15 A White Knight in Shining Armour? Ethiopia, International Organisations, and the Global Colour Line

DANIEL R. QUIROGA-VILLAMARÍN

[…] Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.

W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*[1]

The Japanese Pan-Asianists and the Young Ethiopians had similar ideas about how their respective governments should position themselves globally. They both perceptively understood that the universalism professed by international law and international organisation was a façade to defend Western colonial interests […] The international space was constituted according to racist principles that made any Western talk of sovereign equality empty […] As we have seen, however, [their…] political vision […] was not a remaking of the world under more egalitarian principles of horizontal solidarity.

Sara Marzagora, 'Political Thought and the Struggle for Sovereignty in Ethiopian-Japanese Relations (1927–1936)'

Introduction: Or Else What?

Where can one find the United Nations (UN) and its sister international institutions? As an international organisation (IO) with a 'universal' reach,[2] the UN – just like international law – seems to be

[1] See further W. E. B. Du Bois and Adom Getachew, *W.E.B. Du Bois: International Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[2] Pitman B. Potter, 'Universalism versus Regionalism in International Organization', *American Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (October 1943): 850–62.

both 'everywhere' and 'nowhere'.[3] Elsewhere in this volume, I have tried to answer this question by highlighting that IOs always have to function *somewhere* – and, as such, issued a plea for the study of their geographically situated and materially embedded sites in international institutional law.[4] Departing from this premise, in what follows I want to take this a step further to think about the entanglements of these institutions with what, following Du Bois, one could call the 'global colour line'.[5] With this, I make reference to the ways in which the institutions of international order pivoted on notions of racial hierarchy and white supremacy, including some peoples (while excluding others) within the bounds of the 'international community'.[6] As Obregón and others have shown, the quest of international order has long been haunted by the echoes of a nineteenth-century conception of 'civilised peoples' that has served to exclude and constrain non-European participation in the 'family of nations'.[7]

Indeed, given that the UN and its sister institutions were forged in the ideological crucible of what Hobsbawm has called the 'Age of Empire',[8] it would be easy to assume that they were unable to play a role in challenging the global colour line. And yet, as Mazower has shown, the fact that the UN had been created in the image and likeness of 'imperial internationalism' did not prevent a cast of generations of non-European and racialised international lawyers to flock to its hall to attempt to

[3] Annelise Riles, 'The View from the International Plane: Perspective and Scale in the Architecture of Colonial International Law', *Law and Critique* 6, no. 1 (1995): 39–54.

[4] Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, 'Placeholders: An Archival Journey into the Interim Histories of International Organisations' in this volume (Chapter 9). See also Juan M. Amaya-Castro, 'Teaching International Law: Both Everywhere and Somewhere', in *Liber Amicorum in Honour of a Modern Renaissance Man: Gudmundur Eiríksson*, ed. Juan Carlos Sainz Borgo et al. (New Delhi: Universal Law Publishing, 2017), 521–36.

[5] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). 100–1. See also Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, Interventions (London: Routledge, 2015); William Schabas, *The International Legal Order's Colour Line: Racism, Racial Discrimination, and the Making of International Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[6] Kseniya Oksamytna and Sarah von Billerbeck, 'Race and International Organizations', *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2024).

[7] Liliana Obregón, 'The Civilized and the Uncivilized', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of International Law*, ed. Bardo Fassbender and Anne Peters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 917–39.

[8] E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

create a post-colonial international order from within the very belly of Empire.[9] This is what Sayward has called the UN's 'Nehruvian moment';[10] or what Moyn has understood as the 'high tide of anti-colonial legalism'.[11] For some readers, the label of the first generation of Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL I) lawyer-diplomats might a be more familiar monicker.[12] What matters is that, in all of these attempts to rethink and challenge the global colour line, the UN played a salient role: either as an actor to ally with, as a source of (material and ideological) resources, or as a forum to dispute in.[13]

In this chapter, I show this by focusing on the relations between the polity of Ethiopia and the institutions of international ordering – the UN and its predecessor, the League of Nations ('the League'), chief among them.[14] For, if we look closely at one of the sites where the UN fashioned a shell for itself in the city of Addis Ababa,[15] we can see that the Ethiopian elites understood that the UN (with all of its flaws) had to play a protagonist role in the struggles to come. Let us turn, then,

[9] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). See also Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

[10] Amy L. Sayward, *United Nations in International History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). 21.

[11] Samuel Moyn, 'The High Tide of Anticolonial Legalism', *Journal of the History of International Law* 23, no. 1 (2020): 5–31. Elsewhere, Negar Mansouri and I have tried to trace this by studying the life and careers of non-European international civil servants within these IOs. See Negar Mansouri and Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, '"Third Worlding" International Organization: The Parallel Quests of Santa-Cruz and Aga Khan for a New International Institutional Order (1946–2002)' *Humanity* 15 (2) (in press).

