

FORUM

# Theorizing the history of women’s international thinking at the ‘end of international theory’‡

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## Abstract

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were leading intellectuals on International Relations (IR). They thought, wrote, and taught on this subject in numerous political, professional, intimate, and intellectual contexts. They wrote some of the earliest and most powerful theoretical statements of what would later become core approaches to contemporary international theory. Yet, historical women, those working before the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, are almost completely missing in IR’s intellectual and disciplinary histories, including histories of its main theoretical traditions. In this forum, leading historians and theorists of IR respond to the recent findings of the Leverhulme project on Women and the History of International Thought (WHIT), particularly its first two book-length publications on the centrality of women to early IR discourses and subsequent erasure from its history and conceptualization. The forum is introduced by members of the WHIT project. Collectively, the essays suggest the implications of the erasure and recovery of women’s international thought are significant and wide-ranging.

**Keywords:** History of international thought; gender; women; international theory

## Anthology against/as Canon?

Adom Getachew

The publications of the edited volume, *Women’s International Thought: A New History*, along with the anthology, *Women’s International Thought: Towards a New Canon*, are set to transform how we understand the history of international thought and the development of the field of international relations (IR). The collection of 104 selections from 92 thinkers in the anthology coupled with

‡Please also see the Introduction to this Forum by Patricia Owens, Sarah C. Dunstan, Kimberly Hutchings, and Katharina Rietzler: ‘Theorizing the history of women’s international thinking at the “end of international theory”’, this issue.

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the contributions to the edited volume illustrate that if women have been absent in the history of international thought, 'it is because the historian [but also the political theorist and scholar of international relations] did not seek energetically to find them'.<sup>1</sup> This project is first and foremost an act of historical recovery but not one that seeks to simply assimilate women's contributions into the existing frameworks of the fields of international thought and IR. Instead, as the ambitious sub-title '*Towards a New Canon*' suggests, the aim of the project is to more thoroughly re-envision these fields, by surfacing different questions, methods, and strategies from women's intellectual production. As Glenda Sluga has argued in her contribution to the volume, the rethinking of 'who counts as an international thinker' generates also a reconsideration of 'what counts as international thought'.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, the anthology covers standard topics of IR from war and diplomacy to international organizations. At the same time, it brings to the foreground themes that have been outside of or marginal to the field such as the role of a gendered division of labor in structuring international politics, the significance of public opinion and education (marginalized especially with the dominance of realism), and the rise of feminist internationalisms. The anthology also includes a wide range of genres and authorial styles. Some of the writings included are excerpted from longer monographs while others are taken from pamphlets, magazines, and news papers, some of which the authors founded.

In this essay, I would like to think through the methodological challenges and opportunities opened by this venture at both historical recovery and the constitution of a new canon. I begin with a meditation on the form of the anthology and the ways its structure enables us to simultaneously consider the who and what of international thought. The form of the anthology, I argue, productively complicates any effort at canonization. I will then more closely engage the volume's essays on Black women's internationalist thought to illustrate in more specific terms how the ambivalent relationship to canonization is productively put to use to expand our understanding of what counts as international thought.

The field of IR was formalized during the post-World War II period in the USA. When this occurred, as Robert Vitalis has argued, the discipline erased its longer history, eliding its central preoccupations with race and empire and distancing itself from its entanglements with a range of disciplines especially history.<sup>3</sup> This was also a moment of shoring up a canon of IR not unlike the formation of a political theory canon in the same period. The canonization of IR involved both installing founding fathers from Thucydides to Hobbes and organizing the discipline around schools of thought often named for these figures.<sup>4</sup> There were to be sure earlier appeals to authoritative figures and texts. Indeed, F. Melian Stawell, the woman who coined the term 'international thought' in her 1929 *Growth of International Thought* constructed her own canon drawing on figures from ancient, medieval, and modern European thought from Socrates, Plato, Dante, and Machiavelli to Grotius, Rousseau, Burke, and Kant.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kerber in Owens and Rietzler 2021, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Sluga 2021, 225.

<sup>3</sup>Vitalis 2015.

<sup>4</sup>Owens et al. 2022, 5.

<sup>5</sup>Sluga 2021, 228.

However, the canonization of the post-World War II discipline narrowed and formalized the founding fathers of IR in ways that corresponded with the dominance of realism in this period.

This project of canon formation not only involved a selective and exclusionary set of male intellectuals, but it also had the tendency to present the discipline of IR as if it were an on-going dialogue organized around a set of perennial questions. Stawell herself was very clear about the question to which she believed the history of international thought was an answer. As Sluga puts it, she was concerned with ‘specifically internationalist thinking premised on the progressive evolution of ever-enlarging political communities to the ends of peace’.<sup>6</sup> This attention to internationalist international thought makes Stawell representative of the internationalisms that characterized the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and distinguishes her canon building from the post-World War II period. Yet these two projects converge not only in that they include some of the same figures, but also in that they are concerned with contributions to the disciplines of international thought that primarily and broadly take the form of political treatises.

The anthology of *Women’s International Thought* disrupts the formation of a canon around a limited set of perennial questions and the privileging of the treatise as the genre of international thought. Organized around 19 themes, it collects writings that span the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In each section we thus have writings that represent interventions at various historical moments and some of the authors, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Rosa Luxemburg, Simone Weil, and Merze Tate appear in more than one section. This collage of writing asks us to think of the themes not as static objects of inquiry over time, but as arenas inflected by specific historical moments that require novel formulations of the central questions. To take one example, the anthology invites us not to think of ‘anticolonialism’ as a discrete and closed tradition but as a series of interventions that reframe and reformulate the critique of empire in historical, imperial, and generic contexts. This orientation toward multiplicity and multivocality also characterizes the anthology’s approach to more traditional themes of international thought such as war, diplomacy, and geopolitics.

Complementing and enhancing the multiplicity of perspectives are the range of genres represented in the anthology. Excerpts of larger works are included in the anthology and even these resist the standard form of the canonical treatise. A selection from Eslanda Robeson’s travel narrative *An African Journey*, for instance sits alongside those drawn from more academic monographs. On the whole, however, the anthology leans toward short-form essays published as pamphlets or in newspapers, journals, and magazines. The absence of ‘great books’ is not to be bemoaned, however. Instead, the form of the essay makes more visible the ways in which international thought was a field of debate and argumentation in which women penned interventions that sought to shift debates of their own times. It also asks us to attend more closely to the audience to which and for whom they wrote. Rather than search for timeless foundations or identify the eternal questions of international thought, we see more clearly how argumentative strategies, style, and rhetoric were mobilized to produce timely interventions.

<sup>6</sup>Sluga 2021, 228.

One can imagine the recovery and canonization of women's international thought taking the form of a book series that republishes key monographs. In contrast to such a model, the anthological form, as a genre of collage, is particularly apt for rethinking the terms of canon formation. Some of the women included like Nancy Cunard were themselves engaged in the production of anthologies. Jane Nardal, for instance, worked to ensure that Alain Locke's *New Negro* anthology would circulate in the Francophone world. In her essay 'Internationalisme noir', a term she coined, she notes Locke's anthology as one example of the ways that 'American blacks have been pioneers' for adapting elements of Western civilization while refusing a rejection of blackness.<sup>7</sup> As editors of newspapers, Sylva Pankhurst, Claudia Jones, and others also did the work of assembling a chorus of voices.

