also like the other novelists in this study, Holtby writes with an awareness of the shortcomings and dark sides of even those international interventions driven by political idealist rather than explicitly imperialist motives. In *Mandoa, Mandoa!*, Holtby highlights the common premises of imperialism and humanitarianism in the context of interwar League of Nations trusteeship. According to Article 22 of the League Covenant, “the sacred trust of civilisation” mandated the “tutelage” by “advanced [Anglo-European] nations” of “peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” Abyssinia and Liberia

were the only African nations to gain international legal status with admission to the League of Nations; Holtby based *Mandoa, Mandoa!* on an African nation that managed to retain its independence throughout both the “Scramble for Africa” and the subsequent period of League of Nations trusteeship. Through her use of satire, Holtby challenges the legitimacy of the parent-child relationship between Europe and Africa imagined by the political idealists who drafted the League Covenant, and denaturalizes the white Anglo-European privilege underpinning both British imperial and humanitarian interventions.

### **Interwar Humanitarianism, International Law, and Slavery in Abyssinia**

*Mandoa, Mandoa!* addresses the paradox of international governance and emancipation as it plays out in a salient manifestation of interwar political idealism: anti-slavery humanitarianism. In the novel, the International Humanitarian Association commission inspecting conditions of slavery in Mandoa consists of British, German, and French delegates. The Anglo-European identity of this “international” commission bears out Barnett and Weiss’s argument that humanitarian institutionalism during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was “essentially a . . . Western European enterprise” (32). Barnett observes that the most “striking feature of the history of humanitarianism is the rarity with which humanitarians ask the recipients what they want but instead rely on their own judgment” (36-37). Indeed, the IHA delegates perceive themselves for the most part not as collaborators with Mandoan anti-slavery advocates, but rather as saviors whose goal it is to liberate Mandoan slaves through the imposition of liberal Anglo-European justice. In this way, Holtby’s novel channels the central paradox

of humanitarian intervention: it “operates in the best tradition of emancipatory ethics,” but is also inevitably “an act of control” (Barnett 11-12).

The term “humanitarianism” came into common usage during the early nineteenth century; conceptually, humanitarianism was an important descendant of Enlightenment liberalism, which “helped to foster the discourse of humanity and the rights-bearing individual... and to create a faith in the possibility of using social institutions to bring progress to society” (Barnett and Weiss 19). As a “form of compassion,” writes Barnett, nineteenth-century humanitarianism was differentiated from previous traditions of altruism by “three marks of distinction: assistance beyond borders, a belief that such transnational action was related in some way to the transcendent, and the growing organization and governance of activities designed to protect and improve humanity” (10). Although nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century humanitarianism is identified with the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1864 and the subsequent establishment of international humanitarian laws of war codified in the Geneva and Hague Conventions, for most scholars of humanitarianism, its history begins with nineteenth-century international abolitionism. Britain abolished its own slave trade in 1807, and would lead the charge against slavery internationally in the several decades to follow, in conjunction with the expansion of its empire. For nineteenth-century British liberals as well as many twentieth-century political idealists, unsolicited Anglo-European legal and military interventions in regions of Asian and Africa were not necessarily at odds with the objectives of anti-slavery humanitarianism. In fact, for many liberals of this period, “power and emancipation lived together comfortably” (Barnett 62). The

notion that imperialism created rich opportunities for anti-slavery humanitarian intervention was common among liberals during the height of the British Empire, and it persisted among many political idealists during the rise of League of Nations internationalism during the interwar period. Barnett concludes, therefore, that the “application of power in order to liberate the victims of the world [was] one of the constants of humanitarianism” (8) during the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.

Anti-slavery humanitarianism therefore related to developments in international law during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In her history of civil society and international law, Cecilia Lynch notes that the influence of abolitionism “on the development of international law [during this period] was significant, especially in advancing norms of equality of status and in advocating for and legitimizing international organization” (198). Yet especially in Africa, anti-slavery humanitarian conventions legitimated European colonial conquest. The Brussels Act of 1890, for example,

was a humanitarian instrument in so far as it reaffirmed that “native welfare” was an international responsibility; and bound signatories to prevent slave raiding and trading... But it had important practical advantages for the colonial rulers... By stating that the best means of attacking the traffic was to establish colonial administrations in the interior of Africa... it put an anti-slavery guise on the colonial occupation and exploitation of Africa. (Miers, “Slavery” 19)

Neither the Brussels Act nor its predecessor, the General Act of Berlin (1885), formally bound signatories to suppress slavery in their colonial holdings; no enforcement mechanisms were in place, and colonial powers were expected to take it upon themselves

to eradicate slavery. This was a responsibility to which none of the colonial powers substantively committed—not least of all because these powers “depended heavily on the slave-holding elites to administer their empires” (Miers and Klein 1-2). Africa’s subordinate position in modern international affairs was effectively determined by the colonial powers that continually drew up international documents aligning humanitarianism with colonial conquest. The Declaration of Brussels (1895), for example, “prioritised ‘the moral and material welfare of the native populations’” while simultaneously “endors[ing] the ‘equality of all nations’ in a ‘free trade’ grab for Africa” (Bush 39). Such codifications of international humanitarianism, therefore, “formalised the ‘ironic marriage between anti-slavery and imperialism’” (Bush 39).

The association between humanitarianism and imperialism persisted during the interwar period with the advent of the League of Nations in 1919. Certainly, the League of Nations Mandate System, which, following World War One, sought to gradually facilitate the sovereignty of nations formerly colonized by the German and Ottoman empires, represented a radical break from nineteenth-century positivist international law that explicitly sought to exclude non-European nations and territories. International law historian Antony Anghie explains,

Whereas the positivist international law of the nineteenth century endorsed the conquest and exploitation of non-European peoples, the Mandate System, by contrast, sought to ensure their protection. Whereas positivism sought to exclude non-European peoples from the family of nations, the Mandate System was created to achieve precisely the reverse: it attempted to do nothing less than to

promote self-government and, in certain cases, to integrate previously colonized and dependent peoples into the international system as sovereign, independent nation-states. (116)

Yet functionally, the Mandate System enabled the Anglo-European world to maintain its dominant position in international affairs. The Mandate System conferred upon the victors of World War One the authority to determine a given nation's degree of civilization, and, thus, its entitlement to sovereignty as an independent member of the family of nations. As Barbara Bush writes, "polite euphemisms had supplanted the blatant racism of the late nineteenth century, [but] all [League of Nations] delegates unquestioningly accepted the racial basis of mandate categories" (41). In practice, the Mandate System reproduced what Anghie terms the "dynamic of difference" which has historically characterized international law. This dynamic entails the "endless process of creating a gap between [European and non-European] cultures, demarcating one as 'universal' and civilized and the other as 'particular' and uncivilized, and seeking to bridge the gap by developing techniques to normalize the aberrant society" (Anghie).

Interwar political idealists and League supporters remained invested in the superior, enlightened rationality of Anglo-European modes of law, economy, and governance. They maintained Anghie's "dynamic of difference," based not explicitly on race but on perceived degrees of civilization. According to the "frame of reference"



informing both the League of Nations Covenant and, significantly, the subsequent 1926 Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery,<sup>20</sup>

the West alone had so far reached a collective anti-slavery consciousness via a long civilizing process. Embracing a theory of evolutionary stages, international lawyers easily identified less civilized zones in Asia, and above all in Africa, because they lacked the political organization, the cultural traditions (including anti-slavery), and the consciousness that allowed for full membership in the legal community of nations. (Drescher and Finkelman 908)

The periodical of the Anti-Slavery Society—the primary institutional victim of Holtby’s satire in its incarnation as the International Humanitarian Association (IHA)—provides a vivid archive of this “frame of reference,” revealing an alarmist element within interwar British humanitarianism that fueled support for Anglo-European trusteeship. In a report of the Annual Meeting in the October 1926 issue of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Chairman Charles Roberts begins his opening speech with a warning: “The old abuses which the public at large thinks have been swept away from civilisation, lurk about on its outskirts in dark corners in unadministered territory” (99). Roberts goes on to draw a causal relationship between the advent of League of Nations mandate administration and the eradication of slavery:

May I point out what new openings and new channels have been found, for our work since the League of Nations came into being. In former days when

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<sup>20</sup> The 1926 Slavery Convention “replaced all prior agreements on slavery and the slave trade” (Drescher and Finkelman 911), and, expanded by a 1956 Supplementary Convention, remains in effect to this day.

allegations were made we made protests, we passed resolutions, but action was extraordinarily difficult... Now we have got the doctrine of trusteeship laid down in the mandates, a doctrine which... will make the task of suppression far easier than it has been... [and which opens] up channels for effective action by this Society. It creates new responsibilities for us. (101)

Here, Roberts articulates the consequential definition, reflected in Holtby's plotting and narration, of humanitarian responsibility as a feature or outcome of Anglo-European privilege.

Despite reported conditions of inequity and exploitation throughout the empire, the membership of the Anti-Slavery Society (and of the IHA in Holtby's novel) was heavily invested in the model of imperial trusteeship for the purposes of pursuing what Roberts refers to as "the work of liberation" (57) in an address to the 1928 Annual Meeting recorded in the July issue. Roberts appeals to his audience:

It is our business to act as a gadfly, and no doubt able Administrators think that at times we are a nuisance. I daresay we stir up questions which they would sooner leave alone... but we are good for them, nevertheless, [entreating them to maintain] the highest ideals of the British Empire. (57)

For Roberts and his colleagues, British colonial administration may not consistently meet the humanitarian standards of political idealism, but imperialism itself is hardly an impediment to emancipation. On the contrary, imperialism supplies the rational liberal ideals which administrators must be compelled to fulfill. Even with regard to slavery in Abyssinia—an independent African nation *not* incorporated in the British Empire—Anti-

Slavery Society membership demanded a response from colonial authorities stationed in areas of eastern Africa. While “Foreign Office officials salved their uneasy consciences by telling themselves that it was not their duty to suppress slaving in independent countries,” this “view [was] not shared by the anti-slavery society” (Miers, “Britain” 266). In fact, British anti-slavery advocates saw an important role for colonial authorities in opposing slavery in Abyssinia. In a section titled “Slavery on the Abyssinian Frontier: Correspondence with the Foreign Office” in the April 1928 issue of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Parliamentary Secretary John H. Harris requests from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs requests information about “slave-owning along the Abyssinian-Sudan border” (29): “We should particularly appreciate any evidence that when slaves do escape and appeal to British Officials for their freedom they are not compelled to return over the border to Abyssinia” (29). Harris’s letter indicates the broad reach of imperial humanitarian responsibility called for by British anti-slavery advocates.

It is fair to speculate that the Anti-Slavery Society uniquely emphasized slavery in Abyssinia *because* Abyssinia was independent—that is, not under the (presumed) wholesome influence of an Anglo-European colonizer. Especially in the years following the institution of the Slavery Convention in 1926, the eradication of slavery in Abyssinia was the object of a spirited Anti-Slavery Society campaign that is well documented in the pages of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines’ Friend*, the periodical of the Anti-Slavery Society. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* regularly chronicled conditions of slavery in Abyssinia and reviewed texts that confirmed and reinforced the Society’s perceptions of the country’s lawless savagery. For example, the October 1928 issue includes a review

of James E. Baum's travel memoir *Savage Abyssinia*; according to the review, "Travelling in Abyssinia is made difficult by the excitable character of the people, which Mr. Baum describes as 'vitriolic'" (134). The strong subtext of such content is that Abyssinia is a good candidate for international trusteeship.

This subtext comes across especially strongly in Lady Kathleen Simon's *Slavery* (1929), the publication and circulation of which is comprehensively reported in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. By means of her study, Simon hoped to "[bring] home to civilised humanity everywhere" the plight of "some millions of slaves in the more backward areas of the world" (*Slavery* xi). Largely through emotional appeals, the book tapped into and further fueled British public concern about slavery in Abyssinia and the humanitarian responsibility to respond to it. The first edition sold out quickly. The January 1930 issue of *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* declared that "The reception of this book by the Press has been remarkable; some newspapers have published nearly two columns of matter, with an editorial, and it is probably true to say that no book issued within recent months has received such public notice" (119). The mutual admiration of Lady Simon and the Anti-Slavery Society is amply in evidence: Travers Buxton, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society at the time, is featured in Lady Simon's acknowledgements (Simon xii), and the *Reporter* includes regular updates of the book's success. The Quarterly Notes in the October 1930 *Reporter* indicate the popularity of Lady Simon's lecture circuit in the U.S. and Canada (106), as does the Anti-Slavery Society Annual Meeting Report of July 1930, according to which Lady Simon was in attendance to "speak on the meetings which she had addressed up and down [Britain], and the demands for them. The increased demand

was, of course, a healthy sign. She found that people... often came to her after the meetings, and asked what they could do” (69).

That Abyssinia is the first—and lengthiest—case study in Lady Simon’s book indicates its significance for British humanitarian anti-slavery advocates. Abyssinia posed an analytic challenge to political idealist notions about the relationship between sovereignty and liberal civilization. The country was unquestionably sovereign, having effectively sustained its independence over the course of high imperialism in Africa. Yet Abyssinia did not meet Anglo-European standards of rational, enlightened civilization, primarily in light of its centuries-old slave trade. Slavery was indeed pervasive in Abyssinia during the late nineteenth century through the interwar period. The widespread terror and depopulation precipitated by slave-raids was undeniable. Eyewitness accounts from period abound with reports such as the one written by a British Major Darley, who described “Convoys of slaves march[ing] openly along the roads,” the adults “chained, the toddlers strapped on to mules” (Miers, “Britain” 263). While data on the history of the circulation and export of Abyssinian slave labor is limited, Suzanne Miers speculates that “most of the newly enslaved must have been absorbed into the Ethiopian domestic economy as household or agricultural labor,” with “export slave traffic [also occurring] across the Red Sea” and “into Sudan... on a small scale” (“Britain” 279). It is evident that people from any of Abyssinia’s diverse ethnic groups could be enslaved. While it was the Amharic-speaking, Orthodox Christian peoples that historically “directed and accomplished Abyssinian expansion from the thirteenth century,” Donald Donham explains that as a category of Abyssinian identity, “Amhara”

denotes not “a traditional tribal identity that depends on descent” but rather a “particular position at the centre of the core-periphery structure” of Abyssinian governance (12). Donham explains further that “Abyssinian identity... was fragmented into a series of regional identities often associated with more or less stable local elites,” listing some of the main regional ethnic identities as “Tigrai, Begemdir, Lasta, Wag, Gojjam, and Shewa” (22-23). Like slaves, slave-owners could belong to any ethnic group across the country. They represented a variety of class positions: “owners ranged from the emperor and provincial rulers, who had many thousands, to ordinary soldiers, who might have one or two” (Miers, “Britain” 257).

During the nineteen-twenties and thirties, internal slave-raiding was especially pervasive in the southwest region of the country, where it was reported that the Tishana ethnic group had ultimately been depleted by three-quarters (Miers, “Britain” 269). Slave-raiding was rampant in the areas surrounding Maji in southwestern Abyssinia. Maji was one of the nation’s “most intractable slaving provinces” (Garretson 205) as well as the dynamic center of trade in arms, cattle, and ivory. Officials in Maji took advantage of the trained soldiers under their jurisdiction to dispatch raiding parties that could number in the hundreds. Peter P. Garretson explains,

In Maji the ivory, slave, and arms traders were intimately connected... [C]ycles were created in which violence periodically increased in intensity, particularly when there was a major change of government at the centre. Departing governors taxed heavily and raided for slaves in order to take what wealth they could to their home areas. Local peoples struck back when they were able, often raiding each

other for slaves, for that was the only way to get arms... This was a pattern repeated again and again between 1910 and 1936. (217)

Also from Maji, slave-raids occurred across the Abyssinian frontier into British-administered Sudan, which was a major source of concern for British anti-slavery humanitarians.

In light of the rampant slave-raiding in Abyssinia apparently entrenched by structural dynamics of power and trade, Abyssinian leadership—particularly Ras Tafari himself—was justifiably concerned that slavery in Abyssinia might be used as a pretext for a Western invasion, intervention, or other form of interference in his nation’s sovereignty. (As Italy’s 1936 invasion would demonstrate, these fears were not unfounded.) International anti-slavery bodies, committees, and conventions, including a 1924 League of Nations Temporary Slavery Commission appointed to “inquire into slavery everywhere” and the 1926 League of Nations Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery, were “designed by the colonial powers themselves to have no bite and very little bark.” The Temporary Slavery Commission, for example, “had no power to conduct investigations, make binding decisions, or publish its reports” (Miers, “Britain” 268). This reflects the fact that the colonial powers wielding such influence in the League of Nations were motivated to address slavery “not because of any increased anti-slavery zeal on [their] part... but in order to deflect persistent humanitarian calls for action” (Miers, “Slavery” 16). International anti-slavery treaties, declarations, and acts of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries may have been generally vague and non-binding, but they nevertheless kept slavery at the top of the interwar international

humanitarian agenda and supplied compelling justification for intervention anywhere slavery operated.