[12] Antony Anghie, 'Rethinking International Law: A TWAIL Retrospective', *European Journal of International Law* 34, no. 1 (2023): 7–112. 8. Pahuja and Eslava, in turn, use the expression 'midnight's lawyers'. See Luis Eslava and Sundhya Pahuja, 'Between Resistance and Reform: TWAIL and the Universality of International Law', *Trade, Law and Development* 3, no. 1 (2011): 103–30. 115–16.

[13] Ian Hurd, *International Organizations Politics, Law, Practice*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024). 17–43.

[14] Seeing that the name of the polity itself has its origins in a racial categorization (ancient Greek for 'burnt faces'), it offers a promising vantage point to reflect on the global colour line. See Ayele Bekerie, 'Ethiopica: Some Historical Reflections on the Origin of the Word Ethiopia', *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2004): 110–21. 114.

[15] Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, '*Endroits* of Planetary Ordering: Violence, Law, Space, & Capital in the Diplomatic History of 19th Century Europe', *German Law Journal* 24, no. 7 (2023): 1169–83.

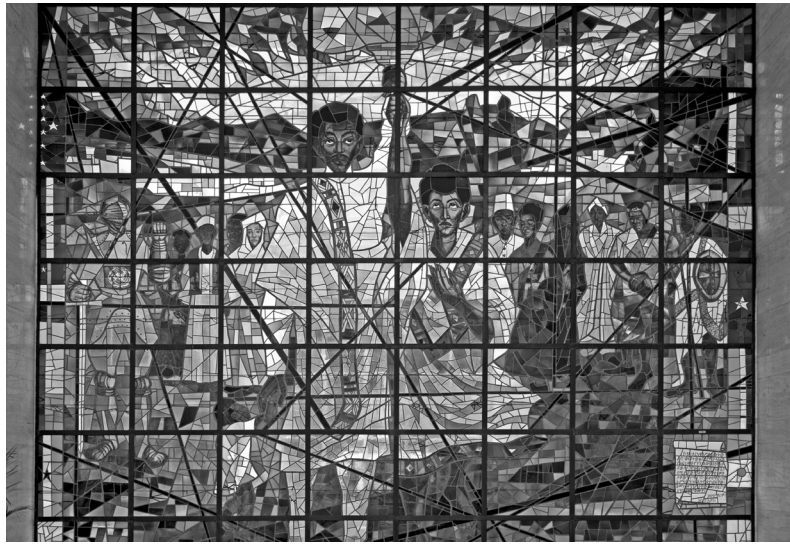

Figure 15.1 A White Knight in Shining Armour?[16]

to the central panel of the stained-glass tryptic *The Total Liberation of Africa*, of 1959 (Figure 15.1).

Designed by the Ethiopian artist Afewerk Tekle after winning a competition and under the supervision of Emperor Haile Selassie I, this three-part stained-glass window constituted the central artwork of the new building 'Africa Hall'.[17] As the edifice was erected to host the new UN Economic Commission for Africa and to provide the continent with a proper site for high-level diplomatic encounters, its design and construction was carefully supervised by the Ethiopian establishment with the purpose of dazzling local, regional, and international audiences alike. Here, tucked in the corner of the panel, we can *find*

[16] Middle panel of Afewerk Tekle's *Total Liberation of Africa* (1959). Photo by: Gunter Fischer © Education Images/Universal Images Group via Getty Images.

[17] Ministry of Information of the Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Africa Hall Addis Ababa* (Asmara: Il Poligrafico, 1963). As consulted in the UNECA repository https://hdl.handle.net/10855/24318. 46–47. I have explored the making of this building in more detail in Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, '"At Long Last": Gifting Africa a True Continental Capital in Addis Ababa (1955–1974)' in '*Architects of the Better World': Democracy, Law, and the Construction of International Order 1919–1998*, PhD thesis (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2024).

the UN. But the portrayal is quite particular: this IO appears as a white knight, clad in European armour and a daunting longsword. All the other figures are dark-skinned and 'wear traditional Ethiopian costumes, because it is felt by the Artist that Ethiopia should occupy this leading place' in the decolonisation of Africa.[18] But the White Knight, the sole European of the composition, with the UN's blue emblem in *his* chest, appears as a symbol 'of what the United Nations stands for and of Africa believing and appreciating its justice and willing[ness] to cooperate in the support of its ideals and aspirations'.[19]

This chapter traces the lofty promises, and resounding disappointments, that the UN (as a proverbial *White*, and *male*, Knight) offered the racialised peoples of the world – and Ethiopia, in particular – in their attempt to challenge the global colour line. The result is neither a blind celebration of the UN's anticolonial potential, nor a resolute condemnation of its imperial lineage.[20] Instead, I want to embrace the ambiguities offered by the metaphor of this racialised and gendered *saviour* trope – especially in relation to the racialised *savage* non-European other.[21] For in any attempt to overturn the global colour line, the UN will prove to be both utterly indispensable *and* insufficient. To argue this, I show how the Ethiopian polity engaged with the treacherous figure of the White Knight of international ordering, (2) from the pre-modern era all the way to the so-called (3) interwar period, and (4) the post-war age of the UN. This allows me to (5) conclude with some remarks on the limits of taking Ethiopia as a representative polity of the racialised peoples of the world.