Even as the anthology gathers together and assembles in one volume, it is at the same time a form that resists this impulse, that remains heterogenous and centrifugal. In this way anthologization and canonization stand in generative tension with each other. On the one hand, the act of assembling in an authoritative volume is an effort at staging the significance of the writings collected and making an argument for their contributions to a new canon of international thought. On the other hand, the anthology resists the privileging of one genre or one set of questions, tendencies that have frequently coincided with the making of canons.

The editors of the two volumes as well as the authors of the essays in *Women's International Thought: A History* reflect in various ways on the complex politics of canonization. First, they acknowledge the differentiated relationship that women intellectuals have had to the standard canons of international thought. Where for example Simon Weil has received 'minor acknowledgement in IR's existing canon', 'street scholars' like Amy Ashwood Garvey and Mittie Maude Lena Gordon are far from even the margins of the field.<sup>8</sup> Second, some of the historical women at the center of this project were likely to be ambivalent to or unconcerned with their inclusion in a canon. As Sluga notes of Stawell, while having been the first to name the field of international thought, she would have been 'unlikely to make an argument for equality on the same basis as men'.<sup>9</sup> Third, the marginalization and exclusion that characterized in divergent ways the experiences of all the women surveyed in this project urges us to constantly be vigilant about the boundary-drawing that comes with canon formation. The project of recovering and restaging women's international thought as enacted across these volumes thus reflects a multifaceted approach to the politics of canonization that exposes the complex relations of women intellectuals to mainstream as well as canonical figures and ideas, that demands their centrality to the history of international thought, and that remains alert to persistent boundaries of exclusion.

I would like to address these three elements of the approach with attention to the essays that take up Black women's intellectual history in the volume. Vivian May's chapter on Anna Julia Cooper and Barbara Savage's on Merze Tate highlight the contributions of African American women who against many odds pursued higher

<sup>7</sup>Nardal 2022, 202.

<sup>8</sup>Dunstan and Owens 2022, 198. 'Street scholars' is Ula Taylor's phrase. It is employed in Keisha Blain 2021, 179.

<sup>9</sup>Sluga 2021, 239.

education up to the PhD level at elite institutions; Cooper at the Sorbonne and Tate at Oxford then Harvard. Though marginalized and often isolated in these contexts, Cooper and Tate found themselves among the leading intellectuals of their respective fields and with access to and knowledge of the central academic debates of their time. Their innovative interventions in the history of international thought emerge from their contestations with the terms of the debates they encountered in these settings. Cooper for instance innovated methods that combatted ‘the politics of absence’ by reading against the grain, and revising temporal frames to represent the past in new ways.<sup>10</sup> In her 1925 dissertation, *L’Attitude de la France à l’égard de l’esclavage pendant la Révolution* (translated as *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutionists*), Cooper employed these methods to pioneer a critique of the limits and contradictions of French republicanism even as members of her dissertation committee like Célestin Bouglé advanced precisely the views she challenged.<sup>11</sup> Tate’s dissertation, *The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for Limitation of Armaments to 1907* critically engaged the politics of disarmament and advanced what Savage calls ‘a social movement theory’ that highlighted various levers of transformation and analyzed persistent power structures. Unlike her Oxford teacher, Alfred Zimmern, who maintained a whiggish faith in the role of enlightened public opinion to lead a transformation of global politics, Tate offered a more circumspect conclusion, highlighting the overwhelming roadblocks thrown up by empires and powerful nation-states. The illusion in her title referred not to pacifism as such, but to the view ‘that there had been any real movements toward limiting armaments’.<sup>12</sup>

As May and Savage highlight the methodological and substantive contributions of Cooper and Tate to the history of international thought, they are alert to the limits of recovery and canonization. Savage for her part resists the framing of Tate as part of what Robert Vitalis has called the ‘Howard School of International Relations’. She argues that ‘like other myths, schools and paradigms in the history of international relations, this label ... implies these ideas [of the ‘kinship between racism and imperialism’] were attributed to or restricted to a single site of influence despite their widespread acceptance among a very broad black public’.<sup>13</sup>

Essays by Imaobong Umoren on Eslanda Robeson, Keisha Blain on Mittie Maude Lena Gordon, and Robbie Shilliam on Amy Ashwood Garvey speak precisely to the necessity of maintaining a broader and more flexible conception of Black women’s internationalist thought. Umoren notes of Robeson that as an anthropologist and journalist Robeson often had access to formal networks either through professional accreditation or through her connection to politicians and activists. Yet if she was an insider in these ways, she never fully fit into one ideological or organizational mold. Her position as an ‘insider-outsider’ contributed to inflecting her international thought with an orientation toward political action and practice. ‘Ideas-in-action’, Umoren argues, ‘were a distinct and robust mode of her thought’.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>May 2021, 33.

<sup>11</sup>May 2021, 47.

<sup>12</sup>Savage 2021, 274.

<sup>13</sup>Savage 2021, 276.

<sup>14</sup>Umoren 2021, 97.

Blain's and Shilliam's contributions to the volume extend this question about the relationship between ideas and practice. In doing so, they compel a further consideration of the limits of canon formation. Blain notes that the explosion of interest in Black women's intellectual history has worked to re-center 'elite and middle class black women' like Tate, Robeson, Shirley Graham Du Bois, and others, but is only just beginning to take up women like Gordon who had 'limited or no formal education'.<sup>15</sup> This emphasis on elite women is connected in part to what Shilliam argues is a still too narrow conception of theory and thought which is equated with an author and his/her text. Where "'theory" gives too much to written composition', Shilliam foregrounds 'living knowledge traditions' in which theorizing is a practice.

Garvey and Gordon exemplify such traditions for their theorizing is intimately connected to their pan-African political projects. Gordon founded and led the Peace Movement of Ethiopia, which advocated repatriation, but also cultivated Afro-Asian solidarity and articulated a defense of Japanese imperialism, a position many African American figures held in the 1930s. It was not that Gordon did not write, but here writing appears in the context of movement building and takes the form of letters, petitions, and pamphlets. Blain's use of Gordon's epistolary exchanges, through which she forged connections with Japanese activists, is especially generative for it pushes us to think through what counts as text in our accounts of international thought. In a similar fashion, Shilliam draws our attention to Garvey's 'artistic output'. Though overshadowed by Marcus Garvey and often assimilated to his ideological and political project, Shilliam argues that in her fiction like *Brown Sugar* and *The Jungle of Civilization* she developed a distinctive perspective on 'race-mixing'. Where Marcus viewed it 'as a political dead-end', Amy 'seemed to find the psychological and social mechanism and consequences of "mixing" worthy of careful study and intervention rather than a priori moral dismissal'.<sup>16</sup> Just as important as her own praxis of theorizing is the ways in which she fostered social spaces in which others might convene and collectively assess their political predicaments and forge new solidarities. For instance, her Florence Mills Social Club, named for the African American cabaret star, would be a central space for the gathering of Black intellectual and activists.<sup>17</sup> Just as Gordon's letters invite a consideration of the blurring of the personal and political, Garvey's club alerts us to the modes of sociality – the food, the music and dancing, the laughter – that sustained and shaped Pan-Africanist thought.

These interventions bring us back to the generative possibilities of the anthology as an exercise of assembling that refuses assimilation. We might borrow from Garvey's 'fractal Pan-Africanism' as we think through women's international thought. 'The fractal disposition', Shilliam writes, 'renders a straight line as a set of infinitely recursive relations'.<sup>18</sup> The anthological form disrupts the 'straight line' of the canon, built around a conversation and inheritance that links one great man and his text to the next. If this collection of women's international thought points toward a new canon, it is a necessarily fractal canon, radically

<sup>15</sup>Blain 2021, 181.