When colonial powers considered attempting to make Abyssinia a League of Nations Mandate territory during the drafting of the League Covenant, Abyssinia promptly and strategically outlawed the trade in slaves (although the proclamation did not go so far as to abolish slavery entirely). There is no scholarly consensus on whether Ras Tafari's anti-slavery measures in the years to follow were any less politically-motivated than those of the colonial powers. As Miers writes, "His anti-slavery decrees... [and] his establishment of slavery courts... have been seen as part of his policy of consolidating power and encouraging the cash economy," but "the timing of his various anti-slavery measures points to their having been astute and successful moves to disarm international criticism" ("Britain" 280). Spurred to more substantive action by ongoing controversy (largely fomented by the British Anti-Slavery Society), the Abyssinian government drafted legislation in 1923-24 to free children born after 1924, introduce penalties for slave raiding and trading, and establish courts to prosecute slavers (Miers, "Britain" 269). The law "remained a dead letter" (Miers, "Britain" 262), but it was nevertheless a significant juncture in the history of Abyssinia's efforts to retain its sovereignty in light of the increasing identification between anti-slavery and international legal recognition.

**Holtby's Biography and the Satirical Critique of Anti-Slavery Humanitarianism in *Mandoa, Mandoa!***

Despite ongoing slave-raiding and trading both within and across its borders during the twenties and into the thirties, Abyssinia not only successfully avoided



becoming a League of Nations Mandate territory but even succeeded in attaining League membership and attendant international legal recognition as a sovereign nation. Holtby's explicit references in her novel to contemporaneous geopolitics having to do with Abyssinia and anti-slavery humanitarianism make *Mandoa, Mandoa!* a vivid reflection of the obsession with Abyssinian affairs that occupied many Western political idealists between the World Wars. Abyssinia's controversial international status meant that the country occupied a unique place in the British imaginary. The notorious 1910 Dreadnought Hoax, in which several members of the Bloomsbury Group including Virginia Stephen (later Woolf) disguised themselves as Abyssinian royalty and contrived to officially tour a Royal Navy ship, represents one bizarre manifestation of the fascination. Ras Tafari's coronation as Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930 attracted immense interest from the West. Journalists, diplomats, and other officials flocked to Addis Ababa to bear witness to this spectacular event, which reportedly cost millions since every Abyssinian subject was invited to feast with the new sovereign. The sheer scope of the festivities earned Haile Selassie the cover of *Time* magazine on November 3, 1930.

In her biography, Marion Shaw indicates that Holtby was not immune to the allure of the Abyssinian coronation, which Shaw writes was, "like all matters Abyssinian at this time... extensively and rather luridly reported in England. In reading about Abyssinia Winifred was struck by the resistance of age-old traditions of court intrigue, slavery, fierce independence and idiosyncratic Christianity, to Western influences introduced by Haile Selassie" (195). Holtby's involvement in the London Group on

African Affairs, which focused on East Africa, and her attendance at meetings of the parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Closer Union in East Africa in 1931, which according to her own account put her in contact with many ““African witnesses”” (Regan 105), also increased her interest in the culture, history, and political struggles of Abyssinia and bordering territories. Holtby’s many organizational affiliations demonstrate her broad interest in Africa and in issues of racial equality in England. Over the course of the early thirties she joined the Joint Council to Promote Understanding Between White and Coloured People in Great Britain, the Council for Promoting Equality of Civil Rights Between White and Coloured Peoples, and the London Group on African Affairs, which coordinated visits to England from prominent African intellectuals. In 1934 she founded the Friends of Africa to raise funds to support black trade unionism in South Africa (Regan 132).

If the setting of her novel is an expression of her interests in African and specifically Abyssinian affairs, Holtby’s satiric emphasis on British humanitarianism in the novel demonstrates that she was also animated by interwar political idealist reactions to the issue of slavery in Abyssinia. She was enthusiastically committed to the mission of the League of Nations, an institution that represented the ideology, values, and practices of interwar political idealism. With her close friend, colleague, and biographer Vera Brittain, she traveled to Geneva in 1923 to attend the Assembly of the League of Nations. At this point she was already a volunteer lecturer for the League of Nations Union, raising awareness around England about the League’s mission and activities (Shaw 111-12). While lecturing (also on a volunteer basis) for the League of Nations Union in South

Africa in 1926, however, Holtby was exposed to the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the political idealist institutions with which she so strongly identified. During her several-month tour, which she funded with her own savings and small payments for columns in South African newspapers, she addressed “Rotary clubs, students’ unions, Jewish guilds, University women, boys’ and girls’ high schools, training colleges, synods of clergy and Sons of England” (Brittain 186) on the League of Nations’ mission and activities. She was dismayed that most of her lectures across the country were slated for white audiences. She wrote to Brittain, ““You have no idea of the race feeling here,”” and expressed consternation at the fact that she was the first LNU lecturer to address the Town Hall Indian Congress in Durban (qtd. in Brittain 192). She was further struck by the blatant racism driving the South African Labour Party, members of which frequently constituted her audiences. She described the Party to Brittain as ““out to preserve white labour in the immediate present, with little thought for the future development of the country... [I]t is simply a white workers’ protection agency, with all the autocracy of trade unionism and little of its compensating security”” (qtd. in Brittain 201-3).

Holtby’s experiences in South Africa inspired her subsequent commitments to racial equality and labor rights, which she considered to extend from her long-standing feminism. Early in her career, Holtby had established herself as a resolute gender equality advocate, joining the British feminist Six Point Group in 1922 and taking over directorship of its affiliated journal, *Time and Tide*, in 1926. In South Africa she identified the parallels between gender and racial discrimination. “[F]or General Smuts and his contemporaries,” she wrote in an article for *Time and Tide* in 1934, “the human

horizon does not yet extend to coloured races, as, for... eighteenth-century[political philosophers], it did not extend to English women” (“Jan Christiaan Smuts” 197). In the years following her return from South Africa she involved herself in organizations and parties promoting labor rights and racial equality, both in England and in areas of Africa: she joined the British Labour Party in the mid-twenties and took on canvassing duties in advance of the 1929 and 1931 elections (Regan 9-10), and was a member of an advisory committee to the International Labour Organization on Forced Labour in Africa (Regan 105).

By the time of her death from kidney failure in 1935 at the age of 37, Holtby was widely considered among the most talented leftist journalists in London (Berry 23); she had also distinguished herself as a literary critic, novelist, and activist for racial, gender, and labor equality, critically examining the conditions of globalization as influenced and interpreted by interwar political idealism. But participation in Britain’s anti-slavery movement is conspicuously missing from Holtby’s advocacy biography. Holtby did have a loose connection to the Anti-Slavery Society: her fund-raising efforts during the late twenties to facilitate trade union leadership in South Africa were supported by the Noel Buxton Trust, which was administered by the Anti-Slavery Society (Bush 183). But given that the campaign against slavery in Abyssinia would have seemed to bring together several of her main advocacy interests—labor, race, and Africa—her absence from this campaign is telling of her critical perspective on anti-slavery humanitarianism, which forms a significant object of her satire in *Mandoa, Mandoa!*

Satire is integrally related to the liberal political tradition itself. Genre theorist John Clement Ball argues that as a genre of subversive political dissent, satire thrives in a “vigorous culture of... opposition” (7) made possible by an environment of political freedom. Yet Holtby finds satire useful for critiquing the very functions of liberalism itself, as manifest in the political idealism informing interwar British humanitarianism. Peter Wilson explains that interwar political idealism is often interchanged with liberalism by historians of international law and relations, despite the fact that idealism implies “a critique of liberalism, especially nineteenth-century doctrines of *laissez-faire*” (3-4). Still, while many interwar political idealists “thought of themselves as socialists” and “were members of the Labour party and other socialist organizations,” Wilson points out that such figures were often “liberals in socialist clothing” (4), retaining a commitment to the paradigm of “benign imperialism” characterizing League of Nations principles and initiatives. Barbara Bush further refines this paradox. She explains that “liberalism” in the interwar political idealist context might be most broadly understood to “define all non-communist British initiatives, yet she distinguishes between “the paternalistic, but implicitly racist, ‘protective’ liberals, including missionaries and philanthropists, and the reformist socialists, who developed a more incisive economic and political critique” (182). Ball writes that the function of satire is to “articulate internal disagreements within a culture” (13); Holtby’s deployment of satire usefully distinguishes between modes of liberalism, and expresses her apprehensions about certain manifestations of the political idealism in which her career was so thoroughly implicated.

In terms of both its publication history and its use of satire, Holtby's novel is a striking counterpoint to Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief* (1932), which reached the market just three months before *Mandoa, Mandoa!* A comparison between the novels reveals the sharp distinction between satire deployed from progressive rather than conservative positions on race and imperialism. While Holtby uses satire in order to challenge prevailing justifications for imperialism (if not to oppose imperialism itself), Waugh set out to defend colonialism and "influence what he believed was misguided British opinion, which supported" Abyssinia against Italian invasion, even if such opinion was ambivalent about the nation's entitlement to international legal status (Salwen 9). *Black Mischief* lampoons Abyssinian efforts to maintain sovereignty. It includes a host of Abyssinian characters—including one female character known only as "Black Bitch"—who are, as one contemporary online reviewer put it, "too stupid to civilize" (goodreads.com). Michael B. Salwen explains that "Waugh's blunt comments concerning race... were not atypical of mainstream news media depictions (19); few Western critics "in Waugh's day" (or in the present day for that matter, judging from the most frequently cited treatments of *Black Mischief*) "thought to challenge or even notice Waugh's deprecations of African culture" (20). However, Waugh's vicious novel, the explicit racism of which is either massively understated or ignored in most analyses, caused immense offense in Abyssinia when it was published. Christopher Sykes, an associate of Waugh's who traveled to Ethiopia in 1956, recalls, "I was told that [Waugh] had done more damage than any other Englishman to Anglo-Ethiopian relations, and that

offence caused [by] his ‘disgusting’ novel would never be forgotten” (qtd. in Salwen 20).

Many Holtby scholars feel compelled to compare *Mandoa, Mandoa!* with *Black Mischief*, given their common settings, genres, and dates of publication. However, such comparisons usually remain overly general and problematically assume common aims and premises behind each novel’s satire. Marion Shaw, for example, writes that in Waugh’s novel, “the satire derives from the hopelessness and absurdity of attempts to communicate across cultures,” whereas Holtby’s novel “is regretful rather than caustic in its sense of near hopelessness” (196). Waugh’s novel is indeed so hostile and unimaginative as to root its so-called humor in crossed wires between bungling Abyssinian royalty and patronizing British visitors to Abyssinia. It does Holtby a disservice to claim that her satire is similarly limited. She was sharply critical of the sort of racial stereotyping that saturates *Black Mischief*. For example, in an article on Jan Christiaan Smuts—South African statesman and influential advocate both of the League of Nations and of the system of racial segregation that would culminate in apartheid—Holtby indicates the role stereotypes play in dehumanizing and disenfranchising black Africans:

General Smuts... does not see... black and brown men and women as his countrymen; he does not see them as human beings at all. Nice natives, good dogs, merry, obedient, rather stupid servants, gay singers and players, swift runners, impossible economists, tribal humorists... yes. But human beings, no. These abrupt failures of the imagination are among the most fruitful sources of

injustice in the world. They are more common than deliberate sadism, more insidious than fear. (“Jan Christiaan Smuts” 197-98)

In reproducing such stereotypes in *Black Mischief*, Waugh’s satire is imbalanced in that its Abyssinian characters are much more cruelly satirized than its European ones. However, Waugh’s novel consistently maintains its mocking, satirical tone. By contrast, *Mandoa, Mandoa!* alternates moments of caricature with moments of earnestness and even tenderness. One such passage directly confronts the dehumanizing racial stereotypes that practically constitute *Black Mischief*. Bill Durrant, one of the novel’s British protagonists, has an epiphany as he becomes acquainted with the Princess of Mandoa, whose imminent wedding the British tourism company Durrant represents hopes to turn into the international tourism event of the century. He reflects on his own orientation to native Mandoans:

Hitherto he had been separated from understanding of these people, because their speech, their customs and their appearance were intelligible to him only in terms that he had been taught to consider comic. Their extraordinary idiom, their incongruous names, clothing and economics, moved him to laughter, because incompletely adapted importations are commonly associated with comedy. But the Princess... was not comical... Bill understood for the first time that he was not a tragic, adult personality working out his fate against a fantastic backdrop of comedians. (170-71)

This earnest passage does as much critical work as Holtby’s satirical jabs do to undercut the stereotypes necessary to justify an imperial relationship of trusteeship between



Anglo-Europeans and native “child races” (Holtby 212) in both the colonial and the humanitarian encounter.

Although Holtby makes effective use of breaks in her satirical tone, the overall identity of the novel remains staunchly satirical. Holtby writes in the tradition of satirists like Swift, Voltaire, and Johnson, who wrote “primarily of Britain, not Africa, using the ‘native’ context as a sounding board... to question the foundations... of European civilization” (Ewins 130). She deploys the perspectives of both Mandoan and British characters to comic effect in order to expose the faulty conviction, common to both imperialism and certain versions of humanitarianism, that Western liberalism represents a logically consistent, supremely rational, universally applicable value system. Holtby’s use of satire serves the dual purpose of allowing her to advance a feminist agenda by asserting her place in a traditionally male-dominated genre, while also producing a trenchant critique of the British liberal humanitarian impulse. In the following sections of this chapter, I consider how Holtby uses satire to expose the common premises of humanitarian and imperialism, critique the inadequacies of abolition feminism, and highlight the internal conflicts of humanitarianism as a manifestation of interwar political idealism.

### **Holtby Exposes and Resists the Correlation Between Anti-Slavery Humanitarianism and Imperialism**

*Mandoa, Mandoa!* follows the intersecting plotlines of British commercial investment in Mandoa and British humanitarian reactions to slavery in Mandoa. Prince’s Tours, Limited, is a well-established British commercial firm helmed by Sir Joseph

Prince, a dashing elderly gentleman who despite his years remains “ever a man of resource” (24). Given Mandoa’s celebrity in the British press—“every one had heard of Mandoa nowadays” (239)—due both to its slave trade and an imminent royal wedding, Sir Joseph Prince contemplates extending his business there: “it was something to quicken the pulse of youth—[the] deliberate introduction of an almost virgin state to all that was best in western civilisation” (207). When Maurice Durrant, the youngest director of Prince’s Tours, wins a conservative seat in parliament on a platform of Britain’s “great Imperial Responsibilities” (24), Sir Joseph Prince is convinced that the time is right to initiate commercial enterprise in Mandoa:

Durrant in—a link with the new National Government—Foreign Office support—shortening the air-route to East Africa—another service rendered by Prince’s to the Empire?... A hotel in Mandoa? A holiday centre in the only remaining part of Africa unexplored[?]... Sir Joseph’s heart leapt with pleasure. (34)

Prince’s Tours easily secures a contract with the Mandoan government as represented by Safi Talal, Lord High Chamberlain of Mandoa, who welcomes the foreign investment. Early in the novel, Holtby exposes the intimate relationship between anti-slavery and imperialism through her satirical depictions of Maurice Durrant. As the novel’s token imperialist, he makes this relationship explicit as he details the conditions that make Mandoa ripe for British intervention. He describes Mandoa as ““a little native state—run as the blacks do their states—slavery, priesthood... you can imagine the mess... plagues, poverty, stagnation... [B]ut certain natural resources... God obviously intended the place as a station on the Cairo-East African-Durban route” (82). Maurice

represents the premises of imperial ideology; he manifests a patronizing and belittling attitude toward native sovereignty that confirms his conviction that Britain has a divinely-appointed privilege of economic exploitation. Citing “slave raids into Kenya and Uganda across the frontier,” Maurice reflects, “would it, or would it not, be a good thing if a British firm could secure a concession from the Mandoans to make an air port there? Centre of European trade, stepping-stone to East Africa, civilizing influence—all that kind of thing?” (83).

Maurice’s rhetorical question indicates the slippery slope from slavery allegations to the justification of imperialism reproduced by the international anti-slavery conventions of the period. His flip reference to the “civilizing influence” of British commerce demonstrates that he is not very genuinely concerned with restricting the slave trade in Mandoa, but that he’s aware of the rhetorical power of the anti-slavery argument in justifying economic intervention. Given the key role it plays in determining his access to Mandoa’s economy, Maurice is a committed proponent of international anti-slavery legislation: he anticipates a much-increased scope of influence and profit if Mandoa is declared a League of Nations Mandate System trustee. Consistent with his belief that “the paternal guardianship of the League of Nations” is “dictated by the logic of world progress to be the future history of Mandoa” (372), Maurice manages to get an International Humanitarian Association report on slavery in Mandoa on the agenda of the League Assembly. Well-satisfied with his success in getting the report raised, Maurice “dream[s] of virgin markets, big business and world influence, of power which he would wield with justice, of profit which he would gain with equity, and of responsibility, which

was his privilege” (384). Through Maurice’s musings, Holtby directly correlates imperial “responsibility” with Anglo-European privilege, thereby making explicit her position that the white man’s “burden” is in fact an appropriative advantage.