In Lewis Carroll's rendition of this trope, Alice finds herself hostage to an unwanted session of poetry-reading by a towering White

[18] Afewerk Tekle, 'No title', in *Africa Hall Addis Ababa* (Asmara: Il Poligrafico, 1963), 47.

[19] Ibid. Years later, Tekle delivered a retrospective speech in which he stressed again that the Knight represented the promise 'that all those who are becoming free and independent have the right to enter the United Nations'. See Afewerk Tekle, 'The State of Art of Ethiopia', 27 July 2009. As consulted in www.loc.gov/item/2021688283/

[20] Compare, respectively, Evan Luard, *A History of the United Nations. Vol. 2: The Age of Decolonization, 1955–1965* (London: Macmillan, 2002); Margot Tudor, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats: United Nations Peacekeeping and the Reinvention of Colonialism, 1945–1971*, Human Rights in History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

[21] Makau Mutua, 'Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights', *Harvard International Law Journal*, 42, no. 1 (2001): 201–46.

Knight.[22] After he appears to rescue her from (another equally unwanted) Red Knight, Alice falls under his 'protection' until she is ready to emerge as an independent queen – that is, a 'sovereign'.[23] In the meantime, she is exposed to his technological inventions and mavericks – including a poem that is 'very, *very*, beautiful'.[24] The White Knight proudly claims that '[e]verybody that hears me sing it – either it brings the *tears* into their eyes, or else'.[25] 'Or else what?' retorts Alice. 'Or else it doesn't, you know' replies the Knight.[26] Either way, Alice was about to hear it! The Ethiopian polity, like Alice, quickly realised that once one falls under the White Knight's 'protection', one might as well enjoy his poetry – what else? But like Alice, Ethiopia did not remain passive through its encounter with the White Knight. She remained always with one eye fixed towards the imaginary border that separated her from her sovereign crown.[27] With this metaphor in mind, we now turn to the story of Ethiopia's encounter with the 'World of White Knights' and their international institutions.[28]

The Kingdom of 'Prester John': Early Modern Fluidity in Interpolity Ordering

'Before the West', as Zarakol reminds us, notions of interpolity order looked quite different.[29] During the Early Modern era, the self-identification of the elites of the Ethiopian Solomonic Empire as 'an isle of Christians surrounded by a sea of pagans' made religion, rather than *race*, the key marker of their approach to foreign

[22] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass: And What Alice Found There* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902). 165–73.

[23] And indeed, relations of 'protection' have long structured imperial oversight of European over non-European peoples (and *mutatis mutandis*, patriarchal family constellations) in interpolity relations. See Lauren A. Benton, Adam Clulow, and Bain Attwood, eds., *Protection and Empire: A Global History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[24] Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass: And What Alice Found There*. 166. Italics in the original.

[25] Ibid. [26] Ibid. [27] In the story, this is a little brook. See Ibid. 172.

[28] With apologies to Martti Koskenniemi, *To the Uttermost Parts of the Earth: Legal Imagination and International Power, 1300–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[29] Ayşe Zarakol, *Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

affairs.[30] As early as the thirteenth century, Ethiopian pilgrims and merchants have found their way to the courts of the leading European polities, especially those with ports on the Mediterranean sea.[31] The first properly documented diplomatic visit sent by an Ethiopian emperor to the Venetian court happened in 1402, opening the door to the 'first age of Ethiopian-European diplomacy'.[32] Animated by the myth of a remote eastern kingdom that had been created by a lost Christian Priest-judge ('Prester John'), the Early Modern Europeans were generally friendly towards the Ethiopian overtures and treated them as 'peers'.[33] Indeed, they both shared an 'interest in military alliance against Muslim powers' and an ecumenical desire for religious dialogue.[34] By the sixteenth century, this reproachment reached its climax as Portuguese forces intervened in favour of the Ethiopian sovereigns in its war against Adalite and Ottoman Muslim forces – leading to a period of sharp Jesuit influence in the region.[35]

What matters for the purposes of this chapter is that, before the 'modern' era, Ethiopians were not seen as beyond the pale of the European family of nations, but rather as long-lost Christian cousins

[30] Serge Dewel, *Addis-Abeba (Éthiopie): Construction d'une Nouvelle Capitale Pour Une Ancienne Nation Souveraine – Tome 1* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018). 74. My own translation. Thereafter, any material in French or Amharic will be translated in the same way.

[31] Andrew Kurt, 'The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the Eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c .1200–c .1540', *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 3 (2013): 297–320.

[32] Samantha Kelly, 'Ewosṭateans at the Council of Florence (1441): Diplomatic Implications between Ethiopia, Europe, Jerusalem and Cairo', *Afriques* [Online] (2016), https://journals.openedition.org/afriques/1858?lang=en. See also Matteo Salvadore, 'Encounters between Ethiopia and Europe, 1400–1660', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, by Matteo Salvadore (Oxford University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.187.