<sup>16</sup>Shilliam 2021, 172.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. 166.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. 178.

recasting the terms of inclusion and proliferating the terms and forums of debate within its boundaries.

## Women in the History of International Thought

Duncan Bell

It is an honour to participate in a forum dedicated to the brilliant Women in the History of International Thought (WHIT) project. The project, spearheaded by the two volumes under discussion, is an essential intervention in scholarship on the history of international thought, and will reshape the way that the subject is researched and taught. It poses a challenge to conventional understandings of the character of international thought, forcing a reconsideration of what counts as thought and who counts as thinker. I have divided my comments between two sections. First, I discuss how the volumes contribute to historical scholarship on international thought. Second, I suggest that the scope of international thought, including women's international thought, might be expanded yet further by incorporating speculative fiction.

### Expanding the history of international thought

There has long been a tension between two different ways of practicing the history of (international) political thought. One emphasizes philosophical systematicity, rigour, and complexity, as the benchmarks for significance and conscription to the canon. In so doing it focuses attention on certain kinds of text, above all the elaborate treatise. International thinkers of note, on this account, are those who have produced such works. An alternative approach adopts a broader conception of political thinking, encompassing cultural production of various kinds – speeches, pamphlets, administrative reports, sermons, newspaper articles, paintings, songs, film, music, the built environment, even computer games. These are treated not just as materials helpful for contextualizing canonical texts and thinkers, but as independent sources of scholarly interest.

Both *Women's International Thought: A New History* and *Women's International Thought: Towards a New Canon* adopt the latter format. The editors make a sophisticated and compelling case for employing a capacious view of international thought, and the contributors demonstrate the virtues of such an approach. They are clear that addressing the absence of women's voices is not solved by adding a select group of women to the canon, significant as that task remains. Drawing on insights from feminist and African-American historical scholarship, they contend that conventional understandings of intellectual history embed problematic assumptions about who gets to count as an international thinker in the first place. Institutionalized modes of exclusion have meant that women – and women of colour, in particular – have only rarely been in a position to produce the kinds of writing that have typically been considered significant in traditional intellectual history. A seemingly neutral methodological choice about how to

conduct research leads to the reproduction of exclusionary norms in the field. ‘This process of IR’s canon formation erased women and people of color, leading to an inaccurate and deficient account of the history of international thought’.<sup>19</sup>

The contributors to *A New History* demonstrate the value of attending to the variety of media in which thought – often highly sophisticated and consequential thought – was produced. If we only focus on elaborate theoretical texts, we miss much of the action, and privilege those who were already privileged. They also show the importance of rethinking who should count as notable producers of international thought. It is necessary to expand the compass of intellectual history, studying (e.g.) the work of social reformers, administrators, teachers, librarians, artists, and activists, as well as scholars. *Towards a New Canon* reinforces this point. Comprising 104 excerpts from 92 authors, it spans a huge range of material, from academic monographs to poetry. It will be an invaluable teaching resource, as well as a spur to thinking about further directions for research.

*A New History* traverses an impressively wide and variegated terrain. The opening chapters address the thought of figures well-known in their time, but who have rarely figured in accounts of international thought (Anna Julia Cooper, Simone Weil, Rosa Luxemburg, and Eslanda Robeson). Another cluster of chapters explore the ideas of women who worked in or adjacent to academic institutions, women who often made important contributions to international thought that were subsequently downplayed or ignored. This includes Vera Micheles Dean, Krystyna Marek, F. Melian Stawell, Merze Tate, and Barbara Wootton. But the volume also explores how it is possible to capture the thought of those who left few writings or whose most important intellectual labour was never published. This requires moving far beyond the conventional interpretive protocols of intellectual historians, to explore, among other things, what Ula Taylor refers to as ‘street scholarship’.<sup>20</sup> We see this careful, creative act of recovery, for example, in Keisha Blain’s chapter on the Black working class intellectual Mittie Maude Lena Gordon, and in Robbie Shilliam’s account of Amy Greenwood Garvey’s important contributions to pan-Africanism. Such work challenges how intellectual history should be understood.

The WHIT project demonstrates the great value of scholarly collaboration and institutional infrastructure for pursuing ambitious, field-changing research agendas. As well as these two volumes, the leaders of the project, Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, and Kimberley Hutchings, have produced a series of important articles in both political science and history journals, establishing the absence of women’s work in existing scholarship on international thought and identifying new research strategies.<sup>21</sup> Sarah C. Dunstan, the post-doc associated with the project, has begun to publish her own impressive work on the subject and created a new Oral History resource.<sup>22</sup> And there is much more to come, including doctoral research and publications, and a free Public Exhibition at the LSE Library.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Owens *et al.* 2022, 6.

<sup>20</sup>Taylor, cited in Owens and Rietzler 2021, 14.

<sup>21</sup>Owens 2018; Huber *et al.* 2021; Hutchings and Owens 2021.

<sup>22</sup>See, e.g. Dunstan and Owens 2022; Dunstan 2021a, 2021b. The Oral History can be accessed at <https://whit.web.ox.ac.uk/oral-history-archive>.

<sup>23</sup>Joanna Wood, D.Phil. dissertation in progress, University of Oxford.



This signals the importance of two things. The first concerns the powers and possibilities of collaborative scholarship. *Towards a New History* marshals a stellar group of scholars from across assorted fields, and working within different intellectual traditions, to produce a book of admirable range, originality, and ambition. No single scholar, however talented or industrious, could have pulled this off. A second, related point, concerns the importance of institutional resources. Large-scale interdisciplinary research projects require time, infrastructure, and serious funding. In a political climate often hostile to critical work in the social sciences and humanities, it is vital that such projects are supported by funders and by academic institutions. It is heartening to see that the WHIT project has received considerable support, notably from the Leverhulme Trust and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Once again, it provides a model for how collaborative scholarship can be pursued.

### Feminist speculative fiction as international thought

The introductory essays to both volumes mention fiction in passing. Building on this insight, I want to make a case for seeing it as an important source for historians of international thought. There are multiple ways to approach this question. In a recent WHIT project article, for example, Hutchings and Owens analyse the thought and reception in International Relations (IR) of Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner, whose work features in *Towards a New Canon*. They argue that an analysis of Suttner's fiction – including her best-selling novel *Die Waffen Nieder!* (1889), translated into English as *Lay Down Your Arms!* (1893) – and its reception in histories of international thought show ‘how gendered assumptions bite deeply into not only attitudes towards women scholars but also assumptions about the substance and form of what counts as international thought’.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the First World War, Samuel Moyn contends, ‘no document of Western civilization did more to turn what had been a crackpot and marginal call for an end to endless war into a mainstream cause’.<sup>25</sup> It was an important contribution to international thought.

Here I focus on speculative fiction, which I define in a deliberately expansive way as encompassing science fiction, fantasy, and the utopian/dystopian tradition. Speculative fiction utilizes thought experiments and imaginative world-building to illuminate features of our present world and to explore a range of alternative possibilities. There is an informative body of IR scholarship dedicated to the subject.<sup>26</sup> Yet little attention has been paid to it as source material for historians of international thought, even though geopolitical themes – war and peace, state-building and empire, capitalism and its alternatives – saturate the genre.<sup>27</sup> Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), for example, sits firmly in the tradition of 20<sup>th</sup> century explorations of totalitarian politics and the dangers of utopianism, and it was motivated by a question that continues to resonate: ‘if you wanted to seize power in the US, abolish liberal democracy and set up a dictatorship, how would you go about it?’<sup>28</sup> Drawing inspiration from a wide range of historical

<sup>24</sup>Hutchings and Owens 2021, 354.

<sup>25</sup>Moyn 2021, 52.