By means of her general satirical offensive against Maurice—whose positions on race and civilization are of a piece with her characterization of him as cowardly, mealy-mouthed, and jealously competitive with his brother Bill for his mother’s esteem—Holtby critiques the prevailing attitudes of interwar British liberal anti-slavery advocates, which informed contemporaneous developments in international law. As a child, Holtby writes, Maurice was “delicate and rather difficult” (36). He “had the greater share of [his mother’s] time, her devotion, her thought, and her caresses; but he never doubted for a moment that it was Bill who had her heart. Just because it was not his, he wanted it” (37). As an adult, Maurice still undergoes “torments of jealousy” (37). When Bill was sent to war, for example, Maurice “prayed nightly with fervent passion that Bill should not be killed, not because he loved Bill..., but because a hero’s death would set the seal finally and irrevocably on Bill’s triumph” (39). Maurice’s greedy jealousy of what does not belong to him translates all too well into imperial ambition. Through her characterization of Maurice—the novel’s most clearly identifiable imperialist—as essentially childish, Holtby satirically challenges the notion that Anglo-Euro liberal capitalists qualify as the world’s “adults,” with a parental responsibility to guide the “child races” of Asia and Africa.

Holtby’s depiction of Maurice is an effective demonstration of how the novel satirically resists the manifest racism of the interwar Anglo-European “frame of

reference” (Drescher and Finkelman 911), which correlated whiteness and civilization and influenced the nature and scope of developments in international law during the period. Targeting a Western metropolitan audience, the novel comports with John Clement Ball’s interpretation of satire in that it “establish[es] complex dynamics of identification and disidentification between readers and satirized objects” (Ball 170). As Ewins observes, one very prominent identification Holtby makes—and certainly it would have been an uncomfortable one for contemporaneous British readers—is between “Mandoan slavery and the treatment of the British working classes under exploitive employers and a weak welfare state” (131). A significant subplot in the first part of the novel concerns the relationship between Bill Durrant, Maurice’s brother, and Sid Granger, an unemployed laborer. Bill is a World War I veteran and pilot struggling with PTSD following a plane crash that killed his co-pilot. Early in the novel he is hired by Prince’s Tours to “make Mandoa” (385). Bill has socialist leanings and a total lack of imperial ambition; despite his disinclination for the work (which both he and his employer recognize), he is offered the job because he has the piloting skills to navigate Mandoa, which, land-locked and without paved roads, is accessible only by air. Before his job offer with Prince’s Tours, however, Bill lines up at the Labour Exchange in the hope of finding employment. There he runs into Granger, with whom he has a friendly acquaintanceship following their participation in a campaign for the (losing) Socialist candidate in the 1931 election. Granger is not pleased to see Bill in line at the Labour Exchange:

it's a damn shame to take the bread out of the mouths of the working class...  
[Y]ou've got ten times my education. You're the gentleman. I'm a worker...  
You call yourself a Socialist... [but] if you really want to benefit the working  
classes you'd better go back and live on your mother... an' not come competing  
with us. (Holtby 57-60)

Through Granger, Holtby highlights the vast inequities that characterize the class system in Britain and precipitate the exploitation of laborers there.

Bill frequently thinks of Granger when he arrives in Mandoa and, in the process of developing a close professional and personal relationship with Safi Talal, begins to grasp how the institution of slavery shapes Mandoan life. Unlike the enslaved in Mandoa, Bill considers, Granger and his fellow laborers “were not slaves—but they were not free” (Holtby 144). Bill’s musings must be considered in light of the British national context in which Holtby was writing. As Jean E. Kennard observes, *Mandoa, Mandoa!* was composed during “a time of national disillusionment during the aftermath of the 1931 general election,” in which the Labour Party lost to the conservative National Government in a landslide. The bitter memory of the failed 1926 General Strike was still fresh, and Britain was “depressed by increasing unemployment” (Kennard 113). Given the massive international attention to slavery at the time, Kristin Ewins notes that the “parallel between slavery and ‘wage-slavery’ was a frequent one in the 1930s left” (132). Holtby is no exception: she asserts this parallel through a comic exchange between Bill and Safi Talal, who “announced his desire to discuss the League attitude toward Abyssinian slavery.” Considering his response, Bill “described the queue at the Labour

Exchange,” which for both Bill and Safi Talal evokes “the slave train to... the Red Sea.” The conversation concludes when Bill concedes that “Socialists spoke of the British system as wage-slavery. At this, “Talal shrugged his shoulders and observed that the attitude of the League of Nations toward his friends in Abyssinia was... incomprehensible” (144). Of course, in this exchange the men’s identification of African slavery with exploited British labor is overly simple; Holtby does not take the step of extending their dialogue to encompass contemporaneous debates comparing and contrasting forms of forced and exploited labor in various contexts internationally. Still, the passage has the desired effect of undercutting any presumed notion of the superior humanity of Anglo-European civilization.

If the identification between African slavery and exploited British labor was a more or less common one to make for leftists at the time, Holtby’s satire also functions in more subtle and unexpected ways to challenge the reader’s identification with various characters and institutions. In order to expose the inconsistencies of liberal imperialism and liberal humanitarianism, for example, Holtby highlights the common impulse toward imperial conquest shared by Britons and Mandoans, *Mandoa, Mandoa!* reacts against what Lisa Regan refers to as “complacent assumptions of unity and commonality espoused both by imperialist and internationalist discourses” (109). “For generation after generation,” Holtby writes, “Mandoans had subjugated all inferior races, Dinkas, Nubas, Shilluks, Gallas, Hottentots” (174). Upon completing a slave raid, Safi Ma’buta’s “young men... praised their mastery over subject peoples. ‘Mandoans,’ they shouted, ‘never, never, never will be slaves’” (179). This passage intentionally recalls the lyrics of

the patriotic anthem “Rule, Britannia!”: “Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.” Holtby’s aligning of British and Mandoan national identities mocks liberal internationalist ideals of (as Lady Lufton phrases it) “world fellowship” premised on “our better natures” (Holtby 112). Certainly, Holtby recognizes “unity and commonality” between Britons and Mandoans, but it is an identification contingent upon what Kristin Ewins terms “an inherent human impulse to enslave” (130)—that is, upon imperial greed rather than humanist solidarity. Holtby collapses the categories of the civilized and the uncivilized by attributing a common imperialist tendency to British and Mandoan patriotism.

If in this previous example Holtby undercuts liberal internationalism by identifying Mandoans with Britons, Holtby also undoes the superior, enlightened rationalism liberalism claims for itself by *disidentifying* Mandoans and Britons. In one of the novel’s crowning comic achievements, Bill Durrant outlines a series of “Rules for Mandoans” (Holtby 225) in anticipation of the royal wedding, which is expected to draw legions of Western tourists. Bill had accepted his job as a potential distraction from post-traumatic stress, but as the main emissary of Prince’s Tours in Mandoa, he is aware that he has become the unwitting object of a humanitarian scandal: rumors are circulating back in Britain that Prince’s Tours aids and abets the Mandoan slave trade. Indeed, as Bill discovers, it is impossible to build a business in Mandoa that does not involve slave labor. Bill presents the “Rules for Mandoans” to Safi Talal and his attendants in the hope of pre-empting unpleasant confrontations between Mandoans and their guests. He encourages Mandoans “to observe European tabus” (226). He explains,



though Europeans like to slaughter their own meat on Shooting, Hunting and Fishing expeditions out of doors, they do *not* consider it a compliment to have goats or fowls slain before them at the dining table. This prejudice is inexplicable but strong... [*M*]ost important. Remember that though the Europeans know you keep slaves, and though they will be glad enough to take advantage of the comfort their service gives, they never themselves refer to slavery, nor will they be happy if you do so. Therefore, *Slaves Are Tabu*. (227)

Here, Holtby reverses the Anglo-European anthropological gaze, which, in such popular late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century ethnographic texts as *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, quintessentially “others” non-white ethnic individuals and communities. According to Bill’s guidelines, though, it is not Mandoans but Europeans who maintain inexplicable taboos and insist upon bizarre habits and laws of existence. Bill’s guidelines satirically undermine the fiction of consistently enlightened rationalism European liberalism claims for itself. In dissociating white liberalism from superior rationalism, Holtby questions the Anglo-European justifications behind both imperial and humanitarian interventions in regions of Africa.

### **Holtby Exposes the Inadequacies of Abolition Feminism**

In order to further expose the common premises of imperialism and humanitarianism, Holtby’s satire highlights the inadequacies of interwar abolition feminism, which was premised on racist categories of civilization. Holtby’s challenge to this version of feminism is part of her bid to advance an alternative feminist agenda in public discourse. In a study of satiric novels, Lisa Colletta argues that “the

disenfranchised and marginalized, that is women and minorities, have always included humor as one of the most important weapons in their arsenal to protect themselves from psychological damage and to subvert the power of those in authority” (8). Yet scholars of satire frequently note the genre’s “gender exclusivity” (Knight 6). Charles A. Knight observes that while women are “prominent enough groups within the satiric frame... as satiric victims,” their status as creators of satire is less certain. Knight notes “the relative silence of women as satirists” (6) historically. “The virtual absence of women as satirists before the twentieth century,” he writes, “seems an instance of the historical exclusion of women from authorship” and “public activity” (7-8); according to Knight, those women who did write satire before the twentieth century (he gives Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Aphra Behn as rare examples) “either did so privately or anonymously... or were in other respects more-or-less notorious figures already” (7). But Knight holds that as women broke into the field of journalism, taking on positions as columnists and reporters during the twentieth century, they began to “assume a place as journalistic satirists” (7), thus asserting their voices in public discourse.

Certainly, Holtby’s satirical novel was an attempt to participate in public discourse and debate about imperial geopolitics, an enterprise which she was aware would not be perceived as suitably ladylike. In a letter to Lady Rhondda dated December 1931, Holtby describes her “new novel” as “a sort of satirical symposium of empire-building” rather than the “nice love-story” she knows her publisher is hoping for. She muses, “I want to do something hard, muscular, compact, very little emotional, and then the emotion hammered into the style. Metal-work, not water-colour” (qtd. in Regan

103). Holtby's critics often point out her intention to assert herself in the boy's club of satirical socio-political critique. Marion Shaw, for example, interprets Holtby's contribution in terms of its engagement of "a masculine form, the novel of political comedy" (qtd. in Kennard 21), while Jean E. Kennard describes *Mandoa, Mandoa!* as "a very successful novel in a male genre" (Kennard 113). In the novel, Holtby's feminism is evidenced in part by her satirizing the conventional understanding of "expanding the empire [and] making Africa" as "a man's job" (72).

In its satirizing of British humanitarianism, the novel also stands as a foil to the versions of feminism that would have been available to Holtby in her time. In *Mandoa, Mandoa!*, Lady Selena Lufton, "a large-bosomed, tranquil, comfortable woman, who wore cretonne dresses, a good deal of home-made jewelry, and... had three thousand a year of her own," is "a member of several organisations which recognised women's special interest in peace [and] world fellowship" (108); she represents what Clare Midgley terms in her history of twentieth-century anti-slavery "imperial feminism." Lady Lufton accuses radical leftists of failing to pay "enough attention to the things that matter." Holtby explains, "'The things that matter' was one of [Lady Lufton's] favourite phrases; vague and uplifting like... 'our better natures,' 'pursuit of the highest,' and 'world fellowship'" (112). Midgley explains that "female anti-slavery," which during the interwar period included major campaigns against Abyssinian slavery and *mui-tsai* (female child slavery in China), "was a form of Western proto-feminism" (164). However, "Despite assertions of international and cross-race sisterhood," Midgley writes, "these comparisons tended to work against any notion of full equality" (164-65); rather,

“British women abolitionists and feminists both based their own claims to fuller participation in the public life of the British nation on their feminine roles as moral reformers of empire” (165-66).

Along with secondary female characters invested in the blessings of empire for native populations—such as an American visitor to Mandoa, Mrs. Marlow, who insists that ““what the child races [of Africa] need is love”” (212)—Lady Lufton is a prime target of Holtby’s satire. She regularly repeats platitudes about world fellowship yet refuses to hear substantive critiques of Anglo-European intervention abroad. Hosting a fashionable tea at her well-appointed Buckinghamshire country house for a selection of London’s pre-eminent humanitarians, she grows agitated when Arthur Rollett, the novel’s outspoken resident communist, persistently brings up what he sees as the scandal of Prince’s Tours’ abetting of the Mandoan slave trade. She repeatedly interrupts him with attempts to change the subject: ““Mrs. Marlow—excuse me, Mr. Rollett—but *did* you say lemon and no sugar?’ cried Selena desperately... ‘Jean, dear. You’re eating *nothing*. Try this oatcake,’ Selena pleaded”” (114). Lady Lufton’s willful deafness to Rollett’s concerns does not square with her self-proclaimed identification with “humanitarians... and Socialists” (108). In terms of both form and content, satire allows Holtby to advocate a progressivism rooted in part in an alternative feminism. In the basic act of engaging the satiric form, Holtby claims a place for herself in the male-dominated tradition of socio-political critique; the content of her satire indicates her resistance to masculinity as empire-building and feminism as empire-reforming, both of which are premised on racist categories of civilization.

## **Holtby Exposes the Internal Conflicts of Anti-Slavery Humanitarianism**

While *Mandoa, Mandoa!* is largely concerned with exposing the continuum between imperialism and humanitarianism, it also satirically highlights the internal conflicts of British humanitarianism. There are two different British inquiries into conditions of slavery in Mandoa: one, a delegation sent to Mandoa by the London-based International Humanitarian Association, takes advantage of Prince's Tour's strategic offer of support and hospitality during the delegates' tour; the other, consisting solely of Arthur Rollett, will not have anything to do with Prince's Tours (on principle). As a passionate anti-slavery advocate, Rollett had initially hoped to be included in the IHA commission, but he understands "the reason for his exclusion perfectly well. He was an extremist, a fanatic, a dangerous man" (263). Therefore he strikes out on his own, undertaking an independent investigation to expose what he suspects is

an immense intrigue against the Slavery Commission of the League of Nations; that a British commercial firm was proposing to enter into alliance with the corrupt mockery of government at [Mandoa's capital] Lolagoba, and to exact from it economic concessions of vast profit to absentee capitalists, in return for helping to hoodwink the placid idealists of Geneva. (89)

The distinction between the two inquiries appears in their respective orientations to race as an indicator of capacity for "civilization." Mr. Beaton, who heads the IHA delegation, represents the paternalism characterizing humanitarianism as interpreted by the Anti-Slavery Society. He "pride[s] himself on his ability to see both sides of a vexed question. It was the British destiny to act as honest broker in continental transactions" (260).

Beaton adheres to a Fabian version of liberalism, according to which the British were entitled to an empire because of their superior fitness, as bearers of civilization and democracy, to rule colonized populations (referred to by early-twentieth-century British Fabian thinkers as, variously, “subject races,” “non-adult races,” and “weaker races”<sup>21</sup>). He makes explicit his investment in the racial basis of categories of civilization with his offhand remark: “no one could care more for the welfare of Africans than I, but [the] absence of colour prejudice can be carried a little *too far*” (260). By contrast, Rollett “preache[s] the equality of mankind”—and is rewarded for his efforts by accusations of “perversity” (348) from white European tourists, clients of Prince’s Tours in Mandoa.

