



# **No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations**

*Mark Mazower*

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*No Enchanted Palace* traces the origins and early development of the United Nations, one of the most influential yet perhaps least understood organizations active in the world today. Acclaimed historian Mark Mazower forces us to set aside the popular myth that the UN miraculously rose from the ashes of World War II as the guardian of a new and peaceful global order, offering instead a strikingly original interpretation of the UN's ideological roots, early history, and changing role in world affairs.

Mazower brings the founding of the UN brilliantly to life. He shows how the UN's creators envisioned a world organization that would protect the interests of empire, yet how this imperial vision was decisively reshaped by the postwar reaffirmation of national sovereignty and the unanticipated rise of India and other former colonial powers. This is a story told through the clash of personalities, such as South African statesman Jan Smuts, who saw in the UN a means to protect the old imperial and racial order; Raphael Lemkin and Joseph Schechtman, Jewish intellectuals at odds over how the UN should combat genocide and other atrocities; and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who helped transform the UN from an instrument of empire into a forum for ending it.

A much-needed historical reappraisal of the early development of this vital world institution, *No Enchanted Palace* reveals how the UN outgrew its origins and has exhibited an extraordinary flexibility that has enabled it to endure to the present day.

## No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations Details

Date : Published October 1st 2009 by Princeton University Press (first published January 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9780691135212

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Format : Hardcover 236 pages

Genre : History, Politics, Nonfiction, Political Science, International Relations

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# **From Reader Review No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations for online ebook**

## **Sean Meriwether says**

Manzower traces the origins of the UN Charter signed in 1945 and the ways in which it succeeds, and more often fails, to live up to our expectations for this international organization. Our hindsight view of the UN's original mission might be altruistic, even Utopian, but as the motives of the primary players are revealed we get the unsanitized reality behind the UN's first decades. The charter was a document of its time, drafted as an optimistic response to the devastating aftermath from a second World War. However, it was more or less a continuation of the failed League of Nations, and created to secure the power of the ruling countries and keep imperialism alive and well. The charter's European focus, led by Anglophile Jan Smuts, who dreamed of whites settling and improving Africa, completely—one might say intentionally—ignored the rights of minorities; it was in their best interest to be led by those who knew better. The chapter dealing with the resettlement of displaced European Jews in the Middle East, thus displacing Arabs and causing tensions that remain today, was the most fascinating section in light of current events. Luckily the UN has changed with the times, and though it may not be a perfect organization, the charter did leave the door open for smaller countries with less powerful voices, who have recently become more visible.

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## **Zack says**

Very thought provoking and made me reconsider the UN in a new light that had never occurred to me before. If definitely like to revisit it someday when I know more other perspectives.

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## **Marcy says**

I found this book by accident, but I'm glad I discovered it. While much of what is in the book is based on ideas I suspected in one way or another, it is fascinating to read the detailed historical elements behind those suspicions. Essentially Mazower explores the theory that the United Nations was created to preserve empire rather than to destroy it (this is why the veto power and the Security Council are set up in a way that favors particular states). The most fascinating element of this story is that of Jan Smuts, one of the architects of apartheid in South Africa who is also one of the architects of the United Nations. He framed documents to structure both systems--the state and the UN--in ways that would serve the British empire in particular. What he did not account for was the way that leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru--anticipating the Non-Aligned Movement post independence--would use the General Assembly to his own ends in ways that ultimately would lead to the downfall of apartheid in South Africa as well. Anyone interested in the birth of the United Nations should read this book as it is clear and well written and deeply interesting.

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## **Jason S says**

A concise book with a great thesis: that the origins of the UN were really rooted in realism and power politics. Although the technique of using small biographies in each chapter is effective at providing support

for the thesis, the book tends to wander at times because of this. Overall a good book that asks us to view the successes of the UN as large because of its origins instead of viewing these as limited because of its seemingly lofty origins.

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### **Tyler says**

I was slightly disappointed with this book because I thought it could have been more expansive. The history of this world body is a tough subject (because it doesn't arouse the same passions as individual nations) but I think Mazower's use of individual narratives was too restricting.

The book is structured three general geopolitical situations and how the United Nations was used to further the goals of different parties. Using examples from South Africa, Israel and India seems too random. I do agree that the whole idea that the UN was developed to further colonial ideologies rather than bring about world peace is an important point to make but I think Mazower leaves a large part of the story of the UN untold.

In other words, I don't think a book that tells 3 experiences in the UN does justice to a body that has 192 members.

Don't get me wrong, I liked this book, but I think it could have benefited from a wider brush.