<sup>26</sup>See, e.g. Kirby 2017; Jones and Paris 2018; Weldes 2003.

<sup>27</sup>Although see, Matarese 2001; Bell 2020.

<sup>28</sup>Atwood 2012.

examples, and responding to the rise of the Religious Right in the United States, the book shows the fundamental role that policing gender and sexuality plays in establishing and reproducing hierarchies of power. The transnational circulation of motifs and slogans derived from the book and later TV series – from protesters clad in red and white outfits to placards demanding ‘Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again’ – demonstrate the cultural salience and affective power of fictional world-building. Atwood’s later work, most notably the MaddAddam trilogy, explores the potentially catastrophic consequences of bio-engineering and climate change, while once again reflecting subtly on the very purpose of dystopian fiction in facing the future. More recent works have also explored questions of empire and international organization, including the *Terra Ignota* series by Ada Palmer, Malka Older’s *Centenal Cycle*, and Arkady Martine’s *A Memory Called Empire* (2019) and *A Desolation Called Peace* (2021). Other works, including N. K. Jemisin’s multi-award winning *Broken Earth* trilogy (2015–17), can be read as a powerful meditation on racism and climate catastrophe.<sup>29</sup> All are contributions to the history of the present.

Here I will mention three examples that could be included in research and teaching on the history of international thought: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974), and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993).

A well-known feminist writer and suffragette on both sides of the Atlantic, Perkins Gilman made her name as a social thinker with *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relations of Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898), an attempt to combine evolutionary theory and feminist social criticism.<sup>30</sup> She challenged what she saw as the exclusive focus on men in evolutionary theorizing, arguing that gender roles were social constructs that reproduced patriarchal structures of power. From a very young age women were socialized to see their roles as confined to the domestic sphere, rendering them psychologically and financially dependent on men. From the 1890s until the 1930s Gilman developed variations of this argument across multiple genres. *Herland* is her most detailed attempt to envision an alternative. An example of ‘separatist feminism’, it is a thought experiment that imagines an isolated utopian community populated entirely by women. Gilman uses it to fictionalize her argument for the benefits of granting women economic independence and to challenge conventional understandings of the gender order. While at first glance *Herland* says little about international politics, the eugenic policies and assumptions about ‘Aryan’ superiority and civilizational hierarchies that run through the text articulate the racialized vision of world order prevalent at the time.

During the 1970s feminist writers remade the utopian tradition, challenging totalizing models of ideal societies (of the kind found in *Herland*) while defending the value of utopian desire.<sup>31</sup> Speculative literature was utilized as a site for the articulation of radical political projects by second-wave feminists. ‘[T]he last few

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g. the analysis of Jemisin (and Atwood), in Thaler 2022.

<sup>30</sup>Perkins Gilman is mentioned in a footnote in *Towards a New Canon* (Owens et al. 2022) listing women who could have been included (16n56).

<sup>31</sup>Moylan 1986. Some of these texts are discussed in Crawford 2003.

years', Joanna Russ observed in 1981, had witnessed 'a mini-boom in feminist utopias, a phenomenon obviously contemporaneous with the women's movement itself'.<sup>32</sup> This included Marge Piercy's, *Women on the Edge of Time* (1972), Le Guin's, *The Dispossessed* (1974), Russ's own, *The Female Man* (1975), and Samuel Delaney's, *Triton* (1976). Russ identified similarities between the social orders imagined by the authors. First, central government was replaced by 'communal' forms of socio-political organization based around extended families or kin groups. Second, they had an ecological orientation, emphasizing the need to live in harmony with the natural world. Third, they were radically egalitarian, with class hierarchies largely eliminated. Fourth, sexual permissiveness was the norm, 'not to break taboos but to separate sexuality from questions of ownership, reproduction, and social structure'.<sup>33</sup> And finally, though not pacifist, they were largely peaceful.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) Le Guin imagined an egalitarian society on a planet, Gethen, populated by 'ambisexual' individuals. But it is *The Dispossessed* (1974), subtitled 'An Ambiguous Utopia', that offers the most for historians of international thought. It is at once a product and a critique of a particular geopolitical moment as well as a sustained account of how a radically different form of politics might function:

I needed to understand my own passionate opposition to the war that we were, endlessly it seemed, waging in Vietnam, and endlessly protesting at home. ... knowing only that I didn't want to study war no more, I studied peace. I started by reading a whole mess of utopias and learning something about pacifism and Gandhi and nonviolent resistance. This led me to the nonviolent anarchist writers such as Peter Kropotkin and Paul Goodman. With them I felt a great, immediate affinity. ... They enabled me to think about war, peace, politics, how we govern one another and ourselves, the value of failure, and the strength of what is weak. ... So, when I realised that nobody had yet written an anarchist utopia, I finally began to see what my book might be.<sup>34</sup>

The story is set on two planets, Anarres and Urras. Urras is a multi-state world dominated by two great powers, A-Io and Thu, the former a patriarchal capitalist society, the latter an authoritarian socialist one. By contrast Anarres is organized along anarcho-syndicalist lines, a system based on worker solidarity and co-operation, direct democracy, and self-management. This allows Le Guin to critique the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War and to sketch an anarchist society as it struggles to establish and maintain itself.

Butler's two *Parable* novels, written in the 1990s, are powerful reflections on racism, social collapse, and global climate catastrophe.<sup>35</sup> Written in 1993, *Parable of the Sower* is a dystopian tale of human survival in the face of social breakdown. Set in the 2020s, it imagines a future United States that has dissolved into a series of largely autonomous territories and corporations fighting over dwindling resources.

<sup>32</sup>Russ 1995, 139.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Le Guin 2017.

<sup>35</sup>Streeby 2017, ch. 2.

Despite its grim setting, a glimmer of hope can be found in *Earthseed*, the Astro-religion devised by the extraordinary teenage protagonist, Lauren Oya Olamina. Adherents of the religion are committed to the prophetic belief that humanity will ultimately escape the doomed earth through space exploration, creating new worlds better than the old. In the closing pages of *Parable of the Talents* (1998), Olamina lives to witness the rockets ascending. As Butler wrote elsewhere: 'There may be nothing new/under the sun,/but there are new suns'.<sup>36</sup> Indeed her work can be read, in part, as experimenting with the 'liberatory potential of space futures', in contrast to more conventional imperial versions of space conquest.<sup>37</sup> A prescient example of speculative engagement with climate apocalypse and its socio-political consequences, the Parables are only likely to grow in relevance.

The reception of *Herland* and Butler's work also speak directly to some of the concerns about canon formation, and the politics of knowledge production, that animate the WHIT project. *Herland* was first serialized in *The Forerunner*, a magazine edited by Gilman, but it was only published in novel form in 1979, when it was reclaimed by feminist literary scholars constructing a useable feminist canon. Butler's work, meanwhile, has been retrospectively incorporated into the canon of Afrofuturism, a tradition that began to be self-consciously articulated and theorized in the 1990s.<sup>38</sup> In both cases, albeit in different ways, the politics of canon formation – its potential as well as its dangers – are foregrounded.

In conclusion, the work that has so far emerged from the WHIT project – including the two volumes under discussion in this symposium – constitute a fundamental contribution to the history of international thought. They will make a deep impression on both teaching and research in the field for years to come.

## On Whose Shoulders am I Standing? My Debt to Louise Holborn

Cynthia Enloe

Louise Holborn, with her partner Gwendolyn Carter, were pathbreakers in the creation of the political science field of comparative politics. Researching refugee politics and African decolonization, Holborn and Carter saw comparative politics and international politics as in constant conversation. As an undergraduate taught by Louise Holborn, I scarcely appreciated her intellectual contribution. Reflecting on this embarrassing past, I sort out the causes of my shallowness and come face to face with patriarchy.