Ultimately Rollett takes pride in his exclusion from the IHA commission as it highlights what he perceives as his own admirable refusal to compromise. “In the end, effective [change]... could be achieved only by unpleasantness. The Beatons... of the world did nothing, because they refused to offend even the offenders” (263). In a turn of events that is just one in a series of IHA misadventures, both Rollet and the IHA commission are taken hostage by Safi Ma’buta, an influential Mandoan chief and long-standing rival of Safi Talal. Both inquiries are brought to a halt by sudden captivity, and emotions run high in the cramped hut where Rollet and the members of the commission are arrested (while Ma’buta’s messenger hurries to Lolagoba to demand ransom from Talal). Rollet sneers at Beaton:

‘I’ve always known you... One of the people who grow fat on reform. Always polite. Travel round the world in the cause of charity. Nice articles in papers that

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<sup>21</sup> See David Piachaud, “Fabianism, Social Policy, and Colonialism: The Case of Tanzania.”

pay well... You once said that I had no sense of humour. What a pity! A sense of humour is so handy, isn't it? It lets you see both sides of a question so that you never need *do* anything.' (268)

Rollett despises the moderate institutionalism of the IHA, but his efforts to “do something”—that is, to expose through his own independent investigation a conspiracy between Prince’s Tours and Mandoan officials to cover up the slavery scandal—end with him dead and disgraced by the middle of the novel. Slavery in Mandoa is no less entrenched, and his exposé of a cynical conspiracy between British commerce and the Mandoan government is not credited. Having embarked on a tour of the forbidding landscape beyond Lolagoba by himself, Rollett arrives at Safi Ma’buta’s village an “emaciated figure... His khaki shirt was tattered and filthy... His leg, broken just above the ankle, had been roughly bandaged... His eyes were bright with fever” (264). Suffering from both malaria and dysentery (265), Rollett dies in ignominy among the IHA commissioners, who both judge and pity him. Fabian-style liberals like Mr. Beaton and Lady Lufton may be imperiously out of touch, but the communist Rollett fares little better in Holtby’s satire. While living, he is riddled with self-doubt: “he was no good, no good... an ineffective, explosive, violent little man... he cared more to prove himself in the right than to free Africans from slavery... vanity alone had prompted this final, futile, ridiculous adventure” (266). Even after his death, the IHA delegates continue to disparage him and infantilize him retrospectively: “[h]e was... a burden; he was dependent upon their help and skill” (270).

As indicated by Rollett's unglamorous demise at a relatively early juncture in the humanitarian inquiry plot, the novel does not take radical communism seriously as a mode or philosophy of social justice practice. Through her depiction of Rollett's life and death, Holtby maintains a critical distance from radicalism. This distance is compounded by the very genre of the novel. While Rollett interprets humor as an impediment to substantive action, Holtby, by composing a satirical novel, evidences her investment in the capacities of humor for socio-political critique. Of course, Holtby's evocation of communism through the character of the stubbornly anti-institution Rollett ignores the success of many interwar communist groups in orchestrating highly functional institutions of their own; certainly radicalism and institutionalism are not inevitably at odds. Yet Holtby's concern that radical communism threatened moderate institutionalism is reflected throughout her advocacy career. In her work on labor rights in South Africa, for example, she feared the influence of communism on black trade unionism. According to Ewins, Holtby

shared the fear among liberal supporters of the League that the disenfranchised black population would be led into racial violence and Communism if extremism was not tempered within the [trade union] ranks. She warned that for black workers, let down by white labour, 'the Communist Party alone offered real co-operation.' (120)

Yet concerned about the proliferation of a "particular brand of Communism, undiluted, and super-imposed upon a peculiar ignorance of history or economics" (qtd. in Regan



10-11), Holtby vocally discouraged revolutionary communism amongst the black South African laborers and unionists with whom she worked and corresponded.

Straight-woman Jean Stanbury is the likeliest avatar of Holtby's own version of leftism. Stanbury "hate[s the] violent measures and extreme opinions" (263-64) she associates with Rollett, but she also dismisses Lady Lufton as "a stupid woman" (384). Like Holtby, who wrote and edited for the leftist-feminist journal *Time and Tide*, Stanbury is an editor. When we meet her in the novel, she works for *The Byeword*, "a weekly review devoted to the exposure of [Britain's] more purulent national and international evils" (65).<sup>22</sup> When she and Rollett meet each other at Lady Lufton's tea, they see eye to eye in their distaste for the Fabian-style liberalism represented by their hostess and other members of the party. Stanbury likes Rollett's "vibrant, emphatic, sensitive, pugnacious personality" (384), and Rollett appreciates Stanbury as "honest, calm and grave. 'You're a sensible woman,' he declared. 'You have a sense of values... [Y]ou *think*; you care'" (120). Yet Stanbury finds Rollett's radicalism and anti-institutionalism alienating and counter-productive. "'We have to work for the world we know as best we can,'" she argues. "'Committees, reports, bills, conventions—all rather dull and slow... [W]e cannot give up'" (385). When she is offered the opportunity to travel to Mandoa as part of the IHA commission, she takes it. Despite her disagreement with the commission's leadership about race as an indicator of civilization, she is eager to

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<sup>22</sup> Stanbury's failed romance with Bill Durrant further correlates her with Holtby. Bill is widely held by critics to stand in for Harry Pearson, a childhood friend of Holtby's who spent much of his career in India and who, according to Vera Brittain's biography, "kep[t] Holtby on 'emotional tenterhooks' by his surprise appearances and disappearances in her life" (qtd. in Kennard 112).

participate in what she sees as a material response to the concerns she shares with other British humanitarians about the scourge of slavery in Mandoa.

On account perhaps of Holtby's identification with her, Stanbury does not suffer the satirical jabs aimed at Rollett, Beaton, and Lufton. Yet Stanbury's leftism, if not viciously satirized, is hardly valorized. Upon her departure for Mandoa, it becomes clear that Stanbury is at least as motivated by escapism as by humanitarian concerns. She is giddy with excitement as the plane leaves Britain: "I have left London. I have left Jean Stanbury... I left half a dozen selves... I'm going to Mandoa. I'm going to have an adventure" (237). And despite her private concession that Rollett has a strong case against Prince's Tours, she is overcome with "lyrical ecstasy" (238) as she enters Prince's "dazzling white hotel, Mandoa's pride," and "sank down upon a narrow bed with a pink silk quilt in the hot little room" (239). In the days to come she takes advantage of the tourism privileges accorded to the IHA commission, profoundly enjoying "exploring the city[:] the cathedral, the Royal Palace, the market place, and all other wonders of Lolagoba" (242). Even as the commission begins its tour of Mandoan villages, however, the holiday feel of the experience continues for Stanbury. "She was delighted to be... living on donkeys, in camps, seeing, perhaps, lions and deer and elephants, interviewing slaves by torchlight, free, marvellously free..., abandoned to the incomparable joys of Africa" (245). Her "marvelous" sense of freedom is contingent upon the enslaved status of the interviewees; she finds her own freedom by doing presumed "good" for Mandoan slaves. Stanbury is not unaware of her deeply problematic equation of wildlife sightings, rustic adventure, and the slavery inquiry as touristic "joys." "[S]he was doing what she

had always longed to do, and her sympathy for suffering Negroes could not drown her pleasure in the opportunity to see them—a state of mind for which she rebuked herself without avail” (247). In her darker moments, she concludes that the humanitarian impulse is inherently and impossibly compromised. Interrogating her own motives for traveling to Mandoa, she concludes that ““There’s no solidarity... What’s the use of being martyrs...?”” (272).

Despite her own shortcomings as a humanitarian and her moments of skepticism about the viability of humanitarianism itself, Stanbury is the novel’s exemplar of responsible humanitarian ethics. Compared to the other humanitarians in the novel, who are cartoonish in their representations of various points on the humanitarian spectrum, Stanbury is not satirized at all. The seriousness of Holtby’s depiction of Stanbury stands out amongst her other (largely mocking) humanitarian character studies, thus signaling to the reader that Stanbury’s ethical position is to be taken seriously. As Stanbury herself points out, “[o]ur motives are never, I suppose, quite pure... We play for our own hands—we advertise our own societies” (385). Her direct confrontation of this fact sets her apart from the Fabian-style liberal humanitarians in the novel. (In response to Stanbury’s observation about humanitarian motives, for example, Lady Lufton’s husband Lord Lufton “thrust out his heavy, puzzled underlip. His motives, he knew, were always beyond reproach” [385].) Following her return to England from Mandoa, Stanbury remains committed to anti-slavery humanitarianism—“we cannot give up” (385)—but her commitment is crucially tempered by a self-reflective humility inspired by her awareness of her own ethical shortcomings. Her humility is further influenced by her

recognition of the limited capacities of British anti-slavery humanitarianism to end exploitation in Mandoa. Indeed, as evidenced by her weary reflection on the IHA commission—“[l]etters were written, speeches made; [and] the ‘freed’ slaves from Mandoa marched to forced labour on the Congo” (384)—Stanbury even recognizes that humanitarian efforts can potentially, if unintentionally, feed into new forms of exploitation. By narrating Stanbury’s process of ethical evolution during and following her participation in an international intervention, Holtby suggests the terms of a revised ethics of humanitarianism.

### **Conclusion**

Holtby’s satire supplies a multi-faceted critique of humanitarianism that functions most significantly to expose the rifts and inconsistencies within the interwar British anti-slavery movement, especially in terms of race-based categories of civilization. *Mandoa, Mandoa!* shows that regardless of their motivations, all humanitarian interventions have their dark sides, including complicity with exploitive economic enterprises, the inadvertent fueling of new forms of oppression, and the reinforcement of uneven distributions of power and privilege. As ethicist Didier Fassin explains in his moral history of humanitarianism, at every point in its history international humanitarianism has “presuppose[d] a relation of inequality” (4). According to this ethical frame, Fassin writes, “it is because we see the other as another self... that we feel sympathy for him or her and act for his or her good.” Yet it is “the very conditions of the social relation between the two parties, which, whatever the goodwill of the agents, make compassion a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity” (3). If “the functions of satire are inquiry

and provocation rather than moral instruction and punishment” (Knight 5), then Holtby’s novel productively questions the structural impediments to solidarity with colonized and enslaved populations that compromise the integrity of interwar anti-slavery humanitarianism.

It is important to acknowledge that in her advocacy career, Holtby herself had difficulty approaching African colleagues in a spirit of solidarity—that is, as equal partners. Holtby’s leftism may have been constrained by her residual investment in liberal assumptions about the superiority of Anglo-European modes of law, government, and political organization. As Kristin Ewins writes,

Holtby valued the benefits of advanced technology and efficient government imported into Africa from the West, while abhorring the continuous exploitation of human and material resources. She took a firm stance against the ills committed by the British Empire—‘I really care a good deal about our monstrous behaviour in breaking faith with ignorant Africans.’ (123)

Even as she generalized about “ignorant Africans,” Holtby was “agitated by an inability to perceive potentially shared experience and humanity between black African and white European citizens” (Ewins 127). Her professional relationship with Clements Kadalie, a Zulu South African labor organizer she met during her League of Nations Union lecture tour in 1926, provides a salient example of how Holtby’s support for solidarity between Africans and Anglo-Europeans co-existed with her assumption that political idealist tutelage ran in one direction, from the metropolitan imperial center to the colonies. Holtby must be credited for her progressivism in welcoming Kadalie’s shrewd critical

questions about the League of Nations and willingly engaging him on his suspicion of “the well-meant philanthropy of the Bantu Social Centre and similar white experiments in reconciliation,” with which he generally “refused to be associated” (Brittain 202). She must also be credited for her prompt and substantive response to Kadalie’s request for support in his capacity as General Secretary of the native Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) headquartered in Johannesburg. Yet Lisa Regan asserts that “Holtby’s efforts to provide the ICU with a library and guidance from British Trade Unions strongly resonated with [a] commitment to tutelage that characterizes... the ‘benign imperialism’ of the period,” which “recommends a continued imperial responsibility towards emerging self-governing nations” and thus reveals “an imperialist attitude couched within the terms of the League of Nations’ internationalist principles” (106).

As demonstrated by her impulse to coordinate the hiring of a British trade union organizer, William Ballinger, to advise Kadalie on the ICU’s mobilization of African labor, it would seem that Holtby herself evidenced some of the “benign imperialism” that characterized so many expressions of interwar political idealism. However, in *Mandoa*, *Mandoa!*, she also constructs a reflective and incisive critique of how such benign imperialist attitudes function to reproduce inequality. At the conclusion of the novel, following Mandoa’s integration into the British economy, Maurice’s circulation in the Assembly of the League of Nations of the IHA report produced by the commission on slavery in Mandoa, and the introduction of anti-slavery reforms in Mandoa, “the ‘freed’ slaves from Mandoa marched to forced labour on the Congo” (384). This conclusion

demonstrates her critical awareness of the ironies of international humanitarian anti-slavery legislation in practice. It is worth noting that the Slavery Convention of 1926 does not explicitly prohibit all forms of compulsory labor. Article 5 specifies that “compulsory or forced labour may... be exacted for public purposes,” though “compulsory labour... shall not involve the removal of the labourers from their usual place of residence” (qtd. in Simon 271). In their history of international anti-slavery legislation, Seymour Drescher and Paul Finkelman state unequivocally that “Labour practices in British colonies by companies and entrepreneurs verged on slavery and both the British government and international lawyers turned a blind eye to this new form of bondage” (910). Anti-slavery acts and covenants specifically did not “discourage massive mobilizations of coerced native labour for the purpose of accelerating the economic development of occupied regions. Ironically,” Drescher and Finkelman conclude, “the attempt to end slavery in Africa led to new forms of forced labour and exploitation that resembled slavery” (910-11). Antony Anghie sheds further light on this dynamic:

infrastructure projects were of such central importance that the League Council permitted compulsory or forced labour for remuneration for ‘essential public works and services.’ These took an enormous toll on native populations, to the point where it became unclear as to which of these two practices—the primitive practice of slavery or the modern practice of development—had more devastating consequences.” (167)

*Mandoa, Mandoa!* is an important contribution to the history of the potential—but mostly the limits—of interwar anti-slavery humanitarianism as an expression of political idealism. Certainly, international anti-slavery conventions of the late-nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries did important work to set the priorities and provide a vocabulary for subsequent labor rights efforts. Yet Suzanne Miers writes that for colonial powers throughout the interwar period, the “slavery issue remained as a card to be played when necessary” (“Britain” 276). Even Abyssinia, which remained independent when Holtby set her novel in a fictional variant of it, was invaded by Italy in 1936 on humanitarian grounds. Italy “made much propaganda out of the slavery issue...[,] bringing charges against Ethiopia at the League” (Miers, “Britain” 276).<sup>23</sup> When slavery *was* finally abolished in Abyssinia in 1942, after Emperor Haile Selassie regained control of the country from the Italians, the success of the reforms the Emperor had been trying to enforce for decades seemed to have more to do with economic factors than with the inherent efficacy of anti-slavery legislation. Donald Donham explains,

In the nineteenth century the most valuable exports had been slaves, ivory, and gold... By the early decades of the twentieth century, elephant herds were being wiped out, and slaving was becoming increasingly difficult. In this context, the new commodity that did most to transform economic relations was coffee.

(Donham 27)

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<sup>23</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Italian invasion did not result in improved labor conditions for the oppressed of Abyssinia. Although the “Italians executed some of the most notorious slavers..., the conquerors were themselves soon accused of calling out people for forced labour and of allowing their soldiers to plunder and oppress the unfortunate population” (Miers, “Britain” 277).



Miers agrees: she writes that slave-raiding and trading died out in Abyssinia in the early 1940s because “the most viable products of the west and south-west changed from slaves, ivory and gold... to agricultural goods, particularly coffee.” Yet she emphasizes that it must be observed that “the legal abolition of... slavery” did not end “oppression,” but “simply removed” a “for[m] of unfree labour” (“Britain” 281). From these historical perspectives, anti-slavery legislation did not materially advance abolition in Abyssinia; if anything, it aggravated suffering in the region as it justified a devastating colonial invasion. In its noteworthy awareness of these ironies and impacts, Holtby’s satirical novel marks an important juncture in the history of international interventionism.

## Chapter Four:

### “When Will I Grow Up and Be a Strong Man?”: Socialism, Political Idealism, and the Bildungsroman in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie*

#### **Introduction**

Anglophone Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand’s 1936 novel *Coolie* follows the adventures of the scrappy protagonist Munoo, a fourteen-year-old orphan and child laborer, as he travels far and wide in pursuit of work in the markets, mills, factories, and rail stations of pre-Independence India. Signs of British imperial economics are everywhere to be found in the novel; narrative references, often in passing, to such institutions and enterprises as the Imperial Bank of India, the Imperial Tea Company, and the Burma Oil Company mean that the political economy of imperialism forms a persistent subtext of the novel. Yet despite the fact that his indigence is tied to the structural economic conditions of imperialism, Munoo remains unconscious of the connection. He is a sensitive, intelligent child, attuned to beauty in clothing design, architecture, and engineering; having secured temporary work hauling grain, Munoo’s eye is drawn to “the blue Hindustani inscription on the sacks of grain. But,” the narrator interjects, “he was too young to know the laws of political economy, especially as they govern the export of wheat from India to England” (122).