[33] Matteo Salvadore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[34] Kelly, 'Ewosṭateans at the Council of Florence (1441)'. The opposite was also true. See, for instance, Francisco Alvarez, *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia during the Years 1520–1527*, trans. Lord Stanley of Alderley (London: Hakluyt Society, 1881).

[35] Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). 33–34.

awaiting to be brought back into its fold.[36] Records of the arrival of an Ethiopian delegation in Lisbon in 1514 show that their hosts asked a slew of questions related to their 'written laws, law courts and magistrates […] written history, […] taxes […] and proper styles of clothing and social distinction' as the Europeans sought to make sense of the shared practices of their Christian equals.[37] But as Pagden has shown, the 'discovery' and conquest of the Americas increasingly complicated (and racialised) the terms of encounter between Europe and its others.[38] As Salvadore notes in relation to the story of an Ethiopian noble who sought refuge and was welcomed in the highest echelons of European secular and religious society in the seventeenth century, 'race defined him in death, but not in life'.[39] With this, he makes reference that it was only later (in tandem to the introduction of racialised African slavery in the Americas) that an increasingly fixed notion of race began to trump Christian brotherhood in the European imagination.[40] By the late Renaissance, Korhonen notes that the proverb 'to wash an Ethiopian white is to labour in vain' was 'repeated so frequently […] that it was understandable even when either half of the sentence was omitted'.[41] Indeed, on the eve of the Age of Revolutions and 'Modernity proper', the 'rather exceptional European attitude

[36] Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). 16–28.

[37] Jeremy Lawrance, 'The Middle Indies: Damião de Góis on Prester John and the Ethiopians', *Renaissance Studies* 6, no. 3/4 (1992): 306–24. 322. In this same vein, Lauren Benton has long argued that very different polities shared a similar vocabulary to make sense of legal practices that she has called interpolity (or 'big') law. See Lauren Benton, *They Called It Peace: Worlds of Imperial Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024). 12–13.

[38] Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, 1492–1830* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1998).

[39] Matteo Salvadore, '"I Was Not Born to Obey, but Rather to Command": The Self-Fashioning of Ṣägga Krəstos, an Ethiopian Traveler in Seventeenth-Century Europe', *Journal of Early Modern History* 25, no. 3 (2021): 194–226. 226.

[40] David Eltis, 'Europeans and the Rise and Fall of African Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation', *The American Historical Review* 98, no. 5 (1993): 1399–423.

[41] Anu Korhonen, 'Washing the Ethiopian White: Conceptualising Black Skin in Renaissance England', in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94–112. 94.

toward slavery […] – specifically, its association with the concept of race' had now fully consolidated.[42]

This had important consequences for interpolity diplomatic relations. As Sluga has shown, the 'invention' of international order that occurred in 1815 (in the wake of the post-Napoleonic restoration) tended to ossify conceptual borders – at least in comparison to a 'relatively diverse aristocratic cosmopolitan brotherhood'.[43] While the Ethiopian establishment continued to pursue diplomatic relations abroad across the Mediterranean, this was 'only grudgingly conceded by Europe [… and this same right] was denied to powerful African states of the time like the Asanthi and the Zulu'.[44] By the late nineteenth century, Ethiopia had gone from Christian peer polity to a potentially conquerable 'savage' entity – and it increasingly found itself 'between the jaws of hyenas' of its former Christian cousins.[45] Shortly after the European great powers formalised the rules for the partition of Africa,[46] the Ethiopian polity inflicted a resounding blow on the encroaching Italian colonial army at the battle of Adwa of 1896.[47] Like the rising Japanese Empire (which, in turn, defeated the Russian Empire militarily in 1905), the Ethiopian elites understood that to be a 'sovereign' in the Modern era military and industrial might were indispensable.[48] While Ethiopia could have been recognised as an equal, even if 'black', Knight in the fifteenth century because of its common faith, on the eve of the Great War in the twentieth century it was clear unless it was ready to brandish its sword it would fall under European 'protection'. The nineteenth century, in this sense, constitutes a turning point in the relations between Europe and the Christian, but

[42] Eltis, 'Europeans and the Rise and Fall of African Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation'. 1415.
[43] Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). 21.
[44] K. V. Ram, 'Diplomatic Practices of Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century', *Transafrican Journal of History* 15 (1986): 127–43. 140.
[45] Richard Alan Caulk, *Between the Jaws of Hyenas: A Diplomatic History of Ethiopia (1876–1896)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002).
[46] Mathew Craven, 'Between Law and History: The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 and the Logic of Free Trade', *London Review of International Law* 3, no. 1 (2015): 31–59.
[47] Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).
[48] Marzagora, 'Political Thought and the Struggle for Sovereignty in Ethiopian-Japanese Relations (1927–1936)'. 100.