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### **Mohamad Ballan says**

The United Nations and the idea of internationalism have, in recent years, become subjects of serious debate. How tenable is the idea of an international peace-keeping body in an increasingly polarized and fragmented world? How relevant is the United Nations in an era in which genocide and other abuses are rampant? Has the United Nations become an instrument for the Security Council (US, UK, France, Russia, China) to exercise their influence in the world and maintain their hegemony? Why should ultimate authority and the right to veto resolutions rest in the hands of a select few? Many have even argued that the UN, dominated as it is by Great Power interests, is hardly representative of the concerns of the General Assembly of Nations (the overwhelming majority of which are Third World countries) and that the absence of an effective enforcement mechanism has made it a counter-productive force in world politics. Regardless of which position one takes or their view on the United Nations, the debate is framed in strictly modern terms, focusing largely on the question of reform rather than reconceptualizing the dominant paradigm. In doing so, the debate takes for granted many of the institutional and ideological facets of internationalism. Indeed, many scholars—on various sides of the debate—have left the idea of internationalism, and its historical foundations, unquestioned. It is as if internationalism, institutionalized in an international organization, is merely the product of the natural progression of human history, untainted by specific historical and ideological factors.

Mark Mazower, in his book *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009), makes uncovering the ideological origins of the United

Nations and the idea of internationalism itself his primary concern. The work is a magnificent accomplishment and very timely. As a distinguished historian of 20th-century Europe, Mazower is well-placed to analyze the diplomatic, intellectual, and political trends in (Western) Europe and the British Empire which led to the rise of internationalism. Many will find his analyses and conclusions especially troubling. Mazower strongly and effectively argues in favor of the notion that the UN, as an ideological and institutional successor of the League of Nations, owes much of its origins to European imperialism. This deep-rooted liberal imperialism, he notes, sought to remake the world in its image and maintain the dominance of the self-proclaimed “white race” (read: Euro-American) over the “black, red, yellow, and brown races” (read: everyone else!) of the globe. Moreover, as Mazower demonstrates, this imperialism was refashioned in the inter-war period into an ideal of “internationalism,” which, among other things, sought to proliferate liberalism (firmly rooted in democratic ideals and Christian ethics) globally, freeze the international political status quo, and suppress the aspirations of the indigenous people of the world by legitimizing their domination and marginalization by the traditionally dominant powers of the world (namely the British).

Mazower thus asserts that the institution of the United Nations, like its League of Nations predecessor, merely sought to ensure and legitimize the domination of the world by European liberal imperialism. Nowhere in the origins of the United Nations, he emphasizes, does one find a concern for indigenous peoples, their aspirations, or their rights. Even the principle of national self-determination was intended above all for European peoples. There was no possibility for “Oriental” and “African” peoples, on the other hand, to exercise this right. They would simply need to be placed under mandates and/or trusteeships until they were instructed by “civilized nations” in the craft of “enlightened government.” For the modern observer, however, this is very troubling. Surely, the ideological and institutional origins of the United Nations, an organization based on such sublime and lofty ideals as “world peace” (read: maintaining the status quo) and “human rights” (read: European Christian values) do not lie in such imperial and racist notions as the mission civilisatrice? Surely, one may assert, the idea of internationalism is not the brainchild of such ideologues as Jan Smuts (architect of South African apartheid), Winston Churchill (ardent proponent of the British Empire), Joseph Schetmann (Revisionist Zionist in favor of ethnic cleansing in Europe and the Middle East) and Alfred Zimmern (defender of liberal imperialism), figures who sought to preserve the status quo of Western European (“white”) hegemony around the globe? In fact, this is precisely the well-supported and compelling conclusion which Mazower arrives at. More troubling still is his demonstration that this imperial-internationalism was undertaken consciously and overtly, and was in some cases so explicit that many contemporary observers commented on the sheer hypocrisy of the project, especially in light of the struggle against Nazi fascism in Europe. To cite one example, Mazower quotes the American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois criticizing the basis and motivation of the new internationalism:

We have conquered Germany...but not their ideas. We still believe in white supremacy, keeping Negroes in their place and lying about democracy when we mean imperial control of 750 millions of human beings in colonies

Although Mazower is not a complete cynic, he does believe that the “original sin” of internationalism and the United Nations needs to be acknowledged and amended before any meaningful reform of the organization can be undertaken. In the meantime, as Mazower reminds us, we have a lot to think about, since the convergence of imperialism and internationalism remains a reality even in an allegedly post-imperial world.

I recommend this book in particular to those whose confidence in the international system remains absolutely unshaken, because it will definitely challenge your views and invite you to look at things in new ways. I also hope students of modern history, politics, and international relations would be able to give it a read as it

would help frame many of the problems we all deal with in our own work.

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## Michael Kotsarinis says

3.5/5

Σε αυτό το βιβλίο ο συγγραφέας επιχειρεί μια προσέγγιση των βασικών ιδεών που διαμόρφωσαν τον ΟΗΕ και καταδεικνύει πως αυτές δεν ήταν καθόλου νέες και καινοτόμες αλλά αντιπροσέπευαν μια εξέλιξη της Κοινωνίας των Εθνών και επιπλέον παρήκριν την περὶ του αντιθέτου ρητορική υπήρχαν στη βάση της γένεσής τους αντιλήψεις που σήμερα θα τις χαρακτηρίζαμε ρατσιστικές. Βέβαια, πολλὰ ἄλλαξαν ἀπὸ τότε και μᾶζι τους και ο ΟΗΕ με τρέπους που οι εμπνευστές του δεν είχαν φανταστεί.