If Anand’s protagonist is unaware of the “laws” of imperial economics, the novel as a whole is almost hyper-aware of them, continually questioning the ethical dimensions and implications of globalized capital. In this chapter, I examine bildungsroman conventions in *Coolie* in order to highlight Anand’s critique of the exploitive economic

relationships between British imperial metropole and colony. As a novelistic genre, the bildungsroman is traditionally understood to consolidate liberal values by plotting the individual's personality development as a metaphor for socio-economic "progress." The theory that the bildungsroman stewards liberal values has been established by such scholars as Franco Moretti, Jed Esty, Terry Eagleton, and Joseph Slaughter. According to Slaughter, the bildungsroman is "the paramount medium for representing the socioaesthetic construction of modern, bourgeois individualism, and the paramount model for imagining the modern nation-state as a social community" (92). Writing at a juncture in the history of the Empire when self-determination movements in India were rapidly gaining momentum in alliance with international socialism, Anand problematizes bildungsroman conventions so as to bring the political economy of imperialism to the fore and emphasize, variously, the inadequacy, exhaustion, and irrelevance of a liberal value system that justifies and perpetuates imperial economic exploitation. That Munoo, as *Coolie's* protagonist and a member of India's indigent working class, repeatedly fails to self-actualize in the conditions of imperial capitalism points to the disillusionment with supposedly liberal economic structures felt by Anand and many other metropolitan intellectual leftists coming of age in India during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Yet in addition to subverting the conventions of the genre, Anand also retains certain features of the bildungsroman in order to imagine the horizons of political freedom in India as consisting in a socialist-inspired nationalism. To be sure, the arrival on the scene toward the conclusion of the novel of representatives of two leftist

institutions—the All-Indian Trade Union Federation and the Red Flag Union, representing, respectively, the democratic-socialist and the communist strains of the Indian left—does not immediately herald Munoo’s self-actualization and emancipation. In fact, Anand’s novel exposes the internal conflicts of leftist Indian nationalism, and narrates Munoo’s uneven and ultimately incomplete process of development partly in terms of these conflicts. Still, examined in terms of pertinent geopolitical developments and international social movements during the 1930s, the structure of the novel as well as the conditions of its publication and circulation evidence Anand’s investment in the potential of international socialist collectives (such as the Indian Progressive Writers’ Association and the London-based socialist *Left Review*, both of which I discuss here in relation to *Coolie*) to influence how both Indian and British political idealists understood the possible relationships between labor interests, self-determination movements, and international socialist institutions.

Anand’s engagement of the bildungsroman allowed him to express his anxieties about the theory versus the practice of the institution of liberalism as it related to interwar international socialism and Indian nationalism. Generically, *Coolie* is sometimes interpreted as a picaresque novel due to its episodic nature. Munoo first travels as an itinerant laborer from his home in the rural village of Bilaspur first to Sham Nagar to work as a household servant, then goes on to Daulatpur where he finds work in a pickle factory and later as a market coolie; from Daulatpur he travels to Bombay where he is employed at the British-owned Sir George White Cotton Mills; and the final episode of the novel takes Munoo to Simla, where he works as a rickshaw coolie. Cumulatively, the

episodes of the novel vividly portray various categories and conditions of the indigent laboring classes in interwar-era India. But if *Coolie* presents Munoo's episodic adventures "in a picaresque manner," writes critic C.J. George, "Munoo the hero is not a rogue. He is only a victim of the world's rogueries" (53). A reading of the novel more as a bildungsroman than as a picaresque allows for an interpretation of the story of Munoo's individual personality development as speaking to the structural inequalities attending economic globalization. Joseph Slaughter explains that "the classical Bildungsroman is only superficially interested in the exemplary individual whose story it narrates. The genre is more broadly concerned with the legitimacy of social institutions—with their propriety, preservation, and promotion—and with the institutional formation of the type of socialized individualism upon which their perpetuity depends" (116). If the "institution" is understood both as an entrenched social or economic practice and as an incorporated public infrastructure, how do we interpret a novel like *Coolie*, which takes a critical approach to liberal economic institutions even as it deploys the rhetoric and conventions of the bildungsroman? And if, as a genre, the bildungsroman is ultimately more concerned with institutional forms and the ethical values that inhere in them than it is with the individual whose story it narrates, how does Munoo, as the "representative man" of Anand's bildungsroman, index the values of interwar political idealism?

### **Anand Subverts the Bildungsroman**

Scholars of the bildungsroman locate the origins of the genre in the eighteenth-century European novel, wherein a hero "comes of age within the framework of national-historical time, in and through which he emerges as an individual, reaching his ideal in

unity with the state” (Berman 119). Critics including Gregory Castle and Jessica Berman offer the “modernist bildungsroman” paradigm to account for twentieth-century bildungsromane featuring protagonists who die (or otherwise significantly self-destruct) before achieving self-actualization. As Berman puts it, these narratives “often subvert what seems to be the most salient component of the genre—development—even as [they] cling to the genre’s language, structure, process of characterization, and ethical claims” (121). Since *Coolie* narrates a protagonist’s stunted, thwarted, and finally terminated process of personal development, it might seem to occupy the generic category of the modernist bildungsroman. Yet Robert Higney points out in an unpublished analysis of *Coolie* that the “untimely demise” of the modernist bildungsroman hero “is a product not of his own failures but of the unjustness of the society into which he ventures.” The hero’s “failure to acquire culture” and “subsequent death” are “indictments not of culture and development themselves but of a social world that is inadequate to those ideals.” From this perspective, *Coolie* does not quite comport with the modernist bildungsroman paradigm: by critically engaging the conventions and rhetoric of the bildungsroman, Anand *does* in fact take issue with the values and ideals that inhere in the genre, especially as they pertain to liberal capitalism.

Since Eagleton’s account of the bildungsroman specifically addresses the economic dimensions of liberalism as a value system, it is particularly useful for understanding the subversive potential of *Coolie* as a problematized bildungsroman. For Eagleton, it is important to recognize that the bildungsroman represents “not just... bourgeois society but... *capitalist* society” (185). Understanding the genre this way,

however, reveals that it is premised on an irreconcilable contradiction: since “there is no stable narrative of growth and maturity to be derived from the random fluctuations and chance connections of the market-place,” the “bourgeois ideology” represented by the bildungsroman is “at odds with its own material infrastructure” (192). Certainly, the plot of *Coolie* would seem to highlight this contradiction. The looping, cyclical narrative structure consists of a series of Munoo’s thwarted attempts to self-actualize by integrating himself into the colonial Indian economy. The novel opens with Munoo being pushed prematurely into economic independence. Asked by a school friend whether it is true that he is leaving their remote village for the larger town of Shampur, Munoo bravely replies that it is—“I am going away this morning”—but he feels “a quiver go through his belly.” Munoo explains, “My aunt wants me to begin earning money... My uncle says I am grown up and must fend for myself” (2). Almost immediately upon opening, then, the novel articulates the liberal value, inherent in the bildungsroman, of economic self-sufficiency as the measure of maturity. However, it articulates this value critically. Along with Munoo, the reader mourns his lost opportunity to complete his schooling and his childhood in the more tranquil environs of the village.

There are other clear invocations of the bildungsroman genre, as well. Munoo has the characteristics of the plucky, enterprising young bildungsroman hero. Over the course of the novel he is variously described as “cunning” (126), “brave” (152), “impish,” and “enthusias[tic]” (159). He demonstrates a penchant for engineering: he is “especially interested in machines such as he had read about in the science primer of the fourth class”; someday he means “to learn to make machines himself” (3). And he

proves his mettle handily in the competitive conditions of the coolie labor market. Competing with several other laborers for a job lifting produce baskets, for example, Munoo “pushed his rivals aside” and “got hold of the basket in the shopkeeper’s hand. It was as easy as that” (126). Small victories like these indicate Munoo’s fitness to survive and fuel his hope that he might even prosper in the conditions of capitalism. Upon his first exposure to the urban market economy, Munoo is baffled by the departure it represents from the subsistence agriculture to which he has been accustomed. Arriving in the city with his uncle to take a job as a servant to an accountant for the Imperial Bank of India, Munoo asks, “‘Where is the cattle which these people graze and where are the fields they plough, uncle?... [H]ow do they get their food...?’” His uncle replies, “‘They have money... They earn money by buying wheat which the peasants grow and by selling it as flour..., or by buying cotton and making cloth and selling it at a profit.’” Munoo exclaims, “‘How strange!’” but is nevertheless immediately enthralled by the city’s extravagant displays of consumer goods:

huge cauldrons in the cookshops... steamed with the most spicy smells he had ever smelt. Tiers of sweets, dripping with syrup, rose from platform to ceiling in the sweetshops. Rubber balloons and little pink dolls and fluffy rabbit-like toys decorated the general stores. A stall-keeper was shouting ‘Ices, cool ices,’ and emptying little conic tins on to leaf cups for some customers... Munoo felt he would have liked to taste one of those ices. (7)

Munoo’s consumer desires, then, are early established as the driving force behind the narrative. The narrative arc of the novel as a whole consists of a distinct set of



repeated plot cycles: Munoo is seduced by the promise of capitalism, but then is discouraged as he realizes his marginalized status in the economy in which he circulates as commodified labor; frustrated, he reaffirms his determination to integrate himself profitably into the economy, but then is literally beaten back from the capitalist promise, usually by an employer, government official, or some other authority figure who polices the boundary restricting who can profit in the economy. Once introduced to the spectacular and varied displays of consumer plenty in the urban center, the “desire to earn money possesse[s] him like a panic.” Munoo marvels at produce displays of “green chillies, green cucumbers, green spinach, pale lady’s-fingers, purple brinjals, red tomatoes, white turnips, grey artichokes, yellow carrots, golden melons, rose-cheeked mangoes, copper coloured bananas, all arranged in little baskets, which sloped up from the foot of each shop to its ceiling, on both sides of the street.” His “mouth water[s]” as he wanders the market, which is “rich... in colour and life... It was a riot of colour and variety, as all the multi-hued and heterogeneous greens which grow in the tropical gardens of Hindustan were there” (125). The limitless array of the vegetable market that Munoo finds so mouth-watering is expressed in terms inflected by capitalist values: the market is “multi-hued,” “heterogeneous,” and characterized by “colour and variety.” These visuals evoke the most robust ideals of capitalism, which promises that diverse economic opportunities and an optimal heterogeneity of consumer products will result from the competitive conditions of the free market.

Munoo is susceptible to these ideals and eager to participate however he can in the market economy. Securing temporary work in a cotton mill, he is captivated by the

industrial landscape where the mill is located: “as he looked across the factories, there seemed something so fascinating in their bare, straightforward look... There was a mysterious superior life wrapped up under them, and the tall chimneys seemed to him wonders of architecture as he speculated on the forms of the machines which must lie at their hearts” (172). Capitalist industry strikes him as “fascinating,” “mysterious,” “superior,” and generally “wonder[ful]”; he cannot wait to start working. But even as Munoo whole-heartedly subscribes to the values of capitalism, Anand foreshadows his economic exclusion. Narrating one of Munoo’s rambles around the city, Anand writes, “[h]e felt as if he were walking in a dream, in a land of romance where everything was gilded and grand... But, as he entered deeper into the town,” he “saw some people like himself who had the aspect of hill folk, as they carried weights on their backs” (9). Soon enough, Munoo begins to recognize his marginalization as he toils in wretched conditions. Working in a pickle factory, he feels “small and insignificant in this underworld of cauldrons and barrels, long, black caverns... The heat of the cauldrons alternated with a stale, smelly draught that came from the caverns, rusting the iron and mixing with the sweat on the flesh to produce a sticky dirt on which the flies buzzed insidiously” (69).

The inescapable filth of the factory overwhelms the very bodies of Munoo and the other laborers. The visceral detail of this passage poses a counterpoint to the consumer wonderland of the bazaar and vegetable market, thus exposing the dark side of the capitalist economy. Nevertheless, the dream—or rather, as Anand bluntly puts it, the “illusion”—of imminent prosperity sustains Munoo. Anand writes,

The illusion gathered force from the sound of the money the... Sahib had fixed as his pay, more money than he had ever earned, from the feel of all the desirable things that he thought he would buy with it, black boots, a watch and chain, a polo topee, shorts, a tunic, and all the paraphernalia of sahib-hood... 'Yes, yes,' he said to himself to ensure the safety of these thoughts. And again he reached out to life, the joy of life which registered in his mind's eye the clear hieroglyphs of numerous desires. 'I want to live, I want to know, I want to work... I shall grow up and be a man, a strong man.' (190)

Here, Munoo proves himself a deserving subject of the capitalist promise. Within the space of this passage he invokes several constitutive aspects of capitalist liberalism, including consumer desire, the equation of work with life, and the conviction that wage-earning is a precondition for knowledge and, following, for maturation and the achievement of vital, economically independent adulthood.

Yet Munoo's goal of attaining adulthood so defined continually eludes him throughout the novel. In a moment of self-reflection in between jobs, Munoo "wished he could grow up soon... He wanted to be a man, to flourish in the true dignity of manhood... He was a little sad to realize that there had not been any appreciable change in his height and girth since he left the village" (91). Soon, his wistfulness becomes agitation: "He was angry with himself and impatient. 'Oh,' he rebuked himself, 'when will I grow up and be a strong man?'" (124). Munoo directly associates his own maturation with his full entrance into the capitalist economy and the strength and dignity

he imagines this entrance will confer. Early in the novel, when Munoo was working as a servant,

it did not occur to him to ask himself what he was apart from being a servant, and why he was a servant... His identity he took for granted, and the relationship between [his master], who wore black boots, and himself, Munoo, who went barefoot, was to him like sunshine and sunset, inevitable, unquestionable. (34)

But as he is refused entrance into the economy again and again as the plot unfolds, there are hints that Munoo's self-actualization might proceed in opposition to rather than in alliance with the conditions of capitalist economics. One of the countless beatings Munoo suffers over the course of the novel—this one by a policeman armed with a baton, for “lift[ing] bundles” at the railway station without a license—makes explicit how members of India's laboring class are definitively disadvantaged by the imperial government's economic policies. “Government orders,” the policeman bellows. “[N]o coolies are supposed to work here without a license!” (136). As he suffers beating upon beating in every new menial job he manages to find, “The boy's soul surged up in rebellion and hate, a hate of which he had not thought himself capable. He was startled” (59).

In the penultimate chapter of the novel, which I will discuss in more detail in the following section of this essay, Munoo joins a union to agitate for better labor and living conditions, with implications for his self-actualization. However, almost immediately after offering his reader the brief hope that Munoo might fulfill his great potential and achieve maturity through his union membership, Anand puts an abrupt stop to the plot

cycle I've described here by narrating Munoo's sudden contraction of tuberculosis. Having procured a grueling job pulling rickshaws, Munoo falls ill with a fever after his first day at work. Within pages, Munoo—whose remarkable constitution has up to this point withstood miserable working conditions, malnourishment, and repeated beatings—rapidly succumbs to the disease. In the final line of the novel—"he passed away—the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps" (282)—Anand specifically invokes language of regression. Munoo has repeatedly proven his fitness to thrive in competitive economic conditions, yet the systemic disadvantages he suffers mean that he can never advance toward self-actualization according to the terms of liberal capitalism.

Munoo is indeed the "representative man" that Jessica Berman explains "lies at [the] core" of the bildungsroman. Yet while in the classic bildungsroman, this representative man's process of "self-development" functions to reinforce liberalism as a mode of political and economic practice, Anand's interpretation of the genre, which concludes with our hero crushed by living and working conditions directly resulting from imperial economic policies, challenges rather than reinforces liberal principles of political economy. Munoo's character features, including his resilience, integrity, and entrepreneurial spirit, give lie to the liberal principle that vast schisms in the distribution of wealth are inevitable since the benefits of capitalist development naturally accrue to the most deserving (that is, the most competitive and enterprising) parties. In Anand's problematized or subverted bildungsroman, Munoo, as the "representative man," stands for the economic marginalization and exploitation of India in the political economy of the British Empire.

## **Anand Engages the Bildungsroman**

The narrative trajectory of *Coolie* consists of Munoo's repeated attempts to self-actualize, followed by his sudden contraction of and death from tuberculosis. Therefore, Anand's engagement of the bildungsroman genre is for the most part subversive. Yet his selective adherence to the conventions of the genre must also be noted in order to fully grasp the dimensions of the novel's ethical position. Most significant is Anand's retention of the bildungsroman convention of the moment of recognition. Anand narrates Munoo's political awakening in response to nationalist labor agitation in the Bombay mill district in such a way as to ally the emerging political consciousness of the subaltern laborer with that of the metropolitan political idealist (such as Anand himself) in response to currents in international socialism. Through Munoo's moment of recognition, Anand advocates a process of individual personality development that resists rather than reinforces the sovereign capitalist state as the macrocosm of which the self-actualized protagonist is a microcosmic representation in the traditional bildungsroman.