Fanning Hall was a plain stone building dating from the founding of Connecticut College for Women in 1911. There were no elevators in Fanning, and our political science classes were held on the top floor. We could hear Miss

<sup>36</sup>Canavan 2014.

<sup>37</sup>Kilgore 2003, 29.

<sup>38</sup>On Afrofuturism, see Lavender 2019; for a key text in the construction of the Afrofuturist tradition, see Thomas 2000.

Holborn before we saw her. She arrived in the classroom huffing and puffing, having climbed up the three flights of stairs. She was a heavy-set woman, by then in her early sixties. She was so eager to begin her lecture, however, that she would not pause to catch her breath. Her English was still heavily accented with her native German. This, plus her initial breathlessness, made listening to her opening sentences a challenge.

Louise Holborn was an international politics thinker. Born in 1898, she attended the Universities of Heidelberg and Berlin.<sup>39</sup> She emigrated to the USA in the early 1930s to study for her PhD in political science at Radcliffe, at that time the semi-autonomous women's college attached to (though not taken truly seriously by) the male-only Harvard University. Even before she became a professor of Government (as 'Conn's' political science department then was named – as was Harvard's) in 1947, Louise Holborn had conducted substantial research and writing on the politics of refugees and on the international organizations created by states to administer the hundreds of thousands of women and men displaced by two world wars.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, none of us callow 19 year olds in the late 1950s, leaning forward in our chairs there atop Fanning Hall in an effort to grasp Miss Holborn's breathless opening sentences, knew any of this. To us, she was an unfashionable, unmarried woman. Serious about her subject, yes; serious about our learning, yes. She was our committed guide into the differences between parliamentary and presidential systems, true. Yet, in our shallow vision, she was a rather pathetic figure.

Louise Holborn was no fool. She knew what the young women sitting before her (we all were white and from middle class, mostly Republican-voting, families) imagined.<sup>41</sup> Only occasionally would she let us know she knew. One day, for instance, she let drop that in her pre-World War II childhood home in Germany her parents hosted informal chamber music gatherings, in which a violin-playing Albert Einstein would join. Albert Einstein and Miss Holborn in the same family parlor? This did manage to upset our casual assumptions.

It was another day's detour, however, that I most vividly remember. Maybe it was in the midst of her describing the structural workings of the Soviet Union's political system. Miss Holborn paused, leaned on the podium box that sat on the table in the front of the classroom, and looked steadily at us. 'You think I have had no chance to be married'. All 20 of us froze. Of course, that is exactly what we thought. But we didn't know that Miss Holborn knew that that was what we thought. Marriage? Being mentioned in a university course on Comparative Politics? This in itself was discomfiting. Miss Holborn continued looking at us. 'I had opportunities to get married. But I chose not to'. And then she returned to her notes on the podium and continued her explanation of the relationships between the Politburo and the Central Committee.

<sup>39</sup>The papers of Louise Holborn (1898–1975) are available at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA: <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/6107>.

<sup>40</sup>Before and during her time on the faculty of Connecticut College, Louise Holborn wrote and published: Holborn 1943, 1948, 1956. She also served as historian of the Liquidation Board of the International Refugee Organization in Washington, Paris, Geneva, Frankfurt, and London and published the official history of the IRO. Following her retirement from Connecticut College, she published Holborn 1975.

<sup>41</sup>I have written more extensively about the influence of my Connecticut College education on my journey to becoming a feminist in Enloe 2017.

Teaching Soviet politics to college undergraduates in the late 1950s was an intellectual innovation. After all, these were years when US higher education was infused with the intensely politicized dynamics of the Cold War. Louise Holborn, however, taught Soviet politics with the same straightforwardly structural approach with which she taught British and French politics. Miss Holborn's comparative politics class was not exciting; it was informative. That, given the heated contemporary political American context, now seems to me to have been quite remarkable. Clearly, Louise Holborn made an intellectual decision to teach Soviet politics as a subject worthy of studying dispassionately. It was a decision to analytically craft a new subfield of political science, 'Comparative Politics'. Those decisions grew out of her collaboration with another mid-20<sup>th</sup> century woman political scientist, Gwendolen Carter.

Gwendolen Carter would become one of the co-founders of African Studies in American academia.<sup>42</sup> Another naturalized American citizen (Carter was born in Hamilton, Ontario in 1906), Carter, like Louise Holborn, saw politics, both national and international, through the frame of governance. To make reliable sense of governance, both Holborn and Carter came to believe, structure does not have to be relied upon to explain everything: both Carter and Holborn were keen explorers of historical context. Yet structure does matter. Structure, they were convinced, is a topic that must be taken seriously by political analysts. That framing, for each of these notably underestimated international political thinkers, was not the stuff of dry organizational charts. It was loaded with meaning and consequence.

By the time I was doing my own doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley, in the 1960s, post-structuralism was hogging the analytical center stage, shoving structural analysis into the proverbial wings. Nonetheless, I remained grateful that I had been taught politics by an international thinker who took structure seriously. As a feminist analyst, I have learned to interrogate cultural dynamics and to keep a sharp eye on personal and ideological interactions that perpetuate distinctive (sometimes toxic) institutional ecosystems. Nevertheless, I was taught also to stay alert to the structural factors that perpetuate racialized sexism. How else could I today make sufficient sense of the workings of patriarchal impunity within international militarized peacekeeping militaries?<sup>43</sup> How else could I now understand why many transnational feminists expended so much strategic energy to shoehorn Article 7 on gender-based violence into the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty?<sup>44</sup>

Louise Holborn and Gwendolyn Carter first met when they were graduate students at Radcliffe in the early 1930s.<sup>45</sup> By then, Gwendolyn had graduated from the University of Toronto in Canada and gained a Master's degree from Oxford

<sup>42</sup>Among Gwendolen Carter's best-known publications are 1958, 1960, 1982, and 1985.

<sup>43</sup>I am grateful to Madeleine Rees, Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and her WILPF colleagues for tutoring me on how impunity is greased by structural conditions within UN-authorized peacekeeping operations. See also the Code Blue project of the international NGO, Aids Free World: [www.aidsfreeworld.org](http://www.aidsfreeworld.org), accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>44</sup>Article 7 of the ATT obligates the treaty signatories to take explicit account in their export decisions of weapons being used to commit gender-based violence in the importing country. To Ray Acheson, director of WILPF's Reaching Critical Will project, I am indebted for insights into the prolonged and contentious Arms Trade Treaty negotiations within the UN. For more on the feminist lobbying inside the UN that helped shape the ATT – and the resistance to those feminist efforts – see: Enloe 2014, 23–28.

<sup>45</sup>Carter n.d.