non-European, world.[49] The same, as the secondary literature has shown, was true of the Ottoman Empire and other polities that suddenly found themselves to be 'quasi-sovereign' after centuries of (at least nominal) equality with European rulers.[50]

The Great(er) War: Ethiopia and the League of Nations

Indeed, as an Ethiopian 'quasi-sovereign', *Lij* Iyasu was an unlikely victim of the upheavals of the Great War of 1914.[51] The prefix *Lij* is used in Ethiopian Amharic to denote a child of royal blood, which was fitting because Iyasu was never crowned, as such, due to his young age. He had been appointed as successor to Menelik II (the emperor who had defeated the Italians at Adwa) in 1909, and in that capacity attempted to rule amidst the palace wars of the period. But the declaration of an actual war in Europe, kilometres away, eventually led to the coup that deposed the young Iyasu in 1916. Given that he had been trained by a German tutor and was widely rumoured to sympathise with the Central Powers, a pro-Allied faction of local notables deposed him (arguing that it was a just a matter of time until the Crown Prince converted to Islam as an apostate and joined the Central Powers in their war effort).[52] He was replaced by an ambitious Crown Prince, who would eventually be crowned in 1930 as the Emperor Haile Selassie I.[53] Given that his rise to power was directly related to interpolity intrigues, it is not surprising that the new emperor would 'concentrate on Addis Abeba [his capital …] and foreign affairs,

[49] Charles Henry Alexandrowicz, *The European-African Confrontation. A Study in Treaty Making* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1973). See also Charles Henry Alexandrowicz, *The Law of Nations in Global History*, ed. David Armitage and Jennifer Pitts, *The History and Theory of International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). 223–302.

[50] Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[51] In Amharic, ልጅ ኢያሱ. See further Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*. 114–18.

[52] Jakob Zollmann, 'Ethiopia, International Law and the First World War. Considerations of Neutrality and Foreign Policy by the European Powers, 1840–1919', in *The First World War from Tripoli to Addis Ababa (1911–1924)*, ed. Shiferaw Bekele et al. (Addis Abeba: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2019), 107–40. See also Ahmed Hassen Omer, 'The "Coup d'État" of September 26, 1916: Different Perceptions', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 46 (2013): 99–120.

[53] Harold G. Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I: The Formative Years, 1892–1936* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1995).

around which he would build his authority'.[54] This led him to undertake a European 'grand tour' in 1924, which culminated with the troubled accession of his polity to the new IO created in the wake of the war and international law's move to institutions: the League.[55]

And yet, Ethiopia's membership of the League was always tenuous – Getachew understands this as a 'burdened and racialised' membership.[56] Famously, the Japanese had been unsuccessful in their attempt to enshrine a racial equality provision in the Versailles peace settlement, with important consequences for the institutions created there.[57] As I have noted elsewhere reviewing some of the literature on non-European participation in the family of nations, 'territorial statehood is always precarious and unstable, constrained to the fulfilment of imperial standards of race; civilization; development; alien/human rights'.[58] In this particular context, it imposed a series of institutional obligations on Ethiopia *vis-à-vis* the League in relation to slavery and the slave trade.[59] With the establishment of the League in 1919, one of its tasks had been to supervise the management of conquered colonial territories, which were given as 'mandates' to the victorious allies.[60] Due to Ethiopia's racialised membership, its situation was almost closer to the non-self-governing mandates than to its peers among the European and Latin American polities, as the system offered 'little more than

[54] Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*. 118.

[55] Boris Monin, 'The Visit of Rās Tafari in Europe (1924): Between Hopes of Independence and Colonial Realities', *Annales d'Ethiopie* 28, no. 1 (2013): 383–89. See also David Kennedy, 'The Move to Institutions', *Cardozo Law Review* 8, no. 5 (1987): 841–988.

[56] Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). 37–70. See also Rose Parfitt, '*Empire Des Nègres Blancs*: The Hybridity of International Personality and the Abyssinia Crisis of 1935–36', *Leiden Journal of International Law* 24, no. 4 (2011): 849–72; Megan Donaldson, 'The League of Nations, Ethiopia, and the Making of States', *Humanity* 11, no. 1 (2020): 6–31.

[57] Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914–1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008). 60–103.

[58] Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, 'Vicarius Christi: Extraterritoriality, Pastoral Power, and the Critique of Secular International Law', *Leiden Journal of International Law* 34, no. 3 (2021): 629–52. 637–38.

[59] Jean Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations: Ethiopia as a Civilised Nation', *Journal of the History of International Law* 8, no. 2 (2006): 213–44.