Anand's critical engagement of the bildungsroman parallels his critical engagement of the ideology of liberalism that inheres in the genre. *Coolie* emerged out of his struggle during the 1930s to square his resistance to liberal economic values with his attraction to liberal humanist values. Anand's ambivalence toward liberalism developed very early in his career. Born in 1905 to a middle-class Hindu Kshatriya military family in Peshawar, he was raised in an atmosphere of loyalty to the Raj. Yet during the nineteen-teens and into the early twenties, Anand was irresistibly drawn to the spirit of anti-imperial resistance sweeping the Punjab. Following the Jallianwalla Bagh

Massacre of 1919, he was arrested and caned in Amritsar for breaking curfew. He was arrested again in 1924 for his political activities in Lahore. These experiences cemented his resistance to the imperial state and determined his early-career emphasis on Indian independence. Following his arrests in India, Anand traveled to England in 1925 to pursue a degree at University College London; not long after his arrival in London, he witnessed the upheaval of the 1926 General Strike, which, he recollected later, was “put down... with bloody violence. It reminded me of the Seven Stripes I had got in the Martial Law days in Amritsar” (“Mulk Raj Anand Remembers” 178). Anand’s realization in the wake of the strike that “Britain was organized and run in the interests of a small minority which could suppress the majority as violently at home as it did in the Empire” (*Apology for Heroism* 64) was followed by the global economic crisis of the early 1930s. Cumulatively, these factors complicated his inherited investment in liberalism by exposing the economically exploitive and politically repressive conditions attending unrestricted capitalism, wherever it operated. By the mid-thirties, when he was writing *Coolie*, he was convinced that “radical change in economic relations is a basic pre-requisite if a new civilization is to be born” (*Apology for Heroism* 168).

Yet despite his increasingly explicit resistance to liberal capitalism, Anand retained a career-long investment in what he identified as the “cardinal virtues” of European liberalism—“benevolence, charity, good will, righteousness,” and “humanity” (“On the Progressive Writers’ Movement” 11). He viewed these humanist principles as correctives to “the maligning of Imperialis[m]” on the one hand and the threat posed by “narrow nationalists, revivalists,” and “orthodoxy” on the other (“On the Progressive

Writers' Movement" 18). "In India," he wrote in a 1949 letter to George Bernard Shaw, just two years after the independence from European administration for which he had tirelessly advocated, "we want to encourage the kind of thinking which is associated with European humanism and free thought." An examination of the *Coolie* manuscripts housed at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin confirms Anand's ambition to appeal to metropolitan Anglophone audiences. On the back of page 571 of the handwritten version, for example, Anand scrawled a list of English-language newspapers including *The Times of India*, *The Bombay Chronicle*, *The Sentinel*, and *The People*. It is fair to speculate that these were publications that Anand hoped might review and promote his novel once it was completed and published. The typed version also bears evidence of Anand's networking with British literary and political communities. A hand-printed note to the right side of the cover page reads, "typed 1935 by Celia Strachey." Celia was the wife of the former British Labour Party politician John Strachey; that she typed the manuscript indicates Anand's proximity to and engagement with British Labour and socialist circles.

During the interwar years and subsequently in his career, Anand continually aligned himself with influential British humanist literati, including some prominent liberals. He secured prefaces to certain of his works by Leonard Woolf and E.M. Forster, and the titles of his essays "One Cheer For Democracy" (1972) and "Why I Write" (1977) intentionally echo the titles of works by Forster and George Orwell, respectively. Why was Anand so keen to appeal to a British metropolitan audience? Ethical questions arise within social contexts where, due to external pressures, common principles of



conduct dictating entrenched power relations are no longer self-evident. Anand recognized that the emergence of international movements allying the causes of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, and labor rights would demand an ethics to guide the orientation of middle-class metropolitan subjects—British and Indian alike—to influential actors in resistance movements emerging from marginalized populations in England, in India, and in the British Empire at large. Of course, he would have been well aware of the fact that the liberal humanist tradition supplied compelling justification for European empires over a period of centuries. To explain the fact that British imperialism failed to bring widespread social, political, and economic enfranchisement to India, critic Ben Conisbee Baer remarks that “the humanist expression of equality compromises when transposed into colonial spaces” (578). Yet *Coolie* tells the story of exploitation resulting from inconsistencies and short circuits inherent in, not apart from, the value structures of liberalism.

In telling this story, Anand taps in to the history of paradox characterizing the relationship of liberalism and imperialism in terms of economic policy. Anand was keenly aware of the extent to which British colonial economic policy aggravated the poverty of India’s indigent agricultural and industrial laborers. Since the bildungsroman promotes liberal values and ethics, this novelistic form provided Anand with a site of experimentation to express his concerns about the conditions of structural injustice, resisting certain liberal values while selectively retaining others. Reflecting upon his confusion and disillusionment following the global economic depression which, for Anand, significantly compromised the legitimacy of liberalism as a value system, Anand

wrote in his long autobiographical essay *Apology for Heroism* (1946), “I found myself... working out the implications of the various systems of values for living, with great difficulty. Nothing seemed certain in the post-crisis years” (92). As he considered the terms of a system of values and ethics alternative to liberalism, he remained “primarily interested in human values, though I knew I would have to face the problem of politics and economics, particularly the wretchedness of the human beings in India which had been the background of my early life” (82-83). According to the liberal value system with which he struggled during the thirties, “human values” and “the problem of politics and economics” were categorically disconnected from each other. This disconnection was symptomatic of what Anand termed the “casual anarchism of much of contemporary European liberal thought,” which he found “distressing” in his travels around Bloomsbury in pursuit of his literary ambitions during the thirties. He wrote in a 1995 preface to *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, “The writers of the Bloomsbury Group... were, of course, humane people, but... they remained enclosed in their precious worlds, without guilts about their status as aristocrats having been achieved by the labour of generations of industrial workers in Midlands and the colonies” (viii).

The ethics that Anand advances by means of his engagement of the bildungsroman in *Coolie* reacts to the “casual anarchism” of Bloomsbury liberalism by insisting on the interconnectedness of capitalist exploitation of industrial workers in India and England. In his 1942 treatise *Letters on India*, he wrote of the imperial political economy, “you cannot condemn millions of human beings to hardship and privation in one part of the world without affecting the conditions of men in another part of the world.

Thus not only did... British capital... cut the throat of the other, but the horrible conditions in Indian factories [were] a bar to the improvement of the workers' lot in England" (73). The climactic labor strike that takes place in the penultimate chapter of *Coolie* is clearly modeled on the Bombay textile worker strikes of 1928-29; among other identifying factors, Pathans were hired as strike-breakers, triggering, in the novel as in history, the outbreak of severe communal rioting (Sarkar 271; Chandavarkar 315).<sup>24</sup> However, Anand likely also drew on his firsthand experience of the 1926 General Strike in England engineered by the British Trades Union Congress. Indeed, it was the failure of the strike, despite the support of over 1.5 million miners and industrial workers, to head off wage reductions and other austerity measures in the wake of World War I, that convinced Anand that "the people of Britain, no less than the people of India, had yet to win their liberty" (*Apology for Heroism* 35).

Anand's strike scene in *Coolie*, then, is intended to rally both Indian and British left-leaning middle-class readers to the cause of exploited labor in both colony and metropole. The textile strike in *Coolie* is precipitated by an announcement authorized by Sir Reginald White, President of the British-owned cotton mill complex where Munoo works, on behalf of the Sir George White Mills' Board of Directors:

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<sup>24</sup> Rajnarayan Chandavarkar explains the influence of communal tensions on employment practices and trade unionism: "Since competition for jobs (as well as housing and credit) could follow lines of caste and communal difference, trade union rivalries, sometimes promoted by Congress, could acquire a communal edge. Employers frequently sought to diversify the caste and communal composition of their labour force to extend their control over it. When, during strikes, they tried to recruit workers of a different religious, caste, or regional identity from those who had struck, their attempts to manipulate the social composition of the workforce could deepen rivalries, provoke violent conflict and lead—as it did in Bombay in February and May 1929 and again in May 1932—to communal riots" (315).

“In view of the present trade depression and currency crisis and... in order to keep the plant running and to curtail expenses, the mills will go on short time, immediately. There will be no work for the fourth week in every month till further notice. No wages will be paid for that week... This change will take effect from May 10.” (223)

The specifics of White’s austerity measures, including the reduction of wages in a bid to normalize profits during a depression, correspond to rationalization schemes undertaken by heads of industry in both England and India during the late 1920s. The conspicuous shifting of the burden of economic depression onto the working classes in order to maintain industry-head profits was met with decisive strike action—by coal miners and other industrial and transportation workers in England in the nine-day General Strike of 1926, and by predominantly textile and railway workers in the 203 documented labor strikes that rocked Indian industrial centers during 1928-29 (Sarkar 261). Given that the British General Strike and the 1929 Bombay textile strike to which Anand is most explicitly referring in the scene both took place in May, the May dating of the austerity measures and resulting strike action in the novel further link the causes of organized labor in India and England.

In *Coolie*, Anand insists on the economic interconnectedness of colony and metropole and analogizes the exploitation and resistance of workers in India and England. During his career at this time and exemplified by his contribution to the drafting of the Progressive Writers’ Association “Manifesto” (which first appeared in a 1936 issue of the *Left Review*), Anand idealized collaborative solidarity not only between

British and Indian workers, but also between political idealists and members of the working classes in and between India and England. In an attempt to facilitate such solidarity, Anand details Munoo's nascent political consciousness in such a way as to relate it, finally, to the evolving consciousness of political idealists in response to developments in international socialism. The first signs of Munoo's potential to self-actualize in resistance to the conditions of imperial capitalism appear as he develops a friendship with the wrestler Ratan, who, like Munoo, hails from the Punjab and works in the cotton mills. Ratan, one of the most vividly characterized secondary figures in the novel, endears himself to Munoo with the "wild light in his eyes, the deep flush of a broad grin on his cheeks" (Anand 194), his proclivity for practical jokes, and his overall "open, frank nature" (Anand 195). What most thrills Munoo, though, is Ratan's history of labor activism and strike leadership. Ratan regales Munoo with tales of the steel worker strike in Jamshedpur where he was formerly employed: "'There were fifty thousand workers there. And we all went on strike, because they cut our wages. Who brought the company to agree to our terms if not I?' He thumped his chest in a jocular, self-congratulatory way" (Anand 201).

As Ratan identifies with his miserable co-workers in the cotton mill ("I know how hard it is to fight for a wage in this cursed world and then to have nowhere to go, nowhere, nowhere but a toddy shop!") and exhorts them to follow his lead ("Trust old Ratan!... Trust the mightiest wrestler in the world!... What am I a wrestler for if I can't help you? Who would call me the Rustom of Hindustan if with a big body I had not a big heart?") [195-95]), Munoo "conceive[s] a wild admiration for Ratan. He had found a

new hero. He would try to be like him” (195). As he attaches Munoo’s initial move toward self-actualization with the mentorship of a labor rights activist, Anand *detaches* the basic features of traditional bildungsroman self-actualization—wherein the representative self-made man integrates himself into the free-market economy by means of his independent entrepreneurial initiative—from the ideal of personality development inhering to the genre. In this refiguring of the principles of personality development, Munoo represents an ethics (that is, a way of being premised on norms of conduct applicable to both individuals and collectives) emphasizing class solidarity as a corrective to fierce capitalist individualism.

Anand’s introduction of the character of Ratan serves primarily to expose Munoo to the possibility of identifying ethically by resistance to rather than reinforcement of liberal capitalism, but Ratan also evokes the regional specificity of Bombay’s mill districts during the late 1920s. At this time, the densely populated neighborhoods surrounding the textile factories portrayed in *Coolie* constituted a dynamic political terrain where communists made significant inroads in trade unionism and took advantage of the labor platform to advance a nationalist agenda. The years 1928-29, during which Anand sets the novel through his evocation of the Bombay textile strikes, represented the high point of communist influence in Indian labor movements. Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri lists the issues prioritized by communist leaders with regard to labor as follows:

the inseparability of the working-class struggle from the struggle for political emancipation; the need for a working-class party leadership or at least hegemony

of the proletariat in the national movement; struggle in respect of definition of the political goal of freedom to mean complete independence...; persistent use of the strike weapon; [and] overthrow of reformist trade union leadership. (174)

Ratan represents a muscular commitment to working class solidarity: “He had the confidence of his own personal strength and, behind that, the strength of the Union” (Anand 217). Anand’s alignment of Ratan’s physical dynamism with robust trade unionism affirms the influence of the radical left principles listed above on labor movement activities during the late twenties in Bombay. Further, by identifying Ratan as a wrestler, Anand taps into the specific history of Bombay mill district gymnasiums as important sites of labor mobilization during the late twenties. The *akhada*, or gymnasium, was a major determinant of the working-class social and political history of the mill neighborhood. In addition to offering mill workers opportunities to expend their limited leisure by spectating and participating in large-scale wrestling contests,<sup>25</sup> gymnasiums provided headquarters for neighborhood industrial and political mobilization. By the late twenties, the gymnasium was an influential stakeholder in labor matters, attracting the attention of politicians and union leaders such as S.K. Bole, vice-president of the Bombay Textile Labour Union, eager to curry favor with such socially and politically influential neighborhood institutions (Chandavarkar 116-17).

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<sup>25</sup> For example, in 1928, the Hanuman Vyayam Shalla, with multiple branches in Bombay, hosted a contest involving over 150 wrestling bouts. For further history of the mill district gymnasium culture, see pages 114-117 of Rajnarayan Chandavarkar’s *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950*.

The character of Ratan evidences Anand's ambition to achieve vivid regional specificity in his portrayal of aspects of India's working class culture. Yet as Ratan becomes the center of a factionalist drama between the All-Indian Trade Union Federation (AITUF), presided over by the moderate Lalla Onkar Nath, and the radical Red Flag Union, run by the "Indian Sahibs" Sauda and Muzaffar along with the British communist Stanley Jackson, *Coolie* taps in to broader currents in Indian leftism during the late twenties and early thirties. When Ratan is fired from his job at the mill as a result of his activism, he immediately appeals to the AITUF. Arriving at Lalla Onkar Nath's office with the intention of filing a complaint, he is told by the clerk that Onkar Nath is "very busy... He orders you to write to him if you have any complaints to make." Ratan is "impotent with rage," but nevertheless "[sits] down to dictate an epistle seeking redress through the Union for the wrong he had suffered" (218). Later that evening, however, the leaders of the Red Flag Union pay a visit to the room where Ratan and Munoo lodge with several other mill workers. Shaking their heads in disgust at Onkar Nath's "insulting behaviour" (219), Ratan and the communists hatch plans to launch a strike that, while sparked by Ratan's illegitimate discharge, responds comprehensively to the mill authorities' austerity measures.

Shortly thereafter, Ratan and the Red Flag Union representatives gather a massive crowd of laid-off mill workers at the AITUF headquarters to demand action from the Union's President. The debate that ensues between representatives of the moderate and radical left reflects the historical rift that would divide the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) by its tenth session meeting in 1929 in Nagpur. Onkar Nath, whose



title “Lalla” indicates his status as a merchant or trader of the commercial class, is certainly based on Lala Lajpat Rai, the first President of the AITUC. Like the All-Indian Trade Union Federation in the novel, the AITUC became upon its founding in 1920 an important meeting point and channel of redress for aggrieved workers and various labor organizations. Yet the question of the AITUC’s official position on the relationship between labor and capital was a source of controversy during the twenties. Both the fictional and the historical Union Presidents—Onkar Nath and Lajpat Rai, respectively—espouse a Gandhian ethical code, premised on “the interdependence of labour and capital” (Chandavarkar 282), to guide labor and industrial relations. Onkar Nath’s speech to the gathered crowd emphasizing “the common interest of the employer and labourer” and advocating “cooperation in industry between labour and capital” (Anand 232) echoes Lajpat Rai’s presidential address to the AITUC, in which he declared that “Labour and capital... must meet on equal ground and join hands to develop Indian industries” (qtd. in Chandavarkar 281-82).

By contrast, communists desired a more revolutionary identity for the AITUC. In the novel, Munoo is captivated by the conviction of the communists Jackson and Sauda, “whom [he] had often seen lecturing in the mill maidan” (Anand 219). It might fairly be speculated that these characters correspond, respectively, to the historical figures Benjamin Bradley and M.N. Roy: Bradley was a British labor and anticolonial activist who traveled to India in 1927 to help organize militant labor movements in Bombay according to radical communist principles; Roy was a prominent Indian nationalist and founder of the Communist Party in India. According to the historian Satyabrata Rai

Chowdhuri, Roy held “that the task before the AITUC was not reform but revolution. It was not conservative trade unionism based upon bankrupt theories of collective bargaining, but revolutionary mass action that could bring about social progress in India” (172). In the novel, Sauda, pushing Lajpat Rai aside and taking the podium to address the gathered mill workers, represents Roy’s radical left position by categorically rejecting the moderate ideal of harmony between labor and capital: ““Lalla Onkar Nath has too much faith in the mill owners. He says that the mill owners are not your enemies... In fact, there is a world of difference between the mill owners, the exploiters, and you, the exploited”” (Anand 232). Bearing witness to this contentious episode, Munoo remains mired in ignorance about the structural determinants of political economy precipitating it: ““Munoo, who knew nothing about directors and shareholders and threatening crises, believed that it was Ratan’s dismissal that had been the cause of this uproar”” (Anand 226). Ratan brusquely disabuses Munoo of this notion, thus setting into motion for Munoo a process of recognition of the structural determinants of economic and political exploitation: ““It isn’t his anger with me, you idiot, but the big Sahib’s greed that is responsible for the order... You come with me to the [trade union] meeting and you will understand”” (Anand 228). The seeds of Munoo’s political consciousness begin to sprout as Sauda rouses the crowd with his impassioned speech: ““They are the robbers..., the brigands who live in palatial bungalows on the Malabar Hill, on the money you earn for them with your work... You are the roofless, you are the riceless, spinners of cotton, weavers of thread”” (Anand 232). Munoo “felt his blood stirring.” He “stared hard at Sauda and pricked up his ears to listen to every word... [He] felt that... he too had had

similar thoughts about the rich and the poor. But he could not say them like the Sauda Sahib” (Anand 232-33).