University in Britain. Having been stricken with childhood polio, Gwendolen was making her way in the world on crutches, carrying with her the added weight of iron braces on both legs. Meeting Louise at Radcliffe fueled her life with added energy:

‘It was at Radcliffe that I met Louise Holborn, who became my lifelong friend and colleague in thought and often in action...my first impression of her was rushing downstairs with her arms full of books to one of the coaching engagements with which she was trying to meet her expenses...her energy and enthusiasm for whatever she was engaged in was contagious’.<sup>46</sup>

Their friendship was mutually fruitful. Louise took on many tasks that Gwendolen’s braces and crutches made it hard for her to manage. In turn, Gwendolen, who owned a car she had named ‘Shan’, taught Louise to drive: ‘...though she was always so eager to get ahead that we got involved in some very narrow squeaks!’<sup>47</sup>

Their collaboration was intellectually vibrant from the start. Looking back, even though by the time they met Gwendolen had earned degrees from the University of Toronto and University of Oxford, she recalled that Louise Holborn was academically ‘far more sophisticated and, in some respects, better trained than I was’. She continued:

‘...Louise had a much better background in international law, political analysis and much of academia, not to mention much wider experience in earning her living than any of the rest of us [as graduate students at Radcliffe in 1932]’.<sup>48</sup>

During their decades together, Louise Holborn and Gwendolyn Carter traveled extensively in Europe – London, Paris, Berlin, and Geneva. Later, they extended their travels to sub-Saharan Africa – South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Kenya. As they traveled, digging into official archives, conducting interviews, observing political life first-hand, Louise and Gwendolen developed their ideas: about both international and national politics, about decolonization and democratization, about localized loyalties, nationalism, and attempts to forge inter-state regional political unity. They were particularly interested in the early post-colonial politics of one-party-dominant political systems: especially their causal relationships to democratization, to sustaining cross-ethnic solidarity. They urged outside observers not to impatiently judge newly independent sub-Saharan governments’ political leaders by ahistorical criteria.<sup>49</sup>

Miss Carter (then teaching at Smith College) occasionally came to Connecticut to give a visiting lecture in our top floor classroom – she climbed the three flights of stairs on her crutches. Much to my everlasting shame, I remember when, still as undergraduates, several of us learned that over as summer vacation Miss Holborn and Miss Carter had gone together to visit the new leaders of the one-party-dominant states of recently decolonized Tanzania and Kenya, traveling

<sup>46</sup>Ibid. Ch. 2.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>While Louise Holborn did not write much about African politics, leaving that to Gwendolen Carter, she did write one essay that reveals how she was grappling with these analytical puzzles: Holborn 1962.

at one point up river in a dugout canoe. In our youthful arrogance, we students chuckled condescendingly among ourselves at the very idea of these two middle-aged, heavy-set intellectual women there in a dugout canoe. Our amusement just shows that our having chosen to attend an all-women's college did not, by itself, inoculate us against either ageism or sexism.

Women's colleges did, nonetheless, position women as authoritative. As students at Connecticut College for Women in the 1950s, we did not for a minute question the expertise of our women professors as specialists in mathematics, literature, history, economics, or politics. When I eventually attended the University of California at Berkeley for graduate studies and encountered a large political science faculty that included not a single woman tenured or tenure-track professor, my having previously experienced women such as Louise Holborn as experts in politics did serve to protect me somewhat against the more conventional patriarchal notion that political science was the intellectual province of men.

By the mid-1950s, Gwendolen Carter had converted her initial research interest in Commonwealth politics into the comparative analysis of the different political systems that were evolving out of French and, especially, British colonized sub-Saharan Africa. First at Smith College, and then at Northwestern University and later at the University of Indiana, Gwendolen Carter would launch the earliest US cross-disciplinary programs in African Studies.

Louise Holborn's own deep interest in the international politics of refugees, I now realize, stemmed in large part from her own personal experiences with emergent German fascism. Gwendolen Carter made her first trip to Germany in 1934, with Louise Holborn as her guide. It left a lasting impression:

'My first experience of Nazi Germany was of its symbols everywhere. The swastika was whitewashed on the hillsides, and the Nazi flag was on every public building, and almost all private ones'.<sup>50</sup>

In the early 1930s, there was no question of where Louise Holborn stood politically on the rise of fascism in her home country. As Gwendolen Carter continued her typed recollections of their early thirties visit to Germany,

'I relished hearing how Louise's mother had refused to have [a Nazi flag] hung outside her window of her Berlin apartment by maintaining that as an old lady the draught would be dangerous! In the Black Forest where we joined her I asked who some black uniformed soldiers were, and she replied loudly, "the SS, the murderers". It was quite clear that Louise's own defiant attitudes ran in the family'.<sup>51</sup>

Some years later, Louise Holborn, generously, began to treat me as somewhat of a peer (I say 'generously' because I certainly was nothing approaching a peer of Louise Holborn). This was the late 1960s. Louise invited me to have tea with her at The Bunting, Radcliffe's Institute of Advanced Study. In its early years, The

<sup>50</sup>Carter n.d. Ch. 2.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.



Bunting was committed to providing funding support for middle-aged and older women researchers and artists who otherwise were overlooked by the major grant-giving institutions. Louise Holborn, I now realize, was a quintessential Bunting fellowship recipient of this early era.<sup>52</sup> There on the front porch of the small white clapboard house on the edge of the Radcliffe Yard that served as the early home of The Bunting, Louise told me of using Gwendolen's passport to smuggle herself back into Germany in the late 1930s in order to help friends and family members.

Nonetheless, Louise was not one to tell 'war stories'. Instead, what she described to me that day with particular pride was an account of the first volume (of two) of her work *The War and Peace Aims of the United Nations* having been found on the Hyde Park desk of President Franklin Roosevelt at the time of his death.<sup>53</sup> She saw that as evidence of her research making a political difference, moving senior policy makers to take seriously the plight of people compelled to flee across state borders to escape violence and oppression, that is, of people who had become refugees.

In 1971, in recognition of her lifetime of contributions to the study of refugees and of international efforts to provide assistance to refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees awarded Louise Holborn the Nansen Refugee Award. The first Nansen awardee was another underestimated international political thinker, Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>54</sup>

Today, more than four decades after her death, Louise Holborn's work still can shed light on the crowded analytical intersection where the fraught politics of wartime, post-wartime, state militarism, diplomacy, forced displacement, racism, patriarchy, and international organization all converge.

It is the new, innovative work of Patricia Owens, Kimberly Hutchings, Katharina Rietzler, and Sarah C. Dunstan that has spurred me to think afresh about Louise Holborn in the gendered history of women thinkers contributing to the development of international political thought.<sup>55</sup> Their ambitious project pushes all of us to rethink what 'counts' as international political thought, and, in so doing, to seriously re-imagine who needs to be recognized as among the creators of that ever-evolving body of thought. As their excavations have revealed, we – all of us – can undertake this important collective work only if we honestly, self-reflectively assess the inter-workings of racism and sexism in what has counted as (or been dismissed from) intellectual contributions and who has counted as (or been excluded from) among the intellectual contributors.

In this incomplete exploration of Louise Holborn's life as an international political thinker, I have run smack into my own complicity greasing the processes of dismissal and exclusion. In so doing, I have (belatedly) had to come to grips with a formula – a patriarchal formula – that seemed to have ensured that all but the rarest woman (Hannah Arendt, of course, comes to mind) among pre-1980s women crafting international political analyses within academia would be shut out of the alleged International Relations canon. The first ingredient: the thinker would be

<sup>52</sup>A new historical account of the early Bunting Institute fellowship recipients is Doherty 2020.

<sup>53</sup>Holborn 1943, 1948.

<sup>54</sup>The Nansen Refugee Award was created by the UNHCR in 1954: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/previous-nansen-winners.html>, accessed 18 May 2021.

<sup>55</sup>Owens et al. 2022; Owens and Rietzler 2021.

chiefly seen by most men doing international political thinking to be female. Second, she would need to spend much of her academic career teaching undergraduate students. Third, she would hold her faculty post at a woman's college. Fourth, she would conduct her international political analysis at the crossroads of Comparative Politics and International Relations, refusing to choose one subfield or the other. Fifth, she would pursue a specialized research interest in a topic that did not fit easily into a narrative that was assigned the badge of seriousness: states preparing for or waging war. Sixth, though confident in her own analytical knowledge and hopeful that her research might prove useful to policy makers, she would not presume to be a publicly ordained expert. Oh yes, and have I mentioned that, to tighten the threads of the exclusionary formula, by the time she had achieved academic tenure she would be middle aged and unmarried?