[60] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

colonialism by another name'.[61] Most famously, Ethiopia's member status did not prevent its brutal invasion by another 'peer' (Italy) in 1935 – an event that, for Du Bois, proved that despite the League's lofty promises, the world was run by those who pinned 'their faith on European civilization, the Christian religion and the superiority of the white race'.[62]

And yet, the institutional set-up of the League (both for the mandates and for Ethiopia as a quasi-sovereign member) offered opportunities for those who sought to challenge racial hierarchy in international order *through* international order. Du Bois, who had participated in the League's first General Assembly in 1920, believed that it could play a central role for anti-racist activism on behalf of both African-Unitedstateseans and colonised Africans.[63] Indeed, even Haile Selassie I never lost his faith in the League. As the Italian armies encroached his homeland, he departed towards exile in the UK. But not before he went to Geneva to personally address the League in 1936.[64] While he was ultimately unsuccessful,[65] the League 'provided a formal stage' where the emperor performed the dances of (quasi)sovereignty.[66] Even if the White Knight's 'protection' was but a fig leaf, the League offered a place where its treacherous ways could be called to account. Indeed, when he reconquered the capital city of Addis Ababa at the helm of his 'Gideon Force' in 1941 with the support of his British allies as part of the UN military alliance against Fascism, Haile Selassie I (as many in

[61] Schabas, *The International Legal Order's Colour Line*. 52–89.

[62] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View', *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 1 (1935): 82–92. 87. See also Richard Pankhurst, 'The Italo-Ethiopian War and League of Nations Sanctions, 1935–1936', *Genève-Afrique* 13, no. 2 (1974): 5–29.

[63] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Negro and the League of Nations, ca. November 1921', Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, accessed 13 June 2024, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b210-i073. See also Jake Hodder, 'African Americans at the League of Nations', paper delivered at the conference 'Global Histories of International Thought and Geopolitical Concepts' – University of Groningen, 23–24 May 2024.

[64] Discours Prononcé Par Sa Majesté Haylé Sélassié Ier, Empereur d'Éthiopie, à l'Assemblée de La Société des Nations, à La Session de Juin-Juillet 1936 (Geneva: Nations Unies Bibliothèque, 1936). Library of Congress (USA), available online at www.loc.gov/item/2021667904

[65] Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 100–66.

[66] Donaldson, 'The League of Nations, Ethiopia, and the Making of States'. 21.

his generation) drew from the experience of the League's 'failure' lessons for the new post-war order.[67]

The First 'Ally': Ethiopia and International Order in WWII

Like Alice in Wonderland, Ethiopia was rescued by the White Knight during WWII. And yet, it would soon discover that the 'protection' of the 'White' UN was not too dissimilar from the occupation of the 'Black(shirt) Knight'. The wake of the Ethiopian Liberation campaign of 1941 had left the country as a thinly veiled British protectorate,[68] in which the emperor's patriots were but 'grudgingly recognised as allies'.[69] At first, key imperial policymakers sought to treat Ethiopia as a conquered Italian possession – some even aspired to create a united British East African colony as a post-war trusteeship territory ruled from Nairobi.[70] Even after some autonomy was devolved to the emperor's quasi-sovereign government, the British held on to the Somali-inhabited area of the Ogaden and the former Italian colony of Eritrea was war conquests. Moreover, the rump state was forced to use the East African shilling as its national currency (until 1945) and almost all the Italian industrial infrastructure was duly looted by its British 'allies'.[71] The emperor remained 'aware that his country was as much occupied as liberated' and 'remained doubtful of British intentions'.[72] Indeed, with friends like these, who needs enemies?

The emperor, who had neither forgotten (nor perhaps forgiven) Geneva, turned to the promise of a new international order to fight for his polity's sovereignty. Like many peoples of the colonised and

[67] Jean d'Aspremont, 'The League of Nations and the Power of "Experiment Narratives" in International Institutional Law', *International Community Law Review* 22, no. 3–4 (2020): 275–90.

[68] Harold G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941–1974: The Politics of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[69] Richard Pankhurst, 'Post-World War II Ethiopia: British Military Policy and Action for The Dismantling and Acquisition of Italian Factories and Other Assets, 1941–2', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 29, no. 1 (1996): 35–77. 35.

[70] Ibid. 40.

[71] Befekadu Degefe, 'The Making of the Ethiopian National Currency 1941–45', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 23–51; Pankhurst, 'Post-World War II Ethiopia: British Military Policy and Action for The Dismantling and Acquisition of Italian Factories and Other Assets, 1941–2'. 42–43.

[72] Jacqueline Swansinger, 'A Three-Legged Race: Ethiopian Reconstruction, 1940–1944', *Journal of World History* 2, no. 2 (1991): 175–200. 177.

occupied world – both seen as racialised by either the Allied imperial or Axis war machines – the promises issued by the Atlantic Charter in 1941 and the Declaration of the United Nations in 1942 offered a glimpse of hope.[73] If all people had, pursuant to the clause three of the Charter, 'a right to self-determination', this had to be true both for the polities militarily occupied by the Fascist powers (say Poland and Ethiopia), and perhaps even for the whole colonised world. This expectation gained even more momentum when, in 1945, the military alliance of the UN was formally institutionalised into a new 'universal' IO – and one, moreover, that enshrined equal rights and self-determination of peoples as one of its cardinal values.[74]

In this spirit, as soon as he retook the capital, Haile Selassie I wrote to the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) arguing that Ethiopia should be seen as the first liberated polity of the UN alliance.[75] FDR reciprocated by inviting the emperor to meet him personally aboard the *USS Quincy* near Cairo, where he would stop after the Yalta conference of 1945.[76] From then onwards, the US became a key supporter of Ethiopian independence. Ethiopia, in turn, committed fully to the UN (being, with Egypt and Liberia, the only three independent African countries that participated in the San Francisco Conference of 1945) and to the idea of the US-led international order.[77] Translating words into deeds, the Ethiopian army answered the military call of the UN by sending its forces to peacekeeping operations in Korea (1950) and the Congo (1960).[78] This gambit paid off,

[73] Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, '"Holding Fast to the Heritage of Freedom": The Grotian Moment(s) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Early United Nations (1941–1949)', *Grotiana* 44, no. 1 (2023): 94–115.

[74] Marcelo G. Kohen, 'Self-Determination', in *The UN Friendly Relations Declaration at 50*, ed. Jorge E. Viñuales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 133–65.

[75] Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941–1974*. 14.

[76] Ibid. 48–50. See also Herbert A. Fine et al., eds., 'The Minister in Ethiopia (Caldwell) to the Secretary of State', in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 5–7.

[77] Thomas Hovet, 'The Role of Africa in the United Nations', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 354 (1964): 122–34. 123. I am not including South Africa here.

[78] Cynthia Tse Kimberlin, 'The Korean War (1950–1953) and the Kagnew Battalion: Music, War, and the Concept of Collective Security', in *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement. Vol I*, ed. Thomas Osmond, Éloi Ficquet, and Ahmed Hassen Omer (Addis Abeba: Centre français des études

as it was untenable for the British to colonise a (nominally) equal ally and fellow UN member. As a British colonial officer noted, 'the fact that we surround [Ethiopia] and could in the old days have squeezed [it] flat with very little difficulty, is of course irrelevant in the age of Lake Something'.[79] This is a reference to 'Lake Success' – where, as we saw in my earlier chapter in this volume, the UN had its interim headquarters during this period.[80] The ambiguities of the White Knight, here, appear in their full colours.

Of course, this change in the nature of the liberal international order had more to do with the vanquished than with the victors. Given that the Axis powers had made racial superiority a central banner of their war effort, the allies included an 'equality of race' provision in their post-war settlement.[81] The inclusion of this, however, was not without frictions. Indeed, as I noted elsewhere, the Soviet Union 'rarely lost an opportunity to embarrass its erstwhile allies by highlighting the persistence of racial discrimination in the US to critique the use of the trope of "civilization" by European empires'.[82] Indeed, colonial powers frequently invoked the cover of sovereignty to shield themselves from UN criticism over entrenched racial hierarchies – with, of course, South Africa being the most obvious example.[83] Immigration policy was – and continues to be – a thorny issue in our allegedly post-racial world.

And yet, at the same time that the UN's notion of sovereignty provided cover for racialised hierarchies, it also created opportunities for those who wanted to challenge the global colour line. The General Assembly, in particular, became a key site of struggle – especially as the increasing tempo of decolonisation added more and more formerly

éthiopiennes, 2016), 273–86; Alan Karabus, 'United Nations Activities in the Congo', *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at Its Annual Meeting (1921–1969) 55* (1961): 30–40. 34.

[79] As cited by Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941–1974*. 76.

[80] Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, 'Placeholders'. See further Daniel R. Quiroga-Villamarín, '*Architects of a Better World*'.

[81] Paul Gordon Lauren, 'First Principles of Racial Equality: History and the Politics and Diplomacy of Human Rights Provisions in the United Nations Charter', *Human Rights Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1983): 1–26.

[82] Quiroga-Villamarín, '"Holding Fast to the Heritage of Freedom"'.

[83] Corrie Gerald Haines, 'The United Nations Challenge to Racial Discrimination in South Africa 1946–1950', *African Studies* 60, no. 2 (2001): 185–204.

colonised peoples to its ranks.[84] In time, this IO – and its family of institutions, UNESCO in particular – has developed a series of mechanisms and procedures to highlight the persistence of racial discrimination and the unfulfilled promises of the post-war settlement.[85] Ethiopia, in particular, became a fervent supporter of the institution's work in general – and, in particular, became the host of its Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

In fact, it was in UNECA's building ('Africa Hall', as we saw earlier), that the UN's Security Council met in 1972 for the first time on African soil.[86] After an extensive diplomatic campaign coordinated with other African member states (and with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) – created in the wake of a summit held in that same building in 1963), Haile Selassie I managed to convince the UN to discuss African problems within the continent itself. A US diplomat, anonymously quoted in the *New York Times*, candidly confessed that this was 'a silly idea, but if you object to it you're a racist, so naturally we didn't'.[87] The agenda was dominated by the thorny issues of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, South Africa, and the Portuguese colonies that remained on the African continent. Unsurprisingly, the session ended in disappointment after the UK vetoed any resolution that threatened white supremacy in their former colonial holdings. Be that as it may, Haile Selassie I and his African allies saw the Council meeting as a triumph. Somalia and Sudan rotated the Council's Presidency, and in that capacity, they invited Haile Selassie I to address the international community – ultimately, for the last time. For the ageing emperor, the Council session's highlight was the ceremony held in his palace where the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim awarded him the 'Peace Medal for his contributions to international peace and justice'.[88] A fitting end for a monarch who had invested many of his early years in convincing

[84] P. D. Kausik and Mansha Ram Singh, 'The UN General Assembly and Racial Discrimination', *Social Scientist* 1, no. 6 (1973): 42–48.

[85] Rosana Garciandia and Philippa Webb, 'The UN's Work on Racial Discrimination: Achievements and Challenges', *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online* 25, no. 1 (2022): 216–45. See further Schabas, *The International Legal Order's Colour Line*. 90–243.

[86] William Borders, 'U.N. Security Council Meets in Addis Ababa Today to Discuss the Problems of Africa', *The New York Times*, 28 January 1972.

[87] Ibid. 10.

[88] Derrick M. Nault, *Africa and the Shaping of International Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). 64–95.

his polity, perhaps somewhat naively, to believe in the promises of a so-called post-racial liberal rules-based international order.

Concluding Remarks: The Star of Ethiopia

The Star of Ethiopia: A Pageant, of 1911, was Du Bois' debut as a playwriter.[89] While it had been presented to audiences before, its presentation in Philadelphia in 1916 (to commemorate the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution) represented its theatrical climax.[90] The plot was simple: merely 'the history and development of the black race from prehistoric times to the present'.[91] The involved cast mirrored the play's ambitions, with at least 1,000 actors involved in different capacities. The result, in Du Bois' mind, was a pedagogical *tour de force* that would teach 'on the one hand the colored people themselves the meaning of their history and their rich emotional life through a new theatre, and on the other, to reveal the Negro to the white world as a human, feeling thing'.[92] Ethiopia, in this perspective, appeared as 'the mother of men': a polity that could claim to be the true cradle not only of humankind as a whole but of the coloured peoples of the world in particular. In this same vein, the anthem of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (led by the famous Afro-Jamaican thinker Marcus Garvey) adopted as its anthem the song 'Ethiopia, Thou Land of Our Fathers'.[93]

Indeed, for Du Bois and many other anti-racist and pan-African thinkers, Ethiopia remained a 'northern star' in their struggle.[94] The Italian war of aggression against this polity in the interwar years, in

[89] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Star of Ethiopia: A Pageant, 1914', Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, n.d., https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b233-i083.

[90] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Star of Ethiopia Brochure, 1916', Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, n.d., https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-x01-i008.

[91] Ibid.

[92] As cited in Errol Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). 201.

[93] Robert G. Weisbord, 'Black America and the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis: An Episode in Pan-Negroism', *The Historian* 34, no. 2 (1972): 230–41. 231.

[94] Ras Wayne A. Rose, *W. E. B. Du Bois, Ethiopianism, and Black Internationalism: A New Interpretation of the Global Color Line* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024).

particular, became a galvanising call to arms for future generations of anticolonial actors. Haile Selassie I, years later, would also come to adopt the pan-African agenda with the zeal of the convert, becoming one of the architects of the aforementioned OAU in 1963. And yet, any recovery of this polity's legacy of anti-racist struggle cannot be complete without a mention of the ways in which the Ethiopian Empire, itself, reproduced racial hierarchies within its own borders. As Asseraf well reminds us (in relation to Arabic feelings of ethnic animosity against 'black' Africans in French-colonised Algeria), notions of racial hierarchy were not solely a European invention.[95] Imperialism, no doubt, ossified (and even radicalised) certain 'racial' tensions in the colonised world – with lasting consequences to our days.[96] But we also ought to remember that 'some of the most vocal "anticolonial states" – such as Indonesia and India – simultaneously repressed independence campaigns *and* pursued imperial expansion'.[97] The same was true of the mid-century Ethiopian polity. Ultimately, for 'the wretched of the earth', the day will not be saved by any dazzling Knight: white, black, or otherwise.[98]

[95] Arthur Asseraf, *Le désinformateur: sur les traces de Messaoud Djebari, Algérien dans un monde colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2022).

[96] UN Human Rights Council, 'Summary of the Panel Discussion on the Negative Impact of the Legacies of Colonialism on the Enjoyment of Human Rights', A/HRC/54/4, 1 June 2023, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session54/A_HRC_54_4_accessible.pdf.

[97] Tudor, *Blue Helmet Bureaucrats*. 164. The same, of course, was true for the Japanese Empire in the so-called interwar period. See Xu Guoqi, *Asia and the Great War: A Shared History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). 185–210.

[98] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2015).