Munoo’s potential for self-actualization, then, consists in the inception of his political consciousness as a result of his exposure to socialist resistance to industrial capitalism. In suggesting such a process of self-actualization, Anand takes advantage of the bildungsroman convention of the moment of recognition to raise the possibility of Munoo’s identification as the “representative man” of a socialist rather than a liberal capitalist paradigm of political economy founding the nation. While Jessica Berman is right to point out in her treatment of *Coolie* that the “situation of a *Bildungsroman* set in a colony struggling for its independence practically ensures that the biography cannot go far,” it is not true, as Berman holds, that Munoo “never has the potential to aspire to universality or self-completeness” (“Imagining World Literatures” 67), nor that he “can not even dream of development” (Berman, “Comparative Colonialisms” 475). As Munoo’s friendship with Ratan deepens into “comradeship” (208) around their shared resistance to their miserable living and working conditions, Munoo “felt he was learning to be a grown-up man. He believed he would soon be a full man. Everything he heard, said or did during these hours was important” (Anand 209).

Ultimately, Munoo’s self-actualization is incomplete. Following the dissolution of the strike amid communal rioting, the novel begins to draw to a close by indicating that socialist recognition has eluded Munoo. “[H]e still regarded the trappings of civilization, black boots, watches, basket hats and clothes, with all the romantic admiration of the innocent child” (Anand 248). At the same time, “as he thought of the

struggle and the futility of the waves of revolt falling upon the hard rock of privilege and possession, as he thought of Ratan... and the riots, he felt sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man” (250). Any point of recognition and subsequent self-actualization Munoo might have achieved is doubly compromised—by his continued investment, which Anand associates with juvenile naïveté, in the glories of commercial capitalism, and by his demoralization following the failure of the strike. Simultaneously the casualty of unrealized youthful potential and the disillusionment of bitter old age, Munoo’s political enlightenment dies on the vine without having ripened to maturity.

Given this inauspicious concluding narration as well as the fact that the cyclical plot structure of the novel, wherein Munoo repeatedly tried and fails to integrate himself profitably into the imperial capitalist economy, culminates in his premature death, it would seem that, as Berman holds, Anand’s iteration of the bildungsroman points to a “politics of... disruption, disillusionment, and dislocation” (“Imagining World Literatures” 67). But if, as Berman argues, “The intrusion of the imperial or colonial situation into the tradition... serves to interrupt not only the Bildungsroman itself but also the model of the nation that is figured there” (“Comparative Colonialisms” 475), we must also acknowledge that in situating Munoo’s broadening experience with trade unionism at the consequential climax of the novel, Anand leverages this generic tradition in order to imagine the horizons of non-imperial, non-capitalist political collectivity. Self-actualization eludes Munoo within the space of the novel, but not because Munoo is incapable of transformation. Even while he details the conditions of inequality and exploitation that extinguish his protagonist, Anand attaches significant weight to the

emancipatory potential of international socialism by integrating it with Munoo's fledgling political recognition at the climax of the novel.

The novel concludes tragically for Munoo, but the tragedy itself raises questions about the relationship between institutional and economic values in contexts of imminent decolonization. As tragedies narrate "historical conflicts, crises, and transitions," what "values... come into conflict?" asks critic and philosopher Mark Roche. "Which positions are rooted in the past and which are harbingers of the future?" (12). When it comes to economic globalization, writes ethicist Didier Fassin, the inevitability of marginalization assumed by liberalism is constituted rhetorically: "domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering" (6). Anand prohibits a liberal empathetic reading of Munoo's poverty as unfortunate yet inevitable by continually contextualizing his experience in such a way as to demand of his readers—British leftist intellectuals and Indian educated elites—a recognition that there are structural, historical reasons for Munoo's economic and political exclusion.

Today, historians of Third World influence on international institutions urge that such contextualization, which accommodates diverse stakeholders in specific regional settings, is required to expose as false "the liberal trappings of neutrality, fairness and universality" (Al Attar and Miller 353), and to make way for a redefinition of progress that diverges from liberalism by privileging material equity over formal equality, and recognizing that "special and differential treatment" might sometimes be necessary to end "historical asymmetries" (359). By situating the self-actualization of the bildungsroman as a matter of socialist political consciousness rather than a matter of integration in the

capitalist economy, Anand undoes the liberal twinning of human development and global capitalism (Al Attar and Miller 360) by subverting the liberal logic implicit in what Couze Venn refers to as “transcolonial... political economy,” which links “political rationality to systems for the appropriation and accumulation of wealth” by identifying the “common good with what is good for business” (208). The ethics Anand advocates by means of his critical engagement of the bildungsroman, then, informs and is informed by the emergence of political idealist international institutions to accommodate and respond to international socialist and anti-imperial movements.

### **Ethical Implications for Political Idealism: Anand and the Thirties Movements**

By writing the novel in English and pushing its circulation in literary Bloomsbury, Anand targeted a metropolitan intellectual audience, but the deployment of bildungsroman conventions that would have been so familiar to this audience served to challenge rather than reinforce the legitimacy and integrity of the sovereign capitalist state by insisting that in contexts of globalization, economic questions become ethical ones. Interrupting traditional bildungsroman plotting at some points and adhering to generic conventions at others allowed Anand to navigate his ambivalence toward liberal values, demanding that Bloomsbury liberals recognize the exploitive economic interconnectedness of imperial metropole and colony, while at the same time exploring the terms of a cosmopolitan, socialist ethics that is inspired by liberal humanism yet not beholden to the liberal principle of the self-actualized individual as a microcosm of a capitalist nation-state.

*Coolie* is ostensibly about an exploited laborer, and, by extension, about a subaltern subject position. Yet Anand's narrative raising of Munoo's political and class consciousness is more usefully understood in terms of its implications for and reflection of a political idealist subject position. In addition to the fundamental point of identification between author and protagonist—both Anand and Munoo are Kshatriyas by birth, high-caste members of the traditionally military class—there are parallels to be drawn between Anand's depiction of pre-Independence India and the context of expatriate Indian nationalism out of which *Coolie* issued in the mid-1930s. Like Munoo, Anand also underwent a raising of political consciousness in response to his exposure to Marxism that would directly facilitate his burgeoning nationalism. Many scholars have pointed out that the Marxist political and cultural movements in India “received [their] first impetus from Europe” (Pradhan ii). Indeed, Sara Blair marvels at “the extent to which Anand's work—its emphasis on detailed analysis of the experience of oppression; its insistence on the structural dynamics of labor, profit, and globalizing markets—grows from his involvement with the British Left” (830).

Anand's experience was typical in the Indian student community in England at the time: Anand himself commented, “I don't think there was any Indian student... whom I know in Oxford or Cambridge, who did not become a nationalist at the very last during his sojourn in Great Britain” (qtd. in Bamezai 32). The 1930s saw the rise of fascism under Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler, whose authority threatened civil, political, and labor rights and gave rise to Marxist resistance movements, including an international popular front against fascism during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Anand would volunteer as a member of the International Brigade in 1936, but long before he was compelled to put his life on the line as an advocate of international socialism, Anand had internalized socialist influences and given them expression through his fiction. As K.K. Sharma writes, during the 1930s in England, “it became a fashion and a compulsion to be on the Left, to be an amateur Marxist.” Consistent with the leftist trend, “Anand’s early novels are mainly a literature of protest” (Sharma xvii).

Despite Anand’s avowedly emancipatory intentions, however, from a contemporary critical standpoint his bid to represent a subaltern protagonist might easily be perceived as appropriative.<sup>26</sup> It is important, then, for contemporary readers to approach Anand’s fiction with a sensitivity to the ways in which he falls short of responsible engagement with subaltern identities and histories. One salient instance is his failure to accurately depict the fracturing of the Indian left taking place during the late twenties and early thirties. *Coolie* was published at a consequential crossroads in the twentieth-century history of Indian labor, Indian self-determination, and the related phenomena of international socialism and what Ben Conisbee Baer refers to as “diasporic

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<sup>26</sup> As Neil Lazarus theorizes with regard to representation of otherness in colonial and postcolonial literatures, “It is important to problematise representation and the issues around it where the writer’s desire to speak *for* others—to endow ‘them’ with consciousness and voice—shades over into ventriloquisation, into speaking *instead* of ‘them’: what starts out as an attempt to speak on behalf of others, or at least about others (in the interests of ‘putting them on the map’) ends up, paradoxically, as a silencing of ‘them’ through the writer’s own speech” (145). Snehal Shingavi paraphrases such concerns around Anand’s fiction (in this case, his fiction of untouchability in India): “critics... have pointed out that Anand’s own caste and class position make it impossible to avoid the appropriation of the untouchable’s voice and that ventriloquizing for an untouchable is the same as claiming to represent him at the Round Table Conference” (49).



anti-colonial activism” (576). After World War One, labor movements successfully prompted legislation that materially improved the lot of many of India’s exploited workers. Trade unionism emerged strongly in India in response to economic crises aggravated by the war, and in conversation with labor movements in Britain and Russia. Following the institution of the All-India Trade Union Congress in 1920 to ally the efforts of textile, railway, seamen, mining, and other labor unions throughout India and to represent India in the International Labor Organization, the Labour Code of India was established in 1922 to restrict night work for women and children and to limit working hours in general. The Mines Act of 1923 and the Trade Union Act of 1926 mandated, respectively, improved working conditions in mines and civil protections for trade unions. Yet despite the influence of Indian labor movements on national legislation during the early decades of the twentieth century, the representation of labor interests in the elite sphere of Indian National Congress (INC) leadership remained a source of controversy and contention over the course of much of the movement for self-determination.

Leftists such as Anand advocated the alliance of labor and self-determination movements. As trade union movements gained traction following World War I, labor leaders argued for the inextricability of anti-imperial nationalism and labor interests. For example, B.P. Wadia, an early labor leader, argued that “the labour movement was an integral part of the national movement, which could not succeed” unless the power over economic policies were transferred “from foreign to native hands” (Chowdhuri 168). Yet the question of how to institutionalize the labor identity of Indian nationalism posed

challenges to the INC, which consistently struggled in its ambition to represent the many factional strands of the Indian left. Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922) had mobilized vast swathes of India's laboring agricultural and industrial poor in opposition to imperial authority, and in the 1920 Nagpur session the INC sought to capitalize on this momentum by adopting resolutions to facilitate the participation of laborers in the national movement for self-determination. However, already in this early attempt to accommodate labor interests within the institutional space of the INC, apparently implacable conflicts of interest emerged. The Congress's purported stance against the exploitation of Indian laborers and in support of trade unionism was restricted by the fact that the INC was largely sustained by the financial support of landlords, land owners, and industry heads. What this meant in practice was that while INC leaders sought to harness the dynamic momentum of Indian labor to propel the movement for national self-determination, they were consistently hesitant to leverage their own influence to meet the needs and demands of exploited laborers.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to sparking controversy in the Indian left at large, the question of whether to collaborate with or resist capital precipitated a rift between reformers and radicals within the labor movement in India. In *Coolie*, labor activists are united in their allying of the causes of anti-imperialism and communism. During a union meeting, this

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<sup>27</sup> For further discussion of interwar-era Indian labor movements, Indian nationalism, and factionalism in the Indian left, see Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri's *Leftism in India, 1917-1947*, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar's "Indian Nationalism, 1914-1947: Gandhian Rhetoric, the Congress and the Working Classes" in *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950*, Sumit Sarkar's "Nationalist Advance and Economic Depression, 1927-37" in *Modern India, 1885-1947*, and Nandini Gooptu's *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century*.

alliance comes across through chanted slogans: “Down, down with the Union Jack; up, up with the Red Flag” (Anand 229). Yet the movement is divided between moderates and radicals. In *Coolie*, industry magnates discuss the recent split in the All-Indian Trade Union Federation: “There are two factions in it now... The old Indian Trade Union Federation started by Onkar Nath, and the Red Flag Union, recently started by a fellow called Jackson, from Manchester” (224). The split in labor union leadership that Anand fictionalizes is presumably based on the split that took place during the tenth session of the All-India Trade Union Congress in Nagpur in 1929. During this session, moderate reformers formed an ostensibly “new” organization called the All-India Trade Union Federation, while communist forces seceded to form the Red Trade Union Congress (Chowdhuri 179). The rivalry between these two factions had begun a few years earlier under pressure from the two main international labor organizations, the International Federation of Trade Unions and the Red International of Labor Unions, headquartered in Amsterdam and Moscow, respectively. Both organizations hoped to claim the affiliation of the Indian trade union movement. According to labor historian Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, “The rivalry between the two international bodies centered around fundamental ideological and tactical differences between the communists and the various social-democratic parties.” This “struggle,” writes Chowdhuri, “found its echo in India and plunged the Indian trade union movement into a crisis” (175).

Anand effectively registers the contention between moderate and communist forces in India during the late 1920s, but he conflates the rifts in labor leadership happening around the 1928-29 Bombay textile strikes with the broader factionalization

taking place in the Indian left. The communist Girni Kamgar Union, literally translated as the Red Flag Union, formed during the strikes to promote elected mill-committees as part of a “grass-roots ‘worker’s control’ movement” (Sarkar 270-71). Unlike the Red Trade Union Congress, which formed in reaction to the moderation of the All-India Trade Union Congress to offer a communist alternative to the Indian left at large, the Red Flag Union was instituted in the regionally specific context of the Bombay strikes as a communist alternative to the moderate Bombay Textile Labour Union. By confusing or conflating the Red Flag Union with the Red Trade Union Congress in *Coolie*, Anand diminishes (however unintentionally) the regional and historic specificity of elements and phases of India’s labor movement. In presuming to document the realities of Indian labor movements with which he had no firsthand experience and from which he was quite geographically distant given his residence in England, Anand evidences blind-spots that leave him open to charges of appropriation in his representational practice.

If *Coolie* is problematic in its representations of subaltern subjectivity, Bombay textile labor resistance, and the Indian left in general, it is more successful as an index of political idealist ethical identification in terms of international leftist collectives. The novel is less about the political awakening of the Indian working class than it about the political awakening of a middle-class intellectual enmeshed in leftist internationalism. Munoo represents the influence of Marxism on Indian metropolitan intellectuals through such channels as the Progressive Writer’s Association, the *Left Review*, and the Indian Students’ Union, all based in London during the thirties. When Anand was coming of age during the early twentieth century, Indian leftism was largely identified by what

Mithi Mukherjee calls the “pleading and petitioning” (xxv) mode of advocacy, premised on the liberal idea that self-rule was a gift or privilege to be bestowed by imperial authority. By the mid-thirties, however, a more robust leftism, informed by Marxist principles and agitating for economic and political independence from the empire, was available to Indian nationalists. Munoo’s process of self-actualization represents this trend. Anand’s formal strategy of critically engaging the bildungsroman allows him to imagine an ethical identity that takes integration into a socialist rather than a capitalist economy as its organizing principle and ideal. The ethical perspective that emerges in *Coolie* takes shape in relationship and response to international leftist institutions. At the same time, the ethics Anand cultivates by means of his novel is meant to feed back into these institutions, delineating, clarifying, and refining leftist institutional values.

Between the late twenties and early thirties international leftist collectives, conferences, and congresses proliferated in Europe. For example, the World Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, associated with the Communist International (or Comintern), met in Brussels in 1927; in 1932, the World Congress Against Fascism and War was held in Amsterdam; 1935 saw both the International Conference of Writers in Paris and the formation of the Anti-Imperialist United Front, also affiliated with the Comintern; the International Writers’ Association Congress was held in London in 1936 and Madrid in 1937 (Pradhan vi-viii). Inspired by the International Conference of Writers in Paris and allied with the Comintern, the Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA) was established by Anand, Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zaheer, and other influential Anglophone Indian writers to advance the objectives of

effecting social justice in India, supporting socialist principles that might facilitate better working conditions for laborers internationally, and fostering class-conscious interaction and exchange between British and Indian writers.<sup>28</sup> Thus, even as the “rise of Fascism in Italy under Mussolini and the Nazi power in Germany in 1933 under Hitler,” the “Japanese aggression on Manchuria in 1931, the Italian rape of Ethiopia in 1935,” and the “extinction of Spanish Republic at the hands of Germany and Italy in 1936-37... all in succession tolled the death knell of the League of Nations” (Dhawan 5) and the interwar-era political idealism it represented, non-state-based leftist international collectives of metropolitan intellectual elites flourished. However marginally influential they might have been in geopolitical affairs, they offered principles of identity alternative (or in addition) to state citizenship for metropolitan leftists animated by the idea that culture had a revolutionary role to play in a world where, as postcolonial scholar Leela Gandhi puts it, “a range of individuals find it increasingly difficult entirely to condone the international commitments and networks forged by their governments” (10).

Anand himself, both by his activities and affiliations during the thirties and by his own explicit declaration, perceived the leftist collective as an important avenue toward the implementation of social justice internationally. “[I]t is only the coherence and unity of the enlightened peoples in the various countries, in voluntary organizations based on a minimum basis of common aims, and a broad common philosophy,” he wrote in *Apology*

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<sup>28</sup> For more on Anand’s role in the PWA, see Anand’s “On the Progressive Writers’ Movement” in *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, pages 582-86 of Ben Conisbee Baer’s “Shit Writing: Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, the Image of Gandhi, and the Progressive Writers’ Association,” and pages 2-3 of Gita Bamezai’s *Mulk Raj Anand: The Journalist*.

*for Heroism*, “that can achieve the new way of life” premised on “a recognition of the duties of individuals to each other” (171). During the thirties Anand involved himself with the British Labour Party, the British-based anti-imperial India League, and the Workers Educational Association, where he lectured for over a decade starting in 1932 (Blair 832). He represented India at the 1935 International Writers Conference against Fascism. As a founding member of the PWA, Anand was a frequent contributor to the *Left Review*, which, along with the Hindi literary journal *Hans* (“Swan”), was one of the original publishers of the PWA “Manifesto” (it appears in the February 1936 issue of the *Left Review*). Anand had several short stories published in the *Left Review*: “Bombay Mill,” which features a character named Munoo and consists of key scenes that would appear in *Coolie*, is printed in the May 1936 issue; “On the Border” is published in the August 1937 issue, and “A Confession” appears in the February 1938 issue. Anand reviewed Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* in the April 1938 issue. The international writers’ conferences attended by Anand and other young members of the PWA—the International Congress for the Defence of Culture, which met in Paris in June of 1935, and the Conference of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, which met in London in June 1936—are covered in the August 1935 and July 1936 issues, respectively. And Anand’s talk at the London conference on “the rising forces in Asia and their cultural possibilities” (Kahn 484) is briefly reported in July 1936 issue.

In addition to supplying a forum to explore the possibilities and challenges of a socialist-inspired Indian nationalism, *Coolie* allowed Anand to explore and delineate the terms of an ethical identity for metropolitan political idealists informed by membership in

international leftist-socialist organizations and institutions. The question, which emerges in a context of resistance to liberal capitalism, of the relationship between the individual and the group was a common theme in the *Left Review*: in an article titled “The Individual and the Group” in the September 1937 issue, T.L. Hodgkin wrote,

one of the first questions which a novelist must decide... is what community he will write about, and where in relation to the axes of place and time he will plot his points. Somehow the lives of individuals must be related to the life of a group. But what group? It seems to be a major difficulty for novelists to-day.

(627)

Similarly, Anand wrote in his “Note on Modern Indian Fiction” about the “creative struggle in our country... to see the individual, in and through the group” (56). The question of how to give creative form to issues of structural inequity and, relatedly, how to figure the individual’s relationship to emergent institutions and collectives concerned with such issues, was also an impetus behind the formation of the Progressive Writers’ Association. What Ben Conisbee Baer situates as the galvanizing question of the PWA—“How will we... create a public?” (584)—also implies the question of the relationship between the individual and the group—whether it be the leftist collective or the independent nation—in conditions of socialism rather than capitalism.

This question was an important indicator of the ethics Anand imagined must attend the emergence of socialism as a dominant mode of geopolitics. By refiguring what constitutes self-actualization and social integration, he refigures what constitutes sovereignty, so that it implies independence by means of socialist rather than capitalist



political economy. Yet sovereignty in these terms requires an ethics (a theory of “what it is to live well”) that might inform a morality (a theory of “how we ought to treat others” [Dworkin 1-2]) in conditions of economic globalization. “[I]t is a narrow and prejudiced view of socialism,” writes Anand in *Apology for Heroism*, “which regards it as concerned solely with the economic organization of society... [S]ocialism implies a spiritual change, which will evolve... its own standards of value and its own ideals” (167). Institutional practice according to these terms “becomes a method of ensuring the recognition and the preservation of the dignity of man, the concrete political control by [the people] of their own lives, and the securing of their economic and spiritual freedom” (*Apology* 164). Such a mode of institutional practice implies “*a way of life*”—that is, an ethics—“in which the moral and material urges of the people can have the fullest play” (*Apology* 162-63).

This ethical position suggests a process of social integration premised on identification with collectives revolving around socialist rather than capitalist class interests; it is determined by the recognition that capitalist industrialization is not the only and inevitable avenue toward economic development and modernity; it is further determined by the understanding that imperialism economically debilitates rather than develops native economies. With this awareness of the historic and marginalizing interconnectedness of British and colonial economies, Anand hoped, a “world of human values, as including facts rather than as opposed to them,” might emerge “as the cornerstone of humanism” (*Apology* 190). Defining the “modern” as “against... obscurantism” (“Note on Modern Indian Fiction” 52), Anand rejected the liberal

capitalist disconnection between ethical values and the material conditions of inequality. “The supreme value of life consists... in the attempt to live as part of the whole of things, in the awareness of the *struggle*” (159).

The ethics Anand advocates is rooted in and responsive to the material conditions of suffering, but despite its reliance on socialism and its attraction to internationalism, it does not dispense with the sovereign nation. The content of *Coolie*, including themes of Indian economic independence and solidarity between Indian and British communists, as well as the conditions of its authorship and circulation evidence Anand’s impulse to reconcile his Indian national identity with his membership in international leftist collectives. The socialist call to identify in terms of international cross-class solidarity rather than in terms of individual integration within a sovereign capitalist state is exemplified in a speech by Henri Barbusse excerpted by Christina Stead in the August 1935 issue of the *Left Review*:

The artist... *has to choose*... between nationalism and internationalism. The question of the progress of the human species and of its salvation is put between nationalism indispensable to the bourgeois empire to maintain its force and internationalism, indispensable to men to build up justice and peace. (470)

Anand’s critical engagement of the bildungsroman allows him to chart a less radical ethical position that squares regional and national identity with international affiliations in part by distinguishing between sovereignty based on capitalism and sovereignty rooted in socialist principles of economy. Jessica Berman writes in “Regional Cosmopolitanism” that Anand’s engagement with India during the thirties seems “to have

grown out of, rather than conflicted with, his displacement and relocation... highlights the possibility of the development of important loyalties beyond strict national boundaries” (148). Even as he critiques the sovereign capitalist state, Anand emphasizes the necessity of an economically independent, socialist-inspired India supported through processes of ethical identification attaching to international leftist institutions. In this way, Anand offers an ethics for political idealists appropriate to a world where the nodal network is a more accurate descriptor for international relations than is the imperial divide between metropolitan center and colonial periphery.

## Conclusion

At its heart, this dissertation is concerned with how the novels under consideration contend with the dilemma of how the beneficiaries of imperialism can commit themselves in good faith to the rights and causes of those marginalized by imperialism. Woolf, Holtby, and Anand are middle-class figures who, by means of their fictional representations of class others in contexts of colonial contention, explore the possibilities and limitations of their own middle-class ethical subject positions with regard to liberal international institutionalism and interventionism. In a context of increasing globalization (which challenged Britain's centrality in world affairs) and strongly emergent self-determination movements (which challenged Anglo-European authority in world affairs), the novelists in this study question liberalism as the prevailing Western political perspective. By manipulating genres with historic relationships to the institution of liberalism, these authors critically examine how the ethics of liberalism functionally determines Anglo-European imperial and humanitarian interventions in Asian and African contexts.

This dissertation is premised on the notion that fiction has an important role to play producing student insights into the ethical implications of international interventionism. Read together and in context, the novels of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand exemplify the function of fiction to offer an ethical education in an era of globalization. Today as in the interwar period, military, economic, and humanitarian international interventions by powerful states are justified using the terms and rhetoric of liberalism. If "humanitarianism" was the operative paradigm of interwar liberalism, "human rights" is

the operative paradigm today, though humanitarianism remains central as well. I intend this study to contribute to the broad interdisciplinary critique of international economic and humanitarian interventionism as represented in TWAIL (Third World Approaches to International Law) in legal studies, activist research in anthropology, and the movement in studies of history to analyze the ongoing legacy of international humanitarianism.

If Woolf, Holtby, and Anand are critical of the various forms of liberal economic and humanitarian interventionism that appear in their novels, none of them take the position that middle-class, metropolitan alliance with the emancipatory objectives of the colonized is inevitably a failed project. In fact, over the course of these novelists' careers, the critiques of interventionism in their fiction inspired and informed their respective involvements in small-scale projects connecting them with collaborators abroad. Woolf's collaboration with Ceylonese lawyer E.W. Perera on a media campaign to expose British-imposed martial law in Ceylon, Holtby's professional relationship with South African trade union organizer Clements Kadalie, and Anand's work to facilitate literary exchange between Indian intellectuals and Anglo-European writers such as George Bernard Shaw exemplify these figures' common investment in the potential of cross-national collaboration, often as facilitated by international institutions and organizations.

Furthermore, the critical perspectives on liberalism present in the novels do not indicate these novelists' outright rejection of liberalism. All of them retained selective investments in the notion of the universalism of Anglo-European liberal values. Anand, despite his unequivocal opposition to British imperialism in India and his support of

international socialism, nevertheless championed British humanism. Holtby and Woolf retained their belief in the superiority of liberal Anglo-European modes of law and politics, even as they advocated international socialism and self-determination campaigns in Africa and South Asia. Woolf's acerbic critique of the League of Nations Mandate System did not prevent him from influentially supporting the League (and, by extension, supporting the privileging of the authority of Western states) in his capacity as Secretary of Labour Party Advisory Committees on International and Imperial Questions. And despite Holtby's skepticism regarding British humanitarianism premised on racial categories of civilization, her contributions to South African trade unionism, including the appointment of the British union organizer William Ballinger to advise Kadalie, demonstrated her assumption that political and institutional expertise flowed in one direction from Britain to Africa.

Collectively, the novels of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand offer a study in how liberalism *and* challenges to liberalism influenced state, institutional, organizational, and individual interventions across lines of class, nation, and ethnicity during the interwar period. Reading each novel in terms of its pertinent historical context as well as its respective author's political and advocacy biography, this study raises the question of whether political idealism with its attendant international institutions and organizations can facilitate middle-class interventions across restrictive lines of privilege imposed by imperialism, without reproducing imperialist patterns of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement. Political idealist institutions and organizations including, in this project, the League of Nations, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigine's Protection Society, and

international-socialist-inspired writers' collectives including the Indian Progressive Writers' Association and the British *Left Review*, must of course be differentiated from each other. For example, the *Left Review*'s literary and journalistic representations of exploited laborers in the colonies are not comparable in scope or consequence to the legal representation of subaltern interests undertaken by the League of Nations Mandate System. But all of these organizations and institutions were commonly characterized by middle-class efforts to represent subaltern interests in elite metropolitan literary and legal spheres. Examined in political idealist context, the fiction under consideration offers insights into both the successes and shortcomings of these efforts.

By the mid-1930s, the global economic crisis as well as the rise of fascism under Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler effectively tolled the death knell of the League of Nations and the version of political idealism it represented, which in general uncritically assumed global interdependence as a positive value. However, the body of fiction under review remains relevant to ongoing efforts to theorize the ethics of international interventionism and institutionalism. A collective reading of the colonial fiction of Woolf, Holtby, and Anand complicates assumptions in studies of modernism that modern novelists were not overly concerned with matters of empire, and that even when they were their fiction was irrecuperably complicit with the discriminatory ideologies of imperialism. A study of the novels in this project offers a dynamic view of the landscape of interwar leftism, while also re-centering the significance of generic forms in an area of literary study often dominated by emphases on formal innovation.

Yet in addition to providing a useful dimension to studies in modern literature, these novels also constitute an important juncture in a periodization of literature responding to twentieth- and twenty-first-century international interventionism. Although published decades before decolonization began in earnest in the British Empire, the novels in this study address Simon Gikandi's quintessential postcolonial question—in “a world defined by cultural and economic flows across formally entrenched national boundaries,” why and how is it that “the world continues to be divided, in stark terms, between its ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ sectors” (628-29)? In taking on pressing issues of the global inequity attending imperialism, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand affirm Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby's identification of the modern period as “the true starting point of post-colonial critique” (4). They do this in part by means of their common move to denaturalize liberal capitalism as the inevitable mode of economic globalization. Also, since Woolf, Holtby, and Anand use tactics of representation and genre engagement that de-emphasize empathy in favor of humility as an objective of the novel form, it is possible to discern in these writers' fiction what Neil Lazarus terms a “‘postcolonial’ ethical sensibility.” Lazarus writes that this sensibility is specifically not governed by empathy—“although empathy is plainly and appropriately in evidence”—but rather by the “acute awareness of the violence entailed in any insufficiently mediated attribution of consciousness across the colonial divide” (126).

While the degree to which each novelist demonstrates such awareness is up for debate, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand implicitly acknowledge the hazards of empathy. In his history of humanitarianism, Fassin observes that the inevitability of marginalization



assumed by liberalism is constituted rhetorically: “domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, violence is expressed in terms of trauma” (*Humanitarian Reason* 6). Telling what were, during the period under review, hitherto seldom told stories of globalization and imperialism—such as the withering of traditional Ceylonese agricultural practices as a result of British colonial land distribution policies, the entrenchment of an impoverished underclass in India by British trade and labor policies, and the continuum of humanitarianism and imperialism in the context of British anti-slavery advocacy in Abyssinia—Woolf, Holtby, and Anand sought to undo the liberal twinning of human development and global capitalism. Recognizing that there are structural, historical reasons for economic and political inequity, these novelists objected to race-based classifications of civilization. Relatedly, they objected to the liberal conviction, taken for granted on account of the “natural” hierarchy of people, that vast schisms in the distribution of wealth worldwide are inevitable since the benefits of development legitimately accrue to those individuals and powers most fit to succeed in the competitive conditions of global capitalism.

Certainly, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand encourage their metropolitan readership to identify with subaltern protagonists and characters, but the identification these novelists seek to cultivate is less about empathy with others and more about self-reflective humility. The novelists’ depictions of ethnic and class others are not always adequate (or even intended) to get the reader inside the skin of the subaltern subject, but they do effectively challenge the reader to confront exploitive conditions attending early-twentieth-century globalization. If the purpose of the novel has historically been to

provide an ethical education, these novels de-emphasize empathy, teaching instead that reflecting on oneself and one's context of privilege is a precondition to an ethical orientation toward those de-privileged by imperialism. Unlike Forster and Orwell, whose fiction conveys pessimism about the possibilities of cross-class, cross-ethnic, and cross-national connection and collaboration, Woolf, Holtby, and Anand demonstrate in their fiction and in their internationalist careers their commitment to such possibilities. But these possibilities must start from the premise that there are always unintended consequences of engaging with difference. Attempts at engagement must be approached with a humility born of a comprehension of one's globalized context, and an awareness of the specificity of regional contexts even in the broader context of globalization.

Colleges and universities increasingly offer students opportunities to engage across lines of privilege and class through study and internship abroad programs as well as domestic community engagement and service learning curricula. As they offer students these opportunities to engage, institutions of higher education, including the departments and programs that constitute them, must also equip students with a historically contextualized understanding of the features of responsible engagement. The undergraduates with whom I currently work in my capacity as Graduate Assistant in Human Rights and Social Justice at the Bridging Disciplines Program at the University of Texas at Austin are representative of the student populations I want to reach and connect with by means of my research. These students came of age in a post-9/11 world, and many of them are already alert to the "dark sides" of human rights and humanitarianism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century geopolitics. They are eager for opportunities to

explore the ethical implications and dilemmas of social justice scholarship and practice. In response to these students' interests and concerns, I intend this project to help delineate an interdisciplinary curriculum that draws on a growing corpus of literature offering critical perspectives on international interventionism, including fiction such as *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin, and *Don't Cry* by Mary Gaitskill, memoirs such as *Emergency Sex and Other Desperate Measures* by Heidi Postlewait, Kenneth Cain, and Andrew Thomson, studies in international law and political science such as *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* by David Kennedy, and studies in ethics and philosophy such as "Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life" by Didier Fassin. Texts like these take for granted the fact that unintended consequences will occur in international interventions of all scales and scopes, and offer tools to help students constructively reflect upon such consequences.

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