Did presumptions about disability matter in sustaining the patriarchal formula? Did presumptions about feminized foreignness? Did presumptions about sexuality?

I don't know. We, though, need to know.

Thus, I am in doubly indebted to Patricia Owens, Kimberly Hutchings, Katharina Riezler, and Sarah C. Dunstan. Not only have they helped me see that it is upon the shoulders of Louise Holborn and Gwendolen Carter that I am shakily standing. By their innovative intellectual explorations, they have made me more curious about how any canon of conventionally esteemed international knowledge gets patriarchally constructed. Thus, too, their work enlivens my curiosity about the processes of exclusion that continue to operate now. Which Indigenous Australian, Brazilian, Turkish, Cameroonian, or Burmese (these possibilities are not randomly chosen) women thinkers' insights into international politics am I missing today?

## For an IR that is Just and Brave!

Vineet Thakur

In late 1908, 33 people – all white, all men – assembled in the port-city of Durban to formulate the future of a political entity that would soon come to be called the Union of South Africa. The key question in their minds was whether the new state to be churned out of the four formerly warring entities – two Boer republics and two English colonies – would be a Union or a Federation.

Federation had been assiduously promoted by a coterie of young male officials whose political clout was far in excess of the heft deserving their age, experience, and talent. All Oxford graduates, they were brought to South Africa to fill bureaucratic positions by the colonial high commissioner, Alfred Milner. Inspired by F.S. Oliver's biography of Alexander Hamilton, they pushed for a federal state as the ideal political unit to bring together the English and the Afrikaners. Lionel Curtis, the 'prophet' of this group, had started work on a book whose premise was remarkably self-assured. Political federation was the teleological end of the march of history in South Africa, he promised to reveal in this work.

But midway through his writing, Curtis realized that Afrikaner leaders, who favoured a Union, were set to prevail in Durban. A Union would secure the

resulting polity against British influence, as well as make it easier to enforce white supremacist policies.<sup>56</sup> As Curtis saw history turning away, he bent his own path to suit it. Conveniently albeit unconvincingly, he concluded in his two-volume study, published as *The Government of South Africa*, that a Union was indeed the best outcome for the South Africans-in-the-making, the country's whites.

A general International Relations (IR) reader would not have to care about this episode, only if Curtis – and ‘Milner Kindergarten’, which later evolved into ‘The Round Table’ – had not capitalized on it. He spun this nod to political inevitability as a celebration of an autonomous exercise of knowledge-production and explained his volte-face as the result of an ‘objective’ research rather than a surrender to circumstances on the ground. All too soon, the lie became a method; from here on, he and the Kindergarten would declaim this as a proof of objective knowledge shaping political events and in due time – as argued elsewhere<sup>57</sup> – present this as a signature event, one of whose genealogical futures led to the founding of IR. The South African model was also later organically upscaled to the British Commonwealth in the 1910s and the World State in the 1930s.

However, mediocre men of the British establishment were not the only supporters of the federal option. Its most resolute advocate was Olive Schreiner, arguably South Africa's most famous intellectual at the time and to quote Charles Dilke ‘the only genius a colony has every produced’.<sup>58</sup> In October 1908, *Transvaal Leader*, a local newspaper, sent her 12 questions on the Durban convention, and she responded with a long letter.<sup>59</sup>

Schreiner was white South Africa's conscience keeper, and indeed someone who communicated with leaders across the colour line from Jan Smuts to Mohandas Gandhi to John T. Jabavu. She had shot into fame with her second effort at writing a novel while barely out of teens: the book was *The Story of an African Farm*. She also wrote an anti-imperial novella called *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, and a pioneering feminist text, *Women and Labour*. Her non-fiction writings were redolent with sharp criticisms of the British for their colonial policies in southern Africa, and of white South Africa on the disfranchisement and ill-treatment of Africans. Raised on the South African veld, where conflict raged permanently, the issue of war was a central concern in her work. A militant pacifist who once refused an invitation from Gandhi because the latter was raising troops for the British during the First World War, in her dying years she meditated on the nature of war, producing an unfinished work, later published as *The Dawn of Civilization*.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike the imperial enthusiasts of the Kindergarten, she was overqualified, yet unrepresented, to speak on the country's issues. As early as 1900, during the South African War, she had championed the cause of federation in South Africa and this was abundantly clear in her letter to the *Transvaal Leader*. But her vision differed in a key manner. The Kindergarten men thought in the register of Empire and could only see South Africa as an able successor of the other dominions such as

<sup>56</sup>Consequently, it was staunchly opposed by Africans, Coloureds, and Indians who sent their delegations to Britain to protest this.

<sup>57</sup>Thakur and Vale 2020.

<sup>58</sup>Quoted in Gregg 1967, 24.

<sup>59</sup>Published as Schreiner 1909.

<sup>60</sup>Stanley 2018.

Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Schreiner called out this faux comparison, reminding that the white, particularly the British, element in South Africa was miniscule compared to other settler colonies. Unlike other Dominions, if the English-speakers were to disappear from South Africa tomorrow, she wrote in 1900, nothing would change.<sup>61</sup>

South Africa teemed with different races of people and multiple pre-existing political entities, including several African ones. It was not a white nation and would certainly not become one in the future. A unified central authority was consequently destined for disaster. In general, larger and centralized political entities were contrary to the spirit of human freedom, she argued: ‘men, like sheep lose their individuality when congregated in too large masses under uniform conditions’.<sup>62</sup>

In pamphlet form, her letter was republished a few months later under the title ‘Closer Union’. At the same time, an organization called the Association of the Closer Union Societies – shortened to, Closer Union Society – sprung up, founded by the self-same young men who had before the convention parroted Federation. Unlike Schreiner who opposed a Union, the Closer Union Society championed and celebrated it and immediately launched a journal called *The State*. This journal was a precursor to *The Round Table* – one of the first IR journals – and some of its early energy was invested in countering the force of arguments that Schreiner was making. Bluntly put, Schreiner saw no future for a racial Union. *The State* characterized her and her brother, William Schreiner – a former Cape Prime Minister, as ‘negrophiles’. The journal insisted on closer solidarity between the two white ‘racial’ populations, the English and the Afrikaners, and the exclusion of the African populations from that racial contract. Their argument now ran that in the face of an overwhelming African population only a closer union among whites could ensure the latter’s survival. Schreiner instead wrote, most prophetically given how the future was to unfold in the country: ‘[a]s long as nine-tenths of our community have no permanent stake in the land, and no right or share in our government, can we ever feel safe? Can we ever know peace?’

The South African state that white men formed and purported was a model of the possible world state, Schreiner noted, far in advance of all later analyses, was planted on quicksand of racial conflict. For her, struggles for gender equality were also intricately tied to racial equality – women’s rights could not be just about white women’s rights. As her biographers Ruth First<sup>63</sup> and Ann Scott argue, she was perhaps alone among her contemporaries who analysed South Africa’s race conflicts in terms of a global struggle between capital and labour.<sup>64</sup> Her work inspired John Hobson’s thesis on imperialism and, by derivation, Lenin’s.<sup>65</sup>

Olive Schreiner is IR’s ‘road not taken’ – scholarship that revels in conviction, courage, and care for a just future; scholarship that is acutely aware of not merely the operations of power, but also its menace. To be sure, her work is not entirely unproblematic. Among other things, Schreiner’s preference for an education-based

<sup>61</sup>Schreiner 1901.

<sup>62</sup>Schreiner 1909, 6.

<sup>63</sup>The anti-apartheid scholar-activist who carried forward the socialist feminist legacy of Schreiner and was assassinated by the South African police in 1982.

<sup>64</sup>First and Scott 1980, 17.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 240–41.

franchise has its own problems<sup>66</sup>; nevertheless her thought offers scholars of IR a broader archive of the discipline's could have beens!

The 'road not taken' brings us to the issue at hand, namely, a review of the two volumes on 'Women's International Thought' – one an edited collection and the other an anthology. Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler helm the former, accompanied by Kimberly Hutchings and Sarah C. Dunstan in the latter.<sup>67</sup> These volumes are landmarks in every sense of the claim. Rich but crisp contributions on over a dozen historic women in the edited volumes and extracts from 92 women thinkers in the anthology deliver a feast of a scholarship. That it took 100 years for IR to recognize women's 'international thought', a term coined by a woman Florence Melian Stawell, is a stunning indictment on the discipline – never mind, its state. The several key figures in these volumes, which the contributors rightfully establish as IR thinkers, illuminate the many lives of the international – from the trenches of theory to the steadfastly unjust realms of experience.

As in Schreiner's case, if you were a woman, it didn't matter if you were South Africa's most famous intellectual. A Victorian woman at the edge of empire, as Rachel Holmes writes with reference to Schreiner's close friend Eleanor Marx, 'had no right to education, was barred from university, from voting to the national government, from standing for parliamentary representation, from most of the professions and from control of her reproductive and psychological rights'.<sup>68</sup> And even when such women were able to overcome all these barriers, usually at huge personal costs, their ideas were either ignored or just stolen from them by men. The intellectual theft could be egregiously direct – as in the case of Stawell whose idea for a book on the League of Nations was purloined by her mentor Gilbert Murray (in Glenda Sluga's chapter in the edited volume), or frustratingly sustained by disciplinary citational rituals. In fact, as Owens' earlier work has shown, women authors continue to occupy marginal space in the academic real estate, that is, citation lists. Deep engagement with women's international thought as part of the disciplinary 'canon' is even rarer.<sup>69</sup>

The labour of retrieval in these volumes is consequently an unparalleled service to IR. As the contributors consistently show, the recovery is never a straightforward exercise. It inevitably demands a redrawing of disciplinary boundaries. Concepts, categories, and catalogues must be unmoored from their disciplinary anchors, sometimes by insurrectionary means.<sup>70</sup>

As importantly therefore, these volumes encourage us to think anew IR's relationship with its archives. Archives are, as Ann Laura Stoler puts it, 'epistemological experiments'.<sup>71</sup> They are 'cross-sections of contested knowledge' rather than mere

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.; McClintok 1995.

<sup>67</sup>Owens and Rietzler 2021; Owens *et al.* 2022.

<sup>68</sup>Holmes 2014, xiii.

<sup>69</sup>Owens 2018.

<sup>70</sup>One can foresee a palpable sense of excitement (and an echo of relief) for when the 'historic women' covered in these volumes are taught in IR introductory and advanced courses around the world. For one, I await the opportunity to spring these on colleagues when the by-now-tired-topic of 'how to diversify reading lists' is met with a prompt launch of another departmental committee. Death by committee being another old academic ritual!

<sup>71</sup>Stoler 2002, 187.

repositories of sources.<sup>72</sup> People outside of the (capital H) 'History' rarely feature in them.<sup>73</sup> They reflect and inscribe power relations, as much as the documents therein may seem revelatory of another sphere of politics.<sup>74</sup> A thorough excursion into the 'evidentiary paradigms', the social and political conditions that produced these documents, is as crucial as the knowledge contained in these documents.<sup>75</sup> Hence, our prowling of the archives in the famed 'Historic turn' in IR must reflect on the nature and power of the archives themselves and the silences that they foster. To illustrate, IR's fascination with 'founding fathers' continues to flourish even in the critical histories on the 'origins' of the discipline, including in my own work. Nigerian feminist Oyeronke Oyewumi marvelously likens this to 'ancestor worship'.<sup>76</sup>

It is on this understanding of history and what its retrieval means for the present and future of the discipline that these volumes are most illuminating. They urge the reader to reflect on a basic problem: how to write and theorize about women whose archival footprints are thin by omission – and, yes, commission? Although most of the articles in the edited volume are faithful to the task of diligent recovery, when faced with archival absences/erasures they venture into 'street strolling' and 'theorizing with' the thinkers. Such contributions open a space – and I read this as an invitation – to find alternative epistemological routes to centre the thought of historic women: comparative, institutional, speculative, contrapuntal, intersectional, intimate,<sup>77</sup> fugitive,<sup>78</sup> and possibly others.

Any collection with a select list of authors will have issues over who is chosen and who not. The editors are quite aware of the class and race dynamics but any sympathetic reading of these volumes can scarcely fail to notice a restrictive definition of 'people of colour' or 'blackness', with only African American, Caribbean, and central African women included. There is a glaring absence of indigenous and non-western women in these volumes.<sup>79</sup> That several African American, Caribbean, and central African women are included is laudable. But the historic women in these volumes tend to align with the political economy of the current discipline (American and European). Further, and relatedly, even though they acknowledge class-dimensions, the understandings of an 'international' thinker remain confined to a lifeworld that is summarily invested in the international as a physical space. It is facilitated by an invisible but permissive infrastructure, which includes ease of travel, such as privileged (American and British) passports, access to funds, as well as receptivity among western audiences.

On these matters, even within the English-speaking world, which the editors clarify is their focus, there are several women – thinkers, theorists, diplomats, authors, activists – from the colonial world who could easily make the cut even if we were to keep

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Nandy 1995.

<sup>74</sup>Guha 1983; Trouillot 1995.

<sup>75</sup>Ginsburg 1989.

<sup>76</sup>Oyewumi 1997, 24.

<sup>77</sup>Lowe 2015.

<sup>78</sup>Hartman 2019.

<sup>79</sup>In the anthology, the editors provide us with a slightly larger list of women including some indigenous and non-western names, who could have been included, but weren't, possibly on account of space. Here, I use the term 'non-western' hesitatingly, and mostly in a geographical sense, i.e. women from outside of North America and Europe.

disciplinary boundaries tight. It is important to note here, that while women in several western countries were disfranchised, women in the other postcolonial contexts could vote, go to universities, be elected to parliaments, become members of their parliaments, and even leaders of their governments. There is a rich history of non-western women's internationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup> It would be cruel irony for an important effort like this if non-western scholars had to publish a third book titled 'Non-western Women's International Thought'.

The takeaway from these volumes is that they demand that its readers push the proverbial envelop further and further out. The demands for diversity and representation must inevitably tie into discussions about intellectual reparations. How do we re-credit the women whose intellectual labour has been unjustly erased? Indeed, questions could be asked: what counts as intellectual labour in the first place<sup>81</sup> and how does one recognize work that is situated in oral knowledge forms?

But for now, these two books rob IR's historians – disciplinary, field, and intellectual – of their primary excuse for exclusion of women, that is, archival absence. They have lifted our eyes to the horizon that leads us – in my case, certainly – to international thought of women like Olive Schreiner. Do better, they ask of us ... and we must!

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<sup>80</sup>Mukherjee 2017.

<sup>81</sup>The pandemic has starkly revealed how social and familial inequality facilitates intellectual work of men at the cost of women.

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