Το βιβλίο δεν είναι μια ιστορία του ΟΗΕ, οἷτε καν της δημιουργίας του. Ἐστιζει σε ορισμένα κρῖσιμα πρῶπα και γεγονῶτα που παίζαν σημαντικό ρῶλο στην ἀρχική διαμόρφωση του οργανισμού; επιχειρῶντας νᾶ διαφωτίσει τον τρέπο σκέψης που επικράτησε. Σῶγουρα δεν είναι το πιο συναρπαστικό βιβλίο του συγγραφέα και δεν θα το πρέτεινα ὡς πρέτη ἐπαφή με αυτόν, οἷτε ὡς πρέτη ἐπαφή με το ιστορικό βιβλίο.

This book is not about the history of the UN but it rather focuses on the development of the ideas that were crucial in their creation. The author examines certain persons and events that played an important part in formulating the ideological base of the new organisation and exposes the underlying assumptions of the organisation's creators. It is not a history of the UN and it isn't intended as such. I would recommend it to readers that have an interest in politics and the formulation of international treaties but not to readers looking for their first book on the history of the UN.

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## Sara says

### The shift away from the protection of cultural minorities, and the rise of universal biology

*[Through my ratings, reviews and edits I'm providing intellectual property and labor to Amazon.com Inc., listed on Nasdaq, which fully owns Goodreads.com and in 2013 posted revenues for \$74 billion and \$274 million profits. Intellectual property and labor require compensation. Amazon.com Inc. is also requested to provide assurance that its employees and contractors' work conditions meet the highest health and safety standards at all the company's sites.]*

Coming to this fascinating book from the current emphasis on the "success" achieved in the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals - one of those "technical" UN initiatives - one is struck by how early on in the history of the UN the seeds were sown of the MDGs jarring disregard for cultures and civilizations beyond the names of the countries printed on a map.

In the aftermath of the second world war, minorities were considered by international diplomacy the main threat to world peace, in a reversal that only confirms René Girard's theory about the centrality of the victim in any anthropological development (and the common sense notion that punishment calls for guilt). Minorities could no longer be acknowledged or protected, as the League of Nations had committed to do

between the two world wars. Population transfers were the solution to the problem: millions of Germans were uprooted from Polish territories and sent to Germany, millions of Poles uprooted from Ukraine and sent to Poland, etc for the sake of peace and national security, and in seamless continuity with Hitler's policies. Against this backdrop, the displacement of millions of Muslims and Hindus from India and Pakistan following India's independence appears perfectly normal, and the creation of Israel logical. The only option for a minority to gain protection was to become a nation-state, with internal ethnic homogeneity.

The UN compensated for this denial to cultural minorities of any right within a nation-state by issuing in 1948 the Declaration of Human Rights. This by-passed those intermediate formations that go by the name of societies, peoples, etc. to look at the human being as a biological creature, in need of a proper habitat in order to reproduce. A biologist was soon afterwards appointed to lead UNESCO, the "cultural" body of the UN. The impossible relationship between nation-states and minorities as sanctioned by the UN Charter also casts a new light on the guiding principle of 'separate development' (Apartheid in Afrikaaner) that was globalized through the socially acceptable notion of 'self-determination' (that often translated into the dumping of a minority outside national borders). The role of Jan Smuts, the founder of Apartheid, as a founding father to the UN on behalf of the British empire is analyzed into detail in the opening chapter of the book.

More than sixty years on - after Bosnia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Darfur, ...- significant progress has been made in institutionalizing this biological approach to human history, namely through the painstaking collection of statistical quasi entomological data. We can all thus rejoice in learning by how much life expectancy has increased in Sudan over the past fifty years, which makes us understand that the eradication of poverty is a practical reality.

The possibility for sovereignty to be felt above, below and beyond the nation-state - as globalization on the one hand and anthropology on the other have proven - for the UN is a structural taboo. The impossible relationship between the nation-state and minorities as sanctioned by the UN charter also casts a new light on the guiding principle of 'separate development' (Apartheid in Afrikaaner), which was globalized through the socially acceptable notion of 'self-determination'. The role of Jan Smuts, the founder of Apartheid, as founding father of the UN on behalf of the British empire is analyzed into detail in the opening chapter.

There's much more to this book than this, and its conclusions are more optimistic than mine. Since all the facts about the history of the second world war and the establishment of the UN are given for granted, this can often be a confusing read. More typos than acceptable.

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## **Margaret Sankey says**

By asking an obvious yet overlooked question--why the hell was Jan Smuts (seriously, Jan Smuts, Boer Kommando and British Imperial Frontman!) trusted to write the preamble to the UN Charter, Mazower builds a case for the intentions of UN founders to preserve the old empires, and how stunningly the 1960s and decolonization caused this to bite them in the ass and turn the organization into something rather different than originally planned.

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