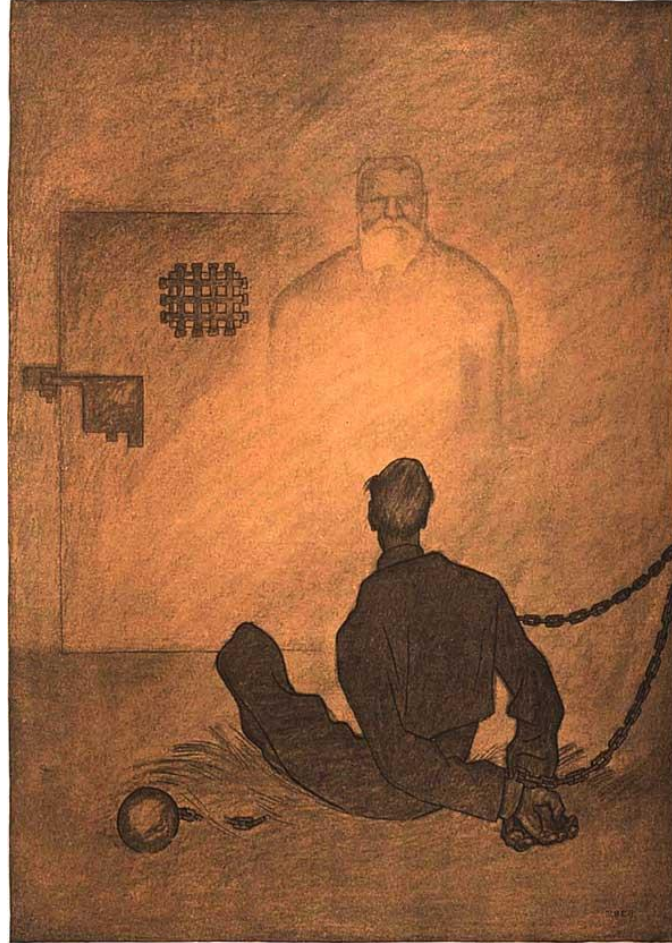


The Worlds of E.D. Morel, 1873-1924

The Ghost of Jaurès Der Geist Jaurès'

Illustration von E. Morel



„Tröste dich, Edward Morel, die Demokratie macht auch in der Entente Fortschritte. Vor drei Jahren wurde man noch umgebracht, wenn man für den Frieden eintrat.“
“Comfort yourself, Edward Morel; democracy is making progress in the Entente. Three years ago, one was still killed when working for peace.”

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LSE Morel Archives, F/16

Short Abstract

The campaigner and journalist Edmund Dene Morel (1873-1924) was one of the most fascinating and contradictory actors in Edwardian politics. This dissertation consists of four interlinked essays on the subject of this beguiling character, each taking as their focus a distinct period of Morel's life and career. In every chapter I take up a different set of theoretical tools in order to investigate the relationship of his actions and experience to grander historical questions from as wide a variety of disciplinary perspectives as possible, before turning back to ask how those processes discovered at the macroscopic level gave distinct shape to an individual human and his sociopolitical subjectivity.

As well as being a study of E.D. Morel's political career, this dissertation is also a self-consciously experimental work of *speculative history* – that is to say, of historical enquiry which grounds itself theoretically by reference to axioms distinct from the empiricism which still underpins the majority of Anglo-American scholarship. The fundamental assumptions and preoccupations of my investigation are instead drawn from so-called 'continental philosophy', in particular the traditions of phenomenology, existentialism, Western Marxism, and psychoanalysis.

Especially important to this project is the titular concept of a 'World': an internally coherent existential space of signification through which the subject is able to navigate its existence meaningfully. In terms of practical relevance to a work of history, the intent to map past Worlds leads us into an investigation of the precise conditions which made the actions of Morel's actions *thinkable*, and the meanings which such interventions carried within their context.

Extended Abstract

Edmund Dene Morel (1873-1924) was one of the most fascinating and contradictory actors in all of Edwardian politics. Over the course of his career, he was dubbed both the new Wilberforce and a paranoid racist; a treasonous internationalist and an Anglo-Saxon chauvinist; in other words, a hero and a villain. In reality he was both – not a compromised mediocrity blowing one way then the next, but a strident crusader whose single-minded pursuit of his quarry drove him to perform deeds of both moral excellence (with world-historic consequences) and hateful demerit (observed approvingly by Adolf Hitler). Indeed, Morel's public work *was* his life, a monomaniacal commitment which inspired many and alienated many more. He had few passions or relationships which were not entangled more or less directly in the sequence of grand campaigns which gave shape to his short existence, and seems barely to have paused for breath between each one before launching himself into another decade-swallowing tilt at the towering windmills of European high politics.

Beginning his career as an unremarkable hireling in the army of clerical workers employed by the mighty Liverpool shipping firm Elder Dempster, Morel's life would be transformed irrevocably by his close exposure to the records of the company's business dealings with the Congo Free State (the name given to the vast Central African territory personally owned by the Belgian King Leopold II). Through careful inspection of his employer's accounts, Morel came to the realisation that nothing of value was being sent to the Congo to recompense the indigenous inhabitants for the mountains of treasure (especially rubber) being sluiced out of the basin – only guns, on a scale sufficient to force a vast population into a state of total submission.

After spearheading one of the largest humanitarian campaigns ever mounted against the atrocities being perpetrated in the Free State, and forcing Leopold to surrender his overlordship of the Congo to the control of the Belgian government, Morel turned his blazing rhetorical powers against the shadowy system of interimperial foreign policy he dubbed 'secret diplomacy'. When proved tragically correct by the July Crisis of 1914 in terms of the dangers presented by Great Power alliances made without democratic consultation,

Morel would help found a campaigning organisation, the Union of Democratic Control, which would become Britain's preeminent force for peace during the war years, and exert significant influence on the Labour Party's formulation of foreign policy well into the 1920s.

Morel was jailed by the Lloyd George government in the summer of 1917, a direct result of his tireless agitation in the cause of peace. His incarceration in Pentonville broke his physical and mental health, and he emerged a more bitter and ruthless figure than before – though still possessed of indefatigable reserves of crusading energy. This newly harsh iteration of Morel now trained his sights on the peace settlement struck at Versailles, unleashing volley after volley of inflammatory invective against what he regarded as a Carthaginian peace: an exercise in victor's justice enforced by a cabal of militarists, financiers, and unaccountable political elites. The ultimate expression of this fury would forever tarnish Morel's reputation. In 1920, he embarked upon what would become known as the 'Black Horror' affair, a perniciously racist campaign accusing African troops stationed in the Rhineland of perpetrating unspeakable sexual crimes against the women and children of the occupied population, with no basis in anything remotely resembling facticity.

Despite having inflicted immense harm on both the sociocultural *Stimmung* of post-war Germany and his own public standing, Morel was selected as a candidate for the Labour Party in the election of 1922, despatching the arch-militarist Winston Churchill in a bitterly fought campaign for the seat at Dundee. Though selected to join the MacDonald government, Morel would be denied the post of Foreign Secretary he so desperately craved, and his parliamentary career would ultimately prove a noonday shadow of his mighty achievements as a social movement leader. Just two years later, having never fully recovered from the intense strain of his wartime imprisonment, Morel passed away quietly on 12 November 1924, at the age of fifty-one.

This dissertation consists of four interlinked essays on the subject of this beguiling character, each taking as their focus a distinct period of Morel's life and career. In every chapter I take up a different set of theoretical tools in order to investigate the relationship of his actions and experience to grander historical questions from as wide a variety of disciplinary perspectives as possible, before turning back to ask how those processes discovered at the macroscopic level gave

distinct shape to an individual human and his sociopolitical subjectivity, elucidating the dialectical, mutually-definitive relationship between the particular and the totality which constitutes human History.¹ The contours of a single, brief lifespan, especially one as richly evocative as Morel's, will gradually, and through prolonged scholarly attention, reveal the impress of grand historical force, just as charcoal moving across paper slowly discloses the complex patterning of the surface below. The more ways we find of looking at Morel afresh, the closer we can come to a total understanding of his life in context, and thus to genuine insight into the historical situation he inhabited.

As well as being a study of E.D. Morel's political career, this dissertation is also a self-consciously experimental work of *speculative history* – that is to say, of historical enquiry which grounds itself theoretically and philosophically by reference to axioms distinct from the Rankean-Eltonian empiricism which still underpins the overwhelming majority of Anglo-American scholarship. More specifically, the fundamental assumptions and preoccupations of my investigation are drawn from among those fractious Franco-German schools of thought conventionally grouped together in English under the vaguely disapproving appellation 'continental philosophy', in particular the traditions of phenomenology, existentialism, Western Marxism, and psychoanalysis.

Especially important to this project is the titular phenomenological concept of a 'World': an internally coherent existential space of signification through which the subject is able to navigate its existence meaningfully. In terms of practical relevance to a work of history, the intent to map past Worlds leads us into an investigation of the precise conditions which made the actions of an individual (in this case Morel) *thinkable*, and the meanings which such interventions carried within their context. In the essays that follow, I locate Morel's beliefs, practices, and self-understanding within their concrete Worldly position along both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' axes – that is to say, in their place both as links in the long, tortuous chains of heredity by which structures of thought descend through particular minds, and as interventions in Worlds shared by other subjects, whose mediation of those phenomena simultaneously

¹ I am distinguishing here and throughout between 'History' (the totality of past events) and 'history' (the study thereof).

perpetuated and modified the shape of the Worlds-in-time they shared with Morel.

The first essay of this dissertation begins with a description of Morel's youth and education, considering the potential influence of formative events on his mature character, before turning to the earliest phase of his career as a clerk for Elder Dempster. I make use here of conceptual tools derived from phenomenology and sense history, in order to evoke the experience of life in the port city amidst the hurly-burly of the High Modern revolution: the sights, sounds and smells of Liverpool at the turn of the century, understood not simply as neutral sensory data but as historical experiences always already infused with sociocultural meaning. I trace the intellectual descent of a particular mercantile genus of liberalism, the so-called 'Manchester School', the influence of which permeated the social and intellectual milieu of the Liverpoolian shipping industry, and left a deep imprint on the nascent political subjectivity of the teenaged Morel. I discuss Elder Dempster's position within the global apparatuses of accumulation and empire, with especial attention paid to the materialities and logistics of long-distance shipping in the fossil-fuelled era. Finally, I closely examine the crucial role of the clerical labourer as a cog in the machinery of technocapitalist informational management, and contend that it was precisely that intimate position *nel ventre della balena* which enabled the clerk Morel to make his epochal discovery of King Leopold's crimes from the abstract traces left on a balance sheet.

In the second section, I consider the terrifying weight of contingency and 'moral luck' in determining the ethical valence of human existence with reference to the *clinamen* of Morel's chance encounter with the bloody ledgers of the Leopoldian state. I make use of new insights from the field of information theory (as yet unassimilated into historical scholarship) into the study of unknowledge, misinformation, and conspiracism in the context of the Congo reform campaign, as well as discussing the deeper, transformative effects of modern communications technology, which does not simply transmit neutral 'facts' from person to person but rather reshapes the very form of the human subject through its rhythms, prompts, and demands. I probe the psychology of the humanitarian impulse as it arises in the context of metropolitan liberalism, and outline the strategies by which pity for the suffering other is activated by

campaigners within a mass-mediated discourse. I make use of the work of literary scholars on the subject of the Congo's position within European discourse as a symbol of degeneration, darkness, and unknowability, with especial reference made to the most celebrated metropolitan ventriloquist of the nightmare of the Free State, Joseph Conrad. Turning my attention away from representations and towards the material politics of empire, I place the Congo Free State itself within the broader context of extractive imperialism across the global 'resource frontier' at the *fin de siècle*, demonstrating the intimate link between environmental destruction and mass violence in the colonial sphere.

The third essay, covering the period of the First World War and Morel's anti-militarist campaigning, is informed primarily by political theory. I excavate the intellectual foundations atop which the UDC's opposition to the Great War was constructed and justified, tracing the genealogy of liberal peace theory from Montesquieu and Kant down to Morel's contemporaries, Jan Bloch and Norman Angell. I position Morel's primary bugbear during this period, the system of so-called 'secret diplomacy' which governed European foreign policy, within the context of the semi-democratic dual state structure of the bourgeois polity, integrating the structural analyses of a diverse range of theorists including Walter Bagehot, C. Wright Mills, Ralph Miliband, Nicos Poulantzas, and Ola Tunander. I make use of contemporary psychological case studies to speculate on the radicalising effect which incarceration may have wrought on Morel's political subjectivity. Finally, I highlight the contradictions of the highly plastic geopolitical situation of the immediate post-war years – the so-called 'Wilsonian moment' – and narrate the rapid coagulation of a post-Versailles revisionist movement on the left as well as right, of which Morel would become one of the most prominent and aggressive spokesmen.

The last section, on the subject of Morel's repulsive Black Horror campaign, sees the most sustained recourse made in this dissertation to the insights of the psychoanalytic tradition. I make use of theoretical instruments developed by Freud, Fanon, and Lacan in order to tender an explanation for the mass social distress precipitated by the panic. I place the widespread paranoia regarding female sexual impropriety which enabled the Black Horror to percolate so readily in the context of both the extreme 'trench misogyny' of the war years, a chauvinistic cast of mind which provided fertile soil for the

germination of politicised patriarchal reaction among disillusioned ex-soldiers, and the emergence in this period of the troubling, sexually independent figure of the 'New Woman'. Finally, I explore the contingent developments in French colonial and military strategy which led to the posting of African troops on European soil during the war and to their continued presence in the Rhineland as part of the army of occupation, and consider theoretical approaches to the abject fear of black sexuality in white society which provided the principal affective anchor by which the Black Horror meme became rooted in European discourse.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Marc Mulholland, for his patient and considerate shepherding of this project to its conclusion over the course of a very strange few years. I also wish to extend my deepest gratitude to my undergraduate tutor, Alex Gajda, without whose indulgence of my many idiosyncrasies I doubt I would have fallen quite so profoundly in love with the writing of history.

It is unlikely that I could ever have made it to the end of this project with my sanity intact without the constant support of my friends and colleagues from St. Peter's College: Joe Ghousoub, Kim Glassman, Bobby Klapper, and Dom McGann. I love you all very much.

I will never be able to repay my parents for their endless support through this long, long march to the finish line. Anything of value in this piece owes a great deal to their patience, kindness, and willingness to repeatedly copyread unfinished chapters. I promise that someday I will learn why a split infinitive is bad.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my grandparents. I hope my work does you proud, now and in the years to come.

Introduction: Worlds

i.

Edmund Dene Morel (1873-1924) was one of the most fascinating and contradictory actors in all of Edwardian politics. Over the course of his career, he was dubbed both the new Wilberforce and a paranoid racist; a treasonous internationalist and an Anglo-Saxon chauvinist; in other words, a hero and a villain. In reality he was both – not a compromised mediocrity blowing one way then the next, but a strident crusader whose single-minded pursuit of his quarry drove him to perform deeds of both moral excellence (with world-historic consequences) and hateful demerit (observed approvingly by Adolf Hitler). Indeed, Morel's public work *was* his life, a monomaniacal commitment which inspired many and alienated many more. He had few passions or relationships which were not entangled more or less directly in the sequence of grand campaigns which gave shape to his short existence, and seems barely to have paused for breath between each one before launching himself into another decade-swallowing tilt at the towering windmills of European high politics.

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shared by other subjects, whose mediation of those phenomena simultaneously perpetuated and modified the shape of the Worlds-in-time they shared with Morel.

The idiosyncratic form and methodology of my thesis owe much to the circumstances of its composition. As a result of the catastrophic outbreak of Covid-19, most university libraries were closed for the better part of two years – including that of the London School of Economics, where the Morel archive is permanently housed. As it became obvious that the pandemic would not be swift in its passing, and thus that a traditional empirical study of the documentary *Überreste* was out of the question, I decided to plot a radically different course. Immersing myself in theoretical literature, I began to incorporate insights from a panoply of intellectual traditions into an internally consistent historical methodology, one which would allow me to speak meaningfully about Morel and his position within the gyre of sociopolitical forces, working not from the sources outwards but rather from ‘outside-in’ – that is to say, by first outlining the investigative propositions of a particular school of thought before applying that ‘lens’ to the events of Morel’s life and career, as recounted in his published work, secondary literature, and (after Covid eventually left the scene) the archives, in order to emerge with novel insights into historical situations which a more traditional methodology would likely not have garnered. It is for this reason that I refer to the chapters of my thesis as ‘essays’, or rather *essais* in the precise Montaignean sense, because each constitutes a nakedly exploratory and unorthodox attempt to set forth a cogent historical argument using tools more unfamiliar to Anglophone historiography than the default recourse to a largely uninterrogated empiricism. Despite the colossal upheaval which the pandemic imposed upon my plans for this project, I thus find myself oddly grateful for its obtrusion, as the limitations placed upon my work have forced me to think with greater theoretical sophistication about both this piece in particular and my historiographical stance more generally, the fruits of which are hopefully visible below.

The first essay of this dissertation begins with a description of Morel’s youth and education, considering the potential influence of formative events on his mature character, before turning to the earliest phase of his career as a clerk for Elder Dempster. I make use here of conceptual tools derived from

phenomenology and sense history, in order to evoke the experience of life in the port city amidst the hurly-burly of the High Modern revolution: the sights, sounds and smells of Liverpool at the turn of the century, understood not simply as neutral sensory data but as historical experiences always already infused with sociocultural meaning. I trace the intellectual descent of a particular mercantile genus of liberalism, the so-called ‘Manchester School’, the influence of which permeated the social and intellectual milieu of the Liverpoolian shipping industry, and left a deep imprint on the nascent political subjectivity of the teenaged Morel. I discuss Elder Dempster’s position within the global apparatuses of accumulation and empire, with especial attention paid to the materialities and logistics of long-distance shipping in the fossil-fuelled era. Finally, I closely examine the crucial role of the clerical labourer as a cog in the machinery of technocapitalist informational management, and contend that it was precisely that intimate position *nel ventre della balena* which enabled the clerk Morel to make his epochal discovery of King Leopold’s crimes from the abstract traces left on a balance sheet.

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global ‘resource frontier’ at the *fin de siècle*, demonstrating the intimate link between environmental destruction and mass violence in the colonial sphere.

The third essay, covering the period of the First World War and Morel’s anti-militarist campaigning, is informed primarily by political theory. I excavate the intellectual foundations atop which the UDC’s opposition to the Great War was constructed and justified, tracing the genealogy of liberal peace theory from Montesquieu and Kant down to Morel’s contemporaries, Jan Bloch and Norman Angell. I position Morel’s primary bugbear during this period, the system of so-called ‘secret diplomacy’ which governed European foreign policy, within the context of the semi-democratic dual state structure of the bourgeois polity, integrating the structural analyses of a diverse range of theorists including Walter Bagehot, C. Wright Mills, Ralph Miliband, Nicos Poulantzas, and Ola Tunander. I make use of contemporary psychological case studies to speculate on the radicalising effect which incarceration may have wrought on Morel’s political subjectivity. Finally, I highlight the contradictions of the highly plastic geopolitical situation of the immediate post-war years – the so-called ‘Wilsonian moment’ – and narrate the rapid coagulation of a post-Versailles revisionist movement on the left as well as right, of which Morel would become one of the most prominent and aggressive spokesmen.

The last section, on the subject of Morel’s repulsive Black Horror campaign, sees the most sustained recourse made in this dissertation to the insights of the psychoanalytic tradition. I make use of theoretical instruments developed by Freud, Fanon, and Lacan in order to tender an explanation for the mass social distress precipitated by the panic. I place the widespread paranoia regarding female sexual impropriety which enabled the Black Horror to percolate so readily in the context of both the extreme ‘trench misogyny’ of the war years, a chauvinistic cast of mind which provided fertile soil for the germination of politicised patriarchal reaction among disillusioned ex-soldiers, and the emergence in this period of the troubling, sexually independent figure of the ‘New Woman’. Finally, I explore the contingent developments in French colonial and military strategy which led to the posting of African troops on European soil during the war and to their continued presence in the Rhineland as part of the army of occupation, and consider theoretical approaches to the abject fear of black sexuality in white society which provided the principal

affective anchor by which the Black Horror meme became rooted in European discourse.

ii.

The first attempt to treat the life and career of Edmund Dene Morel with scholarly seriousness was mounted during his own lifetime. Its author was F. Seymour Cocks (1882-1953), Morel's friend, partner in campaigning, and fellow member of the first Labour government.³ Given this provenance, it is unsurprising that Cocks' account, *E.D. Morel: The Man and His Work* (1920), tends toward the hagiographic. Cocks depicts Morel as a generically heroic figure, facing down near-insurmountable odds and emerging victoriously every time. In this telling, even Morel's childhood is populated by an abundance of premonitory episodes which anticipate his later development into both a valiant campaigner and an archetypal Englishman, possessed of 'British tenacity, stubbornness, impatience, courage, and scorn of consequences'.⁴ The nationalism of Cocks' Morel is evidence of the inextricability of his book from its context, and of the curious status of *The Man and His Work* as both a primary and secondary source. As detailed by Cocks, Morel's reputation had come under brutal assault due to his opposition to British involvement in the First World War, and he was tarred in the press 'not only as an apologist for Germany, but actually as a "pro-German"'.⁵ Cocks' account is thus a self-conscious labour of vindication, and his heroic portrayal of Morel would remain the standard historical depiction up until the revisionist work by Catherine Cline some sixty years later.

Yet if Cocks' work bears little resemblance to any ideal of scholarly detachment, he nevertheless succeeds where most later historians have failed in painting a biographically holistic picture of Morel across the various episodes of his career – the campaigns against King Leopold, secret diplomacy, the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles, and the occupation of the Rhineland – which discerns through-lines of coherent principle whilst also recognising

³ F. Seymour Cocks, *E.D. Morel: The Man and his Work* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 282

moments of sudden subjective peripety in response to contingent events and experiences. To Cocks, Morel's various crusades all reflect 'a firm belief in the virtues of international co-operation'. But although this belief remained constant throughout his career, Morel's prognosis as to the failure of European politics to live up to that ideal was dramatically altered by his contact during the Congo reform campaign with the career diplomats of the Foreign Office. Cocks argues that 'as public feeling in support of Congo Reform deepened and grew in volume', Morel came to loathe 'the reluctance of the Foreign Office to move in the direction towards which public opinion was urging it' for fear of disrupting 'the delicate balance of international relationships'.⁶ Out of these specific experiences developed his conviction, which he would iterate forcefully during the First World War, that *international* peace and co-operation was being sabotaged by the anti-democratic power of *intranational* elites.

The limitations of Cocks' work may be recognised in the fact that, in 1946, the philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) could be found writing to Morel's widow, Mary, inquiring as to whether a qualified biographer might be found to memorialise her late husband and his work.⁷ That same year, Douglas Goldring (1887-1960), the radical journalist and Morel's friend and comrade, expressed to Mary his 'exasperation that none of [Morel's] close political associates with the necessary qualifications has done anything to keep alive the memory of both the man and his message'.⁸ Yet, after Cocks, Morel went undiscussed in scholarly literature until 1957, when he became the coincidental subject of two essays by a pair of strikingly dissimilar historians: W.S. Adams and A.J.P. Taylor. These pen portraits are fascinating when read in counterpoint, containing as they do major similarities (*viz.*, their lionising of Morel and their personal emotional engagement with their subject), but become freighted with divergent meanings when read in the context of the collections in which they are found. Adams's *Edwardian Portraits* opens with a sentimental sketch of the author as a young boy during the 1910s, detailing the vivid effect which that period exerted on his intellectual and emotional development; and indeed, the collection as a whole is characterised by a faintly peculiar Boys' Own

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-6.

⁷ LSE Archives, Morel Papers, F1/1/9, Bertrand Russell to Mary Morel [all subsequent archival references are to this collection unless explicitly stated].

⁸ F17/2/4, Douglas Goldring to Mary Morel.

tone.⁹ This strange effect is perhaps best expressed by the list of fellow recipients of ‘portraits’ alongside whom Morel is uneasily bracketed: King Edward VII (1841-1910); the adventurer-poet and breeder of racehorses Wilfried Scawen Blunt (1840-1922); the arch-industrialist Lord Leverhulme (1851-1925); and Scoutmaster prime Sir Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941). Morel himself is furnished with a hyperbolic introduction which locates him in the lineage of Edwardian adventure fiction:

In the age of Sir Anthony Hope’s *The Prisoner Of Zenda*, Sir Henry Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, truth could rarely hope to be stranger than fiction; but a story written by all three in collaboration would still fall short of the true story of E.D. Morel...¹⁰

While Morel’s own stock rhetorical pose as a Holmesian ‘detective’ and his self-presentation in his campaigns as a virile, masculine crusader could well be fruitfully examined in terms of the cultural milieu and literary stock figures of his day, it must be noted that this is not Adams’ intent here.¹¹ Ultimately, Adams’ account is a shallow interrogation of Morel’s career, interesting largely for its indication of the continued potency of Cocks’ heroic portrayal, and for its contrast with the essay written that same year by Taylor, another (far greater) scholar unafraid to impose his own character on the presentation of History.

While A.J.P. Taylor’s *The Trouble Makers* (1957), the published form of his Ford Lectures on dissent in British foreign policy, is a significantly more insightful and original work than *Edwardian Portraits*, it shares with Adams’ book a very personal engagement with the life and career of Morel.¹² As Taylor admits with characteristic candour in the preface:

⁹ W.S. Adams, *Edwardian Portraits* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹¹ Cf. Joseph Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880-1915* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹² A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy, 1792-1939* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957).

This book presents the Englishmen whom I most revere. I hope that, if I had been their contemporary, I should have shared their outlook.¹³

Taylor is primarily concerned here with Morel's role in the Union of Democratic Control (the anti-war pressure group he co-founded in 1914) and with his vocal rejection of Britain's imperial foreign policy consensus more broadly. In this respect, Taylor struck out in a direction where few have followed, and most subsequent historians have found Morel's involvement in the Congo reform movement a far more interesting subject of investigation. For Taylor, however, it was E.D. Morel more than anyone else who drove the early Labour Party into its adoption of a 'revolutionary' foreign policy:

Versailles had taught it that the governing class was irredeemably wicked; the Councils of Action had shown that this wickedness could be arrested before it passed into action. Labour relied on 'direct action' until it won political power; then it would sweep away the existing evils by 'open diplomacy'.¹⁴

In Taylor's reading, the interwar Labour Party marched in lockstep with the UDC on issues of foreign policy; in turn, he argues, quoting the feminist, pacifist and socialist Helena Swanwick (1864-1939), 'E.D.M. was the UDC. and the UDC. was E.D.M.'. ¹⁵ Such an interpretation thus positions Morel as one of the most significant figures in the development of British foreign policy during the first half of the twentieth century.

By far the most successful attempt to present a holistic overview of Morel's career is Catherine Cline's excellent *E.D. Morel, 1873-1924: The Strategies of Protest* (1980).¹⁶ Cline's is a fuller treatment than that of either Adams or Taylor, and it explicitly rejects the hagiographic tendencies of Cocks. In the nearly forty years since its publication, nothing has yet been written to supersede *The Strategies of Protest* as the definitive study of Morel's career. Providing an overview which envisions his various campaigns as the ostents of

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 165

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 133

¹⁶ Catherine Cline, *E.D. Morel, 1873-1924: The Strategies of Protest* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980).

a holistic 'lifelong effort to mould public opinion and to make that opinion a formative influence in British foreign policy,' Cline's work is particularly striking in its self-consciously revisionist approach to Morel himself.¹⁷ Rejecting the admiring tone adopted towards Morel by the majority of historians before and since, Cline presents an arrogant and sometimes closed-minded man who drove ahead with his ideological crusades without a thought for the consequences, often alienating past or potential allies in the process. Cline's 'inflexible and intransigent' Morel 'failed to perceive the complexity of the moral as well as the power factors in matters of foreign policy', while his 'blinkered view' of foreign affairs was accompanied by ignorance of 'the whole range of domestic problems'.¹⁸ Cline's revisionist account of Morel's personality and motivations may be regarded as a testament to changing social mores in her own time; her study of Morel was published in 1980, as the harsh light of the neoliberal morning broke over America and Britain. Indeed, early in her book, Cline reflects on the cynical anti-Prometheanism which was beginning to settle over the Western political horizon:

Reformers, once viewed as men of wide vision and extraordinary maturity, who dedicate themselves to a cause for reasons of sheer altruism, are now often seen as psychologically disturbed persons seeking martyrdom, religious zealots using the downtrodden to further their own sense of spiritual wellbeing, or the members of declining social groups seizing on a potentially popular issue as a way of maintaining a position of leadership...¹⁹

While *Strategies of Protest* is doubtless the most complete work on Morel thus written, it is nevertheless deficient in several important aspects. For one, it is still not a work of sufficient length to qualify as a 'full treatment' of Morel's life and career, with Cline's account of the UDC in particular unsatisfactorily brisk. While successful in placing Morel within his immediate political context, it refuses to take up the baton proffered by A.J.P. Taylor and examine Morel within any kind of longer traditions of British radical thought. Furthermore, there is no attempt by Cline (working before the heyday of the cultural turn) to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146-7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

place Morel in any context *beyond* that of the strictly political; there is little sense of the broader currents of economic, intellectual, and social history which flowed through his life. *Strategies of Protest* remains an unbettered accomplishment, to be sure, but still one with a narrowly circumscribed set of historiographical goals.

By far the most significant work on Morel since Cline's *Strategies of Protest* is Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998), a best-selling account of the genesis of the Congo Free State, its descent into unspeakable violence, and the subsequent campaign against its atrocities spearheaded by E.D. Morel.²⁰ As Hochschild discusses in the afterword to the book's second edition, the initial publication of *King Leopold's Ghost* ignited a firestorm of public discussion (especially in Belgium), which returned the Congo Free State, and E.D. Morel, to discursive prominence for the first time in seventy years. More often than not, when the story of Morel's Congo campaign has been told since in published general or synthetic histories, it is Hochschild's name which recurs most frequently in the footnotes.²¹ Indeed, without the runaway success of this well-written piece of historical narrative, it is hard to imagine Jeremy Corbyn, just months before his elevation to leadership of the Labour Party in 2015, singing the praises of Morel in Parliament.²² Morel epitomised that humanistic, moralistic Labour tradition from which Corbyn himself hails, both being fuglemen of a rare but distinctive clade within British radicalism which concentrates its appeal for social justice on the international arena, and which grounds itself in individual ethical response rather than in class analysis of the domestic situation.

Hochschild's superbly written book was frequently compared in press notices to a thrilling novel. If that were the case, then Morel would assuredly be its protagonist, the 'most formidable enemy' that the scelestic tyrant Leopold II would ever face. It perhaps goes without saying, then, that Hochschild does not discuss Morel's involvement in the grim 'Black Horror on the Rhine' saga, the

²⁰ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London: Macmillan, 2006).

²¹ E.g. Philip Blom, 'His Majesty and Mister Morel', in *The Vertigo Years: Change and Culture in the West, 1900-1914* (London: Phoenix, 2008), 92-121.

²² Corbyn explicitly praised Hochschild's 'wonderful work': *Hansard*, HC Deb, Mar 25 2015, v.594, col.502WH.

event which presents more intransigent difficulties to the hagiographic interpretation of Morel than any other event in his life.²³ In this sense, we may observe that Hochschild has mounted an effective resurrection of the pre-Cline consensus on Morel's uncomplicated heroism. The prominence *King Leopold's Ghost* enjoys in the popular historical imagination compared to alternative accounts of Morel's career (even variant panegyrics which simply emphasise different aspects of his personality and career, as with A.J.P. Taylor) has rendered it the paradigmatic interpretation, which all subsequent treatments of Morel must acknowledge.

The most high-profile scholarly effort to follow Taylor rather than Hochschild and examine Morel in the context of pacifism and the UDC rather than the now-fashionable Congo reform movement is that of Martin Ceadel in his broad history of the British peace movement.²⁴ Ceadel concludes that a more precise term than 'pacifist' for Morel would be 'isolationist'. While implacably opposed to British involvement in the First World War, to a greater degree than even many of his UDC contemporaries (for example Arthur Ponsonby (1871-1946) and Arthur Henderson (1863-1935)), Ceadel notes that Morel nevertheless vetoed attempts to inscribe opposition to conscription as a core value of the UDC, on the grounds that he himself, while opposed to foreign war, would find the call to join a genuinely defensive effort against invasion 'impossible to resist'.²⁵ Ceadel also attempts to join up the various and conflicting strands of Morel's career into a biographically coherent narrative of a subjective lifespan. In particular, the historian's linking of Morel's post-war extremism and willingness to sacrifice all other commitments to his assault on Franco-British militarism (most notoriously in the Black Horror campaign) to his ordeal in prison during the war after his arrest for dissent, and the attendant 'nervous breakdowns' which he suffered afterwards, makes sense of Morel's seemingly dramatically altered attitudes and strategies in different periods of his career in a way which narratives of overall ideological consistency throughout his life fail to do – notably the odd and reductive thesis recently proposed by Iris Wigger, which attempts to portray all of Morel's activism across

²³ Hochschild, *Ghost*, 181.

²⁴ Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [hereafter OUP], 2000).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 200-1.

his entire career as being underpinned by a deep-seated and unwavering racial animus.²⁶

Ceadel would later return to the subject of Morel's position within the history of the British debate on foreign policy during the First World War in an article which compares Morel, here designated as the avatar of a 'radical-isolationist' position, with his then-colleague in the Liberal Party, the 'liberal-internationalist' Gilbert Murray (1866-1957).²⁷ Though both regarded the 'Liberal imperialism' of the likes of Grey and Asquith with disdain, Murray argued for the necessity of internationalism and commercial connectivity for the prevention of war, while Morel (as had previously been noted by Taylor) abandoned that position, becoming the standard-bearer for an argument which instead stressed the importance of democratic accountability and control *within* states, restraining the ability of enchorial elites to drag a country into war against the (presumably pacifistic) wishes of the general populace. In an innovative historiographical leap, Ceadel now connects Morel to a tradition of British radicalism dating back not just to the standard liberal tidesmarks Richard Cobden (1804-65) and John Bright (1811-89), but also to the legacy of the French Revolution and to Thomas Paine (1737-1809) and William Godwin (1756-1836), who had argued that wars were prosecuted by aristocrats and monarchs and would be eliminated by the installation of republicanism.²⁸ Yet if Ceadel's characterisation of Morel's wartime activism is the most historically and intellectually sensitive yet seen, his description of the Congo Reform Association as Morel's 'one man band' (a sentence which almost seems designed to infuriate recent historians of the CRA such as Dean Pavlakis) is evidence of the apparent inability of scholars to apply the same level of academic rigour to *all* aspects of Morel's career simultaneously.²⁹

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 260; Iris Wigger, *The Black Horror on the Rhine: Intersections of Race, Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan [hereafter PM], 2017), 45-61.

²⁷ Martin Ceadel, 'Gilbert Murray v. E.D. Morel', *Journal of Liberal History* 87 (2015), 34-9.

²⁸ On Godwin, Paine, and other radical 'troublemakers' of the Romantic generation, see Geoffrey Ashe, *The Offbeat Radicals: The British Tradition of Alternative Dissent* (London: Methuen, 2007).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

In his own work, Pavlakis has sought to question the dominant position enjoyed by Morel in conventional histories of the Congo reform movement.³⁰ Instead, his highly sophisticated study attempts to describe the mutive and multifarious nature of the reform movement as a whole, in which the importance of individuals and groupings – and their various alliances and enmities – shifted constantly in response to situational factors, ranging from the international political situation to local fundraising shortfalls. With regards to Morel, Pavlakis acknowledges that the reform movement ‘was not a mass force that then found leaders’ but rather ‘had to be coaxed into existence, given institutional form and sustained by a few leaders’, among whom Morel was paramount. However, he also notes that the power and prolixity of Morel’s writing (and the egotism which drove him to emphasise his determinative proximity to every major twist and turn in the campaign) can offer a misleading incuse of indispensability not wholly borne out by more in-depth study. An effort must be made, therefore, to tell the story of the reform movement in a way which

neither adulates nor trivialises Morel but tries to incorporate the human and structural factors that created the movement’s flawed success.³¹

One recurring note which emerges from a review of the literature is the fact that scholars and interpreters of Morel, particularly of a recent vintage, have been preoccupied with the question of moral judgement. For Hochschild and those who have followed his line (*i.e.* Corbyn, or the light but well-written recent biography by Donald Mitchell), Morel was a selfless hero who saved countless lives.³² For Wigger on the other hand, he was simply, like Achebe’s Conrad, ‘a bloody racist’.³³ For my own part, I firmly reject the idea that it is necessary to pass some final binary moral judgement on Morel, and I will not be doing so in this thesis. At the same time, I will also make no effort to hide my admiration for Morel’s achievements in the early stages of his career, nor

³⁰ Dean Pavlakis, *British Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Movement, 1896-1913* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

³² Donald Mitchell, *The Politics of Dissent: A Biography of E.D. Morel* (Bristol: SilverWood, 2014).

³³ See Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’, *Massachusetts Review* 57.1 (2016 [1975]), 14-27.

downplay my sense of revulsion at the bleak racism of his post-war demagoguery. Historians cannot untangle themselves from the circumstances in which they write, from their own ideological sympathies and class position, and I believe it is both misguided and hypocritical for a scholar to simulate a degree of remove which is impossible to achieve. Yet the urge to draw up a final moral balance-sheet of Morel's deeds and misdeeds must also be resisted. Here, instead, we will enlist a dialectically anti-humanist approach, one that is committed to charting those broader eddies of History glimpsed often as ripples and occasionally as crashing waves in the life of a single human.

iii.

The central philosophical concern of this thesis is the excavation of what I refer to as the 'Worlds' in which Morel's life and career took place. Thus, a precise definition of the concept of a World is crucial here. It will be quickly apparent that I am adopting a specific usage of that term, freighted with particular meanings beyond the everyday. The simplest answer would be that the World is coterminous with the transcendent *intersubjective realm* in which human Being takes place, and which emerges out of the materiality of the Earth (or 'nature') from which it is nevertheless distinct. My understanding of intersubjectivity – *viz.*, the proposition that the *I* of self-consciousness is always already constituted by its relationships, both to other conscious *Is* and to other objects and processes without reflexive subjectivity – is in turn derived *in primo instantia* from the work of the undercelebrated Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814).³⁴ Fichtean intersubjectivity here functions as a crucial colletic concept, by which the dialectical philosophy of Hegel and Marx may be reconciled with both the existential phenomenology of Heidegger and Sartre and the psychoanalytic tradition of Freud and Lacan, via a historicist ontology in which

³⁴ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath & John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [hereafter CUP], 1982 [1795]). See also James Alexander Clarke, 'Fichte's Theory of Intersubjectivity', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Durham University (2004); Allen Wood, 'Fichte's Intersubjective I', *Inquiry* 49.1 (2006), 62-79; Jacob McNulty, 'Transcendental Philosophy and Intersubjectivity: Mutual Recognition as a Condition for the Possibility of Self-Consciousness in Sections 1-3 of Fichte's Foundations of Natural Right', *European Journal of Philosophy* 24.4 (2016), 788-810.

given social experiences, values, and mental architectures are understood to be directly constitutive of the subject's Being. In an intersubjective account of existence, 'the individual – even the personal, the subjective – is social, collective'.³⁵ We *are* the Other in the very structures of our selves.

My language here (especially my conceptualisation of Being) betrays the deep and sustained influence of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), in particular on my understanding of the World of intersubjective human Being as something apart from the noumenal Earth in-itself of material substance from whence it emerges (or 'falls').³⁶ Heidegger's seminal achievement was to 'historicise the transcendental dimension', grounding an account of subjective Being in its innately social givenness-through-time, rather than the atomistic metaphor of the *tabula rasa*, in which the blank, solitary *cogito* of unblemished consciousness *subsequently* discovers the World through its rational interpretation of sensory data. In truth, Being is always already *Worldly*, social, historical – indeed, is literally *unthinkable* as anything but. *Qua* Heidegger himself:

The World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. The World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being.³⁷

My conception of the Worldly totality as composed in itself of an infinite multiplicity of *Worlds* plural (rather than consisting of a single unbroken field of meaning) is also derived from Heidegger.³⁸ In his description of the relations of sense-making by which existence is navigated, Heidegger insists that human Being exists not as one shared intersubjective World, but rather as many overlapping and interconnected Worlds, each defined by its distinct set of situational relationships and symbologies, and between which the individual

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc Wacquant, *Réponses: Pour un Anthropologie Reflexive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), 101, trans. mine. For a neuroscientific presentation of a similar hypothesis, cf. Michael Graziano & Sabina Kastner, 'Human Consciousness and its Relationship to Social Neuroscience: A Novel Hypothesis', *Cognitive Neuroscience* 2.2 (2011), 98-113.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1950), trans. Albert Hofstadter, in David Farrell Krell (ed.), *Heidegger: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2011), 83-140.

³⁷ Heidegger, 'Art', 108, translation amended for clarity. 'Historicise': Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 93.

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being & Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996 [1923]), 59-83.

subject passes as its situation develops through space and time. For example, as well as my strictly quotidian Worlds – that of my family, say, or my profession – I belong to a series of Worlds with greater extension in spacetime: the World of the village, of the region, of the nation (or indeed the global Worlds of a religion, race, gender, class, political commitment...). Some of these Worlds will be common to both myself and the reader, but we all exist also in a great many more from which the other is excluded and alien. This is all to say that the World-as-lived, the World of my Being as it traverses space and time, is in its very essence plural and multiplicitous, comprised of an endlessly fluctuant array of distinct but interacting networks of relation and signification. To Be in the World at any given time is inescapably to Be in one of *many* Worlds – Worlds which will transform irrevocably over time (perhaps even die), even as the total *World* of human Being perseveres. As philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-98) writes:

If there is but one World, it embraces a multiplicity of contrasting aspects; if there are many Worlds, the collection of them all is one. The one World may be taken as many, or the many Worlds taken as one; whether one or many depends on the way of taking.³⁹

My conception of the World is thus closely akin to the idea of the *lifeworld* as envisioned by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserlian phenomenology, in its model of consciousness's reflexive relationality-in-time, challenges the traditional philosophical dichotomy between perceiving subject and perceived object in a more radical fashion than even that implied by Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) Copernican turn.⁴⁰ Husserl's genius (providing a bridge between Hegel and Heidegger, and thence from Marx to Sartre) was thus to redirect Western philosophy towards the question of human existence *as experienced in Being* (that is to say foundationally time-conscious and presaturated with significance), rather than presupposing the monadic, rational-decisional *I* of Descartes and Locke.⁴¹ Such models of a unified and inquiring self subsequently

³⁹ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1978), 2.

⁴⁰ See Eran Dorfman, 'History of the Lifeworld: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty', *Philosophy Today* 53.3 (2009), 294-303; Sebastian Luft, *Subjectivity and Lifeworld in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), esp. 103-25.

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern

encountering static objects-in-the-World do not capture the experiential sense of life-as-lived, requiring always a preliminary effort to withdraw from one's relations with things as they are for everyday Being, when we are not psychically donning our Rawlsian 'veil of ignorance' and imagining ourselves as the self-nominating, transcendently unified consciousness of active philosophical inquiry.⁴² Yet for Being-in-time, as Husserl's most distinguished disciple Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) writes:

The World is nothing but 'World-as-meaning'... Because we are in the World, we are condemned to meaning, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in History.⁴³

Just as it is for Heidegger, then, the Being of the human subject is for Merleau-Ponty fundamentally inconceivable when divorced from its structural-historical relationality-in-the-World:

Truth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man', or more accurately, there *is* no inner man, man is in the World, and only in the World does he know himself.⁴⁴

The *lifeworld* is therefore the World encountered by Being-in-time through its experiences and relationships with others, as described here by Husserl:

In whatever way we may be conscious of the World as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each 'I-the-man' and all of us together, belong to the World as living with one another in the World; and the World is our World, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together'. We, as living in wakeful World-consciousness, are constantly active on the basis of our passive having of the World... Obviously

University Press, 1970 [1936]). See also Tanja Staehler, *Hegel, Husserl and the Phenomenology of Historical Worlds* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), esp. 169-88 on the 'phenomenology of historical Worlds'; Tom Rockmore, 'Hegel and Husserl: Two Phenomenological Reactions to Kant', *Hegel Bulletin* 38.1 (2017), 67-84.

⁴² See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999 [1971]), 118-22.

⁴³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002 [1945]), xi, xxii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

this is true not only for me, the individual ego; rather we, in living together, have the World pre-given in this together.⁴⁵

I have chosen to conceive of my approach to the endless progress of the historical totality through the infinity of intersubjective Worlds by the distinctly old-fashioned name *speculative history* – though perhaps, with a tip of the cap to Rinus Michels, *total history* would do just as well. To deploy a definition from the philosopher Réal Fillion:

Speculative philosophy of history is concerned with history as a whole, which included explicitly relating the past to the present and the present to the future... We can speculatively consider History-as-a-whole in terms of its temporal unfolding and characterise its constitutive parts as events (understood here in a very broad sense) have happened in the past, giving way to a particular present (in its various configurations), itself opening onto an as yet to be determined future... Each part [thus] only really makes sense when it is seen as relating to the other parts and to the whole.⁴⁶

My overarching ‘speculative strategy’ here is to trace a series of philosophical and macrohistorical *themata* discovered at the level of Fillion’s ‘whole’ (capitalism and imperialism, information and ignorance, technology and the state) through their processional emergence, contestation, and reproduction in the lifeworld of a single historical ‘part’ – that particularity being, in this case, Edmund Dene Morel.⁴⁷ I acknowledge at the same time that this open affiliation with speculative continental philosophy is unfashionable among contemporary historians, especially in the Anglophone world. ‘It seems to be more or less accepted today’, as philosopher Christophe Bouton recently opined, ‘that it is no longer possible to resuscitate, without modification, the speculative philosophy of History handed down to us from Herder to Marx by way of authors like Kant,

⁴⁵ Husserl, 108-9. See also Jürgen Habermas’ reading of Husserl in *The Theory of Communicative Action II: Lifeworld & System – A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity, 1987 [1981]), 119-52.

⁴⁶ Réal Fillion, ‘The Continuing Relevance of Speculative Philosophy of History’, *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 8 (2014), 180-95, 183.

⁴⁷ ‘Speculative strategy’: Alain Badiou, *The Immanence of Truths*, trans. Susan Spitzer & Kenneth Reinhard (London: Bloomsbury, 2022 [2018]), 19.

Fichte, or Hegel'.⁴⁸ It is nevertheless precisely this tradition which I intend to reactivate here, in spite of its general calumny since the postmodern turn anathematised the very idea of identifying so-called 'metanarratives' in the protean labyrinth of the human past.

In 1984, the Foucauldian classicist Paul Veyne denounced all speculative philosophies of History as 'nonsense, akin to a dogmatic illusion' (and *nota bene* the *rechtzeitig* anti-Marxist flavour of the rhetoric): a 'false genre' which has now, thankfully, become a 'dead genre'.⁴⁹ In the opening years of the 2020s, however, the return to the speculative thought of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) in academic philosophy is in full swing. As Alberto Toscano has put it (not entirely sympathetically), 'the antidote to a post-Kantian catastrophe threatens to be a neo-Hegelian reverie'.⁵⁰ My own understanding of the relationship in History between particular and totality, the dialectical dynamic which motivates this thesis in its excavation of the relationship between the particular individual and his World, is fundamentally Hegelian in essence. Thus, many of the thinkers on whose conceptual architecture my investigation relies operate within the dialectical arena Hegel built – including even those who would choose to deny it. We cannot, for instance, identify the philosopher Alain Badiou (1937-) as Hegelian *simplement*, and he has openly rejected such a location. Yet (as many of Badiou's most astute readers have noted) his thought exists in a constant productive dialogue with Hegel, without a sense of which our understanding of his work would be irremediably impoverished.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Christophe Bouton, 'The Critical Theory of History: Rethinking the Philosophy of History in the Light of Koselleck's Work', *History & Theory* 55 (2016), 163-84, 164. On Marx considered as a speculative historian, see Michael Krätke, 'Marx and World History', *International Review of Social History* 63.1 (2018), 91-125.

⁴⁹ Paul Veyne, *Writing History: An Essay on Epistemology*, trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolducru (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 26, 293 n.9.

⁵⁰ Alberto Toscano, 'Against Speculation, or, a Critique of the Critique of Critique: A Remark on Quentin Meillassoux's After Finitude (After Colletti)', in Levi Bryant *et al.* (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 84-91, 91. The return to Hegel is surveyed in Slavoj Žižek, Frank Ruda & Agon Hamza, *Reading Hegel* (Cambridge: Polity 2021); Stefania Achella *et al.* (eds.), *The Owl's Flight: Hegel's Legacy to Contemporary Philosophy* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021). See also Arash Abazari, *Hegel's Ontology of Power: The Structure of Social Domination in Capitalism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), 153-91, on the necessity of positing the totality as the ultimate horizon of sociohistorical inquiry.

⁵¹ Alberto Toscano, 'Emblems and Cuts: Philosophy In and Against History', *Symposium* 12.2 (2008), 18-35; Bruno Bosteels, 'Translator's Introduction' to Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2012), xxx-xl; Jim Vernon & Antonio

Slavoj Žižek (1949-), the holy fool of contemporary critical theory, is more responsible than any other for the ongoing effort to drag Hegel out of the ignominy into which he had been cast, dust him down, and return him to philosophical respectability. Concomitantly, no thinker has exerted a more powerful influence over my own formulation of a neo-Hegelian methodology than Žižek, whose big ‘twist’ on Hegel (indeed, the insight which powers the entire Ljubljana School) is his observation of the profound synchronicity of dialectical philosophy with the insights of the psychoanalytic tradition into the nature of the subject: its contingency, its incompleteness, and its non-identity with itself from moment to moment.⁵² It is primarily through the influence of Žižek’s work that I have come to assimilate the insights of Freud and Lacan regarding the essential qualities of the psyche into my own analysis of Morel’s Being-in-the-World.

Finally, it would be impossible to overstate the foundational importance to this study of the critical intellectual tradition conventionally filed under the name of ‘Marxism’ – Karl Marx (1818-83) himself being, of course, the finest left-Hegelian thinker of them all. To write meaningful history of the modern Worlds in which Morel’s life took place, we must first, with Marx, recognise Capital as the productive-destructive protagonist of modernity itself, the autotelic master of industrialised Being, and the defining force at work in the historical totality over the past three centuries. I must acknowledge a particular debt to the theoretically capacious and self-critical form of Marxist historical inquiry developed over the last five decades by Perry Anderson, whose intellectual and stylistic influence on my work here is evinced clearly in both its essayistic structure and consciously heightened rhetorical register.

The task at hand, then, is to locate our chosen particular, E.D. Morel, in his unusually eloquent position within the totality at the nexus of a thickly-latticed array of historical developments coursing through the World-in-time. Morel’s life is, to deploy a useful cliché, extraordinarily ‘good to think with’, entangled as it is with a rich panoply of powerful historical forces motivating

Calcagno (eds.), *Badiou & Hegel: Infinity, Dialectics, Subjectivity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015).

⁵² Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2007), xviii.

the developments of the early twentieth century: capitalism, empire, racial hierarchy, sexual anxiety, militarism, and the rise of information technology. Making use of conceptual tools developed by a coterie of thinkers from across broad spectrum of traditions, this dissertation delves into the Worlds which made Morel and which Morel in turn remade through his Being in them, tracking the transit of those great forces through the life of a single man.

I

Morel the Clerk: Free Trade and Empire

i.

Georges Edmond Pierre Achille Morel de Ville was born in Paris on July 15th, 1873.⁵³ His father was a Frenchman named Edmond Morel de Ville, while his mother was English: Emmeline de Horne, a stern and respectable woman descended from a long line of petty bourgeois Quakers out of East Anglia. The couple and their son lived, surrounded by other Morel de Villes, in a grand old house on the Avenue d'Eylau, under the supervision of Edmond Sr.'s formidable mother. Edmond died when Georges was just four, from an old injury sustained during the siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Already, the contests of European Great Power politics cast a pall over Morel's existence, though ultimately we can only guess at the effects the early loss of his father had on his development.⁵⁴ Emmeline soon fell out with the domineering matriarch of her late husband's family, prompting her to up sticks and decamp to a small apartment in the city with her son. Despite their newly-straitened circumstances, Morel's insuperable mother now supported herself and Georges economically by teaching English and music to French children, refusing to seek help from either her erstwhile affines or her own family. Either by nature or nurture, this proud stubbornness (almost a mulishness) would be passed on to her son.

Notwithstanding her admirable fortitude, Emmeline assuredly resented her ill treatment by the Morel de Villes after the death of her husband, as well as her financially unstable position. She was adamant that her son would receive a proper education in spite of their tribulations. Furthermore, she was

⁵³ The following biographical sketch draws on Cline, 1-8; Mitchell, 7-14.

⁵⁴ On the important place fathers could hold in their children's emotional lives during this period (*contra* clichés about the stern, distant Victorian patriarch), see Julie-Marie Strange, 'Fatherhood, Providing and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working Class Families', *Historical Journal* [hereafter *HJ*], 55.4 (2012), 1007-27.

quite firm on the point that young Georges would grow up not as a Frenchman, but as an Englishman. These two desires were coterminous, for in the late nineteenth century mass schooling was the liberal British state's principal instrument for establishing a broad-based national identity and sense of dutiful citizenship, as well as interpellating each child into their appropriate class, gender, and racial position within the social whole: 'Learning to read the alphabet and learning to read the nation went hand in glove'.⁵⁵ The French pedagogue Edmond Demolins (1852-1907) went so far as to argue that Britain's very paramountcy as the world's foremost Power was itself a direct product of its educational principles, which jettisoned the classical rote of the French system in favour of a system designed to produce the 'practical, energetic men' capable of running an empire.⁵⁶

Thus, at the age of just eight, the young Morel (now calling himself Edmund, like his father) was despatched overseas to Madras House in Hackney, a prestigious grammar school for well-heeled young men – though not so posh that he would suffer the institutionalised physical and sexual abuse which for centuries has constituted the emotional duramen of boarding life in Britain's public schools.⁵⁷ We might nevertheless suspect that Morel experienced the sting of class shame in the company of some of his more comfortable peers at Madras, perhaps even nurturing a kernel of *ressentiment* towards his social superiors which would persevere into his later dealings with the entitled aristocrats of the Foreign Office.⁵⁸ What we can say with a greater degree of certainty is that these years of hardship strengthened the already close bond between Morel and his mother. He would in later years recall 'the intense devotion which united two rather solitary beings in uncongenial surroundings'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Stephen Heathorn, *From Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 20.

⁵⁶ Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority: To What is it Due?* (London: Leadenhall, 1898), 51.

⁵⁷ Joy Schaverien, *Boarding School Syndrome: The Psychological Trauma of the 'Privileged' Child* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17-31.

⁵⁸ On *ressentiment*, victimhood, and politicised grievance-subjectivity, see Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 22-8; Wendy Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', *Political Theory* 21.3 (1993), 390-410; Mikko Salmela & Tereza Capelos, 'Ressentiment: A Complex Emotion or an Emotional Mechanism of Psychic Defences?', *Politics & Governance* 9.3 (2021), 191-203.

⁵⁹ E.D. Morel, *The History of the Congo Reform Movement*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis & Jean Stengers (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968 [1904]), 4.

After five years at Madras, Morel was transferred to the rather more affordable Bedford Modern School, until his education was abruptly curtailed altogether by the failing health of his remaining parent, still domiciled in France.

Emmeline, conscious of her dwindling time, now took charge of the career direction of ‘my clever son’, as she called him.⁶⁰ Through her efforts, she managed to get Edmund a job at the Paris branch of Drexel, Morgan & Co, the American banking house, where he worked for two years while she planned a route back to England for the pair of them. Eventually, through a letter of introduction from a friend of the family, Emmeline secured passports home for herself and her son, through an offer of work in England for Edmund from the Liverpool shipping firm Elder Dempster. The catch, however, was that this job was as an accounts officer aboard a ship engaged in trade with the far-off land of the Congo, the personal African holding of Leopold II, King of the Belgians. This, Emmeline could not abide. By sheer coincidence, a relative of hers had previously been killed on a trading venture in the Congo, and the possibility of a similar fate befalling her beloved only son was too much to bear. Taking command of events, she pressed Elder Dempster to find a less dangerous job for Morel *filis* – and succeeded. Thus it was that, in 1891, the two English exiles returned ‘home’, with Edmund (now a tall and handsome young man) contracted to a job as a clerk in Elder Dempster’s Liverpool offices, at a rate of 2s 6d an hour.

When writing biographically-informed history, it is always tempting to essay cod-Freudian interpretations of a subject’s childhood, matching notable events and experiences to later developments in personality and career. Yet the fact of Morel’s public life which a keen psychohistorian might be most eager to interpret as a clinical corollary of his upsetting youth (namely the vicious misogallism of his political maturity) seems to have emerged only later in his career, after years of engagement with the question of ‘secret diplomacy’ and French practice thereof during the Congo campaign – in other words, as a developing response to political events, rather than as the symptom of an enduring pathology. During his early years in Liverpool, contrastingly, Morel evinced no especial dislike of France and the French beyond that which might be expected of an Englishman *circa* 1900. There is little evidence in the

⁶⁰ Cline, 3.

historical record to suggest the nursing of any private lifelong grudge, a post-hoc political rationalisation of the psychic trace of childhood trauma. Such an undeniably charismatic Oedipal reading, which would draw a direct line from Morel's miserable formative experiences – the death of his father, the mistreatment of his sainted mother – to his adult political subjectivity must remain hypothetical. It does seem significant, nevertheless, that Morel changed his name upon his return to England. He was now simply 'Edmund Dene Morel', a sturdily Anglo-bourgeois appellation with barely a hint of perceptible Frenchness. Yet, despite his best efforts, something tangibly Gallic in his bearing seems to have lingered well into adult life, at least in the eyes of acquaintances. The Irish Nationalist MP for Liverpool Scotland T.P. O'Connor (1848-1929), for instance, described Morel as possessing the air of 'a French gentleman of good family'.⁶¹ Perhaps this lingering trace of foreignness also helps explain the continued accusations of a lack of patriotism which were to dog Morel throughout his career.

What kind of the impression might a certain 'Frenchness' of mien have made on Morel's contemporaries in England? Significantly, his early life corresponded with a historic thawing of the active mutual contempt which had for centuries been the default state of this ancient imperial antagonism. The most important factor in stimulating the new growth in mutual regard between the British and the French was allochthonous to both, and instead concerned developments to the east:

Germany's growing power changed the relationship between France and Britain. For two centuries, their concern had been with each other, as antagonists and as rival models of civilisation. Everyone else had shared the fascination. But France was now in another tense relationship, which has lasted until the present day. Germany became for France (and others) a new model, combining authoritarian rule with modern efficiency. For Britain it became an economic rival whose success cast doubt on

⁶¹ Quoted in Cline, 5.

progressive British assumptions about free trade, free enterprise, and an unobtrusive state.⁶²

Habitual British ill-will towards the ancestral enemy across the Channel softened significantly during the calamity of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), as an initial preference for the ‘noble, patient, deep, pious and solid Germany’ over ‘vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless and over-sensitive France’ (*sec* Carlyle) faded in light of the Prussian army’s brutality, especially in its occupation of Paris.⁶³ For the first time in British history, newspapers and patriotic cartoonists, like those employed at *Punch* (est. 1841), began to portray France and the French with unalloyed sympathy. As Nietzsche archly observed shortly after the war (in which he reluctantly participated as a medical orderly): ‘France has always mastered the skill of reversing even its disastrous turns of spirit into something charming and seductive’.⁶⁴ Though these heights of compassionate fellow-feeling had faded somewhat by the Morel’s schooldays of the 1880s, as the normal service of interimperial competition between the two resumed, the Franco-Prussian War nevertheless marked a definitive turn of the tide with regards to Britain’s comparative continental sympathies – one which never fully receded, even in the relationship’s coming crisis years of Fashoda, Dreyfus and the Boer War around the turn of the century.⁶⁵

In British eyes, the French remained characterised in essence by that glamorous, self-important passion for *la grande vie* of fashion, sex, and intellectuality which has always invited mockery and jealousy alike from Anglophone observers. Marie Lloyd (1870-1922), the queen of the West End music hall, had a song to this effect, which is indicative in its quality of starry-eyed enthusiasm tinged with mocking irony:

See the twinkle in me eye?

⁶² Robert Tombs & Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: Britain and France – The History of a Love-Hate Relationship* (London: Random House, 2006), 392.

⁶³ Thomas Carlyle, ‘The Latter Stage of the French-German War, 1870-71’ (1870), *Works* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896-99) v.30, 49-59. See Michael Pratt, ‘A Fallen Idol: The Impact of the Franco-Prussian War on the Perception of Germany by British Intellectuals’, *International History Review* 7.4 (1985), 543-75.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marion Farber (Oxford: OUP, 1998 [1886]), 100.

⁶⁵ Tombs & Tombs, 378-85.

Just come back from France, that's why!
 Me and Bill went over there to spend our 'oneymoon.
 First time me in foreign parts,
 Did I like it? Bless yer hearts!
 Can't say more about it than it ended up too soon!
 But don't think I've done with good old England, not likely!
 Bred and born down 'Ackney Road, and proud to own it too!
 Do you like my make-up? Ain't it great?
 It's the latest thing from Paris straight,
 Gives a girl a chance to show you what she can do!
 And I'd like to go again,
 To Paris on the Seine,
 For Paris is a proper Pantomime.
 And if they'd only shift the 'Ackney Road and plant it there,
 I'd like to live in Paris all the time! ⁶⁶

Lloyd's was, of course, the familiar fantasy France of *jouissance* and liberated sensuality. As Robert Vansittart (1881-1957), a young Foreign Office clerk stationed in Paris who would go on to become one of Britain's most senior diplomats, recalled later in life:

Victorian England was vaguely convinced that nineteenth century France had too good a time; that Frenchmen laughed too much and cooked too well... More seriously still, Victorian England suspected that the French put more into, and got more out of, sex than the English. Victorian England had not the vaguest idea of how this was done, but was sure that the advantage was not fair, and quite sure that it was not nice! ⁶⁷

The British artist Philip Gilbert Hamerton observed a rather different reality in his record of everyday French life at the *fin de siècle*, *Round My House* (1894):

The French ideal of the *jeune fille* is very beautiful, it is a sort of poem, but it is carried too far for the rude realities of the world.

⁶⁶ Marie Lloyd, 'The Coster Girl in Paris' (London: Zonophone, 1912) [Recording]. See also Ben MacPherson, *Cultural Identity in British Musical Theatre, 1890–1939: Knowing One's Place* (London: PM, 2018), 31-61.

⁶⁷ Robert Vansittart, *Lessons of My Life* (London: Knopf, 1943), 21-2.

In our neighbourhood girls are brought up with a degree of strictness of which English people have no conception. Their existence is composed entirely of religious duties and homely service.⁶⁸

Concrete reality notwithstanding, the more pudibund elements of British society still managed to induce quivers of anxiety in themselves and others regarding the malign influence of decadent France on domestic morality. In March 1888, MPs held a panicked conference in Parliament regarding the dissemination of French literature throughout the country, spearheaded by the Liberal Samuel Smith (1836-1906), a Liverpool cotton merchant turned social purity campaigner. As Hansard records:

Now, [Smith] asked, were they to stand still while the country was wholly corrupted by literature of this kind? Were they to wait until the moral fibre of the English race was eaten out, as that of the French was almost? Look what such literature had done for France. It overspread that country like a torrent, and its poison was destroying the whole national life. France to-day was rapidly approaching the condition of Rome in the time of the Caesars. The philosophy of France to-day was 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'⁶⁹

Ironically, then, perhaps the most positive expression of Frenchness in Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century was the assimilation of its elevated food culture as a signifier of social distinction. As the gastronome Nathaniel Newnham-Davis exulted in 1903:

Paris is certainly the culinary centre of the world. Wherever the great cooks are born... they all come to Paris to learn their art, and then go out through the whole civilised world as culinary missionaries preaching that there is but one cuisine, and that the *Haute Cuisine Française*.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Round My House: Notes of Rural Life in France in Peace and War* (London: Seely & Co., 1894), 365.

⁶⁹ Hansard, HC Deb 8 May 1888, vol.325, col.1708-9.

⁷⁰ Nathaniel Newnham-Davis, *The Gourmet's Guide to Europe* (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 1.

Food scientist Amy Trubek notes that the British were ‘always the primary audience for French food’, with that repertoire attaining a holistic unity for the first time through its formalisation as a *transmanche* export, served up in that modern Parisian invention, the ‘restaurant’, which had now begun to metastasise to London.⁷¹ In the Northern city which Morel was to call home, however, there was as of yet no consumer revolution in dining. Liverpool, like the rest of Britain outside the capital, would have to await *les Trente Glorieuses* and the democratisation of cosmopolitan pleasures for such a transformation in taste.⁷²

ii.

The overarching questions we must now ask are as follows. First, what kind of World did Morel inhabit after his installation into the logistical machinery of international capitalism, and what kind of phenomenological and ideological factors worked on his subjectivity as a result of his position within the totality? In other words, what grand historical forces can we glimpse in motion through turn of the century Liverpool from our embedded vantage point? Secondly, how did the particular material-informational *dispositif* of this maritime, mercantile World bring about the conditions for the great moment of Morel’s life, namely his encounter with the bureaucracy of the Congo Free State and the dreadful secrets it concealed? What structural elements had to lock together in time and space to create the field of possibility for the occurrence of the Event, with all its subsequent ramifications for the inhabitants of Central Africa?⁷³

⁷¹ Amy Trubek, *Haute Cuisine: How the French Invented the Culinary Profession* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 42. See also Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2001); Brenda Assael, *The London Restaurant, 1840-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 16-53. Cf. Keir Waddington, “‘We Don’t Want Any German Sausages Here!’ Food, Fear, and the German Nation in Victorian and Edwardian Britain”, *Journal of British Studies* 52.4 (2013), 1017-42.

⁷² Joanne Hollows, ‘Enthusiasing About Green Peppers: The Europeanisation of British Food Culture in Post-War Britain, 1960-1975’, *Contemporary British History* 35.3 (2021), 392-416.

⁷³ My sense of the ‘Event’ as the decisive rupture-point which makes possible the emergence of a new World is derived principally from Alain Badiou, *Being & Event*, trans Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005 [1988]), 173-7, on ‘evental sites and historical situations’.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, port cities like Morel's new home on the Mersey were the ventricles of global capitalism, pumping commodities across the oceans via highly regularised supply arteries. The nineteenth century, as Jürgen Osterhammel tells us, was 'the golden age of port cities', or at least of those monstrously vast super-ports capable of absorbing and directing the non-stop torrent of goods gushing through a rapidly globalising capitalist system: London, Marseilles, Rotterdam, New York, Bombay, Shanghai, and, of course, Liverpool. As the Liverpudlian *Northern Daily Times* boomed in 1855:

The commerce of the West Indies gave all their immense growth of cotton to the Liverpool markets, which then supplied Manchester and enabled it to be the first manufacturing town in the world. The manufacturers of glass, machinery, cutlery and earthenware increased so immeasurably that the port immediately felt the mighty extense of its revenue. But there was something mightier still in store, the wonderful invention of steam-power, in its application to navigation, which crowned the rising opulence of the port. The construction of the railways which finally laid down the entire surface of the island for the more speedy transmission of products from the banks of the Mersey.⁷⁴

Super-ports like Liverpool were the egressive termini of the capillary networks of railways which now unfurled like fronds across the industrialised European subcontinent, the points of dispersal for a torrent of manufactures; open doors, too, to their peers across the globe, apertures of ingress for the stuff of entire societies to be unpacked, reloaded onto trains, and disbursed to European producers and consumers.⁷⁵ States poured money into their ports, enabling them to meet the increasingly gargantuan physical, infrastructural, and administrative demands with which they were presented, as well as to absorb a

⁷⁴ 'History of Liverpool Docks', *Northern Daily Times*, 5 Jun 1855. See Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2014 [2009]), 275-83; Lasse Heerten, 'Mooring Mobilities, Fixing Flows: Towards a Global Urban History of Port Cities in the Age of Steam', *Historical Sociology* 34.2 (2021), 350-74.

⁷⁵ Christian Kleinschmidt, 'Infrastructure, Networks, (Large) Technical Systems: The "Hidden Integration" of Europe', *Contemporary European History* 19.3 (2010), 275-84.

great deal of labour amidst the low-growth economic conditions of the Long Depression.⁷⁶

Liverpool was thus thickly tethered to other locations around the world by dint of its position as a global trading hub; indeed, its distinct urban character is the direct result of these connections. As the journalist Dixon Scott (1885-1915), later killed at Gallipoli, observed in 1907:

[The port is] the city's *raison d'être*, the chief orderer and distributor of her people's vocations, and in that way... interweaves class with class, provides merchant, clerk, seamen, and dock-labourers with a common unifying interest.⁷⁷

Morel himself would later recall the 'thrill of excitement' he had experienced as a teenaged new arrival in the city, watching as a steamer disgorged 'her endless barrels of palm oil, bags of kernels, bags and casks of rubber, elephant tusks, huge mahogany logs...' ⁷⁸ Liverpool's steep ascent to economic significance in the first place during the eighteenth century had been predicated on its unique role as the fulcrum of the infamous Atlantic triangle trade, the critical node at which financial outlay completed its transmutation back into (a greater amount of) money, having briefly been incarnated in textiles, sugar, and the bodies of enslaved Africans.⁷⁹ So integral a quilting point for the canvas of global capitalism was Liverpool that the port came to attract bombastic nicknames like 'the second city of Empire', 'the western emporium of Albion', and 'the modern Tyre' – an accumulative apex achieved atop a mountain of black corpses.⁸⁰ This

⁷⁶ Robert Lee, 'Configuring the City: In-Migration, Labour Supply and Port Development in Nineteenth Century Europe', *International Journal of Maritime History* 173 (2005), 91-122; John Darwin, *Unlocking the World: Port Cities and Globalisation in the Age of Steam, 1830-1930* (London: Allen Lane, 2020), 80-119.

⁷⁷ Dixon Scott, *Liverpool* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1907), 14-5.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Kenneth Dike Nwarah, 'Introduction' to E.D. Morel, *Affairs of West Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1968 [1902]), ix-x

⁷⁹ Anthony Tibbles, *Liverpool and the Slave Trade* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press [hereafter LUP], 2018). See also Mark Harvey, 'Slavery, Indenture and the Development of British Industrial Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal* 88 (2019), 66-88; Joseph Inikori, 'Atlantic Slavery and the Rise of the Capitalist Global Economy', *Current Anthropology* 61 s22 (2020), 159-71.

⁸⁰ Sheryllynne Haggerty, 'Liverpool, the Slave Trade, and the British-Atlantic Empire, c.1750-75', in *idem.*, Anthony Webster & Nicholls White (eds.), *The Empire in One City? Liverpool's Inconvenient Past* (Manchester: Manchester University Press [hereafter MUP], 2008), 17-34.

unspeakable truth was both encoded within and elided by then-Lord Mayor (and shipping oligarch) F.C. Bowering's proud declaration in 1927:

Liverpool was called into being, not as a terminus for ocean tourist traffic, but as a junction for the landing, embarkation and storage of the vast wealth exchanged between the North and Midlands of England and the overseas world...⁸¹

The ceaseless continuity of mercantile contact between the great ports, intensified by the electrified acceleration of technocapitalism via the steamship and the telegraph, brought these interfaced transoceanic spaces *closer together* in a real sense.⁸² As historian Andrew Denning writes:

Transportation and communications infrastructures consolidated territorial power by synchronising vast territories, producing an effect of administrative simultaneity that allowed the abstract ideals of nationalism and the standardising logic of modern capitalism to take root in everyday life.⁸³

In terms of relative ease of intercourse of both physical commodities and information between locations, Liverpool was far 'nearer' to Africa, America and mainland Europe than were inland communities in roughly the same physical location, such as Blackburn or Bolton. The processive peristalsis of modernity through the World reconstituted space and time along uneven lines, leaving some peripheral areas untouched while metropolitan zones concatenated and synchronised. Land, labour, and other resources exploited in the production of a

⁸¹ Quoted in Tony Lane, *Liverpool: Gateway of Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), 26.

⁸² On said acceleration, see Thomas Parker Hughes on 'technological momentum' in *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore, MA: JHUP, 1993), 150-74.

⁸³ Andrew Denning, "'Life is Movement, Movement is Life!': Mobility Politics and the Circulatory State in Nazi Germany', *American Historical Review* 123.5 (2018), 1479-1503, 1483. Cf. John Britton, *Cables, Crises, and the Press: The Geopolitics of the New Information System in the Americas, 1866-1903* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 1-28; Jean-Michel Johnston, *Networks of Modernity: Germany in the Age of the Telegraph, 1830-1880* (Oxford: OUP, 2021), 1-19.

commodity were abstracted from sight by the torsions of global logistics, occulted by the *givenness* of consumer goods in the metropolitan emporia.⁸⁴

Yet the rationalisation of the urban environment required to ensure the smooth functioning of global market processes of distribution through the port city also had ramifications for the spatiality of class relations. Essayist Alèssi Dell’Umbria describes the transformation of the great French port of Marseilles in the nineteenth century:

Modern capitalism brought about an urban segregation previously absent – a spatial expression of the fracture between the bourgeoisie and a populace on the road to proletarianisation. The rich abandoned the Vieux-Port, with its noises, smells and above all its common people; in the 1830s and ‘40s, the centre of financial and commercial activity shifted south of the Rue Canebière, as banks and shipping companies set up offices there. The old city was left to the fishermen, the dockers, the poor, the over-exploited immigrants. Once this social separation was complete, the bourgeoisie was free to contemplate ‘improvements’ to the old city *à la* Haussmann...⁸⁵

Liverpool’s own economic explosion had concomitated an engorged population. In 1800, the city was home to some 80,000 people; a century later, that number was over 700,000 and growing – and this despite horrible urban mortality rates, with port cities always more vulnerable to infectious diseases, especially of the venereal sort.⁸⁶ Abject poverty was as unmistakably visible on the Mersey as obscene oligarchic wealth, as one observer noted in 1885:

⁸⁴ Edward Soja, ‘History – Geography – Modernity’, in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 10-42; David Harvey, ‘The Geography of Capitalist Accumulation: A Reconstruction of the Marxian Theory’, in *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 237-66; Sandip Hazareesingh, ‘Interconnected Synchronicities: The Production of Bombay and Glasgow as Modern Global Ports’, c.1850-1880’, *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009), 7-31; Peter Hugill, ‘The Shrinking Victorian World’, in Martin Hewitt (ed.), *The Victorian World* (London: Routledge, 2012), 91-107.

⁸⁵ Alèssi Dell’Umbria, ‘The Sinking of Marseille’, *New Left Review* 75 (2012), 69-87, at 72-3.

⁸⁶ Paul Thomas van de Laar, ‘Bremen, Liverpool, Marseille and Rotterdam: Port Cities, Migration and the Transformation of Urban Space in the Long Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Migration History* 2.2 (2016), 275-306, 287.

I came to Liverpool a stranger some six or seven years ago, knowing only that I was about to take up my residence in the second city of the mightiest Empire the world has ever seen... But after the first glance I was appalled by one aspect of things here which pressed on my mind more and more for several weeks, till the sin of it becomes well-nigh unbearable. The contiguity of immense wealth and abysmal poverty forced itself upon my notice. The hordes of the ragged and the wretched surged up from their native quarters and covered the noblest streets like a flood. Men and women in the cruellest grip of poverty, little children with shoeless feet, bodies pinched and faces in which the pure light of childhood had been quenched, swarmed on the pavements that front the most brilliant shops; and the superb carriages of the rich, with their freights of refined and elegant ladies, threaded their way among sections of the population so miserable and squalid that my heart ached at the sight of them. I had seen wealth. I had seen poverty. But never before had I seen the two so jammed together.⁸⁷

The poorest Liverpoolians of all lived on the waterfront, that troublesome 'hotbed of marginality' which lay outside the ambit of bourgeois moral policing, and which thus become subjectively transmuted into a sort of mental rosary for middle-class angst to thumb in its moments of improving zeal (usually manifested in slum clearances).⁸⁸ Dixon Scott describes the docklands in gothic tones:

It is a region, this seven-mile sequence of granite-lipped lagoons, which is invested... with some conspicuous properties of romance; and yet its romance is never of just that quality one might perhaps expect... Neither of the land nor of the sea, but possessing both the stability of the one and the constant flux of the other – too immense, too filled with the vastness of the outer, to carry any

⁸⁷ Quoted in Lane, 77-8.

⁸⁸ Han Meyer, *City and Port: The Transformation of Port Cities* (Utrecht: International Books, 1999), 33; David Hilling, 'Socio-Economic Change in the Maritime Quarter: The Demise of Sailortown', in B.S. Hoyle, David Pinder & M.S. Husain (eds.), *Revitalising the Waterfront: International Dimensions of Dockland Redevelopment* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1999), 20-37.

sense of human handicraft – this strange territory of the Docks seems, indeed, to form a kind of fifth element, a place charged with daemonic issues and daemonic silences, where men move like puzzled slaves, fretting under orders they cannot understand, fumbling with great forces that have long passed out of their control...⁸⁹

A port, even more so than the modern city *générique*, is definitionally a zone of Otherness and alterity, populated by such unplaceable entities as casual labourers, foreigners, and transient seafarers with patchwork portolan identities.⁹⁰ This was especially true in the case of Liverpool, a metropole without a manufacturing sector, nor a significant union presence until the militancy of the late 1880s, and thus lacking in a rooted, ‘respectable’ working-class.⁹¹ Historian and future Liberal MP Ramsay Muir (1872-1941) remarked in 1907 that:

There is probably no city of anything like equal size in which so small a proportion of the population is maintained by permanent and stable industrial work... The principal occupation of the city, the foundation of its prosperity, is the handling of goods between ship, warehouse and railway; a function which is mainly performed by unskilled labour. And as this work comes largely in sudden rushes, and has to be done at high pressure in order to save interest on costly ships and costly dock space and warehouse space, it has come about that a large proportion of the men employed have no permanent work, but must submit to periods of idleness alternating with periods of sudden heavy labour, extending over long hours... Thus the great development of steamships and dock has brought it about that the city’s

⁸⁹ Scott, *Liverpool*, 27.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, Christina Reimann & Martin Öhman (eds.), *Migrants and the Making of the Urban-Maritime World: Agency and Mobility in Port Cities, c.1570-1940* (London: Routledge, 2021).

⁹¹ On respectability as a structuring concept in bourgeois society, see Woodruff Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map and Public Discourse in the Nineteenth Century* (London: T&F, 2017).

prosperity largely depends upon casual labour, the most degrading as well as the most insecure form of employment.⁹²

The continual churn of temporary inhabitants in the Edwardian gig economy, possessed of no clearly fixed position within the social whole, led many a right-thinking Liverpudlian *Bürger* to regard their docklands (not entirely without justification) as being given irredeemably over to the traditional sins of sailortown: alcohol, crime, and prostitution. Indeed, by the turn of the century, the city had acquired something of a poor reputation in the country at large for the sheer drunkenness of its population, even (scandalously) of its women, as the intimate demands of seamen with money to burn attracted ‘disreputable’ girls from all over the surrounding area – Birkenhead, St. Helens, Wigan, Salford.⁹³ An appalled observer for the *Liberal Review* noted that it was far from unusual ‘to find seamen, the day after their arrival in port, lying about the streets... almost naked, and in a stupefied state’.⁹⁴

The working-class inhabitants of Liverpool’s docks suffered from two major disadvantages in the social arena of Edwardian England: many were Irish, and many were black. Both these groups were presumed by the English mind to exist on a lower link of the great chain of being than the civilised Anglo-Saxon. Liverpool’s moralisers ground their teeth over the ‘drunken sluts’ of the dockland, meaning most of all the young Irish girls who turned tricks down Blackman’s Alley in the African-American enclave.⁹⁵ Many of the Irish who settled the slums of Liverpool in a wave during the middle of the nineteenth century had emigrated there first and foremost to escape the Great Famine (1845-52), either to find work in the port or with plans ultimately to take the boat onwards to America (or Australia, or Canada, or New Zealand...). The city thus came to function as something like ‘the Ellis Island of the Old World’, in

⁹² Ramsay Muir, *A History of Liverpool* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1907), 306. See also Eric Taplin, *Liverpool Dockers and Seamen, 1870-1890* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1974). Broader coverage of the experience of maritime labour during the fossil shipping revolution can be found in Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World’s First Globalized Industry, from 1812 to the Present* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press [hereafter UNCP], 2011), esp. 9-34.

⁹³ Lane, 42; David Beckingham, ‘Gender, Space, and Drunkenness: Liverpool’s Licensed Premises, 1860-1914’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (2012) 102.3, 647-66.

⁹⁴ *Liberal Review*, 30 Aug 1879.

⁹⁵ Michael Macilwee, *The Liverpool Underworld: Crime in the City, 1750-1900* (Liverpool: LUP, 2011), 260.

historian John Belchem's evocative phrase. A 1908 report commissioned by the Merseyside Police was rather less romantic, referring instead to 'the scum left by the tide of migration between Europe and the continent of America'.⁹⁶ By the 1850s, as much as 20% of the city's population were Irish; in 1871, 40% of dockworkers came from Irish households.⁹⁷ Given the numerousness and social visibility of the Irish population, it is unsurprising that Liverpool's bourgeoisie developed a habit of framing problems of poverty and so-called 'racial fitness' in the city explicitly in terms of degenerate, intractable Irishness, as in one Victorian medical report:

The native inhabitants are exposed to the inroads of numerous hordes of uneducated Irish, spreading physical and moral contamination around them... By their example and intercourse with others they are rapidly lowering the standard of comfort among their English neighbours, communicating their own vicious and apathetic habits, and fast extinguishing all sense of moral dignity, independence and self-respect.⁹⁸

Yet Irish people were also integrally influential in the motions of the city's social and political life, collectively exercising what Belchem calls 'ethnic agency' through the nerval vinculum of parish, pub, and club – a form of communitarian mutual defence against the withering prejudice of the English majority.⁹⁹

There were limits to solidarity, nevertheless, and these were most strictly imposed by sectarian divisions. A quarter of the Liverpool Irish were Protestants, and Irish evangelical clergy held deeply-rooted seats in Liverpool and Birkenhead. Anti-Catholic bigotry had been part of the quotidian texture of English life for centuries, but was stoked with especial energy on the Mersey by imported Orange paranoia, culminating in a sequence of vicious riots between 1904 and 1909.¹⁰⁰ The religious conservatism of Irish Protestants was a crucial

⁹⁶ John Belchem, 'Hub and Diaspora: Liverpool and Transnational Labour', *Labour History Review* 75.1 (2010), 20-9, 21.

⁹⁷ van de Laar, 290.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Gerry Kearns *et al.*, 'Duncan and the Cholera Test: Public Health in Mid-Nineteenth Century Liverpool', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 143 (1994), 87-117, 98-9.

⁹⁹ Belchem, 'Hub'.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988), 224-49.

buttress for Tory hegemony, as the Conservative party dominated urban politics in Liverpool throughout the nineteenth century (indeed, right down to the 1970s) regardless of national surges for the Liberals and Labour. Catholics, by contrast, stubbornly returned the Home Ruler T.P. O'Connor to Westminster for more than forty years.¹⁰¹ The two confessions even worked different jobs – Irish Catholics as stevedores and dock porters, Protestants as carters.¹⁰² Alternative forms of Irish ethnic affirmation besides the religious were available, but some were scarcely more edifying than sectarian hatred. Belchem notes with distaste the popularity of blackface entertainments among the Scouse Irish in the Edwardian period, with minstrelsy functioning as a proud confirmation of whiteness and thus of a comparatively elevated position within the urban racial hierarchy.¹⁰³

Liverpool's black population could not fall back onto even the schismatic semi-integration of the Irish. They lived in a city which had made itself rich selling their ancestors, and many of whose most powerful inhabitants still viewed Africans with the gelid eye of the auctioneer. Though Britain's slave trade had been wound up in 1807, many wealthy Liverpool merchants had been perfectly open about their support for the Confederacy and its cause during the American Civil War. Within the closed circles of its highest civic institutions and commercial bodies, Liverpool remained a slavers' town.¹⁰⁴ As Marx put it in 1867:

Liverpool grew fat on the basis of the slave trade. This was its method of primitive accumulation. And even to the present day,

¹⁰¹ Gareth Jenkins, 'Nationalism and Sectarian Violence in Liverpool and Belfast, 1880s-1920s', *International Labour and Working-Class History* 78 (2010), 164-80. Cf. David Jeffrey, 'The Strange Death of Tory Liverpool: Conservative Electoral Decline in Liverpool, 1945-1996', *British Politics* 12 (2017), 386-407.

¹⁰² Richard Lawton, 'The Components of Demographic Change in a Rapidly Growing Port-City: The Case of Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century', in *idem.* & Robert Lee (eds.), *Population and Society in Western European Port Cities, c.1650-1939* (Liverpool: LUP, 2001), 91-123, 93.

¹⁰³ John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic, and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool Irish* (Liverpool: LUP, 2007), 234.

¹⁰⁴ Jane Longmore, 'Civic Liverpool, 1600-1800', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History* (Liverpool: LUP, 2006), 113-70, 132-5.

the Liverpool ‘quality’ have remained the Pindars of the slave trade.¹⁰⁵

Yet the Civil War (or ‘the slaveholder’s revolt’, as Marx dubbed it) had also led unexpectedly to the domiciling of a community of African-American seamen on the Mersey: the so-called ‘Black Jacks’. These were freedmen who made a living working the boats between Liverpool and the plantations of North America, making their homes amongst the other ethnic minorities in the poor neighbourhoods by the waterfront, including the long-established West African enclave round Granby Four Streets in Toxteth.¹⁰⁶ Black sailors had laboured on British boats since the seventeenth century, but their numbers only became a truly significant factor in the industry with the advent of steam shipping and its concomitant demand for labour (as well as the newfound mobility of the work-seeking migrant in the transitional Worlds inhabited by the seafarer).¹⁰⁷ The most exhausting and unpleasant jobs in the functioning of a steamer – greasers, stokers, donkeymen – were given to African labourers, sitting as they did at the very bottom of established racial hierarchies.¹⁰⁸ The usual cod-scientific justifications were furnished to justify labour segregation: white employers claimed to believe that Africans were (as a result of their ‘tropical’ nature) better suited to the mortifying heat of the engine room than whites.¹⁰⁹ Despite their ill treatment, some of these black seafarers settled permanently in Liverpool, found friends and lovers, sold yams and plantains and sweet potatoes to the shopkeepers on Lower Parliament Street – in other words, became part of the

¹⁰⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990 [1867]), 924-5.

¹⁰⁶ Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships* (Liverpool: LUP, 2012), 61-74.

¹⁰⁷ On steam, mobility, and migration, see Gopalan Balachandran, ‘Indefinite Transits: Mobility and Confinement in the Age of Steam’, *Journal of Global History* 11.2 (2016), 187-208; Torsten Feys, ‘Transoceanic Shipping, Mass Migration, and the Rise of Modern-Day International Border Controls’, *Mobility in History* 17.1 (2016), 151-62; James Boyd, ‘Mechanising Migration: Transnational Relationships, Business Structure and Diffusing Steam on the Atlantic’, *International Journal of Maritime History* 32.1 (2020), 3-22.

¹⁰⁸ Diane Frost, ‘Racism and Social Segregation: Settlement Patterns of West African Seamen in Liverpool since the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 22.1 (1996), 85-95, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Hyslop, ‘Steamship Empire: Asian, African and British Sailors in the Merchant Marine, c.1880-1945’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44.1 (2009), 49-67, 56. Cf. D.N. Livingstone, ‘The Moral Discourse of Climate: Historical Considerations on Race, Place and Virtue’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 17 (1991), 413-34.

fabric of the city.¹¹⁰ Charles Dickens (1812-70) describes a dance attended by some Black Jacks and a group of Irish girls with his customary brew of open-heartedness and sniffy bourgeois prejudice:

The male dancers were all blacks, and one was an unusually powerful man of six feet three or four. The sound of their flat feet on the floor was as unlike the sound of white feet as their faces were unlike white faces. They toed and heeled, shuffled, double-shuffled, double-double-shuffled, covered the buckle, and beat the time out rarely, dancing with a great show of teeth, and with a childish good-humoured enjoyment that was very prepossessing.¹¹¹

Such amateur anthropologising aside, it was certainly true that African Americans were at far greater liberty in Liverpool than they were on the other side of the Atlantic, not least in matters of love and sex, as the visiting Herman Melville (1819-91) noted back in the 1840s:

In Liverpool indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect to him, as in America. Three or four times I encountered our black steward, dressed very handsomely, and walking arm in arm with a good-looking English woman. In New York, such a couple would have been mobbed in three minutes; and the steward would have been lucky to escape with whole limbs.¹¹²

The young Morel himself would goggle at the strange new kinds of people he came into contact with from his position in the cockpit of African trade:

The office was always full of black men... stokers and others coming up for their pay; anglicised native merchants, very wealthy some of them, occasionally a striking figure in handsome flowing native garments.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Lane, 37; Diane Frost, *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: LUP, 1999), 185-230.

¹¹¹ Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (Oxford: OUP, 2021 [1861]), 46.

¹¹² Herman Melville, *Redburn* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977 [1849]), 277.

¹¹³ Quoted in Nwarah, 'Introduction', ix-x.

Encounters such as these – curious, friendly, hostile, or erotic – between people of different races and cultures were all part and parcel of the kaleidoscopic experience of urban modernity at the turn of the century.

Let us take up one illustrative example. In 1876, Liverpool's globality manifested in a peculiar superposition of science and showbusiness, as Pongo (the first live gorilla ever dragged unwillingly to Western shores *à la* King Kong) was exhibited on Merseyside as the 'missing link' between man and beast.¹¹⁴ Such natural history exhibitions on Merseyside as Pongo and his confreres were provided for in part by the philanthropy of Morel's employers, the great West African shipping company Elder Dempster. The company's founder and chairman, the charismatic Welshman Alfred Jones (1845-1909), had decreed that any items headed to the city museum would be provided with free passage from Africa on his ships; Arnold Ridyard, the chief engineer, personally donated thousands of specimens for public display, from anthropological gewgaws stolen from African villages to perfectly preserved chimpanzee corpses.¹¹⁵ Elder Dempster's own ships, anchored in Toxteth Dock, were called 'monkey boats' by the dockworkers, because where most ships brought cats aboard as pets and mousers, the great West African line kept screeching little primates on their boats, living testament to their intimate intercourse with the Dark Continent.¹¹⁶

The electrical storm of the High Modern which raged across the second half of the nineteenth century was also radically transforming the experience of metropolitan existence.¹¹⁷ As the futurist F.T. Marinetti (1876-1944) wrote of his own home city in 1901:

¹¹⁴ Alexander Scott, 'The "Missing Link" Between Science and Show Business: Exhibiting Gorillas and Chimpanzees in Victorian Liverpool', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 25.1 (2020), 1-20.

¹¹⁵ Scott, 'Missing Link', 10. See also Zachary Kingdon & Dmitri van der Bersselaar, 'Collecting Empire? African Objects, West African Trade, and a Liverpool Museum', in Sheryllynne Haggerty, Anthony Webster & Nicholls White (eds.), *The Empire in One City? Liverpool's Inconvenient Past* (Manchester: MUP, 2008), 100-22.

¹¹⁶ Lane, 37.

¹¹⁷ See Nicolas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experiencers of Urban Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

Beginning at 10am, Milan becomes the station of a gigantic city that doesn't seem real. It is the reign of electricity and of vapour: bells, trumpeting alarms, aggressive bicycles, smoke and noise.¹¹⁸

The newly galvanised Milan was representative of the general metamorphosis of urban space which took place during the modern era.¹¹⁹ Modernity (a referent which we may deploy quite simply as a synonym for the victorious emergence of technocapitalism after the Industrial Revolution) incessantly reshapes the world it encounters:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world---and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.¹²⁰

Or, as Morel put it in a speech during his campaigning years:

We are living in a strenuous age, an age where little or nothing can hope to escape discussion or investigation, an age where events move swiftly, and when old landmarks are disappearing and new ones are taking their place.¹²¹

This evaporation of concrete certainty was felt with the most intense phenomenological immediacy in the concentrated humanity of the industrial city. For a newcomer like Morel, the experience of Being amidst this Heraclitan flux must have been sensually overwhelming and subjectively disorienting: under industrial capitalism, one can never step in the same city twice. The urban space of modern Liverpool presented itself through the sounds and smells of ships and their attendants: the acrid smoke belching from funnels; the yells

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Alberto Toscano, 'The Promethean Gap: Modernism, Machines, and the Obsolescence of Man', *Modernism/Modernity* 23.3 (2016), 593-608, 597.

¹¹⁹ Compare, for instance, the Vienna of 1913 as evoked by Robert Musil in *The Man Without Qualities*, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965 [1930]), v.1, 4: 'Like all big cities, it consisted of irregularity, change, sliding forward, not keeping in step, collisions of things and affairs, and fathomless points of silence in between, of paved ways and wilderness, of one great rhythmic throb and the perpetual discord and dislocation of all opposing rhythms, and as a whole resembled a seething, bubbling fluid in a vessel consisting of the solid material of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions'.

¹²⁰ Marshal Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010 [1982]), 15.

¹²¹ F15/4/1, *Liverpool Post*, Dec 2 1912.

and curses of dockworkers; the stink of dead fish; the squawk of scavenging birds; the ghostly sound of the wind howling in the masts.

Sustained phenomenological experience of a locality forges an emotional bond of belonging between a place and an inhabitant, one which is directly constitutive of a person's identity at a deep stratum of the self, and which brooks no comparison with the airy abstractions of the 'nation'.¹²² Sensory experience provides us with intimate knowledge about our particular World and its total relational organisation, knowledge which precedes intellection in its Worldly specificity:

What we hear initially is never *noises* or complexes of *sounds*, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire...¹²³

Being emerges from material substance, and thought is thus invariably mediated through matter and sensuality; as Merleau-Ponty writes, 'the body is our general medium for having a World'.¹²⁴ Yet at the same time, as anthropologist David Howes insists, 'sensory relations are social relations'.¹²⁵ Our relationship with the World is not with things 'as they are', but as mediated by pre-existing mental architecture founded on life-experience. Henri Bergson (1859-1941) observed in *Matter & Memory* (1896) that our senses enjoy a degree of autonomy, in that every subjective duration is experientially made up of a unique and unpredictable relating of extensities and memories, as an image of the present moment is preshaped by the remembered past in its emergence –

¹²² Cf. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time I: The Way by Swann's*, trans. Lydia Davis (London: Penguin, 2003 [1913]), 430: 'The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions that formed out life at that time; the memory of a certain image is only regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years'.

¹²³ Heidegger, *Being & Time*, 153.

¹²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 169. See also David Seamon, 'Merleau-Ponty, Lived Body, and Place: Toward a Phenomenology of Human Situatedness', in Thomas Hünefeldt & Annika Schlitte (eds.), *Situatedness and Place: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Spatio-Temporal Contingency of Human Life* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 41-66; David Seamon, *Life Takes Place: Phenomenology, Lifeworlds, and Place-Making* (London: Routledge, 2018).

¹²⁵ David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 55.

and, indeed, *is* past by the time it recognises itself as such in thought.¹²⁶ The implication here is that our senses always already report the desires, wounds, and prejudices of our unconscious, an entity with an internally logical language of its own: one constituted socially in Being-in-time.

In *City of Departures* (1946), the Liverpudlian novelist John Brophy (1899-1965) conjures the smells of the city in its heyday, which was also his childhood:

The city air was fresh, it blew perpetually, strong or mild, off the sea and the river, and channelled its gusty way through every street. It ought to be a healthy air, and it had the tang of health, the odour of tidal salt water, edged with smells from mud flats and sandhills and shores strewn with seaweed. But it was not healthy. It was laden with smoke and soot and grease, and with smells from tanneries, breweries, oil-cake factories, margarine factories, smells from the engine-rooms of ships, from dockyards, from thousands of warehouses where every sort of cargo was stored.¹²⁷

But smell does not just concatenate subjective time, returning the lost past to us with Proustian immediacy; it also demarcates social caste at the base level of pre-intellectualised experience. ‘The lower classes smell’, as George Orwell (1903-50) famously declared in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937):

Here, obviously, you are at an impassable barrier. For no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a physical feeling. Race-hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code, can be got over; but physical repulsion cannot... It cannot be denied that he stinks: none can wonder at it, for a bath in the dawn when you have to hurry to your work before the factory bell rings is no pleasant thing, nor does heavy labour tend to sweetness; and you do not change your linen more than you can help when the week's

¹²⁶ Henri Bergson, *Matter & Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul & W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1911 [1896]), 137.

¹²⁷ Jon Brophy, *City of Departures* (London: Collins, 1946), 36.

washing must be done by a sharp-tongued wife. I do not blame the working man because he stinks but stink he does.¹²⁸

Orwell was percipient in identifying the intersubjective stigma which the unpleasant smells of labour attached to the working class as a non-trivial element in the mechanism by which their subalternity was reproduced. At the turn of the century, the interpretation of olfactory signals was understood by the mainstream of the Western medical profession to be crucial in preventing the spread of diseases. The miasma which was *known* to spread sickness announced itself by its stench: those maritime smells of beached seaweed, fish guts, and kerosene which clung to dockers (along with sweat, of course, the universal sensory signature of the labouring body) repelled the health-conscious educated classes, an instinctual repugnance which could be retroactively rationalised by the theory of ‘bad air’. The olid poor, then, were not just displeasing to good taste, but also a legitimate danger to one’s health – and could therefore be shunned without incurring the toll of bad conscience.¹²⁹ As historian Brian Ladd remarks of the ideal of the sanitary city which grew up across Europe in the nineteenth century:

The process of making streets antiseptic and deodorised places often entailed not only eradicating germs and smells but also removing the people and activities blamed for this contamination.¹³⁰

The aristocracy of scent was enforced along racial as well as class lines – the most obvious example being the familiar racist canard that black people ‘smell’, which dates back (as Andrew Kettler has recently demonstrated) to eighteenth century chattel slavery and the reek of the cargo holds during the Middle Passage.¹³¹ Yet this sensory jibe was not purely a malicious white invention, but rather a negative subjective interpretation of real phenomenological data presented to the *cogito* in already-ideologised form as a

¹²⁸ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 2001 [1937]), 119-22.

¹²⁹ Melanie Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 21-52.

¹³⁰ Brian Ladd, *The Streets of Europe: The Sights, Sounds, and Smells that Shaped its Great Cities* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2020), 180.

¹³¹ Andrew Kettler, *The Smell of Slavery: Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020).

confirmation of existing racial biases. Foreigners, of course, *do* smell different to us (and this is especially true of a time before the global capitalist monoculture), because they eat different foods, clothe themselves in different materials, spray their skin with different perfumes, drink and smoke different drugs, burn different aromatics for ritual and hedonic purposes. The bigotry manifests in the leap by which *difference* is transmuted *ipso facto* into *inferiority*. Wealthy white Europeans, of course, managed to convince themselves that they were entirely deodorised, with concomitant implications of cleanliness and purity counterposed to the dirt of the racial or class inferior, yet this assertion was quite as intersubjectively contingent as the idea of non-white malodorousness. Indeed, many Asian observers have testified to the particular, sour stench of Caucasians, chemically explicated by a diet of red meat, dairy, and heavy carbohydrates alien to traditional Eastern modes of subsistence, and thus to their noses.¹³² Social differentiations in patterns of commodity consumption, we may observe, directly shape our sensory lifeworld at the most foundational and preconscious of levels.

The logistics of Capital in motion through time and space also impose their own sensual imprint on the lifeworld: ‘the pulse of global passage’, as anthropologist Shannon Mattern calls it.¹³³ The varying intensities of Capital’s biorhythms – these sounds of ships, containers, and barked orders across the water – allowed experienced dockworkers to follow the functioning of their port and coordinate their actions to it. ‘Cacophony’, writes Mattern, ‘is a sonic index of a busy port, of readily circulating goods and labouring bodies, of a strong global economy’.¹³⁴ Alongside the clangour of money-making, Liverpool’s most distinctive sonic hallmark was (and is) the Scouse accent, with its melodic

¹³² Orwell, 133: ‘Orientals say that *we* smell. The Chinese, I believe, say that a white man smells like a corpse’. See Jan Havlicek & Pavlina Lenochova, ‘The Effect of Meat Consumption on Body Odour Attractiveness’, *Chemical Senses* 31.8 (2006), 747-52; Katharine Prokop-Prigge *et al.*, ‘The Effect of Ethnicity on Human Auxiliary Odour Production’, *Journal of Chemical Ecology* 42.1 (2016), 33-9; Andrea Zuniga *et al.*, ‘Diet Quality and the Attractiveness of Male Body Odour’, *Evolution & Human Behaviour* 38.1 (2017), 136-43.

¹³³ Shannon Mattern, ‘The Pulse of Global Passage: Listening to Logistics’, in Matthew Hockenberry, Nicole Starosielski, & Susan Zieger (eds.), *Assembly Codes: The Logistics of Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press [hereafter DUP], 2021), 75-90.

¹³⁴ Mattern, ‘Pulse’, 81.

intonations and its unmistakable fricative K-sound. Dixon Scott had his own theories on the origins of the accent:

The majority here are either Irish or of Irish descent. It follows, therefore, that here alone in Liverpool do you get a specific dialect. They speak a bastard brogue; a shambling, degenerate speech of slip-shod vowels and muddled consonants – a cast-off clout of a tongue, more debased even than Whitechapel Cockney, because so much more sluggish, so much less positive and acute.¹³⁵

The distinctive phonological pattern we call Scouse was only formally identified by linguistic scholars as a discrete accent in the late-nineteenth century. But despite its late recognition in the academic literature, Scouse speech was both the form and content of self-expressive local identity:

Instantly recognisable, the accent is the essential medium for the projection and representation of the local micro-culture, the ‘Scouse’ blend of truculent defiance, collective solidarity, scallywaggery and fatalist humour which sets Liverpool and its inhabitants apart.¹³⁶

One might imagine Morel, possessed already of a lingering sense of outsiderdom from his schooldays, now found himself doubly alienated in his new home through the received pronunciation which education at Madras had impressed on his tongue.

We ought also to count among the novel sensations of the modern city a factor mentioned above: the continual transformation of the lived urban environment to facilitate the needs of Capital. The physical space of Liverpool’s dockland, as with that of every other major port in the world, had been transformed beyond recognition during the nineteenth century.¹³⁷ The Brobdingnagian bulk of the new iron ships now made careening impossible, necessitating the massive physical expansion of docking facilities out into the water. These floating docks were themselves cast of iron (for the avoidance of

¹³⁵ Scott, *Liverpool*, 144.

¹³⁶ John Belchem, ‘“An Accent Exceedingly Rare”: Scouse and the Inflexion of Class’, in *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool: LUP, 2006), 31-64, 33.

¹³⁷ Brian Hoyle, ‘Global and Local Change on the Port-City Waterfront’, *Geographical Review* 90.3 (2000), 395-417.

shipworm in tropical conditions), and were valuable commodities in their own right. In 1862, Randolph, Elder & Co., the Glasgow shipbuilders, turned a tidy sum by cranking out one such iron dock for the imperial French navy in Saigon, and another for the Dutch in their great East Indian entrepôt of Batavia. Liverpool's own Albert Dock, opened in 1846, was the first of these great modern commercial docks in human history, befitting the city's status as the most important port on the planet at the time. What set the Albert Dock apart was its design as a kind of mercantile fortress: a complex of towering fireproof warehouses, full of brandy and silk and stuffed gorillas, constituting altogether a wall which enclosed the commercial space impregnably against the outside world.¹³⁸ And Albert was only the beginning. The Pier Head, stretching from Herculaneum Dock (1864) in the south to Hornby Dock (1884) in the north, ran for a distance of over nine kilometres from one end of the city to the other.¹³⁹ What these grand reformulations of Liverpool's urban space demonstrate most clearly is the fact that all the abstract decisions and demands of the world market must necessarily be materialised in real boats, crossing real oceans, by the toil of real people like the Liverpudlian working class. This *realisation* is the task of the shipping company.

iii.

The particular shipping company at which E.D. Morel was employed, Elder Dempster, was founded in patchwork fashion by the entrepreneur Alfred Jones between 1884 and 1891 through the gradual agglomeration of a clutch of lesser freighting ventures.¹⁴⁰ This was a familiar pattern in the industry at the time. The iron hulks of the steam shipping era required vast outlays of cash to build. A dizzying £7 million – around half a billion pounds in today's money – was spent on shipbuilding in Liverpool alone during the crucial period 1869-

¹³⁸ See Robert Lee, 'The Social Life of Port Architecture: History, Politics, Commerce, and Culture', *ICOMOS* 54.2 (2015), 33-52; Dara Orenstein, *Out of Stock: The Warehouse in the History of Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2019), 27-66.

¹³⁹ van de Laar, 282-3.

¹⁴⁰ The best overview of Jones' life and career is P.N. Davies, *Sir Alfred Jones: Shipping Entrepreneur par Excellence* (London: Europa, 1978).

75.¹⁴¹ The sheer scale of the investment required to compete in this new world rapidly drove smaller enterprises out of business, and accelerated the monopolistic tendencies already at work in the reorganisation of global shipping.¹⁴² Indeed, such great sloshing vats of Capital could only be obtained by two means: the transformation of shipping companies into publicly-traded joint-stock corporations, and/or the formation of commercial partnerships with one or more of the great banking houses, both of which decisions introduced an ever-more urgent accumulative imperative into boardrooms, in order that the desires and expectations of the company's new shareholders might be continually satisfied.¹⁴³



*Figure 1: Alfred Jones, baron of West Africa and Morel's employer.
People's Collection Wales*

¹⁴¹ Francis Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey: The Development of a Port, 1700-1970* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1971), 56.

¹⁴² Fiona Scott Morton, 'Entry and Predation: British Shipping Cartels 1879-1929', *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy* 6.4 (1997), 679-724.

¹⁴³ Gordon Boyce, *Information, Mediation and Institutional Development: The Rise of Large-Scale Enterprise in British Shipping, 1870-1919* (Manchester: MUP, 1995), 76-96. On Capital-seeking, cf. Sturla Fjesme *et al.*, 'An Efficient Market? Going Public in London, 1891-1911', *Economic History Review* 72.3 (2019), 1008-27.

Jones was what we might call, in the language of Capital, a ‘self-made man’. Having left school at fourteen to work as a cabin boy, his career on dry land began much the same way as Morel’s: with employment as a petty clerk in a shipping agent’s office. Jones’s business acumen was formidable, and his company would soon become one of the most successful of its kind in Europe (not to mention providing for the continual pinguefaction of his own vast hoard of personal wealth).¹⁴⁴ In 1895, he founded a cartel, the West African Shipping Conference, to coordinate accumulation together with other major British enterprises with a stake in the region. The commercial interests represented by Elder Dempster and the WASC worked hand in glove with the forces of British empire-building: the coaling stations which Jones established along the trading route in 1900 were crucial for servicing both the company’s own steamers and the gunboats of the Royal Navy. For longer voyages across the transcontinental oceans, such as the stretch of the Cape Route between Liverpool and the West Coast of Africa, such recharge stations were constructed at convenient spatial intervals in order keep the ships’ voracious engines fed. The proud Welshman Jones secured the fuel for his company’s ships from the great southern coalfields of his homeland, stowing it in waystations along the West African route:

Cheap and reliable sources of suitable coal were found at Garth and Maesteg in Glamorgan, and the collieries were bought. They were then operated by Elders Navigation Collieries Limited. Bunkers were subsequently supplied to Elder Dempster vessels, via Port Talbot, at the main UK ports at Las Palmas, Tenerife and Freetown [in Sierra Leone]. Supplies at these latter places were in the hands of wholly-owned subsidiary firms... and they not only provided fuel for Elder Dempster’s own vessels but catered for a very wide market. Bunkers for the Admiralty, for many foreign navies and for over 200 different shipping lines meant the sale of a quarter of a million tons annually from Las Palmas.¹⁴⁵

Elder Dempster’s spoils from its thoroughgoing exercise in transoceanic primitive accumulation were vast and multifarious: cotton and timber, maize

¹⁴⁴ As narrated in P.N. Davies, *The Trade Makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa, 1852-1972* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978).

¹⁴⁵ Davies, *Jones*, 60-1.

and cocoa, ivory and tin, palm oil and rubber, as well as the monopoly rights for the supply of petroleum and kerosene to British West Africa and a charter to furnish all of Britain's colonies with coal.¹⁴⁶ In 1894, Jones set up the British Bank of West Africa (financed by Lloyds, Standard, National Provincial and Westminster) with a commission from the British government to mint silver coins for the regions and a remit to charge one percent commission on every coin. The BBWA was soon the only bank in the region.¹⁴⁷ By 1907, as Sir Ernest Blake, a senior Crown Agent, remarked, 'Sir Alfred Jones had become the predominant power in West Africa by a long way'; Morel dubbed him the region's 'uncrowned king'.¹⁴⁸

From its foundation in the nineteenth century through to its commercial heyday in the early decades of the twentieth, Elder Dempster was an active and effective participant in Europe's long-term 'underdevelopment' of its African periphery (a necessary combinative precondition of the subcontinent's own hypergrowth within the holistic world-system's uneven distribution of power and wealth). West Africa's economic development had already been thoroughly stunted by the late nineteenth century as a result of centuries of programmatic abduction and enslavement of swathes of native men and women in their economically productive prime.¹⁴⁹ The second disaster to derail African development, one which continues to break across the continent to this day, was the growing interest of the capitalist-imperialist Powers in the raw materials of

¹⁴⁶ A.H. Milne, *Sir Alfred Lewis Jones: A Story of Energy and Success* (Liverpool: Henry Young & Sons, 1994), 57. See also Richard Fry, *Bankers in West Africa: The Story of the Bank of British West Africa Limited* (London: Hutchinson, 1976). For the concept of primitive accumulation, see Marx, *Capital*, 873-940; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 137-82; Alan Cooper & Emmanuel Oritsejafor, 'The Role of Primitive Accumulation and Racism in Capitalist Systems', in *idem.* (eds.), *Africa and the Global System of Capitalist Accumulation* (London: Routledge, 2021), 1-32.

¹⁴⁷ Morel, *History*, 262; Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, *Trade & Imperialism in Southern Nigeria, 1881-1929* (New York: Nok, 1979), 391. See also Leigh Gardner, 'Colonialism or Supersanctions: Sovereignty and Debt in West Africa, 1871-1914', *European Review of Economic History* 21.2 (2017), 236-57.

¹⁴⁸ Marika Sherwood, 'Elder Dempster and West Africa, 1891-c.1920: The Genesis of Underdevelopment?', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30.2 (1997), 253-76, 256.

¹⁴⁹ Nathan Nunn, 'The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.1 (2008), 139-76; Warren Whatley, 'How the International Slave Trades Underdeveloped Africa', *Journal of Economic History* 82.2 (2022), 403-41.

the continent other than enslaved human beings: rare metals, diamonds, petroleum, and (of course) rubber.¹⁵⁰

Elder Dempster exploited the labour and resources of Africa for the benefit of metropolitan Capital, while simultaneously preventing the emergence of native mercantile interests. The massive inflow of European manufactured goods enabled by steam shipping, at prices backed by industrial economies of scale, devastated native producers. Local weaving in particular was annihilated by the arrival of Lancashire cloth in bulk, creating import-dependence and allowing monopolistic pricing strategies to be implemented by the European cartels. Cotton farmers, meanwhile, were forced to pledge their harvests to the only realistic buyer (Elder Dempster) which was thus able to set its own sale price. The British Bank of West Africa refused to extend credit to Africans to develop native productive capacities in order to compete even nominally with Europeans – though loans on caritative terms were available to whites. African attempts to invest in fixed assets through construction suffered from the drag on profitability of Elder Dempster's monopoly on cement. Nor could they construct their own railroads: Elder Dempster also held the monopolies for coal and cabotage. Those railways which *were* built in West Africa served the exporting interests of European shipping firms, taking raw materials to ports controlled by Elder Dempster, where they would be loaded onto Elder Dempster ships. African merchants could not affreight their own produce to Europe and were therefore dependent upon the infrastructure put in place by Western traders in order to reach a market at all, allowing Elder Dempster to siphon off a generous customs premium. Africans employed by Elder Dempster were forbidden from joining trade unions, so wages and working conditions were atrocious. No Africans were promoted into administrative or managerial positions, where they might develop new skills and competencies. And, all the while, Elder Dempster's control of the flow of information regarding West Africa

¹⁵⁰ Patrick Bond, 'Resource Extraction and African Underdevelopment', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 17.2 (2006), 5-25; Nathan Nunn, 'Historical Legacies: A Model Linking Africa's Past to its Current Underdevelopment', *Journal of Development Economics* 83.1 (2007), 157-75.

in the British metropole ensured the prolongation and deepening of these relations of economic dominance.¹⁵¹ *Qua* Foucault:

There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.¹⁵²

As well as demanding great reservoirs of liquid Capital and captive labour in the metropole and periphery alike, the steam shipping revolution which opened the markets and physical resources of Africa to systematic exploitation also required that these elements be combined with that seminal conjuncture of modern technology and natural resources which powered accumulative capitalism ever onwards and outwards: the fossil-fuelled engine.¹⁵³ This unprecedented industrial nexus of Capital-labour-technology-nature ('technocapitalism'), first forged in Britain during the eighteenth century, had unlocked hitherto undreamt-of possibilities with regards to the harnessing and direction of energy, transforming humanity's relationship with the basis of its Being in terms of both the scientific-industrial enframing of the lifeworld and the irreversible ruination of the finite material biosphere.¹⁵⁴ If the fossil fuel revolution, this revealing and harnessing of the planet's hidden energies for the stimulation of capitalist production, was a form of unprecedented take-off which made possible the modern species-project, then anthropogenic climate change is the sonic boom rushing to meet us; and indeed, the newly globalised steam shipping industry for which Morel worked would

¹⁵¹ Sherwood, 273-6. On the introduction of technology to the periphery understood as a tool of imperial underdevelopment, see Daniel Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), esp. 379-83.

¹⁵² Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991 [1975]), 27.

¹⁵³ Crosbie Smith, *Coal, Steam and Ships: Engineering, Enterprise and Empire on the Nineteenth-Century Seas* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018). On the fossil engine as the prime mover of modernity, see Rolf Peter Sieferle, *The Subterranean Forest: Energy Systems and the Industrial Revolution*, trans. Michael Osman (Cambridge: White Horse, 2001 [1982]); Anthony Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

¹⁵⁴ Vaclav Smil, *Energy and Civilisation: A History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 225-93; Paolo Malanima, 'The Limiting Factor: Energy, Growth, and Divergence, 1820-1913', *Economic History Review* 73.2 (2020), 486-512. See also Luis Suarez-Villa, *Technocapitalism: A Critical Perspective on Technological Innovation and Corporatism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016); Diego Fusara, *La Notte del Mondo: Marx, Heidegger e il Technocapitalismo* (Torino: UTET, 2019).

become a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions during the machine age, as the fuming engines that turned the great propellers ceaselessly vomited carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and methane into the atmosphere.¹⁵⁵

This particular omnicidal *dispositif* emerged logically from the conjuncture of Capital's needs and the possibilities opened up by technological innovation. Industrial capitalism induces an exponential growth in output which cannot be profitably absorbed by metropolitan consumers alone; the flood of new commodity-outputs thus demands the tapping of fresh markets in order to valorise itself in sale; global market integration demands a dynamic network of steam-powered shipping lines to process the physical circulation of commodities; and steam ships demand coal. The endless hunger of the engine-powered hulks for energy fundamentally altered the relational geography of global political economy, replacing the previous requirement to follow the natural highways laid down by the winds and currents with a new necessity: the provision of an endless and unbroken supply of fossil fuels, secured by the application of raw imperial power.¹⁵⁶

iv.

E.D. Morel's employment at Elder Dempster began at the high tide of the British shipping industry, when half of the globe's merchant marine flew the Union Jack – a source of great national pride on the island.¹⁵⁷ In 1903, the number of steamships registered in the United Kingdom overtook those of ships under sail for the first time, heralding the dawn of a new age of trade (and of warfare) animated by the combustion of fossil fuel. Britain was unique among the great Powers in the extent of its economic integration into the planetary division of labour, as indicated by its unusual reliance on imports and exports

¹⁵⁵ Jihong Chen, Yijie Fei & Zheng Wan, 'The Relationship Between the Development of Global Maritime Fleets and GHG Emission from Shipping', *Journal of Environmental Management* 242 (2019), 31-9.

¹⁵⁶ Paul Ciccantell, 'Commodity Chains and Extractive Peripheries: Coal and Development', in Felipe Irarrázaval & Martín Arias-Loyola (eds.), *Resource Peripheries in the Global Economy: Networks, Scales, and Places of Extraction* (Cham: Springer, 2021), 21-44. See also Andreas Malm, 'Who Lit This Fire? Approaching the History of the Fossil Economy', *Critical Historical Studies* 3.2 (2016), 215–48; Steven Gray, *Steam Power and Sea Power: Coal, the Royal Navy, and the British Empire, c.1870-1914* (London: PM, 2017).

¹⁵⁷ See Douglas Burgess, *Engines of Empire: Steamships and the Victorian Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press [hereafter SUP], 2016).

and by the global diffusion of its Capital – and particularly when compared to the rival New Powers of Germany and the USA, both of which (despite their increasing enmeshment in world trade) nevertheless remained largely agriculturally autarkic, and sold their industrial products in protected domestic markets.¹⁵⁸ Over the course of the nineteenth century, owing to the energetic-technological bequest of the Industrial Revolution and the concomitant demographic explosion, the productive base of Europe (and, slightly later, America and Japan) had undergone an extraordinary acceleration in output per capita relative to the rest of the planet, an economic bifurcation which we now recognise as the epoch-making ‘Great Divergence’: the clinamenal source of world-systemic hierarchies which survive to this day.¹⁵⁹

The West’s great leap forward was clearly visible to contemporary observers, and some commentators in the metropole predicted ever-deepening dominance stretching into the future. As the social imperialist Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) remarked in 1897:

It seems to me that the tendency of the time is to throw all power into the hands of the greater empires, and the minor kingdoms – those which are not progressive – seem to fall into a second and subordinate place...¹⁶⁰

Indeed, European capitalism was not just growing taller; it was spreading wider. The period between c.1870 and 1914 marks the so-called ‘first globalisation’ of Capital, an era characterised (much like the economic globalisation of our own time) by soaring technological innovation, expansion of markets worldwide, rapidly rising inequality both between and within nations, unprecedentedly high rates of stock market capitalisation relative to gross

¹⁵⁸ Irving Stone, *The Global Export of Capital from Great Britain, 1865–1914: A Statistical Survey* (New York: St Martin’s, 1999); Martin Daunton, ‘Britain and Globalisation Since 1850, I: Creating a Global Order, 1850-1914’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (2006), 1-38; Gary Magee & Andrew Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850–1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 170-231.

¹⁵⁹ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2000); Jonathan Daly, *How Europe Made the Modern World: Creating the Great Divergence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Jack Goldstone, ‘Dating the Great Divergence’, *Journal of Global History* 16.2 (2021), 266-85. The beguiling Japanese exception is well-treated in Peer Vries, *Averting a Great Divergence: State and Economy in Japan, 1868-1937* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (London: Fontana, 1989), 251.

domestic product in the imperial core, and careering financial instability.¹⁶¹ In this moment of rampant capitalist acceleration, the European share of global production rose sharply versus its proportion of the world's population, even taking into account a simultaneous baby boom, reaching its most starkly pronounced peak in the years immediately prior to the First World War. By 1913, despite the advance of American production in the decades after the Civil War, Europe's economies taken together accounted for a staggering 50% of global output, despite representing only about 20% of the world's people. This productive ascendancy was in turn overwhelmingly concentrated within the hyperdeveloped strip in the transalpine northwest of the subcontinent – specifically Britain, France, Germany, and the Low Countries.¹⁶²

Britain herself was the *point d'appui* of this age of globalising liberal empire, the hub in the wheel of the third great cycle in the history of accumulation, each of which had spun around a dominant core. First had come the Italian city-states in the waning Middle Ages, then the United Provinces during capitalism's Early Modern prodrome. London now sat the ascendant chair, and sterling was king, for the moment at least.¹⁶³ In *La Guerre Fatale* (1902), French pulp hack Capitaine Danrit's (1855-1916) jingoistic fantasy of war with the old enemy across the Channel, the English stock villain delivers a hammy but not entirely inaccurate monologue detailing the imperial *Weltanschauung* at the turn of the century:

The Fatherland, the flag! These are prejudices from another age...

Today, with our civilisation, with our means of transport and communication linking the most distant nations together, breaking down barriers which seemed insurmountable – today,

¹⁶¹ Michael Lang, 'Globalisation and its History', *Journal of Modern History* 78.4 (2006), 899-931; Adam McKeown, 'Periodizing Globalisation', *History Workshop Journal*, 63.1 (2007), 218-30; Christof Dejung & Niels P. Petersson, 'Power, Institutions, and Global Markets: Actors, Mechanisms, and Foundations of Worldwide Economic Integration, 1850-1930', in *idem.* (eds.), *The Foundations of Worldwide Economic Integration: Power, Institutions, and Global Markets, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2014), 27-30; Osterhammel, 710-41.

¹⁶² Piketty, 59-64.

¹⁶³ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 2010 [1994]); Youssef Cassis, *Capitals of Capital: The Rise and Fall of International Financial Centres, 1780-2009* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

the word border has no sense! There is now only one vast humanity seeking the greatest possible well-being through the application of science. And what is the universal lever, the key to this most intense and complete happiness? Why, it's money!¹⁶⁴

Yet despite the Empire's continued economic stranglehold over the 'darker peoples' in the periphery, by the time the period of so-called 'New Imperialism' arrived in the 1870s – with the advent onto the world stage of Germany, the United States, Italy, and Japan, accompanied by the technological breakthroughs (steam ships, antimalarials) required to finally master Africa – the British economy had passed its Jupiterian mid-century apogée.¹⁶⁵ Even worse, it was beginning to exhibit that classic symptom of a preagonal hegemon, what Braudel called the 'sign of autumn': it was rapidly financialising.¹⁶⁶ Rudolf Hilferding (1877-1941), in his seminal analysis of finance capital, recognised as early as 1910 that the seizure of control of the market economy by the great banking houses represented at one and the same time the logical summation of capitalist dynamics and the death knell of creative competition in the classic, Smithian mode:

Finance Capital signifies the unification of Capital. The previously separate spheres of industrial, commercial and bank Capital are now brought under the common direction of high finance, in which the masters of industry and of the banks are united in a close personal association. The basis of this association is the elimination of free competition among individual capitalists by the large monopolistic combines.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Capitaine Danrit, *Le Guerre Fatale: France-Angleterre*, trans. mine (Paris: Flamarrion, 1901), 813.

¹⁶⁵ On malaria, medical technology, and the New Imperialism, see Graham Dutfield, *That High Design of Purest Gold: A Critical History of the Pharmaceutical Industry, 1880-2020* (London: World Scientific, 2020), 45-8.

¹⁶⁶ Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press [hereafter UCaP], 1992 [1979]), v.3, 246; Arrighi, 162.

¹⁶⁷ Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*, trans. Tom Bottomore (London: Routledge, 1982 [1910]), 301.

Hilferding's contemporary analysis thus rhymes neatly with Giovanni Arrighi's *post factum* verdict on Edwardian financialisation: 'The beautiful times of the bourgeoisie were a sign of the supersession of existing capitalism'.¹⁶⁸

As a humble clerical fibre in this process of global capitalist polymerisation, the young Morel's political seity was moulded by the distinctive clade of free-trading liberalism which saturated his World and his working life. This was the subcreed which had first evolved in the mercantile *milieu* of North-West England during the eighteenth century, but now directly influenced the lives of millions of people in places like India, Japan and East Africa: the so-called 'Manchester School'.¹⁶⁹ A characteristically Lancastrian passion for trade liberalisation and hatred of taxes and tariffs would become Morel's ideological-affective bread and butter during his Elder Dempster years, absorbed through the pores from the reigning *doxa* of his commercial environs, as we can observe in one outraged article penned by the young polemicist in 1898:

In the French colonies... the British trader's life is made a perfect burden to him. Hostile tariffs meet him at every turn. Differential duties paralyse his efforts. His imports are taxed, his exports are taxed, he himself is taxed – in fact, it is nothing but taxation from beginning to end!¹⁷⁰

As a political-economic ideal, free trade had long occupied an outsize place in the imagination of the British bourgeoisie.¹⁷¹ God, as was well understood by the gentlemanly capitalist, had in his benevolence created the bounty of the world for all men to share in by truck and barter. Richard Hakluyt the Younger (1552-1616), a foundational figure in the country's imperial project, recalled his education in worldly values thus:

[My teacher] pointed with his wand to all the known Seas, Gulfs, Bayes, Straights, Capes, Rivers, Empires, Kingdomes, Dukedomes, and Territories of ech part, with declaration also of

¹⁶⁸ Arrighi, 173.

¹⁶⁹ Goldwin Smith, 'The Manchester School', *The Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 377-89. See also Eric Sheppard, 'Constructing Free Trade: From Manchester Boosterism to Global Management', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30,2 (2005), 151-72.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Cline, 14.

¹⁷¹ Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 1-23.

their special commodities, & particular wants, which by the benefit of traffike & entercourse of merchants, which are plentifully supplied.¹⁷²

In this encounter, Hakluyt saw affirmed the argument from natural jurisprudence that the varied patterns of distribution of the world's resources between states, and those states' needs for what others possessed, constituted proof of the Lord's desire that trade should flourish (and especially that of England).¹⁷³ What's more, as John Locke (1632-1704) asserted a century later, the 'disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth' both between and within nations which necessarily emerges from the pursuit of commercial activity could itself be interpreted according to the benignity of the divine will, when conceptualised as the emanation of the Lord's desire that man improve the natural world of which he is steward by Adamic right:

The taking of this or that part [of nature], does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners. Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.¹⁷⁴

Whilst an enlightened emporitic agenda had been inseparable from England's imperial ambitions since the time of Hakluyt and Raleigh, and property rights from 'Anglo-Saxon liberty' since Locke, the political-economic case for free trade was first given its philosophically mature form by Adam Smith (1723-1790), before being raised to greater heights of sophistication by David Ricardo (1772-1823) in the doctrines of comparative advantage and global

¹⁷² Richard Hakluyt, 'Epistle Dedicated to Sir Francis Walsingham' (1589), *sic passim*, quoted in David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 70-1. See also Edmond Smith, *Merchants: The Community that Shaped England's Trade and Empire, 1550-1650* (New Haven, CT: YUP, 2021), 14-56.

¹⁷³ Joost Hengstmengel, *Divine Providence in Early Modern Economic Thought* (London: Routledge, 2019), 55-93.

¹⁷⁴ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Oxford, OUP, 2016 [1690]), 93. See also Lucas Pinheiro, 'A Factory Afield: Capitalism and Empire in John Locke's Political Economy', *Modern Intellectual History* 19.1 (2022), 1-28.

specialisation of labour.¹⁷⁵ In its theorisation by the classical political economists, free trade miraculously pulled the rabbit of mutual benefit from the hat of self-interest; as in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714), 'private vices' lead to 'publick benefits':

Vast Numbers throng'd the fruitful Hive;
Yet those vast Numbers made 'em thrive;
Millions endeavouring to supply
Each other's Lust and Vanity.¹⁷⁶

The wealth-creating merchant class, David Hume (1711-76) contended, constituted 'one of the most useful races of men'; for while 'lawyers and physicians beget no industry', merchants 'increase industry, and, by also increasing frugality, give a great command of that industry to particular members of society' – that is to say, the bourgeoisie.¹⁷⁷

Towering above even these illustrious eighteenth-century predecessors in the Edwardian liberal imagination were Richard Cobden and John Bright, exponents of a confident free trading ideology for an age of imperial supremacy. The proper noun *Cobden* exerted a fetishistic sway over businessmen who otherwise understood themselves as purely commonsensical rational actors.¹⁷⁸ As John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) archly (and, from a contemporary perspective, ironically) observed:

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from

¹⁷⁵ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: OUP, 2008 [1776]); David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: John Murray, 1817).

¹⁷⁶ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (London: J. Tonson, 1724 [1714]), 3

¹⁷⁷ David Hume, 'Of Commerce' (1752), in *Selected Essays* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 154-66. See also Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Margaret Schabas & Carl Wennerlind, *A Philosopher's Economist: Hume and the Rise of Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2020).

¹⁷⁸ On the genealogy of 'common sense' as bourgeois fetish, see William Deringer, "'It Was Their Business to Know": British Merchants and Mercantile Epistemology in the Eighteenth Century', *History of Political Economy* 49.2 (2017), 177-206.

any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.¹⁷⁹

Indeed, we ought by this stage to recognise with Keynes how the Cobdenite credo 'Free Trade' functioned in the World as a fantastical *master signifier* for British liberalism – that is to say, as one of those sublime ideological objects (like 'the Party' under Stalinism or 'God' in a theocracy) by reference to which an existing order is psychopolitically justified in the intersubjective realm.¹⁸⁰ As a determinative symbolic identification, free trade gave particular form to the liberal-capitalist *aftognosia*, a term I am defining here as *self-sense*: viz., the set of intellectual and affective operations by which a subjectivity makes sense of itself to itself; the unspoken moral axioms and symbolic structures which always already premeditate a political response to events; in other words, the psychic logistics of ideology.

The particular form of this *aftognosia* shaped the activity of liberalism in its World. In 1837, for instance, the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines declared that Britain's holy purpose was to provide for other races

the opportunity of becoming partakers of that civilisation, that innocent commerce, that knowledge, and that faith with which it had pleased a gracious Providence to bless our own country.¹⁸¹

It followed naturally from this assertion that those countries, especially in Africa and Asia, that wished to shutter their borders to said commerce, or to hoard their national resources for their own use, were acting unjustly (and perhaps even sacrilegiously). Britain was therefore justified both by religious principle and by secular faith in the indubitable developmental virtues of the market in its insistence that all societies open themselves up to commerce on the terms set out by Europeans – even if this approach ultimately necessitated recourse to violence. China (1842 and 1857), Siam (1855), Morocco (1856), Persia

¹⁷⁹ John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013 [1936]), 382.

¹⁸⁰ Frank Trentmann, 'Civil Society, Commerce, and the "Citizen-Consumer": Popular Meanings of Free Trade in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain', *Centre for European Studies, Harvard University Working Paper* 66 (1996), 1-33. On political 'master signifiers', see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 87-130.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Robert Butlin, *Geographies of Empire: European Empires and Colonies, c.1880-1960* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 184.

(1857), Japan (1863), Tunisia (1875), and the Ottoman Empire (1876), *inter alia*, all suffered the threat or application of force at the hands of British 'gunboat diplomacy'.¹⁸² In the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885, the world's greatest imperial Power found itself stuck fighting insurgents in the jungles of Southeast Asia for five miserable years in order to open up its teak forests and ruby mines for capitalist extraction.¹⁸³ Such was the moral prerogative of free trade. As the liberal *Edinburgh Review* remarked of Japan in 1852, before the intervention of the American Commodore Perry (1794-1858) opened that nation up to Capital:

The compulsory seclusion of the Japanese is a wrong not only to themselves, but to the civilised world... Other nations are justified in demanding intercourse with Japan, as a right of which they are unjustly deprived.¹⁸⁴

Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) also identified free trade as both the engine and the battery of the British imperial project. In *Indian Home Rule* (1909), he tendered the following assessment:

It is proved that the English entered India for the purposes of trade. They remain in it for the same purpose and we help them to do so... The English have a treaty with Japan for the sake of their commerce, and you will see that if they can manage it their commerce will greatly expand in that country. They wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods. That

¹⁸² Patrick O'Brien & Geoffrey Allen Pigman, 'Free Trade, British Hegemony and the International Economic Order in the Nineteenth Century', *Review of International Studies* 18.2 (1992), 89-113; Reşat Kasaba, 'Treaties and Friendship: British Imperialism in the Ottoman Empire and China in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History* 4.2 (1993), 215-41; Niels Petersson, *Imperialismus und Modernisierung: Siam, China, und die Europäischen Mächte, 1895-1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000); Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism, Sovereignty and Extraterritorialism in Japan, the Ottoman Empire and China* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 41-5; Murat Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2010), 63-9; Erik Ringmar, 'Free Trade by Force: Civilization against Culture in the Great China Debate of 1857', in Jozef Batora & Monika Mokre (eds.), *Culture and External Relations: Europe and Beyond* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 15-31; Antony Best, *The British Engagement with Japan, 1854-1922: The Origins and Course of an Unlikely Alliance* (London: Routledge, 2021), 12-14.

¹⁸³ Anthony Webster, 'Business and Empire: A Reassessment of the British Conquest of Burma in 1885', *HJ* 43.4 (2000), 1003-25.

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Knox, 'Japan', *Edinburgh Review* 196 (1852), 383.

they cannot do so is true, but the blame will not be theirs. They will leave no stone unturned to reach the goal.¹⁸⁵

Gandhi, of course, could refer to the Indian example as damning evidence for the prosecution, whether by highlighting the destruction of the native textiles industry by the gavage of British industrial manufactures into their market, or by pointing to the millions on the commodity frontier in Africa and Asia (and Ireland) who perished in famines, wretched and starving, as a direct result of ‘the theological application of the sacred principles of Smith, Bentham and Mill’ by colonial administrators.¹⁸⁶

Yet, by the close of the nineteenth century, Cobdenism’s hegemonic hold over British economic thought seemed to be breaking down, in an anxious superstructural reflection of the Empire’s economic subsidence relative to its peers.¹⁸⁷ In 1898, Goldwin Smith (1823-1910), liberal historian and longtime disciple of Bright, felt moved enough by the dawning of this new era of protection and mutual suspicion to pen a mournful article for the *Spectator* entitled ‘The End of the Manchester School’.¹⁸⁸ Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836-1908), then leader of the Liberal Party, essayed a similarly elegiac address at the centenary celebrations for Richard Cobden in 1904:

We stand today at the parting of the ways. One road – a broad and easy one – leads to Protection, to conscription, to the reducing of free institutions to a mere name... And the other road leads to

¹⁸⁵ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad: Jitendra T Desai, 1938 [1909]), 48.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Theological’: Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 9; cf. Harvey Cox, *The Market as God* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2016). On the relationship between economic liberalism and famine in the imperial periphery, see David Nally, ‘“That Coming Storm”: The Irish Poor Law, Colonial Biopolitics, and the Great Famine’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98.3 (2008), 714-41; Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Penguin, 2018), 149-216; Jeremy Walker, ‘The Market as Moral Law: Providence, Starvation, and Liberal Empire’, in *More Heat than Life: The Tangled Roots of Ecology, Energy, and Economics* (New York: PM, 2020), 101-18.

¹⁸⁷ Gerard Koot, ‘Historical Economics and the Revival of Mercantilist Thought in Britain, 1870-1920’, in Lars Magnusson (ed.), *Mercantilist Economics* (New York: Springer, 1993), 187-219. See also Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2010), esp. 21-134; Tudor Onea, ‘Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxiety and Great Power Rivalry’, *Review of International Studies* 40.1 (2014), 125-52.

¹⁸⁸ Goldwin Smith, ‘The End of the Manchester School’, *Spectator*, 12 Nov. 1898, 681-2.

the consolidation of liberty and the development of equity at home, and to treaties of arbitration and amity, with their natural sequences in the arrest and ultimate reduction of armaments, and the lightening of taxation, which presses upon our trade and grinds the faces of the poor.¹⁸⁹

As the nineteenth century ceded to the twentieth, the existence of a necessary connection between free trade, social justice, and international peace had come to seem less than obvious to those observers whose political tendencies were not straightforwardly Lancastrian. As Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) remarked with characteristic portentousness in 1905:

The dreams sanguine humanitarians raised almost to ecstasy about the year fifty of the last century... have vanished as quickly as they had arisen. The golden hopes of peace have in a single night turned to dead leaves in every drawer of every benevolent theorist's writing-table. A swift disenchantment overtook the incredible infatuation which could put its trust in the peaceful nature of industrial and commercial competition. Industrialism and Commercialism... stand ready, almost eager, to appeal to the sword as soon as the globe of the earth has shrunk beneath our growing numbers by another ell or so. And Democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter end.¹⁹⁰

This was certainly the position of the liberal socialist Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937), later among Morel's fiercest and most enduring allies, who here sided with Marx *contra* Ricardo (and the Chartists *contra* Cobden) on the subject of *pax mercatoria*:

The Socialist looks beyond the beneficial effects of Free Trade. Free trade has not brought international peace; Commerce, which

¹⁸⁹ *Daily News*, 6 June 1904.

¹⁹⁰ Joseph Conrad, 'Autocracy and War', *North American Review* 181.584 (1905), 33-55, 50.

the Free Trader regarded as the handmaiden of Amity, has become the herald of War.¹⁹¹

Another liberal socialist, George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), concurred, *vis-à-vis* free trade, but gestured towards a tactical alliance with the social imperialism of Chamberlain. Speaking on behalf of the Fabian Society in 1900, Shaw observed that as both protectionist imperialism and meaningful social reform demanded a repudiation of laissez-faire Gladstonianism and an increased role for the state, there really ought to exist no conflict between socialists and the so-called ‘sane imperialism’ of the British protectionists.¹⁹² Of course, Shaw could not carry all his fellow Fabians with him on this point. The arch-liberal Bertrand Russell, briefly a member of that same collective, declared in 1903 that free trade represented ‘the last piece of sane internationalism left’ (and by ‘sane’ we are intended to read ‘non-Marxist’), ‘and if it went, I should feel inclined to cut my throat’.¹⁹³

For British free traders like Russell, morbid symptoms seemed to be emerging rapidly both at home and abroad. Louis Mallet (1823-1890), upstanding liberal imperialist and a founding member of the Cobden Club, regarded Britain’s shameless occupation of Egypt over control of the Suez Canal in 1882 with particular despair, prefiguring the later rhetoric of Morel regarding secret diplomacy and the undemocratic means by which the interimperial balance of power was maintained. Mallet saw in that exercise of naked

¹⁹¹ Ramsay MacDonald, *The Zollverein and British Industry* (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 22. On MacDonald as ‘liberal socialist’, see Duncan Tanner, ‘Ideological Debate in Edwardian Labour Politics: Radicalism, Revisionism and Socialism’, in Eugenio Biagini & Alistair Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 271-93, 274-78. On the general intellectual alignment between radical liberalism and liberal socialism on the subject of free trade during this period, see Marc-William Palen, ‘Marx and Manchester: The Evolution of the Socialist Internationalist Free-Trade Tradition, c.1846-1946’, *International History Review* 43.2 (2021), 381-98.

¹⁹² George Bernard Shaw, *Fabianism and the Empire: A Manifesto by the Fabian Society* (London: G. Richards, 1900). See also Fred Schneider, ‘Fabians and the Utilitarian Idea of Empire’, *Review of Politics* 35.4 (1973), 501-22; Patricia Pugh, ‘Bernard Shaw, Imperialist’, *Shaw* 11 (1991), 97-118.

¹⁹³ Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967-9), v.1, 170. See Peter Clarke, ‘Bertrand Russell and the Dimensions of Edwardian Liberalism’, *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 4 (1984), 207-21. Cf. David Boucher, ‘“Sane” and “Insane” Imperialism: British Idealism, New Liberalism and Liberal Imperialism’, *History of European Ideas* 44.8 (2014), 1189-1204.

Weltpolitik a decisive turn away from peaceable cosmopolitanism and towards a renewed and belligerous mercantilism, bringing with it the spectre of bloody and unstable Great Power politics on the European peninsula itself:

I look upon the Egyptian business as quite fatal. Nothing but a miracle now can save us from a return to all the old follies of alliances, balance of power, great wars, annexation *etc.*, and the gradual possession of half the African continent, if indeed, the whole fabric does not collapse before us.¹⁹⁴

In one respect, Mallet had it backwards: the real damage inflicted on the development of Egyptian capitalism was not so much by its subsumption under Britain's protectionist umbrella with the rest of the Empire's anacritic markets, but rather the massive structural experiment in financial liberalisation carried out in Cairo by colonial experts, and the roller-coaster of speculative calamities which predictably ensued.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, however, Mallet was correct to perceive a broader protectionist swing in the concert of Powers, manifested especially in the sharp-elbowed contest for the raw materials of Africa. In French *Afrique-Occidentale*, for instance, the mid-century drift towards free trade had begun to reverse itself by the 1880s, precipitating a concomitant raising of the British drawbridge in Nigeria.¹⁹⁶

The British Empire's desire to keep the newly colonised regions of Africa open to the Capital of all nations was repeatedly emphasised by the delegation despatched by the Gladstone government to the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, a legalistic interimperial summit in the classic post-Napoleonic style called by the

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1856-1946* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 186. See also Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 80-2.

¹⁹⁵ Aaron Jakes, *Egypt's Occupation: Colonial Economism and the Crises of Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: SUP, 2020), esp. 84-112. Cf. Casper Andersen, 'The Economic Normativity of British Fiscal Administration in Egypt and Nigeria, 1882-1914', in Mikkel Thorup (ed.), *Intellectual History of Economic Normativities* (London: PM, 2016), 185-99.

¹⁹⁶ C.W. Newbury, 'The Protectionist Revival in French Colonial Trade: The Case of Senegal', *Economic History Review* 21 (1968), 337-48; *idem.*, 'The Tariff Factor in Anglo-French West African Partition', in Prosser Gifford & Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (New Haven, CT: YUP, 1971), 221-59. The French Empire's highly effective economic manipulation of its periphery is covered in David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2021), 58-65, 175-226.

Powers to decide the fate of the Dark Continent. In Berlin, the *potemkin* internationalism of Leopold II's 'International Association' was understood for what it was by Europe's diplomats with *realpolitikal* candour: a species of the same accumulative-extractive genus as all the other capitalist empires.¹⁹⁷ The Congo Free State, it was collectively decided, would play a vital lubricant role in the Berlin system as a whole. Leopold's overlordship in Central Africa would enable European trade to penetrate its newly meable depths, freeing Capital from its reliance on the comings and goings of unreliable African middlemen by investing in railroads and constructing a security apparatus to protect property rights. As legal historian Matthew Craven concludes in his study of the Conference:

The establishment of Leopold's Congo Free State as the predominant power in Central Africa was not so much an expression of the failure of the internationalised regime, but rather its most logical extension.¹⁹⁸

The need for a Berlin Conference at all (never mind the particularity of its location) derived in the final instance from the freak mutation of post-Napoleonic continental politics in 1870-1, with the German Empire's *urplötzlich* military debut and the subsequent need to clarify the common legal basis of the accumulative world-system – the bourgeois order's 'domain of law and control' on the planetary 'great frontier' – following the arrival of this new challenger on the imperial scene.¹⁹⁹ In Britain, nationalist jingoes and free trade zealots alike

¹⁹⁷ On the multilateral conference as the Powers' preferred mode of interimperial conflict-resolution between Waterloo and Sarajevo, see George Lawson, 'Ordering Europe: The Legalized Hegemony of the Concert of Europe', in Daniel Green (ed.), *The Two Worlds of Nineteenth Century International Relations: The Bifurcated Century* (London: Routledge, 2019), 101-18; Thomas Müller, 'Between European Concert and Global Status: The Evolution of the Institution of Great Powers, 1860s to 1910s', in *ibid.*, 138-56; Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe After Napoleon* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2021), 87-104. On liberalism, legality, and extractive imperialism in the nineteenth century more broadly, see Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 98-178; Anthony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 32-114. On subaltern resistance to the hegemony of the West's global legal regime, see Arnulf Becker Lorca, *Mestizo International Law: A Global Intellectual History 1842-1933* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015).

¹⁹⁸ Matthew Craven, 'Between Law and History: The Berlin Conference of 1884-5 and the Logic of Free Trade', *London Review of International Law* 3.1 (2015), 31-59, 55.

¹⁹⁹ Richard Robinson, 'The Conference in Berlin and the Future of Africa, 1884-5', in *idem.*, Stig Förster & Wolfgang Mommsen (eds.), *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa*

found in expansionist, protectionist Germany the perfect external bogeyman on which to pin their declinist fears.²⁰⁰ The nascent Second Reich, as Paul Kennedy observes,

was the one ‘newcomer’ Great Power, with the exception of the United States, which really had the strength to challenge the existing order. And it was the one rising Great Power which, if it expanded its borders farther to the east or to the west, could only do so at the expense of powerful neighbours: the one country whose future growth... ‘directly’ rather than ‘indirectly’ undermined the European balance.²⁰¹

Germany’s unwillingness to play by the established ‘rules’ of free trade had generated widespread liberal anxiety during the imperial protection debates of the 1880s, and again during the economic downturn of the ‘90s. In *Made in Germany* (1896), the Fabian journalist E.E. Williams (1866-1935) sounded the alarm regarding the torrent of German goods flooding the world markets, especially at home in Britain, the quondam ‘workshop of the world’. To Williams, Wilhelmstraße’s ruthless application of the import weapon instantiated a ‘deliberate and deadly rivalry’ for economic supremacy between the two nations.²⁰² Returning to the subject in a follow-up article five years later, Williams asserted that Britain’s comparative economic decline must be regarded with fear not just on its own terms, but also because of the implications for the global balance of power:

Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 1-32. ‘Great frontier’: Edward Barbier, *Scarcity and Frontiers: How Economies Have Developed Through Natural Resource Exploitation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 375; and see also Lucien Ashworth, ‘Industrialization and Competitive Globalisation after 1873: International Thought and the Problem of Resources’, in Green (2019), 119-37. ‘Domain’: Charles Maier, *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth and Belonging Since 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2016), 9.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Federico Niglia, ‘Back to the Huns: The German Threat in the European Collective Imagination, 1527-1914’, in Eberhard Crailsheim & María Dolores Elizalde (eds.), *The Representation of External Threats: From the Middle Ages to the Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 205-21.

²⁰¹ Kennedy, *Powers*, 276.

²⁰² E.E. Williams, *Made in Germany* (London: William Heinemann, 1896).

If a nation would be powerful, it must root itself upon a production of wealth correspondent with the wealth production of other nations.²⁰³

The intensification of imperial-economic competition with Germany also gave succour to a budding British far-right, fuelled by popular anxieties about capitalist globalisation and struck through with a vitriolic racist element – as we might expect from partisans of the world’s regnant white supremacist empire.²⁰⁴ This nascent ultranationalist force was mirrored in Germany by the chauvinistic Navy League, with the two functioning for each other as symbiotic nemeses, their sabre-rattling kayfabe performed to a jingoistic home audience via the mass media.²⁰⁵ The highly-publicised naval arms race served both radical reactionaries and armament-manufacturing capitalists in both countries frightfully well, with an increase in the means of destruction by one state providing the grounds for escalation for another.²⁰⁶

The new naval technology, then, was an ideological fetish object for both the bellicose reactionary and the free-trading Cobdenite.²⁰⁷ Indeed Britain’s ‘liberal militarism’ as a viable *Weltpolitikal* doctrine, based as it was on the hegemonic power of the Royal Navy over and above a vast standing army in the continental style, had since Napoleon depended upon the Empire’s maintenance of scientific supremacy.²⁰⁸ A crucial tipping point in the history of the gunboat

²⁰³ *Idem.*, ‘Made in Germany – Five Years Later’, *National Review* 38 (1901).

²⁰⁴ Geoffrey Searle, ‘The “Revolt from the Right” in Edwardian Britain’, in Paul Kennedy & Anthony Nicholls (eds.), *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 21-39; Barbara Storm Farr, *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain, 1903-1932* (New York: Garland, 1987); Richard Saull, ‘Capitalist Development and the Rise and “Fall” of the Far-Right’, *Critical Sociology* 41.5 (2015), 619-39, 623-28.

²⁰⁵ Bradley Cesario, *New Crusade: The Royal Navy and British Navalism, 1884–1914* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2001), 28-59.

²⁰⁶ Geoff Eley, ‘Reshaping the Right: Radical Nationalism and the German Navy League: 1898-1908’, *HJ* 21.2 (1978), 327-54. Cf. Jan Rüger’s conception of ‘naval theatre’ in *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

²⁰⁷ See Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest and Sea Power During the Pax Britannica* (London: Harper Collins, 1986).

²⁰⁸ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology, and British Naval Policy 1889-1914* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014 [1989]), 24-57; David Edgerton, ‘Liberal Militarism and the British State’, *New Left Review* 185 (1991), 138-69; David Morgan-Owen, ‘Continuity and Change: Strategy and Technology in the Royal Navy, 1890–1918’, *English Historical Review* 135.575 (2020), 892-930; Louis Halewood, ‘“Peace Throughout the

arrived in 1879, during Morel's Parisian boyhood, when the British inventors Percy Carlyle Gilchrist (1851-1935) and Sidney Gilchrist Thomas (1850-1885) discovered how to alchemise steel from pig iron and base phosphates, vastly engorging at a stroke the military-materiel potential of the industrial Powers, with the greatest comparative leap forward made on the high seas. Ships with steel hulls could be built bigger, stronger, and faster than their predecessors, the only drawback being their vastly inflated construction and operational costs.²⁰⁹ The evulgation and assimilation of the Gilchrist-Thomas method led to the launching of the paradigm-warping *HMS Dreadnought* in 1906, and thence to a frenzied embarkation upon a new, high-tech arms race between the would-be masters of the ocean.²¹⁰ It is unsurprising, therefore, that liberal Edwardian culture fetishised the inventor as the heroic outrider of its Empire.²¹¹ Capital, technology, and warmaking were inseparable from one another. As the poet Malcolm Lowry once wrote: 'Iron thoughts sail out at evening on iron ships'.²¹²

vi.

And where was Morel, the individual human, amidst this welter of world-historical forces? He was, as we will recall, still a clerk in the office of the Elder Dempster shipping corporation. Three words here are of particular importance for placing Morel neatly in his context, which we can organise into a causal chain: Corporation → Office → Clerk. The towering High Modern corporation, the accumulative *tulpa* given life by the onto-legal innovations of the mid-nineteenth century (the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1844, the Limited Liability Act of 1855, the Companies Act of 1862), embodied concentrations of Capital of unprecedented mass, which were in turn invested in holdings of

Oceans and Seas of the World": British Maritime Strategic Thought and World Order, 1892–1919', *Historical Research* 94.265 (2021), 554–77.

²⁰⁹ On steel as the base metal of modern empire, see Edward Fertik, 'Steel and Sovereignty: The United States, Nationalism, and the Transformation of World Order, 1898-1941', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University (2018), 31–42.

²¹⁰ Vaclav Smil, *Still the Iron Age: Iron and Steel in the Modern World* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2016), 50–4.

²¹¹ See Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism, and British Identity, 1750–1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), esp. 212–48.

²¹² Malcolm Lowry, *Collected Poems* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 87.

bewildering variety, complexity, and geographical diversity.²¹³ Such omnivorous financial cosmopolitanism was made possible only by contemporaneous advances in global communications technology. The telegraph, the telegram and the telephone exponentially magnified the speed and volume of transmission between geographically distant locations – as well as generating an astounding quantity of commercial information to be processed.²¹⁴ Given that the telegram's metal-and-plastic data nodes had to be situated in fixed geographical spaces in order to be physically wired into the networks, and thus to send and receive information, the modern office space was established to house these new machines, and the clerk was hired to attend them.²¹⁵

The white-collar, petty bourgeois clerk was the distinctive worker of the modern communication revolution: the mechanic of the informational logistics birthed by the telegraphic revolution.²¹⁶ His function was that of a recorder and communicator, through whose industry the self-knowledge of Capital spoke itself in the World via the electric media apparatuses and the endless hammering of the newly-massified commercial typewriter:

The clerks who attend at the recording instrument become so expert in their curious hieroglyphics, that they do not need to look

²¹³ John Micklethwait & Adrian Wooldridge, *The Company: A Short History of a Revolutionary Idea* (London: Phoenix, 2003), 45-60; Margaret Blair, 'Why Markets Chose the Corporate Form: Entity Status and the Separation of Asset Ownership from Control', unpublished paper (2003); Paul Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 103-66; Paddy Ireland, 'Limited Liability, Shareholder Rights and the Problem of Corporate Irresponsibility', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (2010), 837-56; James Taylor, *Creating Capitalism: Joint-Stock Enterprise in British Politics and Culture, 1800-1870* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2014), 1-18.

²¹⁴ Duncan Bell, 'Cyborg Imperium, c. 1900', in Anne Chapman & Natalie Hume (eds.), *Coding and Representation from the Nineteenth Century to the Present: Scrambled Messages* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 48-70. For a *longue durée* view of capitalism itself as essentially a matter of harvesting and exploiting information, see Steven Marks, *The Information Nexus: Global Capitalism from the Renaissance to the Present* (Cambridge: CUP, 2016).

²¹⁵ On telecommunications systems as physical, spatialised networks integrated inseparably into built urban space, see Gabriele Balbi & Richard John, 'Point-to-Point: Telecommunications Networks from the Optical Telegraph to the Mobile Telephone', in Lorenzo Cantoni & James Danowski (eds.), *Communication and Technology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 35-56; Shannon Mattern, 'Deep Time of Media Infrastructure', in Lisa Parks & Nicole Starosielski (eds.), *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 94-112.

²¹⁶ See Michael Zakim, *Accounting for Capitalism: The World the Clerk Made* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2018), esp. 47-85.

at the printed record to know what the message under reception is; the recording instrument has for them an intelligible articulate language. They understand *its speech*. They can close their eyes and listen to the strange clicking that is going on close to their ear whilst the printing is in progress, and at once say what it all means.²¹⁷

Clerical workers were thus imbricated in the techno-logistical *dispositif* which emerged to fulfil the accumulative possibilities of a fossil-fuelled, financialised global capitalism.²¹⁸ Modern logistics (the distinct *technik* of organising the transit of bodies, commodities, and body-commodities between continents) had itself been inaugurated in that ‘first great movement of commodities, the ones that could speak’; in other words, the Atlantic slave trade.²¹⁹ Liverpool, the onetime nerve centre of that particular enterprise, now employed thousands upon thousands of petty bourgeois labourers to run the paper of its shipping industry, and of the banks and insurance companies which serviced it:

[In] offices scattered around the city were the average adjusters to settle claims between the insured and the insurer; the shipbrokers to buy, sell or charter a ship; the freight forwarders to arrange shipment of crates or bales of anything to anywhere; the agencies to handle the business of foreign ships; the foreign

²¹⁷ ‘The Atlantic Telegraph’, *New York Times*, 7 Aug 1858. On the transformation of office labour during this period by the typewriter, the telephone, data processors (that is to say, mechanical calculating machines) and other new technologies, see Thomas Whalen, ‘Office Technology and Socio-Economic Change, 1870-1955’, *IEEE Technology & Society Magazine* 2.2 (1983), 12-29. Some electronic interlocutors, aware that intermediary clerks would read all messages sent on the network, devised cryptographic strategies to address these privacy concerns, or even developed private peer-to-peer networks of telegraphic wires between nodes: Jean-François Fava-Verde, ‘Managing Privacy: Cryptography or Private Networks of Communication in the Nineteenth Century’, *Technology & Culture* 61.3 (2020), 798-814.

²¹⁸ Dwayne Winseck & Robert Pike, *Communications and Empire: Media, Markets and Globalisation, 1860-1930* (Durham, NC: DUP, 2007), 1-15; Markus Lampe & Florian Ploeckl, ‘Spanning the Globe: The Rise of Global Communications Systems and the First Globalisation’, *Australian Economic History Review* 54.3 (2014), 242-61; Alexander Engel, ‘Buying Time: Futures Trading and Telegraphy in Nineteenth-Century Global Commodity Markets’, *Journal of Global History* 10.2 (2015), 284-306.

²¹⁹ Stefano Harney & Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, NT: Minor Compositions, 2013), 92.

consular corps to guide and advise resident and visiting nationals...²²⁰

This intensification in demand for literate workers ran parallel to the progress of the electric communication revolution itself; for all the popular modernist rhetoric of the self-propelling accumulative machine, the edifice of corporate capitalism still rested on the waged work of labouring bodies in cramped, noisy offices.²²¹ Such was the urgent need for clerks in Victorian Liverpool that multiple voluntary associations were set up for the sole purpose of educating young men from the lower classes and transmuting them into white collar workers, funded by donations from Merseyside's many humanitarian-minded liberal capitalists.²²²

The new global network of information technology was 'a complex circuit of thought – a system of coils, cross links, and loopings in which a fluctuation at any point instantly becomes a property of the entire system'.²²³ The telegraphic matrix in particular – adopted by business long before it became widely affordable for the masses – became crucial for the proper functioning of modern markets. The simple morse tapper, when wired to every other morse tapper on the planet, became the material-logistical basis of data flows without which Capital could not coordinate accumulation on the worldwide scale its fossil-fuelled productive output now demanded.²²⁴ Yet the High Modern communications revolution played a more profound role in the reshaping of the intersubjective World in the nineteenth century than merely that of a lubricant for profiteering. Its instantiation of new forms of rapid, indirect human relating gave new shape to the modern *self*. Marshall McLuhan famously dubbed the telegraph 'the social hormone', and the messaging machine's gradual integration into quotidian existence attested to the increasingly gravitic

²²⁰ Lane, 40.

²²¹ The study of turn of the century clerical labour *as labour* is a lacuna which has only recently begun to be filled, and such studies as exist remain confined to London: Michael Hell, *London Clerical Workers, 1880–1914: Development of the Labour Market* (London: Routledge, 2015); Katie Hindmarch Watson, *Serving a Wired World: London's Telecommunications Workers and the Making of an Information Capital* (Berkeley, CA: UC&P, 2020).

²²² John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism*, (Liverpool: LUP, 2000), 11.

²²³ Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 13.

²²⁴ Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), esp. 84–8.

presence of technologically-mediated *publicity* in the lifeworld – *i.e.*, of continual performative reference by Being to a vast, deindividuated audience, the *They*, of whom it is constantly aware and by which its self-sense is always already mediated.²²⁵ As Heidegger writes:

The domination of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already decided upon even the possibilities of being attuned, that is, about the basic way in which Being lets itself be affected by the World. The *They* prescribes that attunement, it determines what and how one ‘sees’.²²⁶

The shipping clerk exercised this dialectically mediative agency, this determination of the ‘seen’, on behalf of Capital. Morel, for instance, expressed the *vox corporatorum* of British business on the subject of Africa through his obedient columns on the subject for a variety of publications. The clerk communicated and justified Capital’s accumulative will to the *They* of the public, just as his own subjectivity was shaped by his pinioned position within the global information network (and thus, in the final instance, by his need to sell his labour to survive). A cog, after all, both *works* and *is worked on* in precisely equilibrated measure.²²⁷

Yet if the clerk was on the one hand continually engaged in this public gesturation to *das Man* as the receiver of his missives, he was also a privileged keeper of secrets. The media apparatuses attended by the shipping clerk functioned, in communications scholar Judd Case’s words, as ‘detectors, orderers, and arrangers. They established points of view [and] become collection points for information’.²²⁸ Such tools, nevertheless, were only keyhole slits of light onto the hidden workings of the capitalist world-engine as a whole. Logistical-bureaucratic systems, as Toscano warns us, are characterised by their ‘fundamental opacity’ – an opacity exaggerated in the information societies their modern form has evolved to accompany, in which the vast quantity of data

²²⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1964]), 267.

²²⁶ Heidegger, *Being & Time*, 159.

²²⁷ Cf. Marx, *Capital*, 410, on capitalism’s transformation of the worker into a ‘living appendage of the machine’.

²²⁸ Judd Case, ‘Logistical Media: Fragments for Radar’s Prehistory’, *Canadian Journal of Communication* 38 (2013), 379-95, 381.

produced functions in and of itself as a highly effective strategy for organisations and businesses to make hidden their secrets (even from themselves).²²⁹ The clerk was the filter through which the vast reservoir of *inside* information was lustrated, and by whose labour *outside* information percolated into the World of the mass audience in a form acceptable to his master. Networks, of course, do not diffuse informational power evenly across their surface but rather *concentrate* it at the node-points of its collection and redissemination: ‘Circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and centralisation of knowledge’.²³⁰ This insight into the clerk’s ostiary role is intimately relevant to our discussion of the concrete conditions within which Morel made his Congo-discovery – or more precisely, to the conditions of cultivated unknowledge which rendered such an encounter a *discovery* at all.

When speaking of the High Modern communications revolution, we must be sure to bear in mind the continued *physicality* of pre-digital information, with data stored not on easily-searchable hard-drives but on vast reams of paper – paper, which must be physically housed somewhere, and which is endlessly vulnerable to conflagration, spoliation, and mice. Informational corporeality (which saw records spatialised in one location, usually under the supervision of their creator) radically delimited opportunities for archival perlustration by any would-be investigators into corporate-imperial malice.²³¹ The Leopoldian Free State and its logistical collaborator Elder Dempster enjoyed the vast privilege

²²⁹ Alberto Toscano, ‘Lineaments of the Logistical State’, *Viewpoint*, (2014), <https://viewpointmag.com/2014/09/28/lineaments-of-the-logistical-state/>. See also Alexander Galloway, ‘Are Some Things Unrepresentable?’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 28.7-8 (2011), 85-102; Christopher Grey & Jana Costas, *Secrecy at Work: The Hidden Architecture of Organizational Life* (Stanford, NJ: Stanford University Press, 2016); Martin Parker, ‘Secret Societies: Intimations of Organisation’, *Organisation Studies* 37.1 (2016), 99-113; Stefan Schwarzkopf, ‘Sacred Excess: Organizational Ignorance in an Age of Toxic Data’, *Organisation Studies* 41.2 (2020), 197-217; Anna Essén *et al.*, ‘Explaining Ignoring: Working with Information that Nobody Uses’, *Organisation Studies* 43.5 (2022), 725-47; Mats Alvesson *et al.*, ‘Dynamics of Wilful Ignorance in Organizations’, *British Journal of Sociology* 73.4 (2022), 839-58.

²³⁰ Foucault, *Discipline*, 217. See Alexander Galloway & Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Network Power* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 23-101, on the oft-elided *nodality* of ‘decentralised’ network structures.

²³¹ Cf. Mandy Banton, ‘Destroy? “Migrate”? Conceal? British Strategies for the Disposal of Sensitive Records of Colonial Administrations at Independence’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 40.2 (2012), 321-35; Shohei Sato, ‘“Operation Legacy”: Britain’s Destruction and Concealment of Colonial Records Worldwide’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 45.4 (2017), 697-719.

of informational asymmetry versus any putative critic, able to deploy the inquisitorial power of captive media organs against opponents whilst occluding any proof of wrongdoing within the *enceinte* of their bureaucratic fortress. As technology scholar Frank Pasquale notes: ‘To scrutinise others while avoiding scrutiny oneself is one of the most important forms of power’.²³² The trade records of the Congo state may well have constituted an ossuary in paper, but without a concerned subject to vocalise them, they remained mute to the World. Nevertheless, as the contemporary field of surveillance studies warns us, any information society is *ipso facto* a surveillance society.²³³ To record a profitable crime in a ledger even once (as bureaucratic capitalism demands) is necessarily to risk its discovery. The mastery of information which large-scale accumulation demands of company and state also ensures the continued *reality* of its activities in universally verifiable form – that is to say, as numbers on pages.

Morel, for his own part, was a very good clerk – although, as one colleague later recalled, he was a ‘devil for work’ with obsessive tendencies, and could prove ‘difficult to work with if you did not share his keenness’.²³⁴ In particular, the teenaged Morel channelled his excess energies into *writing*, and to writing about West Africa (that part of the world serviced by Elder Dempster’s lines) most of all, as he would later recount:

There was something very huge and mysterious about the whole subject which exercised an increasing fascination over my mind... I plunged into the old West African literature: learned the geography of the coast, section by section, with the help of maps and steamer charts; studied its history, its trade and its people and customs, its fauna and flora, laid myself out to read up everything I could find about the current problems in the newspapers... The more I read the

²³² Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms that Control Money and Information* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2016), 3.

²³³ John Gilliom & Torin Monahan, *SuperVision: An Introduction to Surveillance Society* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2012), 2-3.

²³⁴ Adams, 177; Cline, 9-16; Mitchell, 13-4. As Helena Swanwick later remarked of Morel in *Builders of Peace* (London: Swarthmore, 1924), 187: ‘Such a man is not a comfortable man. He does not “rest you”’. On the general social-subjective ‘type’ to which the ergonomic Morel conformed, cf. Amy Milne-Smith, ‘Work and Madness: Overworked Men and Fears of Degeneration, 1860s–1910s’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 24.2 (2019), 159-78.

more interested I grew; the more clearly it seemed to me... that the newspapers seemed extraordinarily ignorant of the whole subject.²³⁵

At age twenty, Morel published his first article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*: a boilerplate critique of French colonial policy which demonstrated how thoroughly the young man had internalised the values of his liberal-imperialist milieu. His subjectivity at this stage still displays all the marks of what Althusser called ideological interpellation – that process of psycho-symbolic grafting by which the ruling order affixes us in our designated social location.²³⁶ He remained at this stage, as Cline writes, ‘a true believer in his own propaganda’.²³⁷ Yet the gap between Morel’s inscription by power and his subjective self-understanding would gradually grow apart over the course of his life, to the point where his performative nonconformity to ideological ‘hailing’ would itself become part of an affixed public identity. This conversion remained ahead of him for now, but the track towards the Event was already being laid down by his continued professional advancement.

In 1895 (still aged just twenty-two), Morel was appointed the head of Elder Dempster’s Congo department, owing in large part to his fluent command of French, which came in very handy when negotiating with the various Belgian *apparatchiks* with whom the company had to deal in its ongoing collaboration with the Leopoldian regime. In his new role, he would become privy to all sorts of secret information about the inputs and outputs of that particular commercial relationship. For the moment, however, Morel was quite content to hammer out articles for the metropolitan and national press repeating the liberal line on the imperial topics of the day: the urgent need to build more railways in the colonies, or to take a firmer stand against rival empires muscling in on British trade in Africa:

Shall we, by a short-sighted and fatal policy, let colonies which have hitherto been prosperous and wealthy dwindle down into

²³⁵ Quoted in Cocks, 24.

²³⁶ Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)’, in *Lenin & Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 2001 [1971]), 85-126.

²³⁷ Cline, 12.

mere settlements, alike useless and burdensome to their mother country? [*etc.*]²³⁸

He was proving to be a natural propagandist for empire, and lent covering fire in print to all sorts of colonial enormities – including, of course, those committed by his department's principal trading partner and profit stream, the Congo Free State. Alfred Jones, Morel recalled, 'knew of my press connections and often utilised them to his advantage', allowing the corporation and its public relations operations to work hand in glove:

I usually prepared his brief when he went up to the Colonial Office in his capacity as Chairman of the African section of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce to beg Mr Chamberlain to push on railways construction, to agitate for freedom of trade on the Niger, to emphasise the gravity of French activities behind our interior possessions... I backed up these activities in the Press.²³⁹

One article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1897 stands out for the especial ferocity of its blinkered, common-sense chauvinism. Reports of unspeakable brutality towards the African population of the Congo Free State, which had by this time already begun to leak out from behind the veil of Leopoldian *omerta*, were dismissed out of hand as fantastical, the product of 'uncontrollable sources, dished up in the most sensational style'. In actual fact, Morel complacently informed his audience, the situation in the Congo was 'not as disappointed adventurers, needy place-hunters and misinformed philanthropists would have us believe'. And even if there *was* a bit of firm treatment being applied to the porters and haulers employed by Leopold's rubber operation,

What European nation which has undertaken the heavy responsibility of introducing the blessings and vices of civilisation into the Dark Continent can claim immunity for its representatives in this respect? Are our own records so entirely clean?²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Quoted in Cline, 12.

²³⁹ Morel, *History*, 31.

²⁴⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 Jul 1897.

After all, the savage natives of the Congo Basin – ‘the most degraded, the most ignorant, the most repulsive’ in Africa, we learn – could hardly be expected to be coaxed into productive work without liberal application of disciplinary measures:

Shut up for centuries untold in their impenetrable natural fastnesses, they have never been made aware of any higher form of existence.²⁴¹

Regrettably, therefore, ‘severe repression’ was sometimes the only tool available to the enlightened European empire-builder.

All this, of course, was perfectly conventional wisdom for a man of Morel’s position in society – ‘the smugness and self-confidence one might expect from a spokesman of British trading interests at the high noon of imperialism’, as Cline puts it.²⁴² Taken as a cadre, young male clerks were one of the major social repositories of jingo sentiment in Britain – prominent, for instance, in the frothing paroxysms of nationalism engendered by the Boer War. Their chauvinism was especially exacerbated at the turn of the century by anxieties over female encroachment into the clerical workspace:

From the 1880s onwards, more and more clerical work was being given to women – up to a quarter in some cities – and male clerks protested at this slur on their manhood. A hearty, and above all a physical identification with the quintessential ethos of empire was one very effective way in which that slur could be countered.²⁴³

Nevertheless, one can still sense in Morel’s later writings of this pre-conversion period a certain ideological mollescence, the opening of a humanitarian conscience directed towards the plight of the African which would eventually blossom in his Damascene about-face on the Congo, directly attributable to the growing influence of his friends and mentors Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) and

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Cline, 15.

²⁴³ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (London: T&F, 2005), 46. See also Kim England & Kate Boyer, ‘Women’s Work: The Feminization and Shifting Meanings of Clerical Work’, *Journal of Social History* 43.2 (2009), 307-40.

John Holt (1841-1915) – reformist ‘negrophiles’ both – on his thinking during this time:

One vaguely wonders how many million human beings have been sacrificed in the ‘opening up’ of the mysterious continent by the forces of a civilisation which has often proved itself as ruthless as the barbarism it has encountered. It is a terrible history, this history of Africa during the nineteenth century. We can only hope that the ultimate result of European action will be for the good of Africa.²⁴⁴

Indeed, later in his career, he would go on to offer a suitably shame-faced apology for the prejudices of his early adulthood:

My slowness in finding out the facts may be excused by my youth and inexperience; the elaborate secrecy with which the high officials of the Congo Free State in Brussels conducted their masters’ business; the natural obstacles to a young man in a shipping office going outside his province to investigate the conduct of a foreign government in purely business relations with his employer.²⁴⁵

It is to this crucial process of Morel’s deinterpellation that we now turn.

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Cline, 16. On Morel, Kingsley and Holt, see Kenneth Dike Nworah, ‘The Liverpool’ “Sect” and British West African Policy, 1895-1915’, *African Affairs* 70.281 (1971), 349-64.

²⁴⁵ Morel, *History*, 5.

II

Morel the Crusader: The Congo

i.

Midsummer, 1900, and Britain is sweltering in the grip of a once-in-a-generation heatwave, when E.D. Morel discovers something very strange.¹ In his professional role as the head of Elder Dempster's Congo bureau, Morel was one of the few people party to the complete financial logs detailing the imports and exports which the Leopoldian regime ran on the company's boats. And at the centre of those logs, there was a black hole. Out of the Congo Free State, natural wealth poured on a remarkable scale, most notably in the form of invaluable African rubber. But (and this was what terrified Morel) there were no commodities being shipped to Africa in return; nothing which might suggest the ongoing conduct of free and fair commercial intercourse with the native inhabitants. In reality, he discovered, the only thing being shipped into the Congo was 'military equipment' – in other words, guns.

Analysing with great care the so-called commercial statistics of the Congo Free State, I saw that of the imports going into the Congo something like 80% consisted of articles which were remote from trade purposes. Yet the Congo was exporting increasing quantities of rubber and ivory for which, on the face of the import statistics, the natives were getting nothing or next to nothing. How, then, was this rubber and ivory being acquired? Certainly not by commercial dealing. Nothing was going in to pay for what was coming out... Forced labour of a terrible and continuous kind could alone explain such unheard-of profits in a West African commercial venture; forced labour in which the Congo Government was the immediate beneficiary; forced labour directed by the closest associates of the King himself including

¹ Cline, 21-37; Mitchell, 19-27. 'Heatwave': David Parker *et al.*, 'A New Daily Central England Temperature Series, 1772-1991', *International Journal of Climatology* 12.4 (1992), 317-42.

members of his own household. And as the only medium through which compulsion was exercisable was the native soldier armed with a gun and as no people in the world could be expected to endure what these Congo tribes were enduring without resistance, the accompaniment of compulsion must of necessity be perennial outrageous abomination.²

Suddenly, the void in the ledgers made sense. This was no Cobdenite manuduction of willing natives into mutually-beneficial market relations with a paternalistic imperial tutor, by dint of which the scialytic light of civilisation might penetrate deeper into the heart of the Dark Continent. Instead, Morel realised, Leopold was engaged in the systematic primitive accumulation of all the wealth of the Congo Basin – and, to carry out this ambitious act of plunder, he had made the inhabitants of that country his personal slaves:

It must be bad enough to stumble upon a murder. I had stumbled upon a secret society of murderers with a King for a croniman... The 'Free, independent State' had become a ghastly shambles, filled with dead men's bones, filled with live men's lies, and live men's lusts. But who would believe it? Who would believe that the enterprise which was to 'brighten up with the glow of civilisation the dark places of sad-browed Africa' [sec. Henry Morton Stanley] had been converted into a gigantic slave-farm reeking with cruelty? Above all, who would believe that the crowned Manager was the supremely guilty party and was fraudulently appropriating vast sums, wrung from the blood and tears of African men and women, to his own uses?³

This realisation was the most important moment of Morel's life, one which radically transformed the shape of his subjectivity and bequeathed to him a vision of his life's overarching purpose – his 'fundamental project', in the language of Sartre:

The fundamental act of freedom is discovered; and it is this which gives meaning to the particular action which I can be brought to

² Morel, *History*, 35-42.

³ *Ibid.*, 42-3.

consider. This constantly renewed act is not distinct from my being; it is a choice of myself in the World and by the same token it is a discovery of the World.⁴

The similarity between this Sartrean conception of subjective commitment and Morel's own description of his experience is striking:

I was giddy and appalled at the cumulative significance of my discoveries... To probe the scandal to its very dregs and to take action, though what action I hardly knew, had by that time become for me at once a manifest duty and a dominating passion.⁵

But if the Congo discovery precipitated a total subjective geniculation in Morel, it was also one of those rare moments in History where a profound personal experience of subjective transformation simultaneously represented a hinge point in the process of powerful forces through the World. Morel's discovery, through the overflow of its consequences into intersubjective reality via one of the great humanitarian campaigns of the age, would lead directly to the cessation of one of the most grotesque systems of exploitation instituted by any historical empire, likely saving the lives of millions who would otherwise have remained crushed beneath the Leopoldian yoke. It is important to acknowledge, of course, that a great many people other than Morel were involved in the campaign which brought the Leopoldian regime to an end. But the unsettling fact remains, indigestible as Lacan's 'bone in the throat', that this triumphant future emerged out of a kernel of pure contingency in an individual life. Had Morel not stumbled across the accounting peculiarities in the Congo ledger, or been possessed of a less monomaniacal personality as a result of differences in his upbringing, or simply put less effort into his work (as one might expect of many twenty-seven year olds in a rather drab desk job), then the entire course of events which followed would have been different, and most likely dramatically worse.

The Congo Reform Association, the activist organisation founded by Morel and a group of allies to campaign against the Leopoldian system of

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being & Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (London: Routledge, 2005 [1943]), 461.

⁵ Morel, *History*, 42-3.

exploitation, partook of the precedent of a powerful existing tradition of British humanitarianism – that vibrant young species of non-radical social engagement which had by the Edwardian period assumed an *aftognotic* significance for the patriotic-liberal subject. Humanitarianism can be defined as a moralistic form of bourgeois *praxis* which affirms the individualistic, voluntaristic and humanistic qualities of capitalist society by elevating the particularist plight of a subsection of that society's victims into a *bien-pensant* cause, to be ameliorated by a network of fellow-feelers; the replacement, in short, of *politics* by *morality*.⁶ Such a force is capable of great practical and ethical achievements, as the Congo Reform campaign demonstrates, while at the same time representing no structural threat to the capitalist-imperialist bourgeois order which produces the suffering it claims to deplore, and which (in a Polanyian irony) its mitigations even help to reinforce. *Qua* Marx:

A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this society belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind...⁷

One observer of the Morelian moment who understood this point well was Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), who, in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891), launched a blistering attack against the self-deceiving inadequacies of the altruistic ethic:

The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism – are forced, indeed, so to spoil them. They

⁶ Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, CA: UCaP, 2011), 243-55; S.M. Reid-Henry, 'Humanitarianism as Liberal Diagnostic: Humanitarian Reason and the Political Rationalities of the Liberal Will-to-Care', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39.3 (2014), 418-31; Michael Barnett, 'The Humanitarian Act: How Humanitarian?', *International Social Science Journal* 65.216 (2017), 13-24; Davide Rodogno, 'Certainty, Compassion and the Ingrained Arrogance of Humanitarians', in Neville Wiley *et al.* (eds.), *The Red Cross Movement: Myths, Practices Turning Points* (Manchester: MUP, 2020), 27-44.

⁷ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002 [1848], 252.

find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this... Accordingly, with admirable, though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease. They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor. But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.⁸

Wilde's argument was seconded in 1920 by the then-Mayor of Stepney, Clement Attlee (1883-1967):

The evil of charity is that it tends to make the charitable think that he has done his duty by giving away some trifling sum, his conscience is put to sleep, and he takes no trouble to consider the social problem any further.⁹

Assimilating this longstanding leftist critique, the manifesto for a new history of humanitarianism recently laid down by Enrico Dal Lago and Kevin O'Sullivan

emphasises the primary importance of capitalism as a source of specific motivations and interests in humanitarian action, and as focus of an alternative narrative to the prevalent one based on altruism... The altruistic veneer that humanitarianism shows to the world deflects attention away from a set of core interests that are not, in essence, moral; rather, they are economic... Any attempt to rearticulate a grand narrative of humanitarian

⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1900 [1891]), 2-3.

⁹ Clement Attlee, *The Social Worker* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1920), 58.

intervention, therefore, must take into account the capitalist context in which it took shape.¹⁰

Illustrating Dal Lago and O'Sullivan's point, we may trace the genealogy of the British humanitarian self-sense back to the abolitionist movement of the eighteenth century, which developed in lockstep with the progress of capitalist empire-building across the planet:

The first major humanitarian moment coincided with the expansion of a global economy and the influence of global financial institutions that reached the four corners of the earth.¹¹

In the century which followed the victory of the Great Cause of abolition, the *praxis* of humanitarianism would become immovably entrenched in the self-sense of British patriotic liberalism. A particular way of *remembering* the history of the Atlantic slave trade and its cessation had become absolutely essential to this *aftognosia*, supressing both Britain's own determinative role in the establishment of chattel slavery across the Western hemisphere, whilst simultaneously canonising a clutch of heroic white activists as the saviours of the wretched, voiceless African.¹² Such an evacuation of abolition's troublesome radical charge was a signal example of that occultive sociopolitical process which the German-Jewish philosopher and future conscientious objector Theodor

¹⁰ Enrico Dal Lago & Kevin O'Sullivan, 'Towards a New History of Humanitarianism', *Moving the Social* 57 (2017) 5-20, 7-8.

¹¹ Dal Lago & O'Sullivan, 10. See Thomas Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility', *American Historical Review* 90.2 (1985), 339-61; Jeff Bass, 'An Efficient Humanitarianism: The British Slave Trade Debates, 1791-1792', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75.2 (1989), 152-65; Peter Stamatov, 'Revisiting the Humanitarianism-Capitalism Nexus: Eighteenth-Century British Abolitionism in the Context of Expanding Imperial Markets', unpublished paper (2015); Marc-William Palen, 'Free-Trade Ideology and Transatlantic Abolitionism: A Historiography', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 37.2 (2015), 291-304. My conception of 'genealogy' here and throughout is fundamentally Nietzschean, defined as 'the historical study of multiple intersecting forces which produce the meaning of a given phenomenon or practice' (Douglas Smith, 'Introduction' to Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: OUP, 1998 [1887]), xiii).

¹² Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, Pornography* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 10-21; Joseph Kelly, 'The Problem of Anti-Slavery in the Age of Capital, c.1830-1888', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Liverpool (2017), 5-14.

Lessing (1872-1933) named *Vergemütlichung*: the *making harmless* of historical memory.¹³

At this stage in his career, Morel understood himself uncomplicatedly as an avatar of this distinguished liberal-humanitarian inheritance. His finest work of Congo Reform Association propaganda, *Red Rubber* (1906), explicitly and enthusiastically evokes the enduring memory of British abolitionism, to which the Congo issue is positioned as symbolic heir:

Above and beyond them all [*i.e.*, reasons to intervene] is the great cry for Justice and Mercy which arises from the Congo forests. Can we be deaf to it, we who are of the race of Clarkson and of Wilberforce? Can we forget our glorious part in the emancipation of the negro race? ¹⁴

Much (one imagines) to his satisfaction, Morel's followers in the CRA became fond of calling him 'the modern Wilberforce', perceiving in this diligent young moralist a reawakening of precisely that enlightened national tradition, with its pious concern for the welfare of the suffering African.¹⁵

The liberal appeal to humanitarianism cuts both ways; for, as a *moralising* form of critique, rather than class-based or political (that is, concerned with questions of *power*), it is liable to appropriation and representation by the very capitalistic forces which instigate its querimony. The behaviour of King Leopold II perfectly illustrates the capacity of well-publicised humanitarian sentiments and charitable acts to throw a smokescreen over relations of exploitation, as described by Dal Lago and Sullivan:

In Africa – the continent that witnessed the most wide-ranging efforts at colonial control – compassion for slaves exploited in an inhuman labour system morphed into compassion for dislocated refugees in the post-slavery world. This important ideological shift allowed activists to claim that they continued to 'save' the inhabitants of what was perceived as a 'backward continent'. In

¹³ Theodor Lessing, *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen* (Munich: T. H. Beetz, 1919), 180-2.

¹⁴ E.D. Morel, *Red Rubber* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907 [1906]), 200.

¹⁵ Cline, 21.

time, this led to a situation of ‘permanent emergency’, which was used to justify continued humanitarian intervention in ‘under-developed’ parts of the world.¹⁶

Such a critique describes precisely the artificial philanthropy of the Congo Free State. ‘Our only programme’, as the Belgian King canorously dissimulated to the global public through the press, ‘is the work of moral and material regeneration’.¹⁷ One of Leopold’s favoured fig leaves for his atrocities was his nuncupated intention to fight the Arab slave trader in East Africa – that figure of degenerate *otherness* in whom traditional race hatred and righteous humanitarian indignation could fruitfully coalesce.¹⁸ As Morel sarcastically remarked:

Leopold got what he wanted, a mandate from Christendom to exterminate the Arabs.¹⁹

When the Zanzibari slaving entrepot of Nyangwé fell to Leopold’s forces in 1893, Belgian propagandists loudly rejoiced in the victory, which had apparently ‘substituted the benefits of civilisation for the horrors of slavery and cannibalism’.²⁰ Yet this gleaming vista was not visible to Sir Harry Johnston (1858-1927), the British explorer, who recorded that Leopold’s troops had unleashed ‘horrors scarcely recorded since the worst days of the Spaniard in Central America, or the Englishman or Dutchman in Southern Asia’.²¹ Yet this narrative of a ‘clash of civilisations’ with barbarous Islam was useful for

¹⁶ Dal Lago & O’Sullivan, 10. See also Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Antislavery Activism, 1880-1940* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 14-45.

¹⁷ Morel, *Affairs*, (London: William Heinemann, 1902), 327.

¹⁸ On the Empire’s crusading concern with Arab slavery in the late nineteenth century, see Robert Blyth, ‘Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century’, in *idem.* & Douglas Hamilton (eds.), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), 78-91; Lindsay Doultou, ‘The Royal Navy’s Anti-Slavery Campaign in the Western Indian Ocean, c. 1860-1890: Race, Empire and Identity’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Hull (2010), esp. 189-218.

¹⁹ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 28.

²⁰ Quoted in Maya Jasanoff, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World* (London: William Collins, 2017), 206. See also Raphaël Cheriau, *Imperial Powers and Humanitarian Interventions: The Zanzibar Sultanate, Britain, and France in the Indian Ocean, 1862-1905* (London: Routledge, 2021), 153-6.

²¹ Harry Johnston, *George Grenfell and the Congo: A History and Description of the Congo Independent State* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1910), v.2, 428.

Western imperialists. A campaign waged by a coalition of Western Powers against an amorphous network of sinister Muslim non-state actors provided the perfect cover for the assertion of imperial control in the region under the perfumed veil of humanitarianism.²² The same quest to bring so-called ‘white slavery’ to an end was also, for instance, the main legitimisation provided by Britain’s own foreign policy elite for the Empire’s formal acquisition of huge swathes of territory in present-day Kenya and Uganda after 1885.²³

The potent meme of ‘white slavery’ (a conspiratorial vision of a trade in human lives secretly carried out by nefarious racial Others in an imaginary mirror of Europe’s own sins) had itself first coagulated out of a whole welter of neuroses regarding race, class, sexuality, and empire in the nineteenth-century British public sphere, before transdiscursively metastasising to the question of the Arab pirates of the western Indian Ocean.²⁴ The panic exhibited many of the same fears as those activated by *Dracula* (1897), being a vision of the parasitic foreigner sucking the *élan vital* from the pretty young white girls he enslaves (thus spoiling the enjoyment of their innocence for their upstanding Anglo-Saxon husbands), and whose incrudescence seems in some unspoken and frightening way to be a reversal of *proper* relations of domination – a return of

²² Mark Salter, *Barbarians and Civilisation in International Relations* (London: Pluto, 2002), esp. 28-63; Daniel Laqua, ‘The Tensions of Internationalism: Transnational Anti-Slavery in the 1880s and 1890s’, *International Historical Review* 33.4 (2011), 705-36; Matthew Unangst, ‘Manufacturing Crisis: Anti-Slavery “Humanitarianism” and Imperialism in East Africa, 1888-1890’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 48.5 (2020), 805-25.

²³ Jonas Fossli Gjersø, ‘The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884–95’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 43.5 (2015), 831-60.

²⁴ Mary Ann Irwin, ‘“White Slavery” as Metaphor: Anatomy of a Moral Panic’, *Ex Post Facto* 5 (1996), 1-28; Cecily Devereux, ‘“The Maiden Tribute” and the Rise of the White Slave in the Nineteenth Century: The Making of an Imperial Construct’, *Victorian Review* 26.2 (2000), 1-23; Julia Laite, ‘White Slaves and Alien Prostitutes: Trafficking, Protection and Punishment in the Early Twentieth Century’, in *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (London: PM, 2011), 100-15; Rachel Claire Atwood, ‘Vice Beyond the Pale: Representing “White Slavery” in Britain c.1880–1912’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University College London (2013). Cf. Julia Laite, ‘Between Scylla and Charybdis: Women’s Labour Migration and Sex Trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century’, *International Review of Social History* 62.1 (2017), 37-65. In America, the panic produced the Mann Act, which would have far more repressive consequences for women than those produced by any phantom ‘white slavers’: see David Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1994), 15-47. My use of the term ‘meme’ here, meanwhile, is as defined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: OUP, 2006 [1976]), 189-201, viz. ‘a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation’.

the colonial repressed.²⁵ As an infopathogen and stimulant to moral outrage, white slavery attained its most perfectly virulent form in liberal journalist W.T. Stead's (1849-1912) hysterical and pornographic *Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (1885):

The maw of the London Minotaur is insatiable, and none that go into the secret recesses of his lair return again... Most of those ensnared to-night will perish, some of them in horrible torture. Yet, so far from this great city being convulsed with woe, London cares for none of these things, and the cultured man of the world, the heir of all the ages, the ultimate product of a long series of civilizations and religions, will shrug his shoulders in scorn at the folly of any one who ventures in public print to raise even the mildest protest against a horror a thousand times more horrible than that which, in the youth of the world, haunted like a nightmare the imagination of mankind...²⁶

This enchantingly grim fairy tale of little girls trafficked and abused by sinister international elites metastasised outwards from its focal point in Victorian London like cholera from a tainted pump. With its intense emotional hooks (sex, endangered children, a sense of Holmesian mystery which satisfyingly glamours the conspiracist into a detective), it drew its adherents into increasingly absurd proclamations, as with Victor Hugo's (1802-85) outburst in 1870:

²⁵ Cf. Stephen Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonisation', *Victorian Studies* 33.4 (1990), 621-45.

²⁶ W.T. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (Glasgow: Good Press, 2020 [1885]). See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), 81-134; Greta Wendelin, 'A Rhetoric of Pornography: Private Style and Public Policy in "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon"', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42.2 (2012), 375-96; Gretchen Soderlund, *Sex Trafficking, Scandal, and the Transformation of Journalism, 1885-1917* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2013), 1-66. The term 'infopathogen' was coined by Roger Magarey & Christina Trexler, 'Information: A Missing Component in Understanding and Mitigating Social Epidemics', *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* 7.1 (2020), 1-11. Cf. Nicholas Christakis & James Fowler, 'Social Contagion Theory: Examining Dynamic Social Networks and Human Behaviour', *Statistics in Medicine* 32.4 (2013), 556-77.

The slavery of black women is abolished in America, but the slavery of white women continues in Europe! ²⁷

We may thus observe that the informational-affective *dispositif* called white slavery was the direct ancestor of such Late Modern manias as the Satanic Panic and QAnon.²⁸ It combined pearl-clutching humanitarianism with masturbatory prurience, stimulated by broader social anxieties in a rapidly-changing world, and endowed with pathogenic virality by new communication technologies which allowed dark conspiracy to replicate itself at nodes across the globe.²⁹ What we see at work in these emergent conspiracy theory communities of the *fin-de-siècle* – those mobs of ‘gaunt and hollow-faced men and women with trailing dress and ragged coats’ who stormed the offices of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to obtain for themselves the latest information about the Maiden Tribute – is nothing more or less than World-building, in the Badiolian sense of the creation of a structured network of identities and differences by which Being is cognitively mapped and the appearance of objects is intersubjectively mediated.³⁰ With the dawn of global communications technology, these Worlds could now expand themselves virally between the stations of the new networks at the speed of electricity.³¹ The organic

²⁷ Quoted in Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1896), 13. Similarly overblown is Alfred Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls: A Narrative of Facts* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1880). On information, affect, and the mediation of liberal *aftognosia*, see Susanne Christina Stoddart, ‘Pressing for Reform: The New Liberalism, the New Journalism and Emotion in Edwardian Liberal Newspapers’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London (2014), 52-75.

²⁸ See Janice Irvine, ‘Emotional Scripts of Sex Panics’, *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 3.3 (2006), 82-94; Ronald Weitzer, ‘The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade’, *Politics & Society* 35.3 (2007), 447-75; Jo Doezeema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 30-48; Sarah Hughes, ‘American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970–2000’, *Journal of American Studies* 51.3 (2017), 691-719; Megan Hearst, ‘QAnon and the Rebirth of the Satanic Panic in the Digital Age’, *Gnosis* 22.1 (2022), 30-69.

²⁹ David Singh Grewal, ‘Conspiracy Theories in a Networked World’, *Critical Review* 28.1 (2016), 24-43; Jan-Willem van Prooijen & Karen Douglas, ‘Conspiracy Theories as Part of History: The Role of Societal Crisis Situations’, *Memory Studies* 10.3 (2017), 323-33.

³⁰ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009 [2006]), 113-8. See also Frederic Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, in Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347-58. ‘Gaunt’: quoted in Walkowitz, 81.

³¹ On the accelerating subjective speed of the World-in-time during the modern period, see Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [1989]); Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of*

Worldliness of physical proximity was beginning to cede ground ever more rapidly to dispersed and incompatible Worlds of mediated informationality.

A marginally less unsettling instance of the new infopathogenesis, and the immediate predecessor to the Congo reform campaign in the chain of British humanitarian *causes célèbres*, was the outcry over so-called ‘Chinese Slavery’ in South Africa – another echo of the Great Cause of abolition, and another affective object within mediated discourse which would become entangled in imperial politics.³² This particular campaign was concerned with the mistreatment of indentured Chinese labourers in the gold mines of South Africa after the Boer War. Here too, looking forward to the Black Horror, we may observe the parallel Janus face of the concerned metropolitan’s motivation. Philanthropic disquiet over the mistreatment of coolies was accompanied by both a labourist anxiety that the presence of Chinese workers would undercut the wages and working conditions of whites, and a prevailing sentiment that the war had not been fought against other whites in order to make South Africa a ‘yellow man’s country’.³³ Not that the racist camp was entirely unified on the issue: the arch-eugenicist Francis Galton (1822-1911), for instance, could not help but preconise his glee at the idea of the ‘inferior’ negro being supplanted on

Modernity, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013 [2005]).

³² Kevin Grant, ‘“Chinese Slavery” in South Africa and Great Britain, 1902-1910’, in *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884-1926* (London: Routledge, 2005), 79-108; Scott Spencer, ‘British Liberty Stained: “Chinese Slavery”, Imperial Rhetoric, and the 1906 British General Election’, *Madison Historical Review* 7 (2010), 1-27; Rachel Bright, *Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1902-10: Race, Violence and Global Spectacle* (London: PM, 2013), 70-94; Mae Ngai, ‘Trouble on the Rand: The Chinese Question in South Africa and the Apogee of White Settlerism’, *International Labour and Working Class History* 91 (2017), 59-78.

³³ Elliott Young, ‘Chinese Coolies, Universal Rights and the Limits of Liberalism in an Age of Empire’, *Past & Present* 227.1 (2015), 121-49; Antony Best, ‘“The Great Question of the World Today”: Britain, the Dominions, East Asian Immigration and the Threat of Race War, 1905-1911’, in Rotem Kowner & Walter Demel (eds.), *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Interactions: Nationalism, Gender and Lineage* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 178-95; Cornelis Heere, ‘“That Racial Chasm that Yawns Eternally in Our Midst”: The British Empire and the Politics of Asian Migration, 1900-14’, *Historical Research* 90.249 (2017), 591-612. Cf. Selda Altan, ‘Politics of Life and Labour: French Colonialism in China and Chinese Coolie Labour During the Construction of the Yunnan-Indochina Railway, 1898-1910’, *International Labour and Working-Class History* (2022), forthcoming. On ‘labourism’ and race, see Jonathan Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself “White”: White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa Before the First World War’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12.4 (1999), 398-421.

the Veldt by the more eugenically desirable ‘Chinaman’.³⁴ The patriotic Labour MP John Hodge (1855-1937), meanwhile, synthesised humanitarianism and nationalism in his protest against the import of indentured Chinese workers to mine the South African gold fields instead of honest British labour. ‘I do not know why the Tory Party should have a monopoly of the Union Jack’, Hodge roared in January 1906. ‘They have not honoured it. We will have the British flag too – but with no slavery under it’.³⁵ Hodge helpfully demonstrates for us how difficult it is to separate British engagements with the Empire neatly into ‘pro-imperial’ and ‘anti-imperial’ camps, with the former melodramatically prejudiced and the latter faultlessly cosmopolitan. Subjective political entanglements with the idea of the British Empire, and with European imperialism more generally, were multifarious and contradictory. The Morel of the Congo Reform era, for instance, existed somewhere in the grey area between the extreme poles of ardent, universalist anti-imperialism and pig-headed Anglo-Saxonism – as did the majority of those in the British metropole.

Assuredly, there were many supporters of the Greater British project who earnestly believed in the moral merit of their progressive agenda for the improvement of the lot of the natives.³⁶ As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri note, one should never forget ‘the utopian tendencies... that have always accompanied the progression towards globalisation, even if those tendencies have continually been defeated by the powers of modern-sovereignty’.³⁷ The Congo itself, astonishingly, was imaginable as a colonial utopia – including by that peddler of titillating misinformation, W.T. Stead, whose *In Our Midst* (1903) presents a lupanarian fantasy of perfect matriarchal civilisation sequestered in the dark heart of the continent, lazily cribbed from Stanley and

³⁴ Francis Galton, ‘Africa for the Chinese’, letter to *The Times*, 5 June 1873.

³⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Jan 1906.

³⁶ David Lambert & Alan Lester, ‘Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy’, *Progress in Human Geography* 28.3 (2004), 320-41.

³⁷ Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2000), 115. On liberal-globalist utopianism, see Anthony Howe, ‘Free Trade and Global Order: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Vision’, in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 26-46; Daniel Gorman, *International Cooperation in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 15-38; Paul MacDonald, ‘“Parliament of Man, Federation of the World”: Repertoires of Statecraft, the Hague Conferences, and the Making of the Liberal Order’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 32.4 (2021), 648-73; Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge: CUP, 2022), 24-63.

Haggard.³⁸ For Morel himself (a Cobdenite to his marrow), the integration of unforced, fairly-recompensed African labour and resources into the global economic carousel via the application of a light-touch civilising project could only redound to the benefit of both the indigenous population and European workers:

Nearly five million sterling worth of palm oil and palm kernels were shipped from Southern Nigeria last year, and the kernel trade is but in its infancy. And the output of that labour – which, bear in mind, is free labour in the fullest sense of the term – by these Nigerian producers gives employment to tens of thousands of European wage-earners: a factor in Afro-European relationship which, were it fully appreciated at home, might tend to modify some curious ideas which appear to be prevalent as to the idleness of the West African native.³⁹

Of course, to acknowledge the good faith of the improving imperialist is certainly not the same thing as saying that these grand improving projects always (or ever) redounded to the good of the indigenous population. By contrast, it was frequently the men of grandest vision who incurred the greatest tolls of death and suffering in the imperial arena; the name Cecil Rhodes springs to mind.⁴⁰

If imperialism had its own emotive, even utopian charge – encapsulated in the mass media-figuration of the virile, masterful Rhodes – what, then, were the strategies of the humanitarian?⁴¹ By what methodology is the affect of pity activated and experienced within a mediated discourse? For the profoundly humanistic Levinas, the recognition of one's own pain in the suffering of

³⁸ W.T. Stead, *In Our Midst* (London: Review of Reviews, 1903); Stephen Donovan, 'Congo Utopia', *English Studies in Africa* 59.1 (2016), 63-75. Stead, to give him his due, would later become a vocal opponent of the Leopoldian regime: Marysa Demoor, 'When the King Becomes Your Personal Enemy: W.T. Stead, King Leopold II, and the Congo Free State', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 16 (2013), 1-12.

³⁹ E.D. Morel, 'British Rule in Nigeria', *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts* 60.3103 (1912), 631-41, 632.

⁴⁰ See Robin Brown, *The Secret Society: Cecil John Rhodes's Plan for a New World Order* (Century City: Penguin South Africa, 2015).

⁴¹ Betto van Waarden, 'A Colonial Celebrity in the New Attention Economy: Cecil Rhodes's Cape-to-Cairo Telegraph and Railway Negotiations in 1899', *English Historical Review* 136.582 (2021), 1193-1223.

another, and the *internalisation* of that suffering into one's own subjectivity, is the adhesive process which binds together the very intersubjective realm itself:

The suffering of suffering, the suffering for the useless suffering of the other person, the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the Other, opens upon suffering the ethical perspective of the inter-human. In this perspective a radical difference develops between *suffering in the Other*, which for *me* is unpardonable and solicits me and calls me, and suffering in *me*, my own adventure of suffering, whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on a meaning, the only meaning to which suffering is susceptible, in becoming a suffering *for* the suffering – be it inexorable – of someone else. It is this attention to the Other which, across the cruelties of our century – despite these cruelties, because of these cruelties – can be affirmed as the very bond of human subjectivity.⁴²

Yet the extension of this empathetic remit beyond the immediate lifeworld often seems to come to the subject only with great difficulty. Primo Levi, for example, drew the following conclusions from his ordeal during the Holocaust:

Compassion itself eludes logic. There is no proportion between the pity we feel and the extent of the pain by which pity is aroused... Perhaps it is necessary that it can be so. If we had to and were able to suffer the sufferings of everyone, we could not live. Perhaps the dreadful gift of pity for many is granted only to saints... and to all of us there remains in in the best of cases only the sporadic pity addressed to the single individual, the *Mitmensch*, the co-man: the human being of flesh and blood standing before us, within the reach of our providentially myopic senses.⁴³

⁴² Emmanuel Levinas, 'Useless Suffering' (1982), trans. Richard Cohen, in Robert Bernasconi & David Wood (eds.), *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (London: Routledge, 1988), 156-67, 159.

⁴³ Primo Levi, *The Drowned & The Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 44-5.

Levi is surely correct here, but his comment on the saintliness of the compassionate begs for some caution, so as not to elide moralistically the subjective *pleasures* of altruism – the warm feeling of *puissance* experienced in the taking of another's life into one's own hands, as described by Nietzsche:

‘For the sake of others’, ‘*not* for me’; these are feelings containing so much sorcery and sugar that we must be doubly distrustful of them and ask: ‘Are these not perhaps – *seductions*?’... Anyone who has truly offered a sacrifice knows that he wanted something for it and got it – perhaps something of himself in return for something of himself.⁴⁴

This is not to pursue the purely cynical tack that all sympathy is *ipso facto* solipsism. The dialectical view here is that genuine sentiments of kindness and charity can perfectly easily exist (and often do) in a state of harmonious contradiction with their apparent inverse, *viz.* the self-satisfied performativity of the vocally virtuous, with neither cancelling out the other but instead abiding in non-negative superposition – as they did in the person of the selfless, endlessly self-promoting Morel.

Morel's own affective strategy in the Congo campaign was based on the construction of a charismatic and convincing textual persona, mediated parasocially through his many books and articles.⁴⁵ *Red Rubber*, his greatest achievement as a propagandist, is lent its sternly authoritative tone by the steady accumulation of facts and adminicle evidence. As though engaged in the work of a lawyer or a detective, Morel presents a seemingly endless procession of incriminating letters, payment receipts and government proclamations to forge a starkly *unemotional* appeal to reason in the case of Leopold's guilt, which

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 33, 112.

⁴⁵ On parasociability (that is, the one-sided relationship of identification which exists between a mediated persona and its audience-subjects), see Donald Horton & R. Richard Wohl, ‘Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance’, *Psychiatry* 19.3 (1956), 215-29. Cf. David Thomson on the massive intensification in parasocial attachment enabled by the contemporaneous cinematic revolution (one of the signal developments of the High Modern moment, as recognised by Chaplin and Lenin alike) in *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (New York: Vintage, 2006 [2004]), 86: ‘The capacity for loving strangers, whether one thinks of them as fictional beings or stars one will never meet, is a profound reflection on the new consciousness whereby every individual leads his or her life while aware of all the billions of other people on Earth’.

is only subsequently interwoven with thunderous rhetorical exhortations against evil, as Hochschild observes:

[Morel] was renowned for his meticulous accuracy, amassing evidence as painstakingly as a lawyer's brief, and both admirers and enemies searched his work for factual errors with scant success.⁴⁶

This battological quality in his writing makes him both an exceptional campaigner and a faintly exasperating subject for the researcher, as identified by a writer for the ILP's *Bradford Pioneer* some years later in the context of Morel's stewardship of *Foreign Affairs*:

What one likes best about Morel's editorial method is that he doesn't take it for granted that his readers have a base of knowledge: he doesn't allude to things without explaining them. He has the admirable habit of giving chapter and verse for all his statements. His journal is a perfect mine for knowledge.⁴⁷

Morel, it would be fair to point out, does not wear his erudition lightly; rather, the breadth and depth of his reading strikes the reader like a punch in the face – quite deliberately, of course. The extent of Morel's knowledge of the Congo Free State *constitutes the substance of his textual charisma*, the very kernel of its self-grounding authority.

To the volume itself. Parodying the Egyptian Book of the Dead, *Red Rubber*'s front cover sees Leopold gussied up in Pharaonic costume and sat upon the scales to receive final judgement from Anubis – the dog-headed psychopomp who feeds the souls of the wicked to Ammit, the monstrous Eater of Hearts. The king's turgid *anima*, we observe, is easily outweighed by a single severed black hand, evoking the notorious punishment of mutilation practiced by the overseers of the Free State against those natives who failed to deliver their quota of rubber. Lacking the modern vocabulary of 'human rights' and 'genocide', the purchase of which as legal-discursive objects truly solidified only after the Holocaust, comparison with the biblical suffering of the Israelites in Egypt was one of the reform campaign's most utile methods of articulating the

⁴⁶ Hochschild, *Ghost*, 187.

⁴⁷ F15/4/3, *Bradford Pioneer*, Aug 14 1922.

situation and suffering of the Congolese to their audience within a pre-existing affective framework:

Since Pharoah enslaved the Israelitish nation to minister to his ambitions, there has been no parallel to this... Like Pharaoh of old, King Leopold says of the wretched Mongos [a tribe] in this territory, who have supplied their European owners with untold wealth: 'Ye are idle; ye are idle'.⁴⁸

Sharon Sliwinski, in her study of the Congo campaign's significance for the prehistory of rights discourse, considers Morel's deployment of the Pharaonic model in terms of Benjamin's concept of the 'dialectical image'; that is to say, 'an analytic strategy for demystifying the present by use of a past example'.⁴⁹ Yet, elsewhere in the book, rather than sustain the discomfiting contrast between primeval Pharaonism and civilised modernity, Morel absolutely collapses the historical distance between the ancient past and the present with a Hesiodic lament on human evil's timeless essence:

Why? Why this enslavement and destruction of a people?
The same old motives which from the beginning have
been responsible for all the great world tragedies: human
ambition, greed, and selfishness.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 200, 218. See also Daniel Levy & Natan Sznaider, 'The Institution of Cosmopolitan Morality: The Holocaust and Human Rights', *Journal of Human Rights* 3.2 (2004), 143-57. The key bridging event between the Congo and the Holocaust in the conceptual history of human rights was the Ottoman extermination of the Armenians: see Michelle Tusan, "'Crimes against Humanity': Human Rights, the British Empire, and the Origins of the Response to the Armenian Genocide", *American Historical Review* 119.1 (2014), 47-77.

⁴⁹ Sharon Sliwinski, 'The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo', *Journal of Visual Culture* 5.3 (2006), 333-63.

⁵⁰ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 121-2.

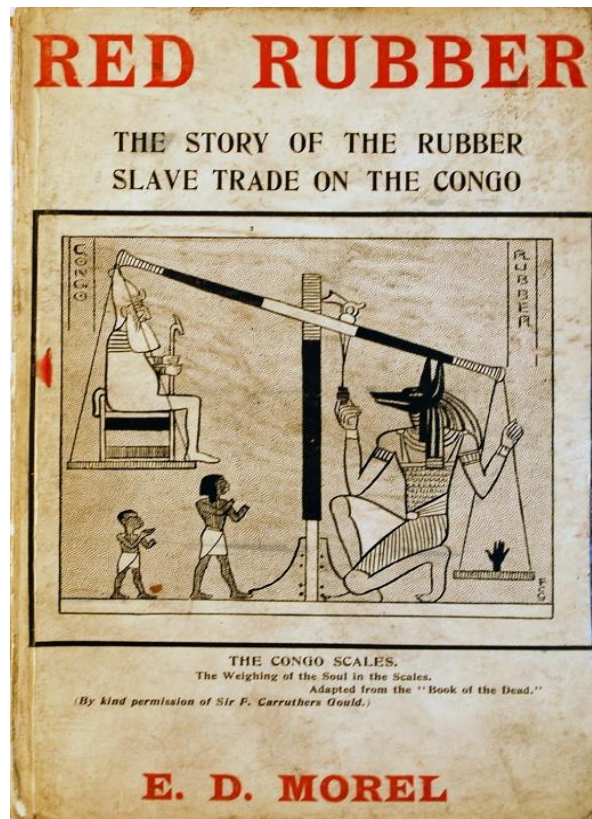


Figure 2: Front Cover to E.D Morel, Red Rubber, op. cit.

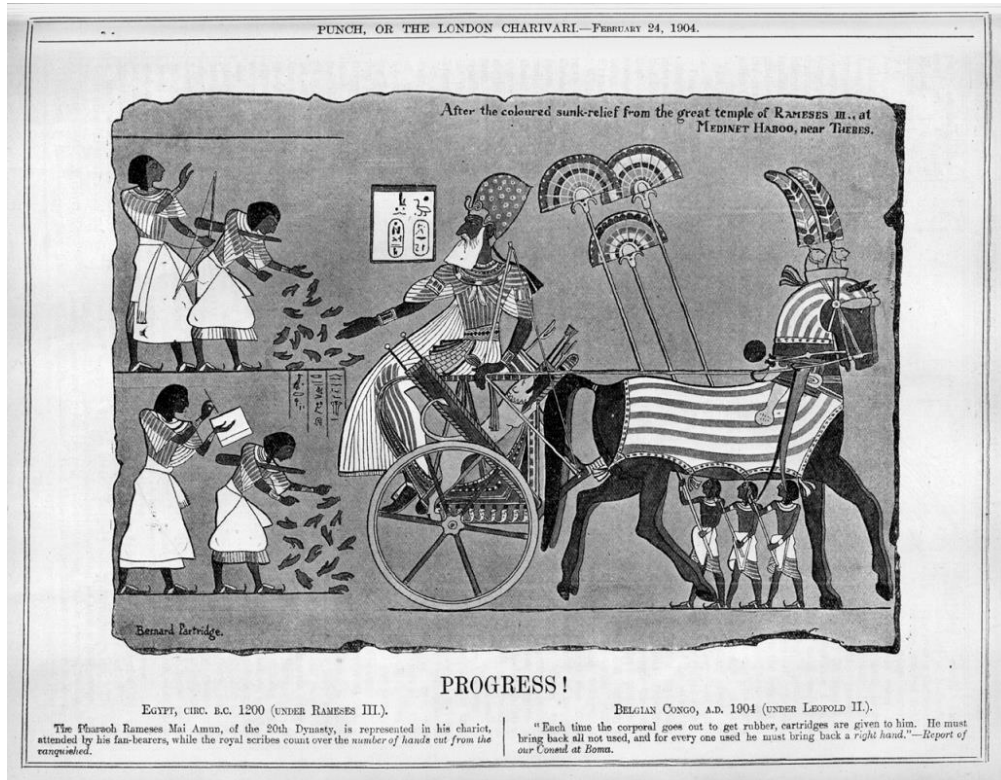


Figure 3: Progress!

Punch, 24 Feb. 1904

There is thus another antinomy at work here: Leopold is at once comprehensible only in terms of the patterns of an earlier, more brutal age lower down the ladder of civilisational progress; and yet is also paradoxically possessed of evil so potent as to *transcend* the concrete historical and belong properly to the realm of metaphysics and eternal recurrence. For Morel, the Congolese catastrophe is freighted with the echoing cruelty of man's historical inhumanity to man across time, from the fighting pits of Rome to the reeking hell of the Middle Passage, reanimated in sonorously gothic tones (and is not the main conceit of that genre, as discussed regarding *Dracula*, the return of the repressed sin from dream and memory to trouble the waking world of conscience?):

I have stood on that quay at Antwerp, and seen that rubber disgorged from the bowels of the incoming steamer, and to my fancy there has mingled with the musical chimes ringing in the old cathedral tower another sound – the faintest echo of a sigh from the depths of the dark and stifling hold. A sigh breathed in the gloomy equatorial forest, by those from whose anguish this wealth was wrung. *They* knew not their merciful Emperor. Yet that echo took form of words in my mind. 'Imperator' – it has seemed to whisper – 'Imperator! *Morituri te salutant*'.⁵¹

It is difficult to read this set piece, as time collapses and the red shadow of History rushes to meet us across the water, and not recall a similar melting away of the present in the liminal dreamscape of dockland at witching hour, in one of the most celebrated passages of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman light-house, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway – a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars. ‘And this also’, said Marlow suddenly, ‘has been one of the dark places of the earth’.⁵²

Yet if Leopold’s stygian fief was a barbarous resuscitation of the worst of the human past, its evil was thence magnified by its fusion with the modern apparatus of exploitation and control:

The Congo Administration extirpated the Arab slave dealers... The policy pursued by these semi-barbarians was atrocious. But was it so atrocious as the *civilised barbarism* which has replaced it?... Civilisation went frantic over the cruelty of the uncultured Arab half-caste. It has allowed the cultured European to impose upon an infinitely greater number of human beings a yoke more unbearable than the Arab laid.⁵³

Turning the page of *Red Rubber* now, facing Pharaoh-Leopold to the table, we are met with the frontispiece – a dashing photograph of Morel, the very figure of reassuring masculine authority, lent a mass-produced personal touch by the overlay of a printed signature: ‘Yours faithfully, E.D. Morel’.⁵⁴ Such an inclusion helps us more clearly perceive Morel’s precise historical position, at the dawn of the spectacular mediatisation of politics in the age of mechanical reproduction.⁵⁵ Despite its massive dissemination, the presiding sense in reading *Red Rubber* (as in all of Morel’s best work) is of being lectured by a deeply *present* individual, whose voice and personal authority bleed into the prose. With the prominent placement of the portrait photograph, Morel’s charismatic appeal begins seeding itself in the mind of the reader even before our arrival at the main text. He’s upholstered here, as we might expect, in the ritual outfit of the Western *Bürger*: a dark suit with jacket and waistcoat; a buttoned shirt with thick rounded collar; a tied cloth round the neck (and presumably, just out of shot, drab trousers and uncomfortable shoes).⁵⁶

⁵² Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2007 [1899]), 5.

⁵³ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 84, 88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁵⁵ See Christopher Shoop-Worrall, ‘Politics and the Mass Press in Long Edwardian Britain 1896-1914’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield (2019), 100-32, on the development of ‘elections as spectacle’.

⁵⁶ Cf. Laura Ugolini, *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain 1880–1939* (London: Routledge, 2007), 19-46.



Figure 4: Frontispiece to *E.D Morel*,
Red Rubber, op. cit.

Morel was young and classically handsome at this juncture. His face is pleasingly symmetrical, his hair thick, his eyes dark and penetrating, his nose surprisingly delicate above that ludicrous moustache.⁵⁷ This was, we must remember, the golden age of the full-bodied moustache as signifier of manly potency.⁵⁸ Masculinity at this time was very much *aestheticised* rather than *scientised*, as it would later become.⁵⁹ Testosterone, crucially, would not yield itself up to study (or fantastical misinterpretation) until the Chicago bull testicle experiments of the late 1920s.⁶⁰ We ought, therefore, to regard the inclusion of this appeal to beauty-as-morality (an all-too-human conflation) as simple canniness rather than vanity on the part of Morel.⁶¹ Recall the weak-kneed

⁵⁷ On hair as signifier of potency, particularly with the decline of the gentleman's hat, see Martin Jones, 'Masculinity, Modernity, and Male Baldness, c.1880-1939', *Gender & History* 35.1 (2023), 190-211.

⁵⁸ Susan Walton, 'From Squalid Impropriety to Manly Respectability: The Revival of Beards, Moustaches and Martial Values in the 1850s in England', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 30.3 (2008), 229-45; Rosalin Eyben, '"The Moustache Makes Him More of a Man": Waiters' Masculinity Struggles, 1890-1910', *History Workshop Journal* 87 (2019), 188-210.

⁵⁹ Paul Deslandes, 'The Male Body, Beauty and Aesthetics in Modern British Culture', *History Compass* 8.10 (2010), 1198-1208.

⁶⁰ Alvaro Morales, 'The Long and Tortuous History of the Discovery of Testosterone and its Clinical Application', *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 10.4 (2013), 1178-83.

⁶¹ For an empirical grounding of this commonplace, see, *inter alia*, Judith Langlois *et al.*, 'Maxims or Myths of Beauty? A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review', *Psychological Bulletin* 126.3 (2000), 390-423; Rick Wilson & Catherine Eckel, 'Judging a Book by its Cover: Beauty and Expectations in the Trust Game', *Political Research Quarterly* 59.2 (2006), 189-202;

rapture which his even more handsome contemporary Ramsay MacDonald inspired in both male and female admirers, and its centrality to his own political authority. David Kirkwood (1872-1955), a stolid Red Clydesider fond of the Bible and Robbie Burns, was moved to raptures by his appreciation for the man from Lossiemouth:

Ramsay MacDonald fascinated me. His head was a thing of beauty. Black hair waved and rolled over a fine brow, one curl almost touching his straight, strong eyebrows, from under which his eyes glowed. His voice was rugged, but soft, and, as he spoke, there came into it a throb. It was the natural instrument of an orator. Standing upright, he was a splendid figure of a man, and his appearance of height and strength was increased by his habit of rising on his toes and throwing back his head...⁶²

One may often observe this habitual psychic passage from the appreciation of male beauty to a positive assessment of the object's ethical character at work in men whom (we presume from evidence) were entirely heterosexual in orientation, as in Morel's breathlessly Romantic description of his closest friend and comrade Roger Casement (who was himself, of course, gay):

I saw before me a man, my own height, very lithe and sinewy, chest thrown out, head held high – suggestible of one who had lived in the vast open spaces... Strongly marked features. A dark blue penetrating eye sunken in the socket. A long, lean, swarthy Vandyck type of face, graven with power and withal of great gentleness. An extraordinarily handsome and arresting face. From the moment our hands gripped and our eyes met, mutual trust and confidence were bred and the feeling of isolation slipped from me like a mantle. Here was a man indeed.⁶³

Na Zhao *et al.*, 'Face Attractiveness in Building Trust: Evidence from Measurement of Implicit and Explicit Responses', *Social Behaviour & Personality* 43.5 (2015), 855-66; Chiara Ferrari *et al.*, 'The Dorsomedial Prefrontal Cortex Mediates the Interaction Between Moral and Aesthetic Valuation: A TMS Study on the Beauty-is-Good Stereotype', *Social, Cognitive & Affective Neuroscience* 12.5 (2017), 707-17.

⁶² David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1935), 195.

⁶³ Morel, *History*, 160.

The new media technologies now allowed this performance of sexuality-as-authority to be transmitted beyond the immediate World of physical proximity and become seminally imbricated in mass-produced politics – a social fact which would only become more pronounced with the progress of the technocapitalist image society into the brilliant future. *Qua* Debord:

The spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. Its sole message is: ‘What appears is good; what is good appears’.⁶⁴

Let us move on from images and speak of the text. In the opening pages of *Red Rubber*, Morel launches into a characteristic broadside, not directed against the Leopold regime itself this time, but rather at those men who have ensured that ‘all this oppression and atrocity has only begun to be realised within a comparatively recent period by the general public’.⁶⁵ The principal charge, and one which links this work to Morel’s later campaign against ‘secret diplomacy’, is that this failure can be attributed to the complacency and self-interest of powerful figures within the British state – those elite, antidemocratic comptrollers of informational circulation within the body politic. Such overt condemnation of the faceless *apparatchiks* of Parliament and the Foreign Office stands in direct contrast to Morel’s glowing descriptions of the lone missionaries who broke ranks to reveal the horrors of the Congo (though these descriptions also rhetorically serve to offer a heroic model, *mutatis mutandis*, for the correct interpretation of Morel’s own actions):

For many years one Congo missionary, and one only, dared to confront [Leopold], with the righteous indignation of a spirit stung to passionate anger....⁶⁶

Morel presents himself to the reader similarly as the renitent, Cincinnati hero, ‘a humble and unknown individual, dragged by the force of circumstances

⁶⁴ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans Ken Knabb (Berkely, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014 [1967]), 4. Cf. Steven Watts, *JFK and the Masculine Mystique: Sex and Power on the New Frontier* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2016), 186-226; and thence Paul Ginsborg, *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power, and Patrimony* (London: Verso, 2005 [2004]), 124-6; Ryan Neville-Shepard & Meredith Neville-Shepard, ‘The Pornified Presidency: Hyper-Masculinity and the Pornographic Style in US Political Rhetoric’, *Feminist Media Studies* 21.7 (2021), 1193-1208.

⁶⁵ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

into a notoriety which was anything but welcome'.⁶⁷ Indeed, one of the great pleasures of studying Morel is attempting to keep track of the ever-growing stable of biblical prophets, classical exemplars, and abolitionist heroes to whom he compares himself with Heepish humility:

Am I a David to face this Goliath? God knows I would like to see the horror of the Congo put a stop to, but are you and I sufficient for attaining such a thing? Have I the power to secure the freedom of millions of the Congo region from the scourge of European brutality being inflicted upon them?⁶⁸

Morel directly implicates the British imperial state in the genesis of the horrors of the Congo Free State. He demonstrates how, in opposition to German-backed French interest in the Congo, Britain had decided to back Leopold's schemes for a personal fiefdom in Central Africa after a calculation of its own imperial interest:

King Leopold's 'International Association' would have dissolved into thin air but for the separate and collective action of the Powers in allowing it to blossom from a private undertaking into a great free area under the trusteeship of the Sovereign of a small neutral European state... Without British sanction, cooperation, and assistance, no such arrangement could possibly have been arrived at.⁶⁹

Morally, therefore, Britain is compelled to help resolve a situation for which it bears partial responsibility. But that responsibility must also fall more heavily on specific individuals, and not merely upon the *realpolitik* tendencies of the impersonal state – and Morel is also quite keen to name names. Here and later in the book, the hypocrisy and self-interest of the explorer, journalist and sensationalist Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) attract particular venom from Morel. As historian Stephen Donovan has put it,

While colonial domination is founded upon economic and military structures that are for the most part invisible to citizens of the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸ Morel, *History*, 83.

⁶⁹ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 11-5.

colonizing power, colonial possessions circulate freely in cultural discourse in ways that exceed the control of any single agent. And it was above all as a cultural phenomenon that the Congo existed in the minds of many, perhaps most, Europeans during the Congo Free State era.⁷⁰

Morel would soon become one of the most significant artificers of this phantasmal heart of darkness, perhaps second only to Conrad, but his interventions both built upon and rebutted pre-existing performances of the Congo to European audiences. He was thus engaged in a duel of representations with Leopold's propagandists – and that meant, above all, with Stanley.

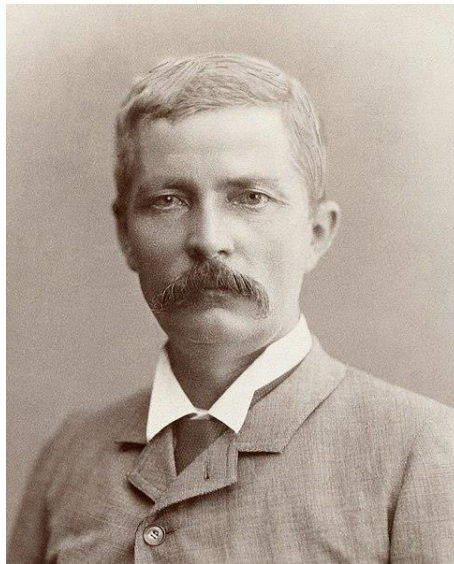


Figure 5: Henry Morton Stanley, imperial myrmidon.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) was Leopold's most treasured catspaw, a vigorously committed agent of imperial propaganda blissfully untroubled by flutterings of conscience.⁷¹ This odd, standoffish Welshman was known to the media public as a regular performer of great feats of colonial derring-do, often in the interests of the Leopoldian project and always with a

⁷⁰ Stephen Donovan, 'Europe Made in Africa', *English Studies in Africa* 59.1 (2016), 1-5, 2.

⁷¹ Kevin Dunn, 'Inventing the Congo: Henry Morton Stanley, Leopold II, and the "Red Rubber" Scandal', in *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity* (London: PM, 2003), 21-59

train of brutally mistreated native porters carrying his baggage.⁷² It was Stanley who made the westward navigation of the Congo river in 1876-77, and then recrossed it facing east in 1886-89. It was Stanley who established a web of stations across the basin between 1879 and 1884. And it was Stanley who ensured that these endeavours were pressed urgently in front of the faces of the Western reading public; in his greatest publicity coup, Stanley was the man who had ‘found’ David Livingstone deep in the jungle (‘Dr. Livingstone, I presume?’, *etc.*).⁷³

Stanley was vain, fastuous, and a keen image-maker. His account of his labours on Leopold’s behalf, *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State* (1885), opens by citing an ego-primping letter received from the great French republican, Léon Gambetta (1838-82), attesting to Stanley’s *bona fides* as an apostle of the civilising mission:

You have thrown the light of knowledge on what you have well described as the Dark Continent. Not only, sir, have you opened up a new continent to our view, but you have also given an impulse to scientific and philanthropic enterprise which will have a material effect on the progress of the world... What you have done has influenced Governments.⁷⁴

In his self-fashioning as a sternly masculine journalist-hero with an impressive moustache (as well as the myriad of other qualities shared between these two white, male members of the British petty bourgeoisie), the image of Stanley mirrored Morel’s own press persona during the Congo campaign – or rather, Morel’s persona mirrored Stanley’s. Thus, the attempt by Morel to overturn Stanley’s hegemonic presentation of the Leopoldian regime within the European public sphere and replace it with his own stark counter-image would involve not so much an attack on the legitimacy of the forms of authority claimed by the older man, but instead an effort to stake himself as a *better* claimant to the same form of discursive authority embodied by those traits – that is, to the pose of the

⁷² Felix Driver, ‘Exploration by Warfare: Henry Morton Stanley and His Critics’, in *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 117-45.

⁷³ Joanna Lewis, *Empire of Sentiment: The Death of Livingstone and the Myth of Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), esp. 18-22.

⁷⁴ Henry Morton Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1885), v.1, vi.

upright metropolitan truth-teller shedding light on the dark mysteries of the colonial periphery – within what sociologist Howard Becker influentially dubbed the 'hierarchy of credibility'.⁷⁵

Stanley's adventures in the Congo had already attracted vast media attention, and the stories, tropes, images and artefacts produced by these exploits had been recreated and recirculated in magazines, exhibitions, advertisements, knick-knacks and beyond.⁷⁶ Among these, perhaps the most beguiling is Stanley's baffling book of children's stories, *My Dark Companions* (1893), inhabited by the same genus of crisply well-spoken animals as Kipling's *Jungle Book* (first serialised that same year).⁷⁷ This strange testament to misapplied talent is worth reading if only for one unnerving little fable in which the greedy, rubber-stealing Queen Crane – 'Oh, royal bird, say since when has rubber become the food of the bird-king's family?' – is brutally punished for her misdeeds, as the complacent monarch is crushed to death in her sleep by the treacherous Serpent. In Stanley's public offerings to the world beyond peculiar allegorical tales for children, however, King Leopold of Belgium was always a true philanthropist, a new breed of humanitarian monarch for the age of New Imperialism.⁷⁸ Indeed, Stanley's halcyon promise of African civilisational and commercial development was, Morel observed in 1905, 'the false ideal which since 1892 has been dangled before the eyes of the Belgian nation, perverting

⁷⁵ Howard Becker, 'Whose Side Are We On?', *Social Problems* 14.3 (1967), 239-47. See also Ann Laura Stoler, 'In Cold Blood: Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives', *Representations* 37 (1992), 151-89; and Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (Berkeley, CA: UCaP, 2010), 22-48, discussing the charisma of Stanley in terms of the spectacular (*sensu* Debord) manifestations of the 'new journalism'.

⁷⁶ Donovan, 2. See also Thomas Richards, 'Selling Darkest Africa', in *The Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (London: Verso, 1991), 119-67; Annie Coombes, 'The Spectacle of Empire I: Expansionism and Philanthropy at the Stanley and Africa Exhibition', in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, CT: YUP, 1994), 63-84; Tim Youngs, 'Consuming Stanley', in *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850-1900* (Manchester: MUP, 1994), 151-81; Matthew Stanard, 'Competing Visions: The Visual Culture of the Congo Free State and *Fin de Siècle* Europe', *Historical Reflections* 46.3 (2020), 101-21.

⁷⁷ Henry Morton Stanley, *My Dark Companions & Their Strange Stories* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1893).

⁷⁸ Brian Murray, 'Building Congo, Writing Empire: The Literary Labours of Henry Morton Stanley', *English Studies in Africa* 59.1 (2016), 6-17; Mathilde Leduc-Grimaldi, 'New Light on the Writing of HM Stanley's *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State* (1885)', *English Studies in Africa* 59.1 (2016), 76-84.

and corrupting a public profoundly ignorant of normal African conditions'. Even more damning, from the point of view of Morel (still the improving Liverpoolian liberal) was the fact that such an elision of Leopoldian avarice with 'normal' empire building constituted 'a menace to the collective effort of civilised expansion in tropical Africa'.⁷⁹



"POOR MISS CRANE WAS FAST ASLEEP."

Figure 6: A violent end for the royal rubber thief.

Henry Morton Stanley, *My Dark Companions*, op. cit.,
illustrated by William Buckley.

iii.

The work of the Congo Reform Association, the campaigning body established by Morel to counter Leopold's propaganda and pressure the Powers into bringing change to the Congo, was principally a matter of knowledge and unknowledge, of the revelation of that which was hidden.⁸⁰ In Leopold's Congo

⁷⁹ F15/4/1, *Punch*, May 21 1905. Cf. Peter Cain, 'Character, "Ordered Liberty", and the Mission to Civilise: British Moral Justification of Empire, 1870–1914', *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 40.4 (2012), 557–78.

⁸⁰ On the subject of unknowledge as a distinct field of study, see Jennifer Croissant, 'Agnotology: Ignorance and Absence or Towards a Sociology of Things That Aren't There', *Social Epistemology* 28.1 (2014), 4–25; Roy Dille & Thomas Kirsch (eds.), *Regimes of Ignorance: Anthropological Perspectives on the Production and Reproduction of Non-Knowledge* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2015); Russell Golman *et al.*, 'Information Avoidance', *Journal of Economic Literature* 55.1 (2017), 96–135; Gerd Gigerenzer & Rocio Garcia-Retamero, 'Cassandra's Regret: The Psychology of Not Wanting to Know', *Psychological Review* 124.2 (2017), 179–96; Ralph Hertwig & Christoph Engel (eds.), *Deliberate Ignorance: Choosing Not to Know*

Free State, Morel had discovered a conspiracy; not a conspiracy *theory*, as with the white slavery imbroglio, but a genuine effort by the deep powers of an imperial state to perform monstrosity and conceal it from view.⁸¹ Yet counterpropaganda must itself function in the *same fashion* as the conspiracy theory, aspiring to exploit the pathogenic qualities of information under the modern technological regime to expand the borders of its World.⁸² T.H. Huxley (1825-1895), ‘Darwin’s bulldog’, understood this point, metaphorised here in the competitive tropics of his master’s theory:

The struggle for existence holds as much in the intellectual as in the physical world. A theory is a species of thinking, and its right to exist is coextensive with its power of resisting extinction by its rivals.⁸³

In an eloquent irony, Morel would himself become the focus of much conspiratorial whispering and rumourmongering on the part of his enemies, who espied in his moralistic crusade the hidden hand of inter-imperial advantage-seeking, as one early encounter with a representative of Leopold made clear to him:

The Belgian gentleman was extremely suave, eloquent and subtle, and possessed of a most insatiable curiosity as to who was behind me...⁸⁴

(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020); Lukas Verburgt & Peter Burke, ‘Histories of Ignorance’, *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 2.1 (2021), 1-9; Ralph Hertwig & Dagmar Ellerbrock, ‘Why People Choose Deliberate Ignorance in Times of Societal Transformation’, *Cognition* 229 (2022), 105247; Matthias Gros & Linsey McGoey, ‘Revolutionary Epistemology: The Promise and Perils of Ignorance Studies’, in *idem.* (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* (London: Routledge, 2022), 3-14.

⁸¹ See Jeffrey Bale, ‘Political Paranoia v. Political Realism: On Distinguishing Between Bogus Conspiracy Theories and Genuine Conspiratorial Politics’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 41.1 (2007), 45-60. Relevant also are Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight: Atrocity Concealment in German Political Culture Before the First World War’, in Alexander Laban Hinton *et al.* (eds.), *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 52-67; Callie Wilkinson, ‘Scandal and Secrecy in the History of the Nineteenth-Century British Empire’, *HJ* 65.2 (2022), 545-69.

⁸² Cf. Cline, 7: ‘Though Morel avoided the grosser distortions to which the propagandist is prone, he was prepared to use dubious methods behind the scenes to defeat the forces of darkness, which he tended to identify with any opposition to his own wishes’.

⁸³ T.H. Huxley, ‘The Coming of Age of *The Origin of Species*’, *Science* 1.2 (1880), 15-20, 15-16.

⁸⁴ Morel, *History*, 128.

What followed, then, was a war of words and signals across the columns and cables of three continents, in which Morel deployed to their fullest those technical skills he had acquired as a humble clerk: his proficiency with typewriter, telegraph, and carbon copy were indispensable for speed and volume of output, at a time when most literate folk still composed their thoughts for public consumption with pen and paper.⁸⁵

The advent of telegraphy had stirred utopian sentiments in certain quarters regarding the transparency of knowledge, expectations which were sadly to be scotched by concrete experience. One mid-century American journalist, for instance, had seen in the Victorian communication revolution an end to the very possibility of political mendacity:

Newspapers will become emphatically useless. Anticipated at every point by the lightning wings of the Telegraph, they can only deal in local ‘items’ or abstract speculations. Their power to create sensations, even in election campaigns, will be greatly lessened – as the infallible Telegraph will contradict their falsehoods as fast as they can publish them.⁸⁶

For techno-optimists such as these, it seemed only natural to presume that ‘a thick flow of fact, widely diffused, would enable individual judgement’.⁸⁷ In reality, as the dematerialisation of the world inaugurated by information technology proceeded apace, so too did the expansion of opportunities to spread *disinformation*, with the volume of nodal networks and therefore of potential carriers of infopathogens proliferating exponentially – a reality exploited ruthlessly by the Leopoldian propaganda operation through its battery of media organs crafted for that purpose (the *Bulletin Officiel de L’État Indépendant du Congo*, the monthly circular *La Verité sur le Congo*).⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Mitchell, 28.

⁸⁶ *Littell’s Living Age* 6.63, 26 July 1845, 194.

⁸⁷ Kenneth Cmiel & John Durham Peters, *Promiscuous Knowledge: Information, Image, and Other Truth Games in History* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2020), 63.

⁸⁸ Matthew Stanard, *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), esp. 26-46; Dean Clay, “‘David vs Goliath’: The Congo Free State Propaganda War, 1890–1909”, *International History Review* 43.3 (2021), 457-74.

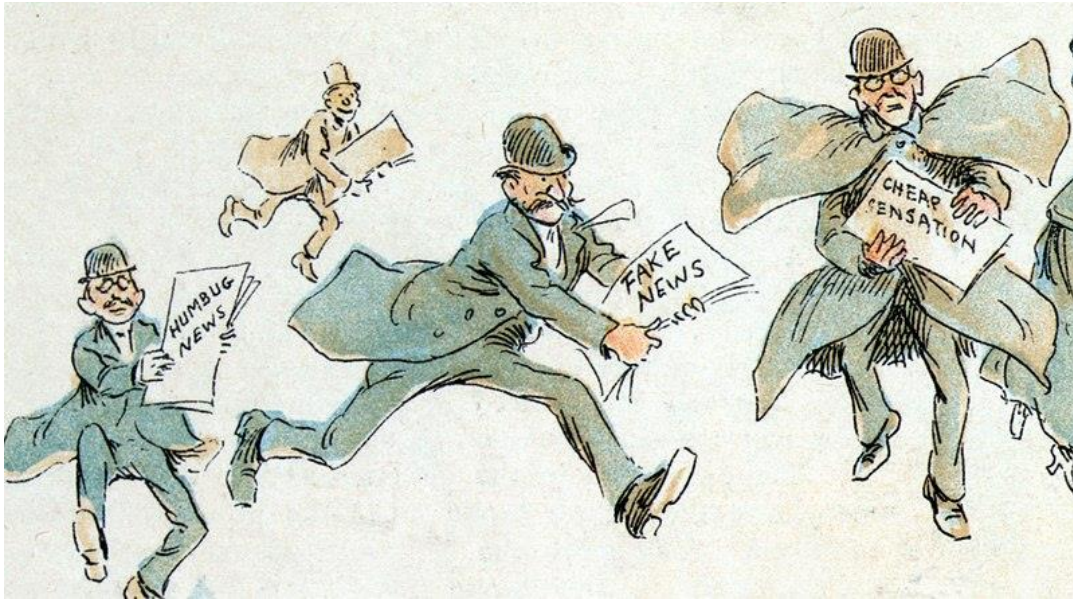


Figure 7: 'Fake News'

Puck, 7 March 1894

The sudden superimposition of previously discrete Worlds via the informational flood bombarded the modern subject with an unprecedented and bewildering array of different truth-claims, a deluge it was ill-equipped to process, as proximity and physical experience ceased to be the prime loci of human data-collection.⁸⁹ Such an overload of information induced in the metropolitan subject a certain ironic sensibility, even a nihilism, as a form of psychic defence mechanism against the anxiety of hyperstimulation, which the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) identified as early as 1903:

The concentration of men and things stimulate the nervous system of the individual to its highest achievement so that it attains its peak. Through the mere quantitative intensification of the same conditioning factors this achievement is transformed into its opposite and appears in the peculiar adjustments of the *blasé* attitude. In this phenomenon, the nerves find in the refusal to react to their stimulation the last possibility of accommodating to the contents and forms of metropolitan life. The self-preservation of certain personalities is bought at the price of devaluating the whole objective world – a devaluation which in

⁸⁹ Carolyn Biltoft, 'The Anatomy of Credulity and Incredulity: or, a Hermeneutics of Misinformation', *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 1.2 (2020), 1-11.

the end unavoidably drags one's own personality down into a feeling of the same worthlessness.⁹⁰

The unconduciveness of this ironic, media-saturated subjectivity to a state of earnest relating-to-truth has been reiterated more recently by historian Michael North:

By the turn of the century, irony had become less a defence against commercialised modernity and more a way of participating in it... As society becomes progressively aestheticised... [and] as audiences begin to consume imaginative and symbolic materials as they had previously consumed material goods, then everyday life acquires an inherent ironic distance from itself.⁹¹

We must not underestimate the Davidian challenge involved in waging an informational war against a state amidst this disorienting data monsoon and against the modern tendency to doubt everything, as Morel now aspired to do. Badiou warns us that the state is itself a form of encyclopaedia, and it draws strength from its great empirical granary of discretised facts.⁹² We might think here, for instance, of Napoleon despatching the great mathematician Fourier to Egypt to conquer that country's *information*.⁹³ The novel subdiscipline of knowledge studies furnishes us with a more precise definition of this essential

⁹⁰ Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. & trans. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 409-24, 415. Cf. Orrin Klapp, *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 11-79; Nolen Gertz, *Nihilism and Technology* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 59-88; Alireza Masouri & Ali Paya, 'Nihilism and Information Technology', *Journal of Philosophical-Theological Research* 21.4 (2020), 29-54.

⁹¹ Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 206-8.

⁹² Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, trans. Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 142-3

⁹³ Anne Godlewska, 'Map, Text and Image – The Mentality of Enlightened Conquerors: A New Look at the *Description de l'Égypte*', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20.1 (1995), 5-28. As Foucault writes in *Discipline*, 141: '[Napoleon] wished to arrange around him a mechanism of power that would enable him to see the smallest event that occurred in the state he governed'. See also James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 53-72.

characteristic of the modern technobureaucratic state, and of its informational advantages over the citizen-dissenter:

Knowledge power derives from the occupation of a favourable position in the global knowledge-structure... Due to path-dependency, the structure exerts a hampering effect on change. It provides an inert environment, in which states face restraints on their way up to leading positions. As the asymmetric distribution of knowledge capacities derives from past differences in foundational knowledge indicators, power shifts cannot appear out of a sudden, and established powers are likely to prevail.⁹⁴

A further difficulty for the counterpropagandist, outlined by Freud in 'Wild Psychoanalysis' (1910), is the subjective impossibility of dousing neurosis or mistaken conviction with the cold water of *facts* – driving out 'bad' knowledge with 'good', as it were:

It is a long superseded idea, and one derived from superficial appearances, that the patient suffers from a sort of ignorance, and that if one removes this ignorance by giving him information... he is bound to recover. The pathological factor is not his ignorance in itself, but the root of this ignorance in his *inner resistances*; it was they that first called this ignorance into being, and they still maintain it now.⁹⁵

Freud raises an important point here regarding one's relationship to the *fact*, namely that such a historical-contingent form of psychic object is on its own merits subjectively neutral; its power to convince is derived only from its emergence from authority and its assimilation into existing affective-*aftognotic* structures. 'Facts!', as the narrator sneers in Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900): 'As if facts could explain anything!'⁹⁶ Or rather, turning to Simmel once more,

⁹⁴ Katharina Below *et al.*, 'Hidden in Plain View: Exploring the Knowledge Power of States', in Maximilian Mayer *et al.* (eds.), *The Global Politics of Science and Technology Vol. 2: Perspectives, Cases and Methods* (London: Springer, 2014), 117-41, 117.

⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Wild Psychoanalysis' (1910), trans. Joan Riviere, in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 351-6, 354.

⁹⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim: A Tale* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1900), 28.

No psychological knowledge is a mere mechanical echo of its object. It is rather, like knowledge of external nature, dependent upon the forms that the knowing mind brings to it, and in which it takes up the data.⁹⁷

In order to dissuade an interlocutor of something, one must instead seriously address the *symptomal point*, the fantastical self-sense which sustains their ignorance, and work to collapse it by marshalling an emotional charge of greater intensity. *Qua* Spinoza: 'An emotion cannot be restrained nor removed unless by an opposed and stronger emotion'.⁹⁸

Morel, the expert rhetorician, was fully aware of this law of the subjective-discursive realm. After all, his own totalising conversion-experience to the cause of Congo reform had resulted not so much from his sober and detached weighing of the facts of the shipping records but from the 'giddy, appalled' subjective experience which that encounter had produced in him. He remarks thus of the rhetorical strategy underpinning *Red Rubber*:

For six years I have appealed to the head, and now I am appealing to the heart, the head having been captured.⁹⁹

Such a commitment to gruelling pathos is expressed in passages such as the following, in which Morel partakes of the dark, decadent register of that late-Victorian subgenre which literary scholar Patrick Brantlinger has influentially labelled 'Imperial Gothic':

Look inside that hostage-house, staggering back as you enter from the odours which belch forth in poisonous fumes. As your eyes get accustomed to the half-light they will not rest on those skeleton-like forms – bones held together by black skin – but upon the *faces*. The faces turned upwards in mute appeal for pity: the hollow cheeks, the misery and terror in the eyes, the drawn

⁹⁷ Georg Simmel, 'The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies', trans. Albion Small, *American Journal of Sociology* 11.4 (1906), 441-98, 442-3.

⁹⁸ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. W.H. White & A.H. Stirling (New York: Hafner, 1954 [1677]), 195. Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 65: 'The will to overcome an emotion is in the last analysis only the will of another or several other emotions'. See also Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 3-44.

⁹⁹ Quoted Cline, 60.

parched lips emitting inarticulate sounds. A woman, her pendulous, pear-shaped breasts hanging like withered parchment against her sides, where every rib seems bursting from its covering, holds in her emaciated arms a small object more pink than black. You stoop and touch it – a new-born babe, twenty-four hours old, assuredly not more. It is dead, but the mother clasps it still. She herself is almost past speech, and soon will join her babe in the great Unknown. The horror of it, the unspeakable horror of it!¹⁰⁰

In Morel's tenebrously Romantic register, King Leopold himself figures as the physical locus of evil and degeneration, as in this melodramatic ventriloquism:

At the touch of my royal robe, whole tribes have disappeared as though struck down with a mysterious pestilence. The progress of my triumphal march through the Equatorial forest is marked by the bleached bones of men and women.¹⁰¹

Yet Morel is not a W.T. Stead, a hysterical sensationalist in whose hands factual concrete melts into air. Despite his newfound capacity for emotive horror, much of the rhetoric of *Red Rubber* is nevertheless premised upon the workings of a counterdefinitive dialectic between Morel as a figure of arch-rationality and the Congo as a zone of madness and epistemological uncertainty – one which seems to exert its own heterotopic agency in the distortion of subjective experience. As Morel writes,

There are times when the recorder of the Congo tragedy stops short with a mental gasp, and pauses before he goes on again, to wonder whether he is the victim of hallucination.¹⁰²

And again:

There is no little difficulty in conveying to the ordinary mind the moral atmospheric conditions prevailing on the Congo. They are

¹⁰⁰ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 200. See Patrick Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult in the British Adventure Novel, 1880-1914', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 28.3 (1985), 243-52.

¹⁰¹ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 93.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 32. Cf. Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley, CA: UCaP, 2000), 209-39.

so charged with chicanery and deceit, so utterly abnormal in every sense of the word, that long experience alone can properly assimilate them, and the knowledge thus acquired is not communicable in a couple of sentences.¹⁰³

This same epistemic uncertainty was consciously exploited by Leopold:

Officers who are inclined to be disagreeable when they return are lunched by the King, told how bad are the effects of the African sun on the European temperament, assured that they must have been dreaming or misinformed.¹⁰⁴

And the conceit of the Congo as a locus of unknowability for the white man is also, of course, a major source of the dreadful power of *Heart of Darkness*:

In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly... They shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembles no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany... 'Do you understand this?', I asked. [Kurtz] kept on looking past me with fiery longing eyes, with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate. He made no answer, but I saw a smile, a smile of indefinable meaning, appear on his colourless lips that a moment after twitched convulsively. 'Do I not?', he said slowly, gasping, as if the words had been torn out of him by a supernatural power... And then that imbecile crowd down on the deck started their little fun, and I could see nothing more for smoke.¹⁰⁵

In a letter home to his mother, Henri Gregoire (1881-1964), chairman of the Belgian commission established in 1904 to audit the allegations of infamy in the Congo, metaphorised the intellectual task facing his investigators (in appositely

¹⁰³ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 106.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 83-4. See also Tony Brown, 'Cultural Psychosis on the Frontier: The Work of Darkness in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *Studies in the Novel* 32.1 (2000), 14-28; John Peters, 'Joseph Conrad and the Epistemology of Space', *Philosophy & Literature* 40.1 (2016), 98-123.

colonialist terms) as akin to that of the lonely explorer hacking their way through the darkness of the tropical jungle:

The commission, which has to open up a route toward the truth through the contradictions of the obscure psychology of the negro, luckily does not have to battle obstructions of such a material nature.¹⁰⁶

Gregoire's comment here cannot simply be dismissed as a throwaway racist remark dropped flippantly into private correspondence, as the convictions which underpin it regarding the epistemic instability of black subjectivity are given full and unabashed voice in the Commission's published report:

The black of the Congo has not the same notion of truth that we have – we do not mean to say that he is a liar, that would be a gratuitous insult to him. Truth in the eyes of a native is not what it is or has been, but what ought to be, what he wishes, what he thinks one wishes or what is expected of him. More than that, he has only a very vague notion of time and is totally incapable of localising the events of the past... After a certain time, in the best of faith, he confounds the deeds of which he was a witness with those of which he has heard others speak. Great caution and unceasing patience are necessary in extracting from his testimony the exact truth.¹⁰⁷

The intersubjective status of the Congo in the Western World as a kind of frightening epistemological whirlpool ('the abysmal and secret darkness of Congo infamy', *qua* Morel) must therefore be recognised as not merely a matter of gothic literary style, deployed for rhetorical effect and of concern only to the critic; it fundamentally undergirded serious political discussion on the subject of the Free State.¹⁰⁸ Imperial ideology, as Edward Saïd writes, is 'at the same time an aesthetic, politics, and even *epistemology*'.¹⁰⁹ We may perceive the power

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Berber Bevernage, 'The Making of the Congo Question: Truth Telling, Denial and "Colonial Science" in King Leopold's Commission of Inquiry on the Rubber Atrocities in the Congo Free State (1904-1905)', *Rethinking History* 22.2 (2018), 203-38, 212.

¹⁰⁷ *The Congo: Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed by the Congo Free State Government*, trans. James Gore (London: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1906 [1905]), 13-14.

¹⁰⁸ 'Abysmal': Morel, *Red Rubber*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Saïd, *Culture & Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 26.

of this occlusive ideological structuration at work in the peculiar uncertainty of the responses to Morel's *Affairs of West Africa* (1902) in the British press, which he reprints in *Red Rubber*:

Mr Morel's indictment is one of the most terrible things ever written, *if true*...

If Mr. Morel is accurately informed... there is hardly a condition of its (the Congo State's) charter that it has not broken, nor a law of common humanity which it has not flouted.¹¹⁰

The sense in these responses is that the sheer *horror* of the accusations made by Morel made the digestion of their truth a challenging proposition for the reader. Such abjection as he depicted seemed to belong to a dark realm (or a Dark Continent) which was not emotionally accessible – or even thinkable – through the self-sense of the liberal metropolitan bourgeois, suffused as it was with continued faith in the civilising task.¹¹¹ Indeed, is worth breaking here momentarily to consider the truly *nightmarish* quality of the reports emanating from the Free State at the time, and to feel for ourselves the antephalitic resistance which emerges unbidden in the mind when presented with knowledge of evil so profound as to challenge our faith in the species-project:

If the rubber does not reach the full amount required the sentinels attack the natives; they kill some and bring the hands to the commissary... Two or three days after a fight a dead mother was found with two of her children. The mother was shot and the right hand taken off. On one side was the elder child also shot, and the right hand also taken off. On the other side was the younger child, with the right hand cut off, but the child, still living, was resting against the dead mother's breast... A sentinel passed our mission station, and a woman accompanied him, carrying a basket of hands... They belonged to men, women, and even children... One of the soldiers told me: 'The commissary has promised us if we bring plenty of hands, we will shorten our service. I have brought

¹¹⁰ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 43, *emph. mine*.

¹¹¹ On the psychic processes by which the troubling 'conceptual vertigoes of liberal violence' were reconciled to the coloniser's self-satisfied self-sense, see Nathan Hensley, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 1-36.

in plenty of hands already and I expect my time of service will soon be finished'.¹¹²

We might cast some light on the question of the non-assimilability to sense of such horrors too alien to be countenanced by turning to another of Morel's contemporaries – in this instance the father of cosmic horror (and outrageous racist) H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), who, in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1925), nevertheless tendered one of the most profound essays ever written on the bewildering terror of the unknown and the paradoxical charisma of the abyss:

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown... No amount of rationalisation, reform, or Freudian analysis can quite annul the thrill of the chimney-corner whisper or the lonely wood. There is here involved a psychological pattern or tradition as real and as deeply grounded in mental experience as any other pattern or tradition of mankind; coeval with the religious feeling and closely related to many aspects of it, and too much a part of our inmost biological heritage to lose keen potency...¹¹³

Yet this dialectical codefinition of unknowability and deep horror ('the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim') is not confined to the pages of the *Necronomicon*.¹¹⁴ Holocaust scholars have observed a similar relationship in the phenomenon of 'innocent' denialism, *i.e.*, disavowal of the facts of the *Shoah* not as a result of conspiratorial anti-Semitism, but deriving rather from the psychic difficulty involved simply in *believing* that such maddening evil could genuinely have been perpetrated by humans.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Levi recalls the inmates at Auschwitz being taunted by their Nazi captors with precisely this point:

¹¹² E.D. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1904), 111.

¹¹³ H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (Corvallis, OR: Pulp-Lit, 2016 [1927]), 1-3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁵ Israel Charny, 'Innocent Denials of Known Genocides: A Further Contribution to a Psychology of Denial of Genocide', *Human Rights Review* 1 (2000), 15-39. See also Catherine Hall & Daniel Pick, 'Thinking About Denial', *History Workshop Journal* 84 (2017), 1-23.

Even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed; they will say that they are the exaggerations of Allied propaganda and will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you.¹¹⁶

In this context, the similarity between the rhetorical strategy of Morel *vis-à-vis* the Congo and the language deployed by the prosecutors at Nuremberg cannot help but strike the reader profoundly:

We will show you these concentration camps in motion pictures, just as the Allied armies found them when they arrived... Our proof will be disgusting and you will say I have robbed you of your sleep... I am one who received during this war most atrocity tales with suspicion and scepticism. But the proof here will be so overwhelming that I venture to predict not one word I have spoken will be denied.¹¹⁷

Widening the lens still further, we might even observe that the tendency to doubt constitutes the fundamental *Grund* of modern subjectivity itself; philosophically speaking, a state of ‘epistemological insecurity’ is the characteristic condition of the post-Cartesian subject.¹¹⁸ As Hannah Arendt writes,

The outstanding characteristic of Cartesian doubt is its universality, that nothing, no thought and no experience, can escape it... [It] did not simply doubt that human understanding may not be open to every truth or that human vision may not be able to see everything, but that intelligibility to human understanding does not at all constitute a demonstration of truth, just as visibility does not at all constitute proof of reality.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Levi, 11-12.

¹¹⁷ Robert Jackson, in *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg, 1947), v.2, 130.

¹¹⁸ Caroline Williams, *Contemporary French Philosophy: Modernity and the Persistence of the Subject* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 14.

¹¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1998 [1958]), 275.

Yet it is certainly too broad a stroke to claim to have discovered the psychic core of Congolese unknowability in something called ‘modern subjectivity’ and leave it at that, without further attempt at a more specific allocation. Might we contend instead that the intersubjective darkness of African horror proceeded symptomatically from a general *crisis of the knowable* at the *fin-de-siècle* – one which has been identified in scholarship across a variety of subfields? Historian of philosophy Bill Mander, for instance, has remarked of British speculative thought of the nineteenth century that:

The idea of an ultimate but unknowable way that things really are in themselves may be seen as supplying a narrative arc that runs right through the metaphysical systems of the period in question.¹²⁰

We may expand Mander’s point here and remark that the Victorian era was one in which, for many educated observers, reality came to assume a new and frightening invisibility to the senses owing to developments not just in philosophy, but also in the natural sciences, even before the advent of Einstein’s children (relativity and quantum mechanics), with all their clock-melting weirdness. Physics, in particular, presented the subject with gnawing imponderables which seemed to challenge the human capacity for empirical sense-making: the newly-discovered forces and energies which coursed invisibly through Being, most notably the electromagnetic field of Faraday and Maxwell; the luminiferous, undetectable *Æther* (not yet disproved), which purportedly bound all of space together; and the immutable laws of thermodynamics, with their ominous and inevitable procession towards universal entropy:

Nineteenth-century physics – especially dynamics, the science of force and motion – often depended on what could not be observed, and Victorian physicists were particularly at ease with non-empirical methods of enquiry and concepts such as imponderable matter.¹²¹

¹²⁰ W.J. Mander, *The Unknowable: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Metaphysics* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), 1.

¹²¹ Sarah Alexander, *Victorian Literature and the Physics of the Imponderable* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

One contributor to *Science* magazine in 1883 lambently illustrated the unnerving quality of the new discoveries:

The real conquests of science have been so vast and unexpected, so much like the workings of magic, that people eagerly pay homage to a power, which, though mysterious enough to engage their credulity, accomplishes everyday feats that witches, ghosts and magicians performed only on rare occasions.¹²²

Indeed, for some observers, the new science seemed to collapse the gap between empirical and mystical altogether, as in the following contribution to *Scientific American* from 1897, which claimed the clairsentience of neoteric physical discoveries to advance a case for the existence of ghosts:

Recent science has shown that there is probably a world of energy and matter, hidden from our ordinary senses, of which we can only conjecture from the suggestions obtained when the photographic plate records more than the human eye is ever capable of seeing, or the magnetic needle responds to an influence not quite felt by our dull senses. Now it may be that it is in such a hidden world that ghosts have their existence – spirits find their dwelling place in forms as much material as those of ordinary human beings, but of an essentially different, perhaps more invisible character...¹²³

Attempts of a more or less desperate kind were made to fold the intangible into a more materialist, scientific *Weltanschauung*. In 1907, a doctor named Duncan MacDougall tried to estimate the mass of the soul by weighing human bodies before and after death, coming to the surreal conclusion that the spiritual source of life and consciousness had a mass of about 21 grams.¹²⁴ One may observe at work here an active effort to stare into the metaphysical abyss opened by modern science and feel again Lovecraft's 'thrill of the chimney corner whisper', to replace the dwindling mysteries of religion after the death of God

¹²² E.T. Nelson, 'From Superstition to Humbug', *Science* 2.41 (1883), 637-79.

¹²³ W.E. Ord, 'A Scientific View of Ghosts', *Scientific American* 77.3 (1897), 42.

¹²⁴ Duncan MacDougall, 'The Soul: Hypothesis Concerning Soul Substance Together with Experimental Evidence of the Existence of Such Substance', *Journal of the American Society of Psychical Research* 1.1 (1907), 237-75.

with a new, physical *arcanum*. We might also pass comment on the appropriateness of Lovecraft's own emergence amidst the alienating tumult of the quantum revolution. If Frankenstein's monster is the nightmare of Newton's man – of enlightened Prometheus catastrophically unbound – then Cthulhu is the horror of Einstein's; the pinprick that is humanity once more made cognisant of its futile and contingent inconsequence, in spite of its titanic pretensions. As H.G. Wells wrote in 1891:

Science is a match that man has just got alight... It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated – darkness still.¹²⁵

As the sciences turned towards the unknowable, so too did political economy. Money beat a long retreat from immanence over the course of the bourgeois revolution, coming to dwell increasingly in the transcendent domain of finance, credit and debt, a process accelerated by the mediative properties of High Modern information technology. Capital's ascent to primacy over human existence was thus accompanied paradoxically by its decampment from the physical finitude of metal and paper into the realm of pure mathematical abstraction. Money was no longer corporealised as a real presence in local space, but rather became coterminous with electricity itself: the *élan vital* of the accumulative world-engine.¹²⁶ This interpassive vacuum was filled with bafflement on the part of the ordinary person not inducted into the mysteries of the financial *katholikon*. With Capital's flight into inaccessibility, new forms of entrepreneur – fraudsters, hucksters, conmen – rushed to exploit the ontic gap, promising to return money to the realm of ordinary subjective *bon sens*.¹²⁷ New

¹²⁵ H.G. Wells, 'Rediscovery of the Unique', *Fortnightly Review* 50 (1891), 106-11, 111. Cf. Tyler Austin Harper, "'The Pitiless Judgement of Time': Human Extinction in the Evolutionary Tragedies of H.G. Wells', *Science Fiction Studies* 48.3 (2021), 323-43.

¹²⁶ Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2008), 1-10, 57-86, 153-70; Alex Preda, *Framing Finance: The Boundaries of Markets and Modern Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2009), 82-112; Simone Müller & Heidi Tworek, 'The Telegraph and the Bank: On the Interdependence of Communications and Capitalism, 1866-1914', *Journal of Global History* 10.2 (2015), 259-83.

¹²⁷ George Robb, *White-Collar Crime in Modern England: Financial Fraud and Business Morality, 1845-1929* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 11-30; Sarah Wilson, *The Origins of Modern Financial Crime: Historical Foundations and Current Problems in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2014), 101-

technologies endowed the aspiring financial criminal with undreamt-of possibilities for separating marks from their money. Counterfeiting (of identity documents, of doctored photographs, of money itself) was elevated to an art-form by cybernetically-enabled mountebanks, smuggling elided intensities of doubt into every financial transaction.¹²⁸ In 1903, a young Emilian by the name of Charles Ponzi (1882-1949) arrived in Boston aboard a steamship, destined to become one of the great financial innovators of twentieth-century capitalism through his formulation of a magnificent new form of swindle – one which depended entirely upon the careful cultivation of investor nescience.¹²⁹

The strategic husbandry of ignorance is not just the tool of the unscrupulous profiteer, but also of the state. As Linsey McGoey has demonstrated, the fermentation of public unknowledge by governments – or at least, the calculated muddying of the boundary between truth and untruth – has played a crucial strategic role in the maintenance of bourgeois domination since the 18th century; Podsnappery is in this sense the child of power.¹³⁰ In particular, socially-inculcated unknowledge is vital for the intersubjective

27; Hartmut Berghoff & Uwe Spiekermann, 'Shady Business: On the History of White-Collar Crime', *Business History* 60.3 (2018), 289-304.

¹²⁸ Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2007), 1-19. Re. doctored photographs, see Jennifer Tucker, 'Photography as Witness, Detective, and Imposter: Visual Representation in Victorian Science', in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1997), 378-408.

¹²⁹ Tamar Frankel, *The Ponzi Scheme Puzzle: A History and Analysis of Con Artists and Victims* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), esp. 29-51. On the exploitation of unknowledge in financial profiteering more generally, see Paula Vedoveli, 'Information Brokers and the Making of the Baring Crisis, 1857-1890', *Financial History Review* 25.3 (2018), 357-86; and Walter Mattli, *Darkness by Design: The Hidden Power in Global Capital Markets* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2019), 114-36, on 'informational asymmetry'.

¹³⁰ Linsey McGoey, *The Unknowers: How Strategic Ignorance Rules the World* (London: Zed, 2019). See also David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1832-1998* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 1-25; Claire Birchall, 'The Politics of Opacity and Openness', *Theory, Culture & Society* 28.7-8 (2011), 7-25; Koen Vermeir & Dániel Margócsy, 'States of Secrecy: An Introduction', *British Journal of the History of Science* 45.2 (2012), 153-64; Christopher Moran, *Classified: Secrecy and the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 23-52; Katlyn Carter, 'Practicing Politics in the Revolutionary Atlantic World: Secrecy, Publicity, and the Making of Modern Democracy', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University (2017), 77-138; David Frost, *Classified: A History of Secrecy in the United States Government* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2017), esp. 118-36; Massimo Leone, 'Silence Propaganda: A Semiotic Inquiry into the Ideologies of Taciturnity', *Signs & Society* 5.1 (2017), 154-81; Deborah Bauer, *Marianne is Watching: Intelligence, Counterintelligence, and the Origins of the French Surveillance State* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 23-44.

construction of the imperial periphery, and thus in justifying the domination thereof within a liberal intellectual framework.¹³¹ *Qua* Žižek:

The systemic unlearning of facts about colonised peoples imposed by the colonisers... concerns not only the facts, but even more so the ideological space that establishes the coordinates for our understanding of 'primitives'.¹³²

It is precisely this systematic unlearning of the humanity of indigenous populations which furnishes the coloniser with permission to destroy them. Indeed, in an unholy epistemic perversion, the very scale of imperial butchery serves to abstract its criminality beyond the facile subjective comprehensibility of mere murder. As the anarchist publication *The Blast* put it in 1916:

There is double the pathos for us in the death of one little New York waif from hunger than there is in a million deaths from famine in China. It is not that distance glosses over the terrible picture of the Chinese horror, or that a feeling of national kinship with the waif impresses us the more sincerely with his plight. It is merely that the mind is unable to grasp a suffering in the gross. Suffering is so intimately personal a thing that it must be explained through the personal equation, if at all.¹³³

Such a perverse subjective contradiction is a quintessential symptom of the gap between humanity's active capacity and its imaginative limits opened up by the Promethean power of modern technology, as identified by the philosopher Günther Anders:

In the course of the technical age the classical relation between imagination and action has reversed itself. While our ancestors considered it a truism that imagination exceeds and surpasses reality, today the capacity of our imagination (and that of our

¹³¹ Manu Vimalassery *et al.*, 'On Colonial Unknowing', *Theory & Event* 19.4, (2016), 1-13.

¹³² Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 210. Cf. Eleonora Freddi, 'Do People Avoid Morally Relevant Information? Evidence from the Refugee Crisis', *Review of Economics & Statistics* 103.4 (2021), 605-20; Romain Espinosa & Jan Stoop, 'Do People Really Want to be Informed? Ex-Ante Evaluations of Information-Campaign Effectiveness', *Experimental Economics* 24.4 (2021), 1131-55; Claudia Aradau & Sarah Perret, 'The Politics of (Non-)Knowledge at Europe's Borders: Errors, Fakes, and Subjectivity', *Review of International Studies* 48.3 (2022), 405-24.

¹³³ *The Blast* 1.12, 1 May 1916.

feeling and responsibility) cannot compete with that of our *praxis*. As a matter of fact, our imagination is unable to grasp the effect of that which we are producing... At best we can repent the murder of *one* man: more our feeling does not perform; we may be able to imagine *ten*: more our imagination cannot perform; but to destroy a hundred thousand people causes no difficulties whatsoever.¹³⁴

More poetically, we might illustrate this phenomenon by reference to G.K. Chesterton's 'The Sign of the Broken Sword' (1911), one of his brilliant Father Brown detective stories:

Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. But what does he do if there is no forest? He grows a forest to hide it in... And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in.¹³⁵

And what of the dark wood which King Leopold grew in the heart of Africa?

iv.

The Congo Free State was extremely violent.¹³⁶ In this, it both reflected the broader murderous *habitus* of nineteenth century imperialism and prefigured the unprecedented carnage of the twentieth. Yet what was taking place in the bowels of the *fin-de-siècle* Leopoldian state was not *genocide* as such, *i.e.*, an ideologically-motivated extermination of the Congolese (as with, for example, the near-contemporaneous massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman

¹³⁴ Günther Anders & Claude Eatherly, *Burning Conscience* (New York: Monthly Review, 1961), 12.

¹³⁵ G.K. Chesterton, 'The Sign of the Broken Sword', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 7 Jan 1911.

¹³⁶ This usefully broad heuristic was coined by Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010). On the exponential intensification of violence during the modern epoch (*contra* the fashionable Hobbesian-Pinkerian line), see Siniša Malešević, *The Rise of Organised Brutality: A Historical Sociology of Violence* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), 41-66, 99-141; Philip Dwyer & Mark Micale (eds.), *The Darker Angels of Our Nature: Refuting the Pinker Theory of History & Violence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

Empire in 1894-6, a direct prefiguration of their destruction in the First World War), but simply the ‘natural’ working out of accumulative exploitation through human bodies and their life-environment, unbounded by opposition or limit.¹³⁷ This logic, which we might refer to by the name *extractivism*, is the acquisitive child of the technocapitalist nexus, a self-propelling rationality which transmutes the physical qualities of both the labourer and nature into fuel for its own engorgement:

Capital asks no questions about the length of life of labour-power. What interests it is purely and simply the maximum of labour-power that can be set in motion in a working day. It attains this objective by shortening the life of labour-power, in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility.¹³⁸

Marx famously declared that ‘Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt’.¹³⁹ We must recognise here that, under the auspices of extractivism as practiced in the Free State, the *dirt* (the ripping and churning of the ecological bower) is inseparably implicated in the *blood* (the exploitation of the labourer unto death) and *vice versa*.¹⁴⁰ The animals of the Congo, for instance, were set on their own path to extinction alongside the human population by the process of Leopoldian geophagy, as the forests were ripped down and habitats were razed to the ground in order to plant rubber and other cash crops. Within decades, many of the Basin’s characteristic fauna

¹³⁷ Re. the massacres of the 1890s, see Robert Melson, *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1992), 44-69.

¹³⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 376. For theoretical expositions of capitalist ‘extractivism’, see Verónica Gago & Sandro Mezzadra, ‘A Critique of the Extractive Operations of Capital: Toward an Expanded Concept of Extractivism’, *Rethinking Marxism* 29.4 (2017), 574-91; Sandro Mezzadra & Brett Neilson, *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (Durham, NC: DUP, 2019), 38-48; Martín Arboleda, *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction Under Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2020), 248-54.

¹³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 926. Cf. 638 in the same: ‘Capitalist production... disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth... All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil’.

¹⁴⁰ Important recent works on the relationship between capitalism and ecocide include John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review, 2000); Franz Broschimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* (London: Pluto, 2002); Jason Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM, 2016); Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: OUP, 2017).

would be staring annihilation in the face (if they had not already succumbed): bonobos and broad-eared elephants, pangolins and okapis, mountain gorillas and white-backed vultures.¹⁴¹ To the bourgeoisie, the proper function of any given ecological object or process is to serve merely as a ‘temporary contribution to our income’ (in the words of F.A. Hayek), to be exploited, violated and ruined ‘once and for all’.¹⁴² Conrad evoked this morbid confrontation between the natural world and capitalist ‘civilisation’ in *Heart of Darkness*:

We call... all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair.¹⁴³

Capital always consumes both labour and nature to the extent that it is unbounded by political opposition.¹⁴⁴ In the legal and political *terra nullius* of the Free State, that internal opposition was nil, as historian of the CFS Neal Ascherson writes:

The Congo State was now a set of closely-interrelated monopolies. The main object of their operations was to win wild rubber. The absence of competition, and of imported goods which the African population could buy meant that no money economy existed in these regions; the lust to save overheads and the degree of

¹⁴¹ See Kent Redford, ‘The Empty Forest’, *BioScience* 42.6 (1992), 412-22; Ashley Dawson, ‘Capitalism and Extinction’, in *Extinction: A Radical History* (New York: OR Books, 2016), 39-64.

¹⁴² F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1978 [1960]), 373. Cf. Nathaniel Wolloch, *Nature in the History of Economic Thought: How Natural Resources Became an Economic Concept* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁴³ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 16-17. See also Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, ‘“A Choice of Nightmares”: The Ecology of *Heart of Darkness*’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 55.3 (2009), 620-48; Caitlin Vandertop, ‘“The Earth Seemed Unearthly”: Capital, World-Ecology, and Enchanted Nature in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 64.4 (2018), 680-700; Jesse Oak Taylor, ‘Wilderness After Nature: Conrad, Empire, and the Anthropocene’, in Lissa Schneider-Rebozo *et al.* (eds.), *Conrad and Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 21-42; Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2021), 131-9.

¹⁴⁴ Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2018), 197-212.

political control which the exploiters held over the helpless population discouraged them from introducing one. In such conditions, as outside observers could guess for themselves, forced labour and extortion were inevitable.¹⁴⁵

Morel concurs as to the structural causation of the Congolese atrocities:

My endeavour from the first was to show that given certain premises – the repudiation of native rights in land and in the produce of the soil – ... these deeds must *of necessity* take place.¹⁴⁶

How, then, should we address the question of the Free State's extreme extractive violence with appropriate moral seriousness? Assuredly not with ahistorical liberal *lachrimae* for the inhumanity of man to man, but rather with a statement of the concrete political-economic conditions which logically concomitated such exterminatory practice in the pursuit of profit. This analysis brings us far closer to the causal kernel of such violent acts than any focus on the *experience* or *agency* or *trauma* of the victims, of the kind which predominates in contemporary discourse.¹⁴⁷ Mass violence is not edifying or instructive. It does not endow its victims with some kind of privileged *truth* to whose authority we ought to defer. It is a simple matter of *politics*. I am reminded here of the testimony of a Holocaust survivor when presented with

¹⁴⁵ Neal Ascherson, *The King Incorporated: Leopold the Second and the Congo* (London: Granto, 1999 [1963]), 202. On the accumulative brutality of the CFS, see Aldwin Roes, 'Towards a History of Mass Violence in the *Etat Indépendant du Congo*, 1885–1908', *South African Historical Journal* 62.4 (2010), 634–70; David Gordon, 'Precursors to Red Rubber: Violence in the Congo Free State, 1885–95', *Past & Present* 236.1 (2017), 133–68; Louise Cardoso de Mello & Sven van Melkebeke, 'From the Amazon to the Congo Valley: A Comparative Study on the Violent Commodification of Labour During the Rubber Boom (1870s–1910s)', in Sabrina Joseph (ed.), *Commodity Frontiers and Global Capitalist Expansion: Social, Ecological and Political Implications from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day* (New York: PM, 2019), 137–81; Sara Lowes & Eduardo Montero, 'Concessions, Violence, and Indirect Rule: Evidence from the Congo Free State', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 136.4 (2021), 2047–91. On the place of *terra nullius* in imperialism's conceptual armoury, see Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'The Genealogy of *Terra Nullius*', *Australian Historical Studies* 38.129 (2007), 1–15.

¹⁴⁶ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ See Wulf Kanstein, 'Genealogy of a Category Mistake: A Critical Intellectual History of the Cultural Trauma Metaphor', *Rethinking History* 8.2 (2004), 193–221; Didier Fassin & Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2009 [2007]), 25–39; Joel Robbins, 'Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19.3 (2013), 447–62.

the hypothesis that enduring the death camps must have made it impossible for any victims to hold prejudiced views:

Auschwitz was no instructional institution... You learned nothing there, and least of all humanity and tolerance. Absolutely nothing good came out of the concentration camps, I hear myself saying, with my voice rising, and he expects catharsis, purgation, the sort of thing you go to the theatre for? They were the most useless, pointless establishments imaginable.¹⁴⁸

The innate *meaningless* of victimhood is also asserted by Badiou, who writes of our present fetish for the ennobling quality of persecution and suffering:

If philosophy serves any purpose, it is to take away the chalice of sad passions and to teach us that pity is not a loyal affect... and that victimhood is not the starting point for thought.¹⁴⁹

And again:

It's not in terms of massacres as such that politics can be thought; it's in terms of politics that massacres need to be thought.¹⁵⁰

Extreme violence is always, at root, the product of structural forces and not of ethics. Thus, rather than engaging in humanistic moralising, or seeking to endow the slaughter of the Congolese with any meaning beyond its own facticity, it is more instructive to focus on the entanglement of the two vast political-economic forces which *produced* this violence – namely capitalism and imperialism – in order more precisely to locate the atrocities within the broader situation of the extremely violent High Modern conjuncture. For all its uniquely evocative horrors, Leopold II's enfeoffment of Central Africa conformed essentially to the standard Western liberal-imperial model in its ready deployment of organised extra-economic coercion against subaltern populations (including mutilation, rape, and *de facto* enslavement) in order create stable

¹⁴⁸ Ruth Klüger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: Feminist Press, 2001), 189.

¹⁴⁹ Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Post-war Philosophy*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 2016 [2009]), viii.

¹⁵⁰ *Idem.* & Jean-Claude Milner, *Controversies*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity, 2014 [2012]), 25.

conditions for accumulation.¹⁵¹ If the Congo Free State was the most nightmarish of these variegated colonial hells, its distinction from the practice

¹⁵¹ *Inter alia*, Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Annihilation in Africa: The "Race War" German Southwest Africa (1904–1908) and its Significance for a Global History of Genocide', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 37 (2005), 51–57; Benjamin Madley, 'From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe', *European History Quarterly* 35.3 (2005), 429–64; John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire* (London: Bookmarks, 2006); Paul Kramer, 'Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the US Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War', *Diplomatic History* 30.2 (2006), 169–210; John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNCP, 2006); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNCP, 2007); Norbert Finzsch, '"[...] Extirpate or Remove that Vermin": Genocide, Biological Warfare, and Settler Imperialism in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Genocide Research* 10.2 (2008), 215–32; Jürgen Zimmerer & Joachim Zeller (eds.), *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War (1904–1908) in Namibia and its Aftermath* (London: Merlin, 2008); Mohamed Adhikari, '"Streams of Blood and Streams of Money": New Perspectives on the Annihilation of the Herero and Nama Peoples of Namibia, 1904–1908', *Kronos* 34.1 (2008), 303–20; Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); David Olusoga & Casper Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010); Susanne Kuss, *German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence*, trans. Andrew Smith (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2017 [2011]); Carroll Kakel, *The American West and the Nazi East: A Comparative and Interpretive Perspective* (New York: PM, 2011); David Anderson, 'Punishment, Race and "The Raw Native": Settler Society and Kenya's Flogging Scandals, 1895–1930', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37.3 (2011), 479–97; Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London: Verso, 2011); Stephen Howe, 'British Worlds, Settler Worlds, World Systems, and Killing Fields', *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 40.4 (2012), 691–725; Brendan Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846–1873* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); William Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony* (Basingstoke: PM, 2013); Joseph Vergolina, '"Methods of Barbarism" or Western Tradition? Britain, South Africa, and the Evolution of Escalatory Violence as Policy', *Journal of Military History* 77.4 (2013), 1303–27; Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014); Tom Lawson, *The Last Man: A British Genocide in Tasmania* (New York: PM, 2014); Bart Luttikguis & A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2014); Raphael Brewster Folsom, *The Yaquis and the Empire: Violence, Spanish Imperial Power, and Native Resilience in Colonial Mexico* (New Haven, CT: YUP, 2014); Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland and the Crisis of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empire and the Use of Force*, trans. Peter Lewis (Oxford: OUP, 2017); Andrew Woodford & Jeff Benevenuto (eds.), *Canada and Colonial Genocide* (London: Routledge, 2017); Philip Dwyer & Amanda Nettelbeck (eds.), *Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World* (Berlin: Springer, 2018); Benjamin Weber, 'The Strange Career of the Convict Clause: US Prison Imperialism in the Panamá Canal Zone', *International Labour & Working Class History* 96 (2019), 79–102; Ryan Masters, '"The People Who Make Our Heads Spin": White Violence in German East Africa', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto (2019); Michelle Gordon, *Extreme Violence and the 'British Way': Colonial Warfare in Perak, Sierra Leone and Sudan*

of other capitalist empires in their zones of influence was only one of degree, not of kind. Yet the violence wrought by those *soi-disant* humanitarian empires – viz. Britain, France and the United States – was unassimilable in its bare monstrosity to the liberal *aftognosia* of the metropolitan bourgeoisie without the occlusive effects of ideological mediation; as Steinbeck once remarked, ‘a crime is something someone else commits’.¹⁵² The British in particular were committed to the idea of the *improving* quality of their own violence, whether in the colonies or on the school rugby pitch. ‘You cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs’, Joseph Chamberlain pronounced to a cheering crowd in 1897: ‘You cannot destroy the practices of barbarism, of slavery, of superstition, which for centuries have desolated the interior of Africa, without the use of force’.¹⁵³ In Southern Rhodesia in 1896, meanwhile, one colonial governor proposed the forcible introduction of a compulsory labour scheme of the Leopoldian kind, in order to ‘teach the natives... industrial habits’ – a shotgun education in Smilesean self-help.¹⁵⁴ The anti-slavery *bona fides* which the British deployed to assert their moral perspicacity proved no obstacle to the reintroduction of effective enchattlement under the banner of moral and economic improvement.¹⁵⁵ This is not even to mention the fact that the ‘voluntary indigenous labourer’ so beloved of the liberal imperialist was usually paid so little as to be functionally free from the point of view of Capital, or was otherwise

(London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Deana Heath, *Colonial Terror: Torture and State Violence in Colonial India* (Oxford: OUP, 2021); Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (London: Bodley Head, 2022); Tom Menger, ‘“Press the Thumb Onto the Eye”: Moral Effect, Extreme Violence, and the Transimperial Notions of British, German, and Dutch Colonial Warfare, ca. 1890–1914’, *Itinerario* 46.1 (2022), 84–108; *idem.*, ‘Concealing Colonial Comparability: British Exceptionalism, Imperial Violence, and the Dynamiting of Cave Refuges in Southern Africa, 1879–1897’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 50.5 (2022), 860–89.

¹⁵² John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (New York: Viking, 1961), 291.

¹⁵³ Joseph Chamberlain, ‘The True Conception of Empire’, in *idem.*, *Foreign and Colonial Speeches* (Manchester: George Routledge and Sons, 1897), 241–246.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Mads Bomholt Nelson, ‘“As Bad as the Congo”: British Perceptions of Colonial Rule and Violence in Anglo-German Southern Africa, 1896–1914’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, King’s College London (2018), 104. The moral-affective *topos* of self-help in bourgeois society is analysed brilliantly by Eva Illouz in *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 40–61.

¹⁵⁵ See Katarina Schwarz & Andrea Nicholason, ‘Collapsing the Boundaries Between De Jure and De Facto Slavery: The Foundations of Slavery Beyond the Transatlantic Frame’, *Human Rights Review* 21 (2020), 391–414.

so firmly indentured that their subjective experience of exploitation was indistinguishable from that of the slave.¹⁵⁶

For all their manifold monstrosities, however, none of these empires (even the routinely brutal British and messianically genocidal Americans) committed atrocities on the exceptional scale of the Leopoldian regime in the Congo. The extractive murder perpetrated in the Free State was, as historian John Tully writes, ‘European colonialism’s greatest crime’, comparable only to the exterminationist apparatus of the Nazis in Eastern Europe after 1941 in the concentrated intensity of its violence.¹⁵⁷ The final toll of this immensely successful accumulative project will never be known for sure, but most estimates place the charnel magnitude at something like ten million dead Congolese (and the true figure may be higher still).¹⁵⁸ Beyond the brute fact of this mass murder, the signal cruelty of the Congo Free State was the severed hand: the paramount expression in the punitive poetics of the Free State of the mastery of Leopoldian discipline over the Congolese labourer, a ritual expressing utter control over a native body now reduced to a malleable *thing* in service of extraction. Yet in the metropolitan public sphere, the memetisation of this mutilative practice through widely disseminated atrocity photographs provided a crucial emotional anchor in relation to which a Western audience could develop sympathetic attachments:

The humanitarian narrative relies on the personal body, not only as the locus of pain but also as the common bond between those

¹⁵⁶ Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London: Routledge, 2018 [1984]); Michael Twaddle (ed.), *The Wages of Slavery: From Chattel Slavery to Wage Labour in Africa, the Caribbean and England* (London: Routledge, 1993); Alessandro Stanziani, ‘Local Bondage in Global Economies: Servants, Wage Earners, and Indentured Migrants in Nineteenth-Century France, Great Britain, and the Mascarene Islands’, *Modern Asian Studies* 47.4 (2013), 1218-51; Richard Allen, ‘Slaves, Convicts, Abolitionism, and the Global Origins of the Post-Emancipation Indentured Labour System’, *Slavery & Abolition* 35.2 (2014), 328-48; Jonathan Connolly, ‘Indentured Labour Migration and the Meaning of Emancipation: Free Trade, Race, and Labour in British Public Debate, 1838-1860’, *Past & Present* 238.1 (2018), 85-119; *idem.*, ‘Indenture as Compensation: State Financing for Indentured Labour Migration in the Era of Emancipation’, *Slavery & Abolition* 40.3 (2019), 448-71; Purba Hossain, ‘“A Matter of Doubt and Uncertainty”: John Gladstone and the Post-Slavery Framework of Labour in the British Empire’, *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 50.1 (2021), 52-80.

¹⁵⁷ John Tully, *The Devil’s Milk: A Social History of Rubber* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 101.

¹⁵⁸ Hochschild, *Ghost*, 225-34.

who suffer and those who help and as the object of the scientific discourse through which the causal links between an evil, a victim, and a benefactor are forged.¹⁵⁹

What did it mean to the Congolese subject to be mutilated in this particular way? Hands, as cognitive science tells us, are essential in the phenomenological shaping of thought and experience.¹⁶⁰ As the Scottish physiologist Charles Bell (1774-1842) explained in his 1833 treatise on the subject:

The hand is not a thing appended or put on, like an additional movement in a watch; but a thousand intricate relations must be established throughout the body in connection with it – such as the nerves of motion and nerves of sensation.¹⁶¹

Twenty-first century paleoneurological research shows that our plastic cognitive architecture has been shaped by the haptic hand-tool relationship since Neolithic times.¹⁶² The asymmetry of our left- and right-handedness, for example, is a vital element in the construction of space-for-us, giving form to our

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Laquer, 'Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative', in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: UCaP, 1989), 176-204, 177. See also Karen Haltunnen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *American Historical Review* 100.2 (1995), 303-34; Noora Kotilainen, 'Visual Theaters of Suffering: Constituting the Western Spectator in the Age of the Humanitarian World Politics', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki (2016), esp. 72-6 (on the Congo) and 148-66 (on the 'humanitarian tragedy' as spectacle). *Re.* photography and the Congo campaign, see T. Jack Thompson, 'Light on the Dark Continent: The Photography of Alice Seely Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century', *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 26.4 (2002), 146-9; Christina Twomey, 'The Incorruptible Kodak: Photography, Human Rights and the Congo Campaign', in Liam Kennedy & Caitlin Patrick (eds.), *The Violence of the Image: Photography and International Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2014), 9-33; Jane Lydon, *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire* (London: Routledge, 2020), 94-114.

¹⁶⁰ David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1992), 218-93; Rob Ellis, *Bodies and Other Objects: The Sensorimotor Foundations of Cognition* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), 63-79, 159-74.

¹⁶¹ Charles Bell, *The Hand, Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments, as Evincing Design* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1867 [1833]), 163.

¹⁶² Emiliano Bruner *et al.*, 'Cognitive Archaeology, Body Cognition, and Hand-Tool Interaction', *Progress in Brain Research* 238 (2018), 325-45; María Silva-Gago *et al.*, 'Not a Matter of Shape: The Influence of Tool Characteristics on Electrodermal Activity in Response to Haptic Exploration of Lower Palaeolithic Tools', *American Journal of Human Biology* 34.2 (2022), 23612.

innate understanding of mutually-constituted oppositions as a fact of Being.¹⁶³ To sever a hand, therefore, is not just to delimit cruelly a person's practical capacities, but to mutilate fundamentally their very subjecthood, their full humanity; for just as substance *is* subject, so too the psychic subject *is* the bodily substance from which it emerges: *qua* Heidegger, 'we do not *have* a body; rather, we *are* bodily'.¹⁶⁴ Kristeva famously argued that the essence of horror is that which threatens the integrity of the self – and indeed, it is precisely this quality of existential threat to sense-making ipseity which unites physical mutilation or violation and psychic trauma (though they often come together in the same incident) under the banner of the *wound*: as Badiou asserts, 'the wound is what testifies to the body's exposure to the Real'.¹⁶⁵ Yet unlike a political commitment, in which the subject willingly opens themselves up to the Real's stark truth, the wound represents the non-consensual irruption of the Real into Being.

To be *unhanded* (or blinded, or raped, or castrated) is to be forcibly stripped of one's sustaining fantasies of control over one's existence – and we ought to note at this point that rape and other forms of sexual torture were endemic in Leopold's Congo, functioning as both disciplinary tool and *récompense pour service* for the Free State's enforcers. As historian Amandine Lauro writes:

In colonial central Africa, as in other colonial contexts, racial discourses endorsed the 'rapability' of indigenous women.¹⁶⁶

Morel himself noted the omnipresence of sexual violence under the rubber-gathering regime, though he effaces some of the more repulsive specifics (such as gang rape, the rape of children, and forced incest) out of concern for the delicate bourgeois sensibilities of the metropolitan reading public:

¹⁶³ As argued by Rodney Needham, *Right & Left* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1974).

¹⁶⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1979 [1961]), 99.

¹⁶⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]), 53-4. 'Wound': Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity, 2007 [2005]), 116.

¹⁶⁶ Amandine Lauro, 'Violence, Anxieties, and the Making of Interracial Dangers: Colonial Surveillance and Interracial Sexuality in the Belgian Congo', in Chelsea Shields & Dagmar Herzog (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2021), 327-38, 329. See also Charlotte Mertens, 'Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and Present Reconfigurations', *Aras* 37.1 (2016), 6-20.

In the distant village, wives and children live at the mercy of the capriciousness, cruelty, and lust of the armed ruffians set there by the white man... Death or torture rewards protest against the violation of the sanctuaries of sex, against the rape of the newly-married wife, against bestialities foul and nameless.¹⁶⁷

The violence of the Congo Free State was not wholly contained by these acts of stochastic brutality. It is also to do with the deeper, *desubjectifying* effects of the modern mass-extractive process itself on the labourer in the World. The bureaucratic abstractions of Capital and the state serve to transmute a human being into a *fact*, a discretised and interchangeable datum to be manipulated dispassionately in the accumulative process.¹⁶⁸ It was, of course, in this abstracted form that Morel first ‘met’ the Congolese, as implicit items in a corporate ledger, before his grand performance of their suffering in the Western media. The men and women of the Congo were thus negatively *serialised*, in Sartre’s sense of the term – that is to say, deindividuated and rendered interchangeable with any other person as far as their relationships to the regnant social order was concerned.¹⁶⁹ Such a transmutation of the Congolese into a series of fungible data was consummated through the processes of bureaucratic flattening and mathematisation, crucial components of the deep alchemy of capitalism itself, which renders all things comparable with all other things through abstraction into the universal mediator, money. To quote Simmel:

The calculative exactness of practical life which the money economy has brought about corresponds to the ideal of natural science: to transform the world into an arithmetic problem, to fix every part of the world by mathematical formulas... Through the calculative nature of money, a new precision, a certainty in the definition of identities and differences, an unambiguousness in

¹⁶⁷ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 93-4.

¹⁶⁸ *Nb.* James Scott’s crushing assessment of High Modernist desubjectification (capitalist and socialist alike) in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: YUP, 1998).

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Andrew Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004 [1960]), v.1, 256-69.

agreements and arrangements has been brought about in the relations of life-elements.¹⁷⁰

Much of the systemic violence of the capitalist system is wrought by the gap which exists between this abstracted world of accumulative calculation, in which human labour is remade into a commodity like any other, and the underlying Worldly reality of subjectivity-in-society.¹⁷¹ For those living under the star of Capital, as Negri writes,

Every relation becomes relative: merely the comparison between two monetary quantities... The realm within which one moves is that of *the reified equivalent*.¹⁷²

We may observe this abstractive process at work in a CFS memo, reprinted by Morel in *Red Rubber*, regarding the recruitment of native men and boys into the Free State's disciplinary force and the bonuses to be granted to them based on their size:

The Congo state will allot for each recruit obtained a bonus on the following lines: 90 francs for every healthy and vigorous man considered fit for military service, and whose stature exceeds 1 metre 55 centimetres; 65 francs for every youth whose stature is at least 1 metre 35 centimetres; 15 francs per male child...¹⁷³

Here we find at least a minimal differentiation between human individuals, if a brutally numerical one predicated on the body's capacity for energetic output in the manner of the slave auction.¹⁷⁴ The outcome of this conceptual violence was the reduction of the Congolese worker to the condition which Agamben (with reference to the concentration camp) famously dubbed *bare life*: he may be freely killed because the law does not recognise him; he is robbed of his political being and reduced to brute animal existence, cast into what theorist Achille Mbembe has resonantly named a *deathworld*, in which his extinction is not just tolerated

¹⁷⁰ Simmel, 'Metropolis', 412 (translation amended slightly for clarity).

¹⁷¹ See Stavros Tombazos, 'Capital as "Abstraction in Action" and Economic Rhythms in Marx', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 44.5 (2020), 1055-68.

¹⁷² Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (London: Continuum, 2003 [1997]), 48-9.

¹⁷³ Morel, *Red Rubber*, 25-6.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Walter Johnson, 'Turning People into Products', in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1999), 117-34.

but *expected* by his masters.¹⁷⁵ As the gentlemanly capitalist Nicholas Forsyte ponders contentedly in Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* (1906):

All experience tended to show that a man must die; and whether he dies of a miserable old age in his own country or prematurely of damp in the bottom of a foreign mine, was surely of little consequence, provided that by a change in his mode of life he benefited the British Empire.¹⁷⁶

The Congolese was the archetypal subject of this capitalist necropolitics. In the name of imperialism and accumulation, as Forsyte affirms and the case of the Congo Free State demonstrates, all life is ultimately bare, meaningless, dispensable. The young men of Europe were about to become intimately acquainted with this fact.

¹⁷⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: SUP, 1998); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: DUP, 2019 [2016]). See also Walter Mignolo, 'Dispensable and Bare Lives', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 7.2 (2009), 69-88.

¹⁷⁶ John Galsworthy, *The Man of Property* (London: William Heinemann, 1906), 47.

III

Morel the Troublemaker: War and Peace

i.

In 1919, after the killing was over (in Western Europe, at least), the great French writer Paul Valéry (1871-1945) tendered the following verdict on the instruction in historical consciousness bequeathed to modern man by the First World War:

We see now that the abyss of History is deep enough to hold us all. We are aware that a civilization has the same fragility as a life... It was not enough for our generation to learn from its own experience how the most beautiful things and the most ancient, the most formidable and the best ordered, can perish by *accident*; in the realm of thought, feeling, and common sense, we witnessed extraordinary phenomena: paradox suddenly become fact, and obvious fact brutally belied.¹

In its initiation of enlightened, self-satisfied Western civilisation into the depths of hell, the war of 1914-18 provided retroactive confirmation of the dark *Stimmung* of dysphoria and dread which had perfused antebellum Europe. In 1909, the radical liberal (and future head of Britain's wartime propaganda operation) C.F.G. Masterman (1873-1927) had diagnosed the universal build-up of armaments among the Powers and the growing gulf between classes in the European metropole as symptoms of an overweening entropic drive towards civilisational suicide:

With the vertical division between nation and nation armed to the teeth, and the horizontal division between rich and poor which has become a cosmopolitan fissure, the future of progress is still doubtful and precarious. Humanity – at best – appears but as a

¹ Paul Valéry, 'The Crisis of the Mind' (1919), in James Lawlor (ed.), *Paul Valéry: An Anthology*, trans. Jackson Mathews (London: Routledge, 1975), 94-107, 94-5, *emph. mine*.

shipwrecked crew which has taken refuge on a narrow ledge of rock, beaten by wind and wave; which cannot tell how many, if any at all, will survive when the long night gives place to morning. The wise man will still go softly all his days; working always for greater economic equality on the one hand, for understanding between estranged peoples on the other; apprehending always how slight an effort of stupidity or violence could strike a deathblow to twentieth century civilisation, and elevate the forces of destruction triumphant over the ruins of a world.²

Masterman was one of many who predicted shipwreck. Conservative novelist John Buchan (1875-1940), who during the war would combine his work for the government's propaganda effort at Wellington House with writing *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), has a character pontificate thus in *The Power-House* (1913):

You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass. A touch here, a push there, and you bring back the reign of Saturn.³

Buchan's words here summon to mind an eerily similar comment made by Bertrand Russell regarding Joseph Conrad's own prewar premonitions of civilisational collapse:

I felt... that he thought of civilized and morally tolerable human life as a dangerous walk on a thin crust of barely cooled lava which at any moment might break and let the unwary sink into fiery depths.⁴

Despite these premonitions of apocalypse, the eruption of the monstrous and bizarre into concrete reality represented by the outbreak of general war was regarded by British foreign policy dissenters like Morel with disbelief and a

² C.F.G Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), 303.

³ John Buchan, *The Power-House* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1916 [1913]), 26.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, 'Joseph Conrad', in *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), 85-91, 87.

mounting sense of dismay.⁵ Goldie Dickinson (1862-1932) – Cambridge historian, soon-to-be theorist of what he imagined as a ‘League of Nations’, and (alongside Morel) one of the most eloquent critics of the European system of ‘secret diplomacy’ – would recall his sense of the unreality and unknowability of events as the late summer of 1914 dwindled over the lawns at King’s:

As we sat by the river, in that marvellous summer, it seemed incredible what was going on over the water in France... The perfect weather continued, and the dumb impotent feeling of the gulf between nature, the past, all beautiful true and gracious things and beliefs, and this *black horror of inconceivability*...⁶

Other members of the incipient party of dissent struck a less elegiac note. Morgan Philips Price (1885-1973), who like Morel would be stripped of his parliamentary candidacy for the Liberals due to his anti-war position, before joining the Union of Democratic Control and thence the Labour Party, penned a seething letter to the Cobdenite *Economist* editor Francis Hirst (1873-1953) dated July 31st 1914, the day Russia mobilised for war:

Should Sir Edward Grey be hounded on by the Foreign Office and those devils at *The Times* to involve us in a European war, I hope a great outcry will be raised all over the country by those Liberals who still hold true to the traditions of Liberalism as enshrined in the lives of Bright, Gladstone and Cobden... This is the supreme crisis of Liberalism. Is everything we hold dear to be sacrificed to the Moloch of the ‘European Power Balance’? Are these barbarian Slavs to rule not only Asia but Europe also, in order that Jingo Editors may fatten, armament dividends increase, and the poor plunged further into social misery? I feel the gravity of the situation profoundly.⁷

⁵ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin, 2012), 488-98; Douglas Newton, *The Darkest Day: The Truth Behind Britain’s Rush to War, 1914* (London: Verso, 2015), 75-82, 95-106.

⁶ G. Lowes Dickinson, *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson and Other Unpublished Writings* (London: Duckworth, 1973), 189, *emph. mine*. Dickinson’s critique of secret diplomacy is to be found in *idem.*, *After the War* (London: A.C. Fifield, 1915). See also Sakiko Kaiga, *Britain and the Intellectual Origins of the League of Nations, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021), 66-90.

⁷ Quoted in Newton, 100.

The same bewildered Russophobia as evinced by Price was a common motif across dissenting opinion during the July Crisis. The radical journalist Alfred Gardiner (1865-1946), editor of the *Daily News*, expressed his own horror at the prospect of Englishmen fighting and dying for the Tsar's benefit:

The suggestion that we should spend British lives and British treasure to establish Russia in the Balkans would be an *inconceivable* outrage to a democratic country. Our hands are free in the business, and we must take care to keep them free.⁸

That Britain, the *echt*-liberal power, should commit itself to a European war in alliance with the Russian Empire – ‘virtually a synonym for economic and social backwardness in Europe’⁹ – was only the most parochially baffling element of the perfect storm of contingency which birthed the First World War. The Rude Goldberg machine of interlocking alliances and mobilisation plans which resulted in general conflagration may now be endowed, from our retroactive position relative to events, with a certain baleful inevitability, but from the forwards-facing position of the historical lifeworld, the signal quality of the July Crisis was surely the profound *unlikeliness* (indeed, ‘inconceivability’) of this precise conjuncture, by which the disintegration of Habsburg rule in the Balkans would ultimately trigger the long-foreseen apocalypse of the Great Powers.¹⁰ The absurd consent of the modern, supposedly *Realpolitikal* Concert of Powers to mutual annihilation was precipitated by a strictly *chaotic* causal chain, in which trigger cause and final effect are of totally incommensurable magnitudes:

War [must] be viewed as a breakdown in predictability; a situation in which small perturbations of initial conditions, such as malfunctions of early warning radar systems or irrational acts

⁸ Alfred Gardiner, ‘Russia and the War’, *Daily News*, 29 July 1914, *emph. mine*.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Abacus, 1995), 376. But *cf.* Olga Petrovich-Belkin *et al.*, ‘Russian Liberals and the Conceptual Foundations of Russian Foreign Policy in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Revolutionary Russia* 31.1 (2018), 46-66.

¹⁰ See David Stevenson, ‘From Balkan Conflict to Global Conflict: The Spread of the First World War, 1914-18’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7 (2011), 169-82.

of individuals disobeying orders, lead to large unforeseen changes in the solutions to the dynamical equations of the model.¹¹

The Great War illustrates this lunatic cascade quite clearly. No sane person could weigh Franz Ferdinand against Verdun or Ypres and find the scales at balance, yet every belligerent power consented hypothetically to such a trade after weighing the odds for reasons it found convincing in the moment, and therefore cast the die of zero-sum conflict in historical concrete.¹² Thus is the oneness by which History contingently-inevitably unfolds in the World, as a process of retroactive reflection on *possibilities* made *necessary* by the fact of their occurrence:

The necessity we see in the past is a function of the *reality* we grant to the past, even as we recognise that our access to this reality is through those aspects of that reality made *possible* by our re-presentations of the past. In this way we can appreciate how our present depends on the past (it would not be as it is had the past not been as it has been) while recognising that the past depends on the present (via efforts to make sense of it through its re-presentations. This twin dependence suggests that the relation between the past and the present can be characterised in terms of a dual *contingency*, the present as (ontologically) contingent on what happened in the past; the past as (epistemologically) contingent upon our ability to re-present it.¹³

There is a Hegelian *hapax* which can help us to approach in a properly philosophical manner this peculiar Janus-faced quality of the Event, by which absolute contingency is transmuted by the Worldly transit through time into

¹¹ Richard Neb Lebow, 'Contingency, Catalysts and Nonlinear Change: The Origins of World War I', in Jack Levy & Gary Goetz (eds.), *Explaining War and Peace: Case Studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals* (London: Routledge, 2007), 85-112. See also Alvin Saperstein, 'Chaos: A Model for the Outbreak of War', *Nature* 309 (1984), 303-5; Alan Beyerchen, 'Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War', *International Security* 17 (1993), 59-90.

¹² Cf. H. E. Goemans & Mark Fey, 'Risky but Rational: War as an Institutionally Induced Gamble', *Journal of Politics* 71.1 (2009), 35-54.

¹³ Fillion, 188-9.

absolute necessity: *absoluter Gegenstoss*, or, in Žižek's poetical translation, *absolute recoil*. As the latter explains,

What Hegel means by 'absolute recoil'... is this closed circle when there is a cause which is generating effects, but, at some point, cause is only a retroactive effect of its effects.¹⁴

Žižek illustrates this phenomenon, in which profoundly unlikely outcomes retroactively secure the determinate concrescence of their causes, with reference to the process by which a war breaks out:

We do not know what will happen, but if the war happens it will appear as if the war *had* to happen; that we were just postponing it. But if it doesn't happen, we will be telling ourselves a story of how it was clear that it was a 'false danger', 'the war couldn't happen', 'we are not so stupid to ruin civilisation', and so on. I think that this is the deepest Hegelian insight: *things become what they are only retroactively*.¹⁵

Thus, as the philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy describes,

If a memorable event occurs, for example the loss of a loved one, it was somehow bound to occur, while feeling at the same time that so long as it has not occurred, it is not inevitable. It is therefore the realization of the event – the fact that it actually occurs – that makes it retrospectively necessary.¹⁶

All past-writing is in this sense postlapsarian, irrevertible to the naïve subjectivity of Being in-the-moment; we are cursed to know the ends of things before the actors-in-time even understand that the scene has begun:

¹⁴ Hisham Aqeel, 'Visiting Hegel at Dusk: A Conversation with Slavoj Žižek', *Rethinking Marxism* 32.4 (2020), 459-66, 461.

¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, 'Hegel, Retroactivity & The End of History', *Continental Thought & Theory* 2.4 (2019), 3-10, 5-6.

¹⁶ Jean-Pierry Dupuy, *A Short Treatise on the Metaphysics of Tsunamis*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015 [2005]), 9.

There are hopes, plans, battles and ideas, but only in retrospective stories are hopes unfulfilled, plans miscarried, battles decisive, and ideas seminal.¹⁷

During the July Crisis, engaged and sensible observers in the party of peace who continued to insist that a general war would be ruinous to all involved, and therefore in the final analysis *could not occur*, were in fact furthest from grasping the internal systemic coherence of unfolding events. This was partly, of course, due to the basic fact that the future is unknowable to the subject; but it relates also to a fundamental misunderstanding of the logic of the events themselves – or rather, to the mistaken belief that historical events will unfold in a *logical* chain of determinate and proportional responses by rational actors.¹⁸ Their miscalculation was to presume the relevance of *calculation tout court* to unfurling events, rather than recognising the insuperability of the total situation's own chaotic causality. This is the paradox which Lacan identified under the punning sigil *les non-dupes errant*: those who refuse to allow themselves to be swept along by the inner sense of a situation, cynically insisting that self-interested 'objective' reason will eventually reassert itself, are in fact more deluded than those who partake of the reality of the symbolic fiction.¹⁹ I am reminded here of John Keegan's tragicomic description of Kaiser Wilhelm II, trapped in the vortex of irrational hyperrationality conjured into being by strategic automatisms and precisely-calibrated train timetables:

In the crisis of 1914, when he alone might have put brakes to the inexorable progression of the Schlieffen Plan, he found that he did not understand the machinery he was supposed to control, panicked, and let a piece of paper determine events.²⁰

¹⁷ Louis Mink, *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 60.

¹⁸ Cf. John Young, 'Emotions and the British Government's Decision for War in 1914', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 29.4 (2018), 543-64.

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XXI*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (1974), 21-33, https://nosubject.com/images/3/30/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XXI_les_non-dupes_errant.pdf.

²⁰ John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 51. On the July Crisis as the result of the systemic 'unthinkability' of peace within the situation-at-hand, see Paul Schroeder, 'Necessary Conditions and World War I as an Unavoidable War', in Levy & Goetz, 147-94.

From whence did this mad rationality – this ‘crackpot realism’, in C. Wright Mills’ apposite phrase, by which a commitment to the immanent rationality of ‘realist’ *ragion di stato* leads actors into objective lunacy – enter into the events of July, bending the procession of affairs to its own inscrutable will? The ultimate source of the crisis was the self-propelling causality of *total systemic determination* accentuated exponentially by its ramification through the technobureaucratic order, by dint of which a great mass of subjects willingly accede to a structural imperative that none regard as a preferable outcome. Such a phenomenon draws to mind a Nietzschean aphorism from the dawn of High Modern era: ‘Madness is rare in individuals – but in groups, political parties, nations, epochs, it is the rule’.²¹ Less wittily but more precisely, we have the judgement of Marcuse on the occult logic of the organised society:

The technical achievement of advanced industrial society, and the effective manipulation of mental and material productivity have brought about a *shift in the locus of mystification*. If it is meaningful to say that the ideology comes to be embodied in the process of production itself, it may also be meaningful to suggest that in this society, the rational rather than the irrational becomes the most effective vehicle of mystification.²²

For his own part, Mills would come to offer up something like a dissenters’ creed in defiance of the mysteries of the pseudo-rational state – one which Morel would surely have subscribed to:

We are among those who cannot get their mouths around all the little Yeses that add up to tacit acceptance of a world run by crackpot realists and subject to blind drift. And that, you see, is something to which we do belong; we belong to those who are still capable of personally rejecting. Our minds are not yet captive.²³

²¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 70.

²² Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1964]), 194. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1971 [1968]), 85-98.

²³ C. Wright Mills, *Letters and Autobiographical Writings* (Berkeley, CA: UCaP, 2000), 185.

ii.

On August 3rd 1914, the day before Germany brought the Schlieffen plan online by striking west into Belgium, Liberal Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey (1862-1933) attempted to reassure the House of Commons that Britain's national and imperial interests demanded a defence of France. Yet Grey's rhetorical decision to place the European conflagration within the historical continuum of British deployment in defence of the Empire not only failed to convince Ramsay MacDonald on the opposite bench, but also provided the rhetorical opening for that charismatic orator to mount a stinging critique of Britain's mopsical foreign policy decision-making more broadly. MacDonald directed the attention of the House to the ways in which appeals to national honour had previously been mobilised in service of bloody wars in the Crimea and on the Veldt. Referring specifically to conflict with the Boers, the Labour leader delivered a stark commonition: 'I have been through this before, and 1906 came as part recompense. It will come again'.²⁴ In drawing this direct line from the South African war to the present, MacDonald's opposition to the conflict which broke out in 1914 was thereby articulated as a continuation of the liberal dissenting tradition in British foreign affairs. His invocation of this moral mortmain created political space for the gradual conversion of a plethora of dissenting liberal intellectuals, politicians and activists to the Labour cause during and after the war, especially in light of widespread disillusionment with the Liberal Party itself over its militarism.²⁵ One of the most prominent of these figures, of course, was E.D. Morel.

How did Morel's political-intellectual *aftognosia* shape the form which his resistance to the prosecution of the war would go on to take? Strictly speaking, Morel was a 'pacifist' rather than a 'pacifist' in foreign policy – that is, he was not *absolutely* opposed to violence in all forms, including the fighting of defensive wars, but was instead committed to the avoidance of armed conflict whenever possible through the democratic control of foreign policy, and to the swift resolution of those which could not be averted.²⁶ The specific form of

²⁴ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 3 Aug 1914, cols. 1829-31.

²⁵ Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage, 2011), 104.

²⁶ Ceadel, *Semi-Detached*, 243-6.

Morel's relationship to the cause of peace, as with much of his ideological infrastructure, descended directly from the mainstream of the British radical liberal tradition in which his political subjectivity was forged, exemplified by the totemic figures of Richard Cobden and John Bright. Cobden and Bright had, in the previous century, given mature expression to the argument that peace was the best guarantor of continued improvement in material conditions for the majority of the people.²⁷ Free trade was hailed as 'God's diplomacy': the translation of the principle of enlightened self-interest to the geopolitical sphere. The nations of the world would surely avoid war in future, they believed, if only out of a hard-headed appraisal of the mutual plexure of their commercial interests.

This was not a new argument. The greatest cosmopolitan thinker of them all, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), had glimpsed in the progress of economic globalisation the prospect of perpetual peace:

As nature wisely separates nations which the will of each state, sanctioned even by the principles of international law, would gladly unite under its own sway by stratagem or force; in the same way, on the other hand, she unites nations whom the principle of a cosmopolitan right would not have secured against violence and war. And this union she brings about through an appeal to their mutual interests. The commercial spirit cannot co-exist with war, and sooner or later it takes possession of every nation. For, of all the forces which lie at the command of a state, the power of money is probably the most reliable. Hence states find themselves compelled – not, it is true, exactly from motives of morality – to further the noble end of peace and to avert war, by means of

²⁷ A.J.P. Taylor, 'John Bright and the Crimean War', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 36.2 (1954), 501-22; Alexander Tyrell, 'Making the Millennium: The Nineteenth Century Peace Movement', *HJ* 21.1 (1978), 75-95; Peter Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden', *British Journal of International Studies* 5.2 (1979), 229-47; David Nicholls, 'Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement, 1848-1853', *Journal of British Studies* 30.4 (1991), 351-76; Martin Ceadel, 'Cobden and Peace', in Anthony Howe & Simon Morgan (eds.), *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (London, Routledge, 2006), 189-207; Anthony Howe, 'Radicalism, Free Trade, and Foreign Policy in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain', in William Mulligan & Brendan Simms (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660-2000* (London: PM, 2010), 167-80.

mediation, wherever it threatens to break out, just as if they had made a permanent league for this purpose.²⁸

Such a line of thought is older even than Kant – as old, indeed, as liberal ideology itself, of which it constitutes a crucial pillar. Here is Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), for instance, on the irenic precipitate of fruitful commerce:

Peace is the natural effect of trade. Two nations who traffic with each other become reciprocally dependent; for if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling; and thus their union is founded on their mutual necessities.²⁹

In all its many historical variations, however, the ‘commercial peace’ theory runs essentially thus: conflict will be averted via the prophylaxis of the hidden hand, which binds nations together in relationships of mutual advantage. War serves only the sectional interests of those who look to profit from the sale of armaments, and who consequently propagate jingoism through their malign influence on the press and politicians. Taking up the Kantian baton, Cobden’s own proposed solution to the warmongering gulosity of these undemocratic elites was a programme of liberal institutional reform, in particular the introduction of a fairer system of parliamentary representation, allowing the moderating influence of the naturally pacifistic ‘common people’ to exercise restraint on self-serving militarism:

If you had a thorough representation in Parliament, you could not persuade the people of this country to spend half the money which is now spent under the pretence of protecting them, but which is

²⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, trans. Mary Campbell-Smith (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1903 [1795]), 157. On internationalism and the cosmopolitan ‘vocation’ as major *themata* of Kant’s work, see Reidar Maliks, *Kant’s Politics in Context* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 144-67.

²⁹ Charles Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Colonial Press, 1899 [1748]), 316. For the perseverance of this intellectual throughline into the twentieth century, see Edwin van der Haar, ‘Ludwig von Mises, Capitalism, and Peace’, in *Classical Liberalism and International Relations Theory* (New York: PM, 2009) 75-100; Jorg Spieker, ‘F.A. Hayek and the Reinvention of Liberal Internationalism’, *International Historical Review* 26.5 (2014), 919-42.

really spent in order that certain parties may get some sort of benefit out of it.³⁰

In the commonsensical humanism of their assumptions regarding the rational, predictable behaviour of subjects and states, Cobden and Bright were building not just on Kant, but also on the intellectual foundations set down by the calculative utilitarian school of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), John Stuart Mill (1806-73) and their epigones.³¹ Yet that tradition itself did not confer a unitary heritage to its legatees, and its two central thinkers occupied opposing positions on certain crucial points regarding peace and war. Bentham (setting down an argument that Morel himself would come to fulsomely advance) declared in his 'Principles of International Law' (1789) that conflicts typically broke out as a result of intrigues among the international elite, contradicting the natural harmony of interests which in fact existed between the plebeian inhabitants of all nations.³² Bentham's consequent endorsement of a negative foreign policy, trending in Cobdenite fashion towards isolationism (save for an enthusiastic engagement in trade), stood in direct contrast to the ideas of the other most prominent Utilitarian philosopher, Mill, who instead came to formulate an active doctrine of benignant humanitarian intervention for the post-Napoleonic age of British hegemony.³³ In 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention' (1859), Mill asserted that, under certain conditions, it was the duty of powerful enlightened states, like Britain, to interfere actively and forcefully in international affairs in order to defend the rights of weaker nations to sovereignty and self-determination against the aggression of uncivilised neighbours. Furthermore, *contra* Bentham, the crucial factor in deciding

³⁰ Richard Cobden, 'Foreign Policy, Rochdale, 29 October 1862', in *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy. Vol. 2: War, Peace, and Reform* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1870), <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/smith-speeches-on-questions-of-public-policy-vol-2-war-peace-and-reform>. See also W.H. Dawson, *Richard Cobden and Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926), 106; Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 7-12.

³¹ Stephen Conway, 'Bentham, the Benthamites, and the Nineteenth-Century British Peace Movement', *Utilitas* 2.2 (1990), 221-43.

³² Jeremy Bentham, 'Principles of International Law', in John Bowring (ed.), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh: W. Tait, 1843), v.2, 551-9.

³³ Georgios Varouxakis, 'John Stuart Mill on Intervention and Non-Intervention', *Millennium* 26.1 (1997), 57-76; Carol Prager, 'Intervention and Empire: John Stuart Mill and International Relations', *Political Studies* 53 (2005), 621-40. See also Mark Swatek-Evenstein, *A History of Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), 42-164.

whether foreign intervention is justifiable or not must be *moral judgement*, rather than a consultation of existing international law or international consensus: progress, after all, is only to be made by challenging and overcoming outdated norms.³⁴

Mill's international theory was the correlate of his grand personal philosophy of History, one filtered through personal experience of the liberal imperialism of the nineteenth century.³⁵ The philosopher was for several decades directly involved in Britain's imperial domination of South Asia through his affiliation with India House. His cod-Darwinian understanding of human progress placed the concepts of 'barbarism' and 'civilisation' at opposite ends of a sliding scale, with the nomadic societies of the indigenous Americans at the bottom, India a notch above, and Great Britain (naturally) at the top.³⁶ While a general policy of mutual non-interventionism was usually to be preferred, especially between 'civilised' Powers, it was nevertheless Mill's view that a 'barbarous' people might require a more sustained involvement by an outside power than would ever be acceptable when meddling in the affairs of a more advanced state:

A civilised government cannot help having barbarous neighbours: when it has, it cannot always content itself with a defensive position, one of mere resistance to aggression. After a longer or shorter interval of forbearance, it either finds itself obliged to conquer them, or to assert so much authority over them, and so to break their spirit, that they gradually sink into a state of dependence upon itself; and when that time arrives, they are

³⁴ On the tortuous effort to construct an international legal order for armed conflict during the *Belle Époque*, see James Crossland, *War, Law and Humanity: The Campaign to Control Warfare, 1853-1914* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

³⁵ Beate Jahn, 'Barbarian Thoughts: Imperialism in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005), 599-618; Vasilis Grolios, 'Philosophy of History and Philosophical Anthropology in J.S. Mill's Views on Colonialism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19.2 (2014), 187-206.

³⁶ Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford, CA: SUP, 1994); Mark Tunick, 'Tolerant Imperialism: John Stuart Mill's Défense of British Rule in India', *Review of Politics* 68.4 (2006), 586-611. In his 'civilisational racism', Mill is the legatee of an enduring strand of the liberal tradition: see James Farr, 'Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery', *Political Theory* 36.4 (2008), 495-522; Huaping Lu-Adler, 'Kant and Slavery, or, Why He Never Became a Racial Egalitarian', *Critical Philosophy of Race* 10.2 (2022), 263-94.

indeed no longer formidable to it, but it has had so much to do with setting up and pulling down their governments, and they have grown so accustomed to leaning on it, that it has become morally responsible for all evil it allows them to do.³⁷

This call to arms would sound with especial urgency should an aggressive, barbarous power decide to involve itself uninvited in the affairs of a smaller, weaker neighbour (Belgium, say). In this way, the general progress of humanity out of savagery and towards civilisation might be guarded from the ever-present threat of entropic backsliding; such was the wing of the utilitarian heritage assimilated by the likes of Edward Grey. Thus, we may observe that the liberal fratricide provoked by the outbreak of war in 1914 descended from a century-old disagreement within the tradition regarding the properly 'progressive' attitude to the problem of war.

During the 1890s and 1900s, the Benthamite anti-war position began to fuse with a related critique, one which regarded the destructive potential of advances in military technology with gathering dread.³⁸ In 1898, the Polish financier Jan Bloch (1836-1902) published his six-volume magnum opus on *The Future of War*, arguing that if civilisation was to survive, war must be abolished.³⁹ Bloch made the prescient case that the size of the armies which could now be mobilised by industrial nations, coupled with the exponentially intensifying destructive capacities of modern weaponry, would lead not only to an increase in the scale of wars but also to a huge swing in the military balance of power towards the defender of any given position, resulting necessarily in bloody stalemates and calamitous loss of resources (as the American Civil War

³⁷ John Stuart Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention' (1859), in *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education: Collected Works, Volume XXI*, ed. J.M Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 109–24.

³⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace For The First World War* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 270–3.

³⁹ Jan Bloch, *Is War Now Impossible? Being an Abridgement of 'The War of the Future in its Technical, Economic, and Political Relations'* (London: Grant Richards, 1899). See T.H.E. Travers, 'Technology, Tactics, and Morale: Jean de Bloch, the Boer War, and British Military Theory, 1900-1914', *Journal of Modern History* 51.2 (1979), 264–86; Paolo Motta, 'Economy and Conduct of War: The Theory of Ivan Bloch', *History of Economic Ideas* 3.3 (1995), 65–91; Andrzej Pieczewski, 'John Bloch's *The Future of War*: Pacifism Based on Economics', *Annales: Ethics in Economic Life* 19.4 (2016), 67–80.

had vividly illustrated for those with eyes to see).⁴⁰ Under such circumstances, war could only be ‘a catastrophe which would destroy all existing political institutions’, and could never be regarded as being in the rational self-interest of a nation. The main strands of Bloch’s argument were introduced to a wider audience in the Anglophone world by Morel’s future UDC colleague Norman Angell (1872-1967) in his own prognostic bestseller, *The Great Illusion* (1909).⁴¹ This ‘illusion’, Angell argued, was the idea that war could ever be an economic or social boon for a belligerent nation. Modern, globalised capitalism required a stable world to sustain its complex networks of accumulation; no nation could now prosper without the markets and resources of other countries. As such, war could only ever be economically disastrous not just for the defeated, but the victors as well:

The more our commercial system gains in complication, the more does the common prosperity of us all come to depend upon the due performance of all contracts. Commercial development is broadly illustrating one profound truth: that the real basis of social morality is self-interest. If the subject of rivalry between nations is business, the code which has come to dominate business must necessarily come to dominate the conduct of governments.⁴²

At the moment when the Great War engulfed Europe in the summer of 1914, there existed already in the British public sphere a well-stocked conceptual armoury of radical liberal arguments for peace with which to mount a resistance: Kant’s faith in the prophylaxis of commercial peace; Bentham’s suspicion of the undemocratic forces within the state that precipitated war; and

⁴⁰ See Edward Hagerman, *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), esp. 175-98; Earl Hess, ‘Tactics, Trenches, and Men in the Civil War’, in Jorg Nagler & Stig Förster (eds.), *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 481-96.

⁴¹ Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage* (London: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1910). See J. D. B. Miller, ‘Norman Angell and Rationality in International Relations’, in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Interwar Idealism Reassessed* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 100-12; Andrew Williams, ‘Norman Angell and his French Contemporaries, 1905–1914’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21.4 (2010), 574-92; Martin Ceadel, ‘The Founding Text of International Relations? Norman Angell’s Seminal yet Flawed *The Great Illusion* (1909–1938)’, *Review of International Studies* 37.4 (2011), 1671-93.

⁴² Angell, *Illusion*, 79.

Bloch's horror at the destructive powers which modern technology threatened to unleash into the World. Many of the men and women who would come together to form the Union of Democratic Control – people like Angell, Bertrand Russell, and (of course) E.D. Morel – identified with this cosmopolitan tradition and held true to its henotic principles in the face of a suddenly non-hypothetical catastrophe. We now turn to the practical and propagandistic ends to which that intellectual legacy was put.

iii.

Britain's antebellum peace movement, ineffectual as it may retroactively seem in light of the events of July 1914, was nonetheless stronger and more broadly supported than its analogues in any of the major Powers except the United States. Martin Ceadel attributes this state of affairs primarily to Britain's relative security from the threat of invasion compared to its European neighbours, owing to the natural moat defensive of the Channel. Such a buffer against harm produced a comparatively relaxed public discourse on issues of war (especially when compared to the prickly neurosis of post-Sedan France), and thus provided space within itself for the espousal of pacifism without the speaker facing accusations of disloyalty or defeatism.⁴³ Yet if Britain's unique security allowed for the upgrowth of a legitimised peace movement in the pre-war years, it also served to minimise the perceived importance of foreign affairs in the public sphere – that classic 'Fog in Channel; Continent Cut Off' parochialism which has never truly been expunged from the psyche of John Bull. As such, the anti-war movement, whilst unstigmatised in peacetime, was also not entrenched especially *deeply* in British life in terms of its emotional valence or political priority. This helps to explain its ultimate weakness in the face of rampant reactionary appeals to 'Crown, Country, and Empire' which accompanied the outbreak of hostilities.⁴⁴

⁴³ 'Post-Sedan': see Karine Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat: The War of 1870-71 in French Memory* (London: PM, 2008), 25-55

⁴⁴ Martin Ceadel, 'Attitudes to War: Pacifism and Collective Security', in Paul Johnson (ed.), *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), 221-41, 222.

As the enthusiastic but nebulous pre-war peace movement withered amidst the jingoistic onslaught in late 1914, a cluster of new, more organised societies (of which Morel's Union of Democratic Control was just one, though the most prominent) sprang up in the early months of the war to take its place.⁴⁵ Two of these – the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR) – may be described as strictly 'pacifist': that is, unconditionally opposed to all forms of armed conflict.⁴⁶ The UDC, however (like Morel himself), is better categorised as 'pacificist', a situational stance *vis-à-vis* non-violence well-expressed by early member Bertrand Russell:

The question of whether war is ever justified, and if so under what circumstances, is one which has been forcing itself upon the attention of all thoughtful men. On this question I find myself in the somewhat painful position of holding that no single one of the combatants is justified in the present war, while not taking the extreme Tolstoyan view that war is under all circumstances a crime...⁴⁷

If not the total rejection of resort to arms of Christian pacifism as practiced by the *Tolstovsty* and the FoR, what then were the specific granulations of the UDC's pacificist philosophy? In its public statements of purpose, the organisation elevated four interlinked claims (all bearing the stamp of Cobdenite radical liberalism) to the status of ideological lodestars:

1) Resort to war is *irrational*; it is almost always morally wrong; it can and should be prevented. The pacific resolution of disputes is entirely possible because of the good sense of man and his natural dislike for conflict.

⁴⁵ Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford: OUP, 1971); Sally Harris, *Out of Control: Foreign Policy and the Union of Democratic Control, 1914-1918* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ Thomas Kennedy, 'Fighting About Peace: The No-Conscription Fellowship and the British Friends' Service Committee, 1915-1919', *Quaker History* 69.1 (1980), 3-22; Bert den Boggende, 'Richard Roberts' Vision and the Founding of the Fellowship of Reconciliation', *Albion* 36.4 (2004), 608-35.

⁴⁷ Bertrand Russell, 'The Ethics of War', *International Journal of Ethics* 25.2 (1915), 127-42, 127. Cf. Ian Attack, 'Tolstoy's Pacifism and the Critique of State Violence', Jorg Kustermans *et al.* (eds.), *Pacifism's Appeal: Ethos, History, Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 81-102.

- 2) All national communities are entitled to sovereignty and self-determination on the Westphalian model, as well as to equal treatment under international law and access to the global marketplace.
- 3) Balance of power politics, entangling alliances, and secret agreements are profoundly dangerous. They sow mistrust and provoke arms races, and therefore lead to conflict.
- 4) Imperialism is exploitative and based in greed. It promotes rivalry between states, and as such ought to be curtailed.⁴⁸

The dissenting coalition which rallied around these principles in Morel's new organisation was comprised of both radical liberals and liberal socialists, bound by increasingly tight relationships of coadjuvancy. Indeed, the Union would become an important facilitator in the transition of individuals from the former bloc to the latter during and after the war (one of those figures being Morel), as part of Labour's wider supersession of the Liberals as Britain's preeminent progressive party.⁴⁹ Yet the UDC's broad-church approach to coalition-building came with a necessary corollary, as the group found itself the target of criticism from both right and left of its centre of gravity. The *echt*-liberal Russell found the organisation to be excessively ambitious in its attempts to end the war and steer the direction of the peace; the UDC leadership seemed, he wrote, 'like eight fleas talking of building a pyramid'.⁵⁰ To the ILP activist, and later founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Ellen Wilkinson (1891-1945), by way of contrast, the more 'pacifist' leanings of the UDC made the organisation's anti-war commitment seem lamentably lukewarm:

To the ardent pacifist it is a tragedy that the advocacy of the cause of peace should be largely represented in Britain by as cautious a body as the UDC. Its 'four points' are so admirably moderate and

⁴⁸ Harris, 5.

⁴⁹ Keith Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', *History* 80.259 (1995), 207-26; John Shepherd, 'The Flight from the Liberal Party: Liberals Who Joined Labour, 1914-31', *Journal of Liberal History* 67 (2010), 24-34.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Jo Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (New York: St Martin's, 1980), 12.

remote that no intelligent person, not quite blinded by party, could honestly disagree with them.⁵¹

The UDC's principled but non-radical approach, and especially its commitment to a 'just peace', would be adopted wholesale by the Labour Party during the latter years of the conflict, as can be clearly perceived in the strikingly Morelian tone of their 'Statement of War Aims', published in August 1917.⁵² This proclamation made the argument that the working people of Europe, being innately pacifistic – as Bentham had argued a century earlier – 'had themselves no hand in' the outbreak of war, but were plunged into it by their leaders (compare Morel: 'Will the peoples begin to understand that their real enemies are not their neighbours against whom they hurl shot and shell; but that their real enemies are those same groups of men who, in every land... hound the peoples to mutual destruction?'); it advocated for 'territorial readjustments' not in terms of spoils of war but 'on the general principle of allowing all people to settle their own destinies' (Morel: 'No province shall be transferred from one Government to another without the consent, by plebiscite or otherwise, of the population of such province'); and, most strikingly of all, a central emphasis was placed on the democratisation of national foreign affairs, couched in the Morelian language of 'secret diplomacy', including a reiteration of his complaint in *Truth and the War* (1916) regarding the unaccountability of Foreign Ministers (those clancular panjandrums who, Morel exclaims, had created 'in the management of our foreign affairs an autocracy more complete than that wielded by Tsar or Kaiser'): 'The British Labour movement relies very largely upon... the suppression of secret diplomacy, and on the placing of foreign policy, just as much as home policy, under the control of popularly elected Legislatures; [and] on the absolute responsibility of the Foreign Minister of each country to its legislature'.⁵³

⁵¹ Quoted in Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), 144. Wilkinson is a fascinating figure in her own right: see Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2016).

⁵² Found in Keith Laybourn, *The Labour Party 1881-1951: A Reader in History* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1988), 75-6.

⁵³ Laybourn, *Labour*, 75; Morel quotes from E.D. Morel, *Truth and the War* (London: National Labour Press, 1916), 43, 172, 274.

As the Labour Party adopted a Morelian line on the war, Morel himself would in turn finally renounce his own longstanding liberal affiliation and throw his lot in with Labour in early 1918 – though not without the addendum of significant caveats:

There is Socialism and Socialism, and mine is of the reasonable and moderate kind... So far as any Party can express what appear to me to be the country's needs, the ILP approximates nearer to my outlook than any other, although I still look forward and hope for the day when all really progressive forces can unite under the title of the Democratic Party.⁵⁴

As the somewhat muted tone of Morel's statement suggests, his newfound attachment to the socialist camp was the result not so much of a sudden conversion to the doctrines of Marx and Engels as much as an irreconcilable political alienation from the mainstream liberal position as represented by Edward Grey and David Lloyd George, along with a personal estrangement from the Liberal Party as an organisation. Morel's dissenting position had calamitised his nascent political career. In November of 1912, he had been selected as the prospective Liberal candidate for the parliamentary seat of Birkenhead, just across the Mersey from Liverpool. Newspaper reports of the choice reflected approvingly on the suitability of this 'remarkable man' for the post: 'The announcement will, we are certain, give the utmost satisfaction to all Liberals in the constituency', beamed the *Birkenhead News*.⁵⁵ A commentator in the *Hawarden Chronicle* remarked, with wry understatement, that 'if [Morel] is returned for Birkenhead – as no doubt he will be – in the House he will not be a silent member'.⁵⁶ The Labour Party, meanwhile, evinced a certain spurned sniffiness at the selection, though still shot through with personal respect: 'We only know', an unnamed 'prominent Labour worker' opined, 'that he is Mr. Morel, and that he has done good work on the Congo. Before we can say whether we will support him or not, we must know his opinion on many questions – housing, nationalisation of the land, and the like'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Quoted in Cline, 114.

⁵⁵ F15/4/1, *Birkenhead News*, Nov 2 1912.

⁵⁶ F15/4/1, *Hawarden Chronicle*, Nov 9 1912.

⁵⁷ F15/4/1, *Birkenhead News*, Nov 6 1912.

In his first speech as candidate-elect, Morel articulated the core of his personal understanding of radical liberalism. Diagnosing ‘the terrible inequalities in well-being which divided the various classes of the population’ as ‘the greatest of the problems which confronted our national life’, one which indeed threatened the very ‘root of our racial power’, Morel proclaimed his conviction that ‘liberalism afforded the most practicable and the sanest means of grappling with this huge problem’.⁵⁸ This was an implicit rejection of socialism (as we have already observed in the case of Russell, the liberal invocation of ‘sanity’ is always counterposed to the presupposed fanaticism of the left and right), shot through with the ‘practical’ Liverpoolian attitude of the reformist merchant milieu in which he had received his political education.⁵⁹ ‘Mr Morel’s religion [is] evolution, not revolution’, as the leader of the Birkenhead Liberal Party declared.⁶⁰ Yet upon the outbreak of war, Morel’s moderation ultimately counted for nothing among his liberal fellow-travellers when measured against his repudiation of militarism. In August 1914, he despatched a long and thoughtful letter to the Executive Council of the Birkenhead Liberal Association, outlining his considered position on the war and offering to resign his nomination if they felt that his opposition to the government line rendered his candidacy untenable. To his disgust, they accepted. This moment of exauguration, in which Morel caught a glimpse of the naked face of liberal imperialism behind the mask of the *schöne Seele*, jolted him out of his comfortable Cobdenite stance, as the incompatibility of his deeply-held personal principles with actually-existing liberalism’s bloodthirsty nationalism precipitated a radical reconfiguration of his self-sense. As he would later outline with not a little bitterness to Gilbert Murray, the moderate Liberal who reluctantly acceded to the belligerent line:

When the war broke out, I had probably outside the ranks of prominent politicians a larger personal following than any other single private citizen in the country; I was a candidate for

⁵⁸ F15/4/1, *Manchester Guardian*, Nov 9 1912.

⁵⁹ On the load-bearing function of the concept of ‘sanity’ in liberal ideology, see Emily Robinson, ‘Defining Progressive Politics: Municipal Socialism and Anti-Socialism in Contestation, 1889-1939’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76.4 (2015), 609-31, 628. Cf. Shaun Young (ed.), *Reasonableness in Liberal Philosophy* (London: Taylor & Francis [hereafter T&F], 2014).

⁶⁰ F14/4/1, *Birkenhead News*, Dec 7 1912.

Parliament and sitting on an import Government Commission. Do you really imagine a man deliberately flings away all that sort of thing represents, and lays himself open to every kind of abuse, unless it be under the influence of the profoundest conviction? ⁶¹

We may measure the extent of Morel's disillusionment with the belligerent mainstream of British liberalism after 1914 in his most plangent blast of counterpropaganda, 1916's *Truth and the War* – the work for which he would ultimately be jailed by the Lloyd George regime. His declared intention therein was to overthrow certain mistruths which had gradually calcified into 'axioms' in British public discussion of the origins and aims of the war, and 'to do so not by elaborating opinions or indulging in rhetoric, but by recalling concrete facts', as he proclaimed (without the slightest quiver of irony) in a characteristically piquant rhetorical exclamation.⁶² Such a transformation could only be effected by the power of hard-headed rationality: 'we must', Morel urged, 'look out upon the world as it is and frame our action in conformity therewith'.⁶³ One may nevertheless observe here, in the harping on *facts*, a rhetorical continuity with the forensic register of *Red Rubber*; despite the renunciation of his political affiliation, Morel continued to deploy that distinctive appeal to *reasonableness* of the liberal discursive sensibility which we remarked on above. This is not the only thread of rhetorical continuity between *Red Rubber* and *Truth*. From the very first sentence of the latter work, we found ourselves in Morel's favoured mode of emotive automartyrology: 'During the past twelve months', he writes, 'I have been one of the best-abused men in the British Isles'.⁶⁴ The reason for this abuse, we are informed, is that Morel's efforts to argue that the outbreak of the war could not be attributed solely to Germany, and that a lasting peace must consist of a complex negotiated settlement rather than merely 'crushing' the enemy, had been slandered as 'unpatriotic', even 'pro-German'. Morel is thus seeking here to exculpate himself from viral calumnies circulating in the bourgeois press by proving the truth of his charge that no single nation can be blamed for the outbreak of the First World War. Instead,

⁶¹ Quoted in Cline, 98. On Murray and pro-war liberalism, see Charles Carpenter, 'Shaw and Bertrand Russell versus Gilbert Murray on Britain's Entry into World War I: The Inside Story', *Shaw* 33 (2013), 25-54.

⁶² Morel, *Truth*, 162.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

he argues, the conflict's ebullition was the direct result of the anti-democratic system of so-called 'secret diplomacy' which had dominated international politics in the decades before 1914, and its prolongation was attributable to the propaganda of the ruling classes and their outriders in the media apparatus, who risked nothing in the war but could gain materially in victory. It was the conflict of interest between these undemocratic forces *within* nations and their subject populations, rather than between reified 'national communities' of ethnic identity, which represented the genuinely antagonistic relationship in the modern world, a contradiction which ultimately would have to be expressed in a global climacteric eclipsing the present war in its apocalyptic magnitude:

The war of tomorrow will be a war, not between nations, but between influences and forces within nations divided into two opposing camps.⁶⁵

To impose a punitive peace settlement on Germany, then, would only serve to bolster the most stridently chauvinistic voices within that nation, permitting the power elite to continue their exploitation of gentilitia particularism to their own ends. Such an outcome must be avoided at all costs if the twentieth century was not to become a grimly unprecedented era of blood and iron:

The future of the European peoples – of the whole world, indeed – depends for many generations to come upon whether reaction in Russia and Germany joins hands against Democracy in Germany and Russia – or the other way about. We can turn the hopes of the German people towards the more liberal West or towards the reactionary East in the measure in which we attempt – or do not attempt – to make this war an excuse for interference in their constitutional and domestic affairs.⁶⁶

'The peoples have been helpless to save themselves' from the outbreak and continued prosecution of the war, Morel continues, 'because they have been lacking in combination, organisation, and effective co-operation'.⁶⁷ As such, what was required to bring the war to a swift conclusion and prevent its repetition

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 312

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 16

was the universal rejection of the jingoistic exhortations of the national elites (the ‘tubthumping and tinsel’ of empire, as he dubbed it elsewhere), who suffered nothing from the war, and the recognition of common interests and the construction of *international solidarity* between the peoples of the combatant nations.⁶⁸ As Morel argues, it is precisely *contrary* to the material interests of the international working class to allow themselves to be swept along in hatred of their foreign counterparts. Those populist elements in the power elite who would fan the flames of chauvinism must instead be recognised as the true enemies of the people, wrapping themselves in the flag as a means of disguise:

Both the Anti-German League and the Anti-German Union appear particularly desirous of capturing the working man. Curiously enough, they have neglected to include representatives of the working class among their patrons and committees. More curious still, these are exclusively drawn from a class which – as a class – abominates the claims of labour, and in peace time, utilises the whole machinery at its disposal to counteract them.⁶⁹

Morel was profoundly wary of spasms of national feeling drummed up by Britain’s ruling classes, whose material interests were, in reality, common to the landholders and capitalists of all Europe. As he wryly notes of the aristocracy, ‘their patriotism... has a silver lining’.⁷⁰ On the other hand, deploying a classic reformist line, Morel hints at several points that an overhaul of British and international foreign policy would be in the overall systemic interests of the landholders and capitalists, even if it might not seem so in the short term, because the alternative might be the development of a violent revolutionary situation across the continent. In order to avoid this outcome, a ‘safety valve’ for the grievances of the working classes must be found, in the form of democratising reforms which would delimit the deep powers of bureaucratic elites and the executive within the state.⁷¹

⁶⁸ ‘Tinsel’: F15/4/1, *Liverpool Courier*, Jan 14 1913.

⁶⁹ Morel, *Truth*, 216

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 186

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 178-9. Jan Bloch, for example, also deploys this argument in *Future* (1898); and compare the Second International’s Stuttgart Resolution of 1907, which declared that it was the duty of the socialist movement ‘to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule’ (quoted

In mounting his resistance to the powers and prerogatives of the imperial state, Morel positions himself (as in *Red Rubber*) as a lonely crusader, armed only with his commitment to the truth against the hypocrisy of the powerful:

In the absence of Governmental and Parliamentary leadership and in the functional abdication of the Press, we are reduced to pursue the search for truth by such lights as we individually possess.⁷²

Indeed, he extends this heroic figuration as isolated truth-teller to his fellow founders of the UDC:

When discussion reached the point of decision, just five individuals in the group felt that the effort must be made. Fully conscious of their own deficiencies and shortcomings, but confident alike in one another's integrity, and in the righteousness of the cause they espoused, they launched their frail barque upon the troubled seas.⁷³

Even more so than in *Red Rubber*, this valiant self-patterning offers the reader a framework through which to interpret Morel's own rhetoric and actions. And just as in *Red Rubber*, the most telling outward signs of immorality in Morel's ethical typology is *hypocrisy*, of the sort previously practiced by Leopold's propagandists, who boasted of the King's civilising mission in aid of the benighted African while occluding the monstrous reality behind a veil of secrecy. It was hypocrisy alone, for instance, which allowed the British to regard their diplomatic conduct as being of a fundamentally higher moral order to that of Germany. Whilst the inhabitants of his island 'entertain in peculiar degree the illusion that we enjoy a truly democratic constitution' (despite the blatantly 'autocratic' conduct of the Foreign Office), Morel speaks almost admiringly of Germany's frankness about the universal dishonesty of international diplomacy.⁷⁴ With regards to Bethmann Hollweg's (1856-1921) notorious remark expressing disbelief that Britain and Germany could possibly go to war

in Marc Mulholland, "'Marxists of Strict Observance'? The Second International, National Defence, and the Question of War', *HJ* 58.2 (2015), 615-40, 615.

⁷² Morel, *Truth*, 224-5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 170

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

over such a piddling issue as Belgian neutrality, Morel refused to be carried along by the pearl-clutching consensus:

When in September, 1914, I read... the famous phrase of the German Chancellor about the 'scrap of paper', it struck me then, and it strikes me now, less on the score of its immorality than on the score of its *honesty*. It is the one statement, perhaps, in the whole official collection of despatches to which the word 'honest' is completely applicable.⁷⁵

It was also this hypocrisy *vis-à-vis* the conduct of diplomacy which allowed Britain to portray the war as a 'clash of civilisations', rather than a coming together of *realpolitikal* aims and strategic anxieties:

Even those who take the sanest view of our own grave national and Imperial problems endorse the postulate that this war is fundamentally a war between two ideals, the ideal of liberty incarnated in the British Constitution, and the ideal of tyrannous reaction incarnated in the German Confederation... So far, those organs of the Press which used to be 'Liberal' complacently envisage, in the name of liberty, a future Europe in which the present Allies, armed to the teeth, shall 'permanently hold down' a forcibly disarmed Germany.⁷⁶

These counter-concepts of honesty and hypocrisy were also raised in the context of British liberalism by at least one outside observer. In 1915, Morel found himself the subject of a high-handed inspection by none other than V.I. Lenin, in a short essay on the subject of 'British Pacifism'. Though in some respects simply the usual fulminating broadside against Kautsky semi-disguised as an overview of British attitudes to the war, Lenin's article nevertheless highlights the overlap of positions and arguments between the radical liberal Morel and many self-described European 'Marxists' of the

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi. Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 136: 'This friendly, receptive, cards-on-the-table aspect of German *honesty* may be the most dangerous and most successful disguise that the German has mastered: it is his true Mephistophelian art'. On the development of the German 'realist' tradition in foreign policy (and its subsequent bequest to the governing class of the American empire), see Matthew Specter, *The Atlantic Realists: Empire and International Political Thought Between Germany and the United States* (Stanford, CA: SUP, 2022), 18-49.

⁷⁶ Morel, *Truth*, 243

reformist type during this period. To Lenin, the long-standing traditions of bourgeois political liberty in Britain, combined with the clarity of its class stratification, had rendered that nation's political discourse unusually open, more 'honest' and denuded of theoretical obfuscation. As such:

Various shades of bourgeois opinion [are] able to find rapid, free and open expression in that country's new political organisations. One such organisation is the Union of Democratic Control, whose secretary and treasurer is E. D. Morel.⁷⁷

In Lenin's eyes, Morel's sincere and passionate campaigning against governmental dishonesty and in favour of peace, disarmament and self-determination elevated him above the mass of his class confreres:

As an individual, Morel undoubtedly deserves credit for his sincere sympathy with democracy, for turning away from the jingoist bourgeoisie to the pacifist bourgeoisie... We cannot but admit that we are dealing with an exceptionally honest and courageous bourgeois, who is not afraid to break with his own party.⁷⁸

Yet in the final analysis, Lenin concluded,

Morel is a bourgeois, whose talk about peace and disarmament is a lot of empty phrases, since without revolutionary action by the proletariat there can be neither a democratic peace nor disarmament. Though he has broken with the liberals on the question of the present war, Morel remains a liberal on all other economic and political issues.⁷⁹

Such a totalising dismissal must be understood in light of Lenin's anti-reformist line that, in modern capitalism, there no longer existed such a thing as a 'progressive middle class'; the petty bourgeoisie were so thoroughly intermeshed with Capital, militarism and state power as to be irredeemable, and bourgeois

⁷⁷ V.I. Lenin, 'British Pacifism and the British Dislike of Theory' (1915), *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishing, 1974), v.21, 261-2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 262-3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

politics as a whole was *ipso facto* inseparable from imperialism.⁸⁰ For all of Morel's personal qualities, he was nonetheless no ally of socialism – and, in Lenin's Clausewitzian understanding of class struggle as *war*, anyone who is not an ally is necessarily an enemy.⁸¹

Here, though, comes an interesting turn, which brings us back to Lenin's diagnosis of British politics as in some way particularly 'honest', owing to the historic predominance of commonsensical empiricism in that country's philosophical tradition:

With their dislike of abstract theory and their pride in their practicality, the British often pose political issues more directly, thus helping the socialists of other countries to discover the actual content beneath the husk of wording of every kind (including the Marxist).⁸²

In a characteristic collapse of fine gradation, Lenin asserts that Morel's liberal-utilitarian position on the war, derived principally from Cobden and Bentham, is in truth indistinguishable from that of Kautsky, a so-called socialist who nonetheless insists on hypocritically dressing his 'bourgeois phrases about peace and disarmament' in a 'Marxist guise'.⁸³ In this way, Lenin affords to Morel a kind of perverse respect withheld from his reformist 'comrade':

In Germany it is not frankness that is prevalent, but Kautsky's hypocrisy and playing at sophistry. That is why it is so instructive to cast a glance at the situation in a more advanced country, where nobody will be taken in with sophisms or a travesty of Marxism. Here issues are stated in a more straightforward and truthful manner. Let us learn from the 'advanced' British.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Marc Mulholland, *Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear: From Absolutism to Neoconservatism* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 157-8.

⁸¹ Jacob Kipp, 'Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921', *Military Affairs* 49.4 (1985), 184-91; James Ryan, "'Revolution is War": The Development of the Thought of V. I. Lenin on Violence, 1899–1907', *Slavonic & East European Review* 89.2 (2011), 248-73.

⁸² Lenin, 'British', 263.

⁸³ Lenin may have been closer to the mark than he appreciated – Morel's own copy of Kautsky's pamphlet 'The Question of Guilt Revived' (1921) is enthusiastically and affirmatively annotated (F7/1/1).

⁸⁴ Lenin, 'British', 264-5.

One imagines that Morel, always wary of accusations of a lack of patriotism, would probably be rather pleased with this characterisation by Lenin as an avatar of the best of Britain – as well as perfectly willing to unread the mocking undertone of the piece to flatter his own ego.

iv.

The continuing role played by the Congo-experience in giving shape to Morel's self-sense after 1914 may be detected in the continuity of his vision of human evil between *Red Rubber* and *Truth and the War*. In *Red Rubber*, the evil of King Leopold is located at the crossroads between inhuman, 'civilised' rationality and timeless, 'barbarous' malevolence. What is created thereby is the synthesis, 'civilised barbarism', which transcends the brutality of primitive man via the mechanical efficiency of European technocapitalism. There is thus a conceptual continuity across Morel's rhetorical *corpus* with regard to his understanding of evil, which is shown to be at one and the same time modern-automated-inhuman and primitive-mysterious-supernatural:

It was given me to see behind the veil, and to realise how utterly at the mercy of a Bureaucracy working in darkness and in secrecy, were the peoples, not of Africa only, but of Europe; a Bureaucracy... supremely indifferent to the human pulse.⁸⁵

That synthesis of barbarism and modernity which, in Morel's formulation, had constituted the Leopoldian system was now extrapolated into a broader critique of the faceless and sinister apparatus of European statecraft, to which he assigns the names 'diplomacy' or 'bureaucracy' more or less interchangeably. These were the discursive labels by which Morel referred to the deeply embedded and fundamentally undemocratic nexus of power which existed within and between the European states, and which governed the conduct of geopolitics at the highest level:

It is of vital moment the nation should realise that in this matter it has been led blindfolded to the very brink of war, *as the outcome*

⁸⁵ Morel, *Truth*, xv-xvi.

*of liabilities secretly contracted by its diplomatists without its authority.*⁸⁶

‘Secret diplomacy’, it must be emphasised, was not a figment of Morel’s paranoid imagination, but instead an accurate representation of the systematically undemocratic practices of Europe’s foreign policy elite. Indeed, undeniable proof of the veracity of Morel’s critique would be provided by the Bolsheviks just a few years later, as the triumphant communist leadership released into the public sphere the full documentation of the Tsarist regime’s confidential dealings with London and Paris both before and during the war, including commitments to mutual military support and territorial aggrandisement struck with no reference to the representative organs of the British and French states.⁸⁷ As Leon Trotsky thundered in his *communiqué* accompanying the mass archival manumission of 1917:

Secret diplomacy is a necessary tool for a propertied minority which is compelled to deceive the majority in order to subject it to its interests. Imperialism, with its dark plans of conquest and its robber alliances and deals, developed the system of secret diplomacy to the highest level. The struggle against the imperialism which is exhausting and destroying the peoples of Europe is at the same time a struggle against capitalist diplomacy, which has cause enough to fear the light of day. The Russian people, and the peoples of Europe and the whole world, should learn the documentary truth about the plans forged in secret by the financiers and industrialists together with their parliamentary and diplomatic agents. The peoples of Europe have paid for the right to this truth with countless sacrifices and universal economic desolation... The abolition of secret diplomacy is the primary condition for an honest, popular, truly democratic

⁸⁶ E.D. Morel, *Morocco in Diplomacy* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1912), xviii, emphasis in original.

⁸⁷ John Quigley, ‘Leon Trotsky and the Prohibition against Secret Treaties’, *Journal of the History of International Law* 19.2 (2017), 246-73.

foreign policy. The Soviet Government regards it as its duty to carry out such a policy in practice.⁸⁸

In Britain specifically, a deliberate policy of obscuring decision-making processes and evading democratic scrutiny has been essential to the fulfilment of the Foreign Office's structural role within the British state as the agent of elite interest on the global stage since its foundation in 1782.⁸⁹ Such elitist impulses manifested themselves in what we might call the *institutional personality* of the British diplomatic bureaucracy, the phenomenon which historian T.G. Otte has dubbed the 'Foreign Office mind':

A set of broad-based departmental principles, experiences, and traditions that had seeped into institutional memory... [and] reflected the social, political, and intellectual concerns of Britain's foreign policy elite.⁹⁰

British foreign policy, as exercised via these continually-renewed collective reflexes, was characterised therefore by a series of underlying presuppositions laced together into a coherent *Weltanschauung*: 'realism' (in the self-consciously Machiavellian tradition extending in the modern period from Bismarck to Kissinger), an aristocratic outlook concerning matters of imperial prestige, contempt for so-called 'ideology' and for democratic party politics, and a deeply-ingrained anti-intellectualism.⁹¹ It was towards this elite state-within-a-state formation that commanded British foreign policy outside of the oversight of both Parliament and public that Morel's own critique of 'secret diplomacy' was directed. Indeed, by turning the sights of this critique of undemocratic power against the Foreign Office in particular, Morel was not innovating but instead

⁸⁸ Leon Trotsky, 'Statement on the Publication of the Secret Treaties' (1917), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/commissar/gov.htm>.

⁸⁹ See Peter Richards, *Parliament and Foreign Affairs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 16-35.

⁹⁰ T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 6. See also Blake Duffield, 'The Grey Men of Empire: Framing Britain's Official Mind, 1854-1934', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas (2016), an excellent study of the 'gentlemanly indoctrination' by which the British imperial bureaucracy was reproduced.

⁹¹ As outlined by Donald Cameron Watt, *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1965), 27.

merely elaborating on a pre-existing discursive theme, one given especially astringent voice by a commentator for *Vanity Fair* in 1883:

When the portals of the Foreign Office close behind a newly-received novice, the processes of his subsequent career are as unknown to the outer world as are those of a sister who has taken the veil. Thenceforth he belongs to a mysterious fraternity into whose proceedings it does not become the outer world to pry. Each Foreign Office clerk is a priest of secrecy, and it is the boast of their number that not one amongst them has ever been guilty of an indiscretion in this respect. Secrecy is, in fact, the system on which the Foreign Office lives, and it is never in any instance departed from... It is, indeed, so ingrained in the Foreign Office mind as to have become a second nature.⁹²

The satirist's portrayal of King Charles Street, the home of the Foreign Office, as a kind of cultic institution, a temple staffed by avowed initiates responsible to their order above and beyond any loyalty to the nation at large, seems less melodramatic and more precisely literal if one takes seriously as a civic fact the claustrophobic class system which still saturated and segregated imperial British society. Britain's enduring social hierarchy was perpetuated in the modern period less by overt relationships of seigneurie (of the kind which characterised, say, pre-revolutionary Russia) than by the subtle nods and taps of *intra-elite recognition*, of antique heredity made manifest in 'traditional' signifiers of distinction which announced to the similarly-initiated one's place within the charmed circle of the born-to-rule.⁹³ In an earlier chapter, we remarked on the importance of Morel's resoundingly middle-class education for his successful interpellation into the petty bourgeoisie, as evidenced by his mother's desperate scramble to secure his place at Madras House. The Foreign Office's status in this period as an autonomous bastion of ruling-class interest may be similarly evidenced by references to the institutional provenance of its coenobites. For instance, between 1908 and 1913, twenty-one men served as senior diplomatic attachés for the British Empire: sixteen of them were educated

⁹² *Foreign Office, Diplomatic, and Consular Sketches Reprinted from Vanity Fair* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1883), 1-3.

⁹³ See John Scott, *Who Rules Britain?* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 93-117.

at the same public school (*sc.*, Eton), and fifteen had attended Oxford. Similar ratios obtain for the other crucial position within the foreign policy firmament.⁹⁴ Thus, not only was the democratically unresponsive power of the Foreign Office concentrated in the hands of a bare handful of individuals, but the overwhelming majority of those individuals were in turn bonded together by the experience of a process of institutional self-formation expressly designed to reproduce the British ruling elite as a ‘class-for-itself’ in perpetuity.⁹⁵ *Qua* Ponsonby:

The diplomatic service in most countries is composed of men who have to be well off in order that one stratum, and that the upper social stratum, may alone be the class represented.⁹⁶

Advancing further this point regarding the class character of the British diplomatic firmament, I propose that the ultimate target which lay behind Morel’s crusade against the foreign policy elite was the phenomenon which some contemporary political theorists (taking up Ernst Fraenkel’s work on dictatorship) have identified to as the characteristic *dual state* structure of the modern polity, as defined in opposition to the unitary and constitutionally-bounded state, which forms the reified subject-object of liberal ‘political science’.⁹⁷ The dual-state hypothesis asserts that the phanic, democratically-

⁹⁴ Jan Stöckmann, ‘The First World War and the Democratic Control of Foreign Policy’, *P&P* 249.1 (2020), 1-47, 9.

⁹⁵ In this, Britain was an entirely typical European state. *Cf. ibid.*, 7, 17, on the making of foreign policy in the belligerent Powers on the eve of war: ‘Crucial decisions were taken by a small group of government ministers, generals, and diplomats – no more than a dozen individuals per country, in some cases considerably fewer. All of them were men. Most of them came from a fairly homogeneous social background, or even descended from the same families... Besides gender, class was the decisive factor for participation in foreign policy. Almost all decision-makers in government, diplomacy, and the military came from a small, wealthy, and often aristocratic elite. Many had been educated at elitist institutions and were members of exclusive clubs’.

⁹⁶ Arthur Ponsonby, ‘International Morality’, *International Journal of Ethics* 25.2 (1915), 143-64, 151.

⁹⁷ Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship*, trans. E.A. Shills (Oxford: OUP, 2017) [1941]; Ola Tunander, ‘Democratic State vs. Deep State: Approaching the Dual State of the West’, in Eric Wilson (ed.), *Government of the Shadows: Parapolitics and Criminal Sovereignty* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 56–72; Eric Wilson, ‘The Concept of the Parapolitical’, in *idem.* (ed.), *The Dual State: Parapolitics, Carl Schmitt and the National Security Complex* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1-28; Scott Burchill, ‘Is There a Deep State?’, in *Misunderstanding International Relations: A Focus on Liberal Democracies* (London: PM, 2020), 85-105.

sensitive organs of the bourgeois electoral state function in parallel with other, occulted *loci* of elite power, unbridled by responsibility to the *demos* and pursuing independent goals: ‘Real power begins where secrecy begins’.⁹⁸ This is an argument which, in the current political climate, will naturally set alarm bells ringing for some readers. After all, a bastardised version of this hypothesis is frequently propounded in the most delirious and conspiratorial of far-right echo chambers, in the form of paranoid whisperings about the so-called *deep state* and its sinister (possibly satanic) agenda. Yet to assert the existence of a dual state structure within *soi-disant* democratic polities is in reality not only not conspiratorial; it is barely even controversial.⁹⁹ That the secretive forces which make permanent nest within the bourgeois state (in the form of autotelic bureaucracies, hidden fortresses of executive prerogative, and membranous synergies with Capital) wield decisive power over modern political life in both the foreign and domestic arenas was as obvious to percipient observers in the 19th century as remains in the 21st.¹⁰⁰ ‘The day may come’, as the Liberal academic James Bryce (1838-1922) intoned ominously in 1888, ‘when in England the question of limiting the at present all but unlimited discretion of the executive in foreign affairs will have to be dealt with’.¹⁰¹ His contemporary, the American socialist leader Daniel de León (1852-1914), observed with similar disquiet the legal-economic revolution of the Gilded Age which had secured the power of the capitalist class over his own nation’s political life:

⁹⁸ Hanna Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1962 [1951]), 403.

⁹⁹ Sec. Tunander, ‘Democratic State vs. Deep State’, 68: ‘In the world of democracies, the “sovereign” – the “deep state” – must always implement its game of fear and protection covertly, and its very existence is always denied in public. Thus, the problem with liberalism in political science and legal theory is not its ambition to defend the public sphere, political freedoms, and human rights, but rather its claim that these freedoms and rights define the Western political system. Liberal political science has been turned into an ideology of the “sovereign”, because indisputable evidence for the “sovereign” ... is brushed away as pure fantasy or “conspiracy”’.

¹⁰⁰ The study of the essence of the *arcana imperii* long predates the feudal order’s supplantation by the bourgeoisie – and indeed, the feudal order itself – extending back via Giovanni Botero (1544-1617) and Arnoldus Clapmarius (1574-1604) to Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and thence to Tacitus (56-120). See Eva Horn, ‘Logics of Political Secrecy’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 28.7-8 (2011), 103-22; Howard Caygill, ‘*Arcanum*: The Secret Life of State and Civil Society’, in Divya Dwivedi & Sanil V. (eds.), *The Public Sphere from Outside the West* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 21-40.

¹⁰¹ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1888), v.1, 104.

An Empire has been slowly rising within the Empire of the United States, and today the new and privately owned Empire virtually overshadows the Nation and holds it by its throat.¹⁰²

The serious study of the dual state structure in the British context begins with Walter Bagehot (1823-77), and his famous distinction between the dignified and efficient institutions of the ‘democratic’ polity, which he dubbed the system of ‘double government’:

There are two parts [of the British state]... First, those which excite and preserve the reverence of the population – the *dignified* parts, if I may so call them; and next, the *efficient* parts – those by which it, in fact, works and rules... Every constitution must first gain authority, and then use authority.¹⁰³

The state, in other words, exhibits externally what Bagehot calls its ‘theatrical elements’, its consent-manufacturing performances of connection to the ‘organic community’ of the nation.¹⁰⁴ *Qua* Bagehot:

The fancy of the mass of men is incredibly weak; it can see nothing without a visible symbol.¹⁰⁵

England, in Bagehot’s view, was an especially ‘deferential community’, populated by ‘crowds of people scarcely more civilised than the majority of two thousand years ago’.¹⁰⁶ Thus, ‘the mass of the English people... defer to what we may call the *theatrical show* of society’.¹⁰⁷ The outer vestiges of the British bourgeois state organise mass ceremonies of approbation – the general election being the principal demotic saturnalia by which acquiescence to government is ritually renewed – in order that the ‘efficient institutions’ of the state (the unrestricted executive, the permanent bureaucracies, and the military) might

¹⁰² Daniel de León, ‘Imperium in Imperio’, *Daily People*, 4 June 1903. On deep politics in the context of the United States, see Aaron Good, ‘American Exceptionalism: Hegemony and the Tripartite State’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Temple University (2020), esp. 45-99.

¹⁰³ Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1888 [1867]), 4, 288 (‘double government’).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 269, 6.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

pursue their interests without encountering mass social resistance, having been theatrically endowed with the legitimating *mana* of the reified ‘people’.

Bagehot’s key analytic distinction, outlined a generation before the outbreak of the war, is thus between the *legitimacy-generating, public-facing* wing of the state and the *governing, self-occluding* element. Taking our cue from Bagehot, then, we ought to conclude that it is more accurate to conceive of a continually-evolving *dual state* relationship between public and secret bodies governing ‘democratic’ bourgeois polities like modern Britain, rather than an almighty *deep state* pursuing an unlimited sovereign agenda, as in the crudely conspiratorial imagination. The democratic organs of the state assuredly possess genuine powers and competencies of their own, as well as a mediated receptivity and accountability to the popular will; thus, the bourgeois state is not *merely* a sham or a sock puppet controlled directly by the secretive power elite, but constituted instead by a continual *process of negotiation* between forces and institutions – albeit one with certain areas (especially those relating to imperial interest) cordoned off from the rabble in concrete.¹⁰⁸ In this respect, the dual state model closely resembles Poulantzas’s complex relational theory of Capital-state interaction, which modifies the oddly humanistic vulgar-Marxist tendency to imagine systemic class domination as a simple case of *instruction* issued from the bourgeoisie, rather than *dialectical-relational mediation of forces within the power elite*, with semi-democratic organs (the Houses of Parliament in the British case) possessed of their own semi-independent animacy.¹⁰⁹

Yet Poulantzas also warns us (*sec.* Gramsci) that the bourgeois order’s capacity to reproduce itself is reliant not just on the brute fact of its power base

¹⁰⁸ For a thorough definition of the political-economic-military ‘power elite’ of the modern bourgeois polity, see C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: OUP, 1956), 269-97.

¹⁰⁹ Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: Verso, 2013 [1978]), 123-62. Cf. Poulantzas’ old sparring partner Ralph Miliband, *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 1984 [1982]), 20: ‘By far the most important institution in the British political system is the House of Commons... However, the importance of the House of Commons cannot simply be measured by reference to its strength or weakness in relation to other elements of the constitutional and political system. Its importance does not derive from its actual powers, but from the fact that it enshrines the elective principle and thus provides the absolutely indispensable legitimation for the government of the country; nothing, for the containment and management of the pressure from below, could be more important than that’.

within the state and its command of the means of biopolitical repression, but also upon the continual manufacturing of consent, especially via the informational-filtrative capacities of the captive media apparatus and other such curative tools of the interpellative system.¹¹⁰ Power cannot simply be *stockpiled* like a conceptual object to be unleashed by fiat at a later date, but is instead characterised essentially by its processional *wielding-towards* in the World. As Christopher Clark writes:

‘Power’ is not an identity that can be said to inhere in groups or individuals; rather, it expresses a *relational* state of affairs.¹¹¹

Thus, *qua* Foucault:

In order to conduct a concrete analysis of power-relations... one [has] to study power not on the basis of the primitive terms of the relation but starting from the relation itself, inasmuch as the relation is what determines the elements on which it bears: instead of asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or what powers of theirs they have surrendered, allowing themselves to be subjectified, one would need to inquire how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects.¹¹²

In this light, it is perhaps less accurate therefore to speak of belligerent governments *accumulating* psychological power over their subject populations through their exertions during the Great War than it is to remark that modern governance itself became increasingly defined by *public relations* – that is, by the capacity of the state-media *dispositif* to manage the beliefs and opinions of a reified ‘public’ – as the wartime propaganda machine evolved, and thus that

¹¹⁰ Nicos Poulantzas, ‘The Problem of the Capitalist State’, *New Left Review* 58 (1969), 67-78, 75-7. See also Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic, 1969), 179-218; Noam Chomsky & Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Bodley Head, 2009 [1988]), 1: ‘The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function... to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour which will integrate them into the institutional structures of larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda’.

¹¹¹ Christopher Clark, ‘Power’, in Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *A Concise Companion to History* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 131-56, 131.

¹¹² Michel Foucault, ‘Society Must Be Defended’ (1976), trans. Robert Hurley *et al.*, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Essential Work of Foucault 1954-1984, I: Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1997), 59-65, 59.

the citizen-subject in the very shape of its self was ever more completely the object of this unequal power dynamic; for ‘is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have?’¹¹³

The new technosocial developments of the modern communication revolution had exponentially expanded the number of interpellative ‘contact points’ between the subject and the will of the state by which this consent-manufacturing relationship might be asserted, from the radio and the popular daily press to those famous mass-produced posters of Lord Kitchener, with his shaming, nominating forefinger.¹¹⁴ In bourgeois society, such steerage usually took the form of nationalism – that is to say, the particularist appeal to identity which intensified dramatically within combatant societies during the Great War, both as an organic popular response to events and as the result of deliberate stoking by autochthonous elites, directed both externally against the foreign foe and internally towards the putative ‘enemy within’ – for, as *John Bull* opined in January 1916 ‘Our worst and most formidable foes are dwelling in our own tents!’¹¹⁵ From the very first, British opponents of the war like Morel and MacDonald were beaten back by waves of mass patriotic bellicosity; for, as historian Brock Millman acidly remarks, ‘a “patriot”, in First World War parlance, was a jingo willing to employ violence against dissenters’.¹¹⁶ The militant mood which permeated British society in the early years of the conflict resulted in overt pacifists suffering the wrath of the right-thinking, flag-waving public, their rage tacitly endorsed by the police and overtly channelled by the

¹¹³ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 23.

¹¹⁴ Gary Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester: MUP, 1992), esp. 9-23; David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: LUP, 2012), 113-39 on the construction of ‘negative difference’; Keith Somerville, *Radio Propaganda and the Broadcasting of Hatred: Historical Development and Definitions* (London: PM, 2012), 33-54; James Taylor, *Your Country Needs You: The Secret History of the Propaganda Poster* (Salford: Saraband, 2013); Dorothea Flothow, ‘Coming to Terms with the War: War, Propaganda and the German Enemy in British Children’s Novels, 1900 to 1916’, in David Owen & Maria Cristina Pividori (eds.), *Writings of Persuasion and Dissonance in the Great War* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 221-36; Pier Paolo Pedrini, *Propaganda, Persuasion and the Great War: Heredity in the Modern Sale of Products and Political Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2017), esp. 19-24; Philip Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 1-62.

¹¹⁵ *John Bull*, 8th Jan 1916.

¹¹⁶ Brock Millman, ‘HMG and the War against Dissent, 1914-18’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 40.3 (2005), 413-40, 416.

bourgeois media.¹¹⁷ The nominally liberal *Observer*, for instance, frothed with unnerving violence against the internal minority of dissenters it dubbed 'Our Real Enemy':

In a free society at war no fit man of fighting age has the right to be a parasite upon the blood of his fellows. When democracy is at war, the shirker who... dares still to nourish his selfish prudence and advantage upon the sacrifice of the community is a vampire on the state.¹¹⁸

Before one 1915 peace meeting in the capital, the *Daily Express* published a rogues' gallery of the names and photographs of prominent anti-war campaigners, including Morel and Trevelyan. 'Londoners,' asked the paper:

What do you think of them? Is Germany to hear the wail of peace cranks from the City of the Empire? ¹¹⁹

The venue was subsequently invaded by a mob and subjected to stink bombing – a response which would have been deemed altogether insufficient by the *Sunday Herald*, which in April 1916 bellowed that although generally speaking conscientious objectors were 'not worth the powder and shot', in light of the circumstances, 'perhaps a few rounds might be spared'.¹²⁰

Dissenting media organs were thus engaged in a losing battle against the sanguinary solidarity of the mainstream press. ILP campaigner and editor of the *Labour Leader* Fenner Brockway (1888-1988) issued an essorant plea for proletarian unity and resistance to the coming slaughter from the pages of his journal:

¹¹⁷ Philip Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda* (Manchester: MUP, 2002 [1990]), 173-97; Milmann, 'HMG', 425-6; Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War* (London: PM, 2011), 48-61. The Northcliffe press was an especially fruitful collaborator in the British state's management of the public mind: see J. Lee Thompson, *Politicians, the Press, & Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe & the Great War, 1914-1919* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999); Joachim Neander & Randal Marlin, 'Media and Propaganda: The Northcliffe Press and the Corpse Factory Story of World War I', *Global Media Journal* 3.2 (2010), 67-82.

¹¹⁸ *Observer*, 9th Jan 1916.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in DeGroot, 147-8.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Kennedy, 'Public Opinion', 112.

Workers of Great Britain, you have no quarrel with the workers of Europe... The quarrel is between the ruling classes of Europe!

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Yet when Brockway tried to take his earnest zeal to public meetings, he was shouted down by hostile crowds and threatened with violence.¹²² This venomous disciplining of dissidents was not, however, the sole preserve of the frothing reactionary, but was also meted out by representatives of the so-called ‘patriotic’ left.¹²³ Victor Grayson (1881-1920), who had lost his seat at Colne Valley after a mental breakdown, now lost friends on the left by turning his rhetorical talents to demonstrating the compatibility of a commitment to socialism with support for the war.¹²⁴ ‘War’, Grayson claimed, ‘has made us what we have never been before – a nation’.¹²⁵ As with Robert Blatchford (1851-1943), author of the seminally sentimental *Merrie England* (1894), patriotism was for Grayson not so much an accommodation with his socialism but a rather a foundational component thereof.¹²⁶ Ernest Bevin (1881-1950), a portly Baptist firebrand from Devonshire and a national organiser for the Dockers’ Union, derided the ILP’s earnest moral opposition to Britain’s entry into the war as ‘fatuous’. Would the German Social Democrats, he enquired rhetorically, be striking to stop the conflict?¹²⁷

Ramsay MacDonald, meanwhile, who had resigned his post as Chairman of the PLP when it became apparent his anti-war position could not carry the party, was now brutally monstered for his pacifism by the jeering liberal press, who closed ranks to portray the erstwhile Labour leader as dangerously unpatriotic – perhaps even a traitor – and therefore undeserving of any editorial cohibition. ‘No paid agent of Germany had served her better’, the *Times* intoned

¹²¹ *Labour Leader*, 6 Aug 1914.

¹²² Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison & Parliament* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942), 48.

¹²³ David Swift, *For Class and Country: The Patriotic Left and the First World War* (Liverpool: LUP, 2017), 24-55.

¹²⁴ Pugh, *Labour*, 104.

¹²⁵ David Clark, *Victor Grayson: Labour’s Lost Leader* (London: Quartet, 1985), 103-4.

¹²⁶ See Abraham Scherr, ‘Robert Blatchford and Clarion Socialism, 1891-1914’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa (1974), esp. 337-88.

¹²⁷ Pugh, *Labour*, 102. For the affirmative answer to Bevan’s ignorant and chauvinistic question, cf. F.L. Carsten, *War Against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (London: Batsford, 1982), 124-42

of MacDonald, while the *Spectator* led calls to strip him of his MP's salary. *John Bull*, the magazine published by the extravagant mountebank (and Liberal representative for Hackney South) Horatio Bottomley (1860-1933), outdid its peers in malice by printing MacDonald's birth certificate and exposing his dubious parentage as 'the illegitimate son of a Scotch servant girl'.¹²⁸ In September of 1914, MacDonald wrote to Morel from his hometown of Lossiemouth, describing the state of fecund conspiracism which now predominated in the remote Scottish community following the general patriotic hailing launched by the regime and its media during July and August:

As an amusing indication of the state of mind here, I tell you this story. A friend of mine came to see me last Saturday. He was not well known here and a report that he was the German Emperor secretly arrived by aeroplane went round *and was believed*. If someone had only said that he was Morel of the Congo, my house would have been blown up. The Kaiser's wickedness is known, Morel's would have been supplied by the imagination.¹²⁹

Morel himself was subjected to a similarly brutal assault at the hands of the state-press nexus, as one incident from 1917 serves to illustrate. Taking his cue from widespread media speculation alleging that the anti-war movement was being secretly financed by Germany, Basil Thomson (1861-1939), head of the Metropolitan Police's Criminal Investigation Department, despatched a scurrilous report to Lloyd George's War Cabinet:

The probabilities are certainly strong that Mr Morel did not work out of pure altruism... As his activities have certainly been in the German interest... the public cannot be blamed for believing that Mr Morel has been financed by Germany in the past and may possibly be expecting financial reward for his peace activities in the future.

This was a conscious fabrication. As Thomson recorded in his diary at the time, 'I feel certain that there is no German money' paying paid to dissenters like

¹²⁸ Quotes from David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Richard Cohen, 1997 [1977]), 186-93.

¹²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 186.

Morel.¹³⁰ Yet the false report would prove the last straw for a paranoid and increasingly authoritarian regime to activate the Defence of the Realm Act against Morel, leading in short order to his incarceration and thence the subsequent collapse of his mental and physical health.

Aside from the important intrastructural muscle tissue connecting the jingoistic editorial policy of the bourgeois media apparatus to the will of the imperial state even in peacetime, the government's own in-house propaganda machine run out of Wellington House (though never officially acknowledged by the Lloyd George regime, even to Parliament) was itself becoming vastly more sophisticated at the task of destruction-by-press – 'information domination', in Millman's apt phrasing.¹³¹ Though a public relations operation had been in place at Wellington House since September 1914, it was not until Lloyd George's accession to the premiership that its true potential as an organ of World-shaping was realised.¹³² More specifically, it was the prime minister's energetic personal efforts – regularly meeting for dinner with influential journalists and newspaper barons to coordinate messaging – which played the crucial reagent role in the agglutination of the British state's propaganda effort with the 'independent' operations of the bourgeois press, and thence in the decision to channel the efforts of that compound operation through the new technosocial apparatus of the High Modern mass media, notably the cinema and the wireless radio network.¹³³

Beyond the coordinating hub of Wellington House, Lloyd George also tapped a clutch of prominent media moguls to head up their own semi-independent bodies under the state's auspices: Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1964), Tory MP and owner of *The Daily Express* and *The Globe*, was given command of the newly-minted Ministry of Information, whilst Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922),

¹³⁰ Quoted in Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars: A Story of Protest and Patriotism in the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 2011), 296.

¹³¹ Millman, 'HMG', 417. 'Intrastructural': see John McEwen, 'The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation', *Journal of Contemporary History* 17.3 (1982), 459-86. For a longer view of the symbiotic relationship between the British ruling stratum and the media, see Brendon Maartens, "'What the Country Wanted": The Houses of Parliament, the Press and the Origins of Media Management in Britain, c. 1780-1900', *Public Relations Review* 45.2 (2019), 227-35.

¹³² M.L. Sanders, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War', *HJ* 18.1 (1975), 119-46, 119.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 123-4

the infamous founder of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, as well as proprietor of *The Times* and *The Observer*, took charge of the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries headquartered at Crewe House.¹³⁴ As the aristocratic sobriquets of Lloyd George's lieutenants indicate, the government's capacity to wield the media as a misinformational bludgeon relied not so much on the brute force of executive *diktat*, but instead on effective exploitation of the peculiar structures and rituals of Britain's class-stratified power elite. As historian Alice Goldfarb Marquis writes in her study of wartime propaganda in Britain:

Beaverbrook's appointment (as well as Northcliffe's) roused a storm in Parliament, highlighting the equivocal position of the press throughout the war. Who was government, and who was press? In fact, they had merged to so strikingly a degree that official censorship and propaganda in England was largely a dead letter. The Beaverbrook appointment merely confirmed intimate relationships which had existed throughout the war... [British journalists] all belonged to the same club, whose membership also included the most powerful politicians. Publishing a casualty list, or a letter from a wounded corporal about military bungling, would have meant expulsion from the club; social ostracism apparently meant more to the newsmen than their professional duty to inform the public... The British government could trust the press because of the tight web of personal, political, social and professional relationships that bound newspaper owners, editors and politicians into one ruling elite.¹³⁵

The method by which more formal propaganda emissions were concocted in Britain attests to the cheek-to-jowl interwovenness of the nation's political and cultural establishment. Cognisant of a deep talent reserve lying dormant in the country which could be tapped for the benefit of the state, the government's propaganda organs recruited a raft of literary luminaries to assist in the construction and dissemination of nationalistic misinformation, including

¹³⁴ Philip Taylor, 'The Foreign Office and British Propaganda During the First World War', *HJ* 23.4 (1980), 875-98, 891.

¹³⁵ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, 'Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany During the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 13 (1978), 467-98, 474, 478, 485.

Morel's old Congo allies Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells, alongside G.K. Chesterton, John Galsworthy, and Thomas Hardy – just as, a generation later, the 'patriotic socialist' George Orwell would be recruited by the government's Information Research Department for the coordination of anti-communist propaganda.¹³⁶ The skills of these authors would be set to work for the war effort in a publicity campaign without precedent in British history in terms of its scale, complexity, and sheer ruthlessness against its targets foreign and domestic. Assimilating the tactics of the Edwardian humanitarian campaign, British propaganda organs produced for public consumption an emotively-charged public narrative of German atrocities against the innocent in Belgium and France, blending fact with hearsay and outright fabrication to stoke moral outrage and bind the *bien-pensant* liberal subject to the belligerent Cause.¹³⁷

Arthur Ponsonby of the UDC illustrated the operation of digestive degradation by which anodyne reportage became transfigured into atrocity propaganda, tracing the progress of one particular canard through the organs of the allied press over the course of November 1914:

When the fall of Antwerp got known, the church bells were rung
(meaning in Germany).

Kölnische Zeitung

According to the *Kölnische Zeitung*, the clergy of Antwerp were
compelled to ring the church bells when the fortress was taken.

Le Matin

According to what *Le Matin* has heard from Cologne, the Belgian
priests who refused to ring the church bells when Antwerp was
taken have been driven away from their places.

¹³⁶ D.G. Wright, 'The Great War, Government Propaganda, and English "Men of Letters", 1914-16', *Literature & History* 7 (1978), 70-100. On Orwell, see Phillip Deery, 'Confronting the Cominform: George Orwell and the Cold War Offensive of the Information Research Department, 1948-50', *Labour History* 73 (1997), 219-25.

¹³⁷ John Horne & Alan Kramer, 'German "Atrocities" and Franco-German Opinion, 1914: The Evidence of German Soldiers' Diaries', *Journal of Modern History* 66.1 (1994), 1-33; Nicoletta Gullace, 'Allied Propaganda and World War I: Interwar Legacies, Media Studies, and the Politics of War Guilt', *History Compass*, 9.9 (2011), 686-700; Emily Robertson, 'Propaganda and "Manufactured Hatred": A Reappraisal of the Ethics of First World War British and Australian Atrocity Propaganda', *Public Relations Inquiry* 3.2 (2014), 245-66.

The Times

According to what *The Times* has heard from Cologne via Paris, the unfortunate Belgian priests who refused to ring the church bells when Antwerp was taken have been sentenced to hard labour.

Corri re della Serra

According to information to the *Corri re della Serra* from Cologne via London, it is confirmed that the barbaric conquerors of Antwerp punished the unfortunate Belgian priests for their heroic refusal to ring the church bells by hanging them as living clappers to the bells with their heads down.

Le Matin ¹³⁸

Instances of sexual violence and violence, substantiated or otherwise, were especial useful for nationalistic propaganda, activating as they did powerful affects of hatred and self-righteousness – alongside other, less salubrious but equally intense emotional engagements. As the communication theorist Harold Lasswell observed in his 1927 study of *Propaganda Technique in the World War*: ‘A young woman ravished by the enemy yields secret satisfaction to a host of vicarious ravishers on the other side’.¹³⁹ The bombardment of towns on the English coast by German raiders, meanwhile, afforded propagandists with a glorious opportunity, reactivating pre-war terrors about modern air warfare and the sudden coming of blind death from above.¹⁴⁰ Images of the destruction thereby wrought were widely disseminated by national media organs, demonstrating to the public the barbarous and indiscriminate cruelty of the

¹³⁸ Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), 161.

¹³⁹ Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York: Peter Smith, 1938 [1927]), 82. On the place of rape narratives in WWI atrocity propaganda, see Nicoletta Gullace, ‘Sexual Violence and Family Honour: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War’, *American Historical Review* 102.3 (1997), 714-47; Lisa Todd, ‘The Hun and the Home: Gender, Sexuality and Propaganda in First World War Europe’, in Troy Paddock (ed.), *World War I and Propaganda* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 137-54.

¹⁴⁰ Brett Holman, ‘The Phantom Airship Panic of 1913: Imagining Aerial Warfare in Britain Before the Great War’, *Journal of British Studies* 55.1 (2016), 99-119; Michael Reeve, ‘Constructing Fear of Invasion and Bombardment’, in *Bombardment, Public Safety and Resilience in English Coastal Communities during the First World War* (London: PM, 2021), 55-91.

Hun, and reaffirming the civilisational quality of the conflict, in which no compromise could be brooked nor quarter given.¹⁴¹

The High Modern revolution in communications technology represented the opening of a new front in human conflict, as recognised by all the belligerent states. The management of *public opinion* by the state and its organs would become a crucial factor in the choreography and execution of total war.¹⁴² As one Department of Information *apparatchik* remarked in 1917:

The conditions of modern warfare have now so enormously increased the value of the moral factor that it is less a question of armies being arrayed against armies than of nations against nations - so that the civilian front is scarcely, if any, less important than the fighting front.¹⁴³

Or, as rendered more poetically by German high commander Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937):

Wars today are battles: the right words, battles won; the wrong words, battles lost.¹⁴⁴

The vulpine Lloyd George understood this point better than most. In private, he acknowledged quite openly that the government would have faced a near-impossible task in resisting the peace movement had the truth about the extent of British casualties been known by the country at large: 'The public knows only half the story. They read of the victories; the cost is concealed'.¹⁴⁵ Censorship of the gruesome facts of the Western Front was exercised through the Prime Minister's distinctively informal light touch. Here, for instance, is C.P. Scott (1846-1932), editor of the liberal *Manchester Guardian*, commenting in 1915 on

¹⁴¹ Michael Reeve, "'Are We Downhearted? NO!': Representing War Damage and Destruction following Bombardment on the First World War 'Home Front'", *Critical Military Studies* 7.4 (2021), 497-417. On the 'Hun' meme as applied to the Teutonic enemy, see Andreas Musolf, 'The Afterlife of an Infamous Gaffe: Wilhelm II's "Hun Speech" of 1900 and the Anti-German Hun Stereotype during World War I in British and German Popular Memory', *Pragmatics & Society* 9.1 (2018), 75-90.

¹⁴² See John Griffiths (ed.), *Communications and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁴³ Quoted in Taylor, 'Foreign Office', 897.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Marquis, 468.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, 478.

a shocking missive received from the trenches which he deemed ‘too damaging for publication’:

It appears that in [this] engagement we again shelled our own men and that we lost Hill 70 after winning it in that way. Otherwise we might have got through to Lens... P.S., just heard from Lloyd George. Shall be lunching with him tomorrow.¹⁴⁶

We may conclude our discussion of the development of the wartime propaganda regime in Britain thus: during the course of hostilities, the governing power elites of the combatant states came to realise that, in order to continue to wage their conflicts of interimperial competition, it was necessary to police the contents of the public sphere – and to extract dissenting voices by any means necessary.¹⁴⁷ As the American propagandist and proto-neoliberal Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) commented in 1922 on the lessons imparted by the Great War:

Without some form of censorship, propaganda in the strict sense of the word is impossible. In order to conduct a program, there must be some barrier between the public and the event. Access to the real environment must be limited, before anyone can create a pseudo-environment that he thinks wise or desirable.¹⁴⁸

The methods by which this discursive purification was effected in British public life are the subject of the next section.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 477.

¹⁴⁷ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. 167-205.

¹⁴⁸ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1922), 28. ‘Proto-neoliberal’: see Ben Jackson, ‘Freedom, the Common Good, and the Rule of Law: Lippmann and Hayek on Economic Planning’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73.1 (2012), 47-68; Francis Clavé, ‘Comparative Study of Lippmann’s and Hayek’s Liberalisms (or Neoliberalisms)’, *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 22.6 (2015), 978-99.

V.

In 1917, E.D. Morel was arrested, tried, and sentenced to six months imprisonment under the auspices of the Defence of the Realm Act. Whilst the nominal offence which merited such severe punishment was his posting of a copy of one of his pamphlets to the renowned pacifist Romain Rolland (1866-1944), then living in neutral Switzerland, the true reason for Morel's incarceration (barely concealed by the Lloyd George regime) was his history of continued public agitation against the conduct of the war in Europe and, in particular, the publication of *Truth and the War* in 1916. That the Rolland correspondence was a mere fig leaf may be demonstrated by the fact that, some nine months before Morel's arrest, officials in the Home and Foreign Offices were already weighing up the possibility of prosecuting Morel for his 'poisonous book' and bemoaning its deleterious effect on international opinion.¹⁴⁹

The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA, for short) was the British government's principal legal instrument for the punishment of domestic dissent during the Great War, an open-ended licence for the state policing of civil society under the capacious banner of 'national security' – including the subjection of civilians to military courts. DORA gave form and official sanction to the social punishments already being meted out to opponents of the war in vigilante fashion, with its punitive tribunals functioning principally as theatres of humiliation. One conscientious objector hauled before an army court to account for his refusal to fight was informed in no uncertain terms that his rightful position in life was to be found 'on the point of a German bayonet'; another was pronounced, *a voce legis*, to be 'a shivering mass of unwholesome fat'.¹⁵⁰

Yet the punishments handed down to those unwilling to surrender themselves to militarism could extend far beyond mere public mortification, and could represent instead one's formal expulsion from the British body political, a civic disinvestiture manifested in the disqualification of conscientious objectors from the right to vote in elections for five years.¹⁵¹ It was amidst this grievous assault on the rights and liberties of dissenters that Bertrand Russell (who

¹⁴⁹ Cline, 111.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Thomas Kennedy, 'Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector, 1914-1919', *Journal of British Studies* 12.2 (1973), 105-19, 109.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

would himself come to be incarcerated for political nonconformity) began to realise that those who fought in the cause of peace would 'have to suffer a good deal before public opinion and government would cease to persecute them'.¹⁵² Not without cause did D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) – himself the subject of malicious mistreatment by the police and 'patriotic' civilians during this period due to his anti-militarist position – dub this period of intensified state nationalism under Lloyd George the 'awful years', when 'a wave of criminal lust rose and possessed England... a reign of terror, under a set of indecent bullies'.¹⁵³



Figure 8: 'This little pig stayed at home.'

John Bull, May 4 1918

The repression of wartime opposition could carry even more severe consequences for the dissenter than being ejected from the *demos*. Britain, as Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi have recently demonstrated, was 'the epicentre of global mass internment and deportation operations' during the Great War: the most enthusiastic global practitioner of internment as a weapon against dissent of all the combatant nations, both in the metropole and the far-

¹⁵² Russell, *Autobiography*, v.2, 62.

¹⁵³ D.H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: Martin Secker, 1923), 238-9.

flung periphery.¹⁵⁴ Across the Empire, 50,000 men and women were identified as ‘enemy aliens’ on the basis of their ethno-religious status and interned without trial in detention camps. This mostly meant Germans, but also Turks, Austro-Hungarians and Bulgarians, many of whom saw their property expropriated as well as their bodies forcibly incarcerated.¹⁵⁵ The will to imprison foreigners on the basis of ethnicity alone attests to John Bull’s fervid embrace of a hysterical politics of *identity* during the war – ‘that curious admixture of racialism, patriotism, anti-corruption, and antisemitism that characterised the era of Lloyd George’s dominance in British politics’, *qua* historian Kenneth Morgan.¹⁵⁶ As the old goat perorated to a baying London crowd early in the war:

There is something infinitely greater and more enduring which is emerging already out of this great conflict – a new patriotism, richer, nobler, and more exalted than the old.¹⁵⁷

Such nationalistic self-aggrandisement was crucial to the general emotional case made by the state for prosecution of the war. The conflict was explicitly framed by British propaganda organs not in terms of *Weltpolitik*, competition for resources and imperial prestige, but rather as a crusading *Kulturkampf* – a clash of civilisations between the enlightened, liberal *Entente* (the Russian Empire’s brutal autocracy brushed under the carpet) and a barbarous, militaristic Prussianism.¹⁵⁸ The war was in this sense *depoliticised* (and

¹⁵⁴ Stefan Manz & Panikos Panayi, *Enemies in the Empire: Civilian Internment in the British Empire During the First World War* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).

¹⁵⁵ Manz & Panayi, *Enemies*, 3. See also Panikos Panayi, ‘The Destruction of the German Communities in Britain during the First World War’, in *idem.* (ed.), *Germans in Britain Since 1500* (London: Hambledon, 1996), 113–30; Stefan Manz, ‘“Enemy Aliens” in Scotland in a Global Context, 1914–1919: Germanophobia, Internment, Forgetting’, in Hannah Ewence & Tim Grady (eds.), *Minorities and the First World War: From War to Peace* (London: PM, 2017), 117–42; Stefan Manz & Panikos Panayi, ‘The Internment of Civilian “Enemy Aliens” in the British Empire’, in *idem.* & Matthew Stibbe (eds.), *Internment During the First World War: A Mass Global Phenomenon* (London: Routledge, 2018), 19–40; Mary Chaktsiris, ‘Identifying the Enemy in First World War Canada: The Historiography and Bureaucracy of Enemy Alien Internment and Registration’, *Canadian Military History* 28.2 (2019), 1–31; Haia Shpayer-Makov, ‘Close Encounters of an Unprecedented Kind: Police and German Enemy Aliens in Britain During the First World War’, *Journal of British Studies* 61 (2022), 422–49.

¹⁵⁶ Kenneth Morgan, ‘The Boer War and the Media (1899–1902)’, *Twentieth Century British History* 13.1 (2002), 1–16, 9.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Franz Coetzee, ‘English Nationalism and the First World War’, *History of European Ideas* 15.1 (1992), 363–8, 363.

¹⁵⁸ Monger, 140–68.

especially *de-economised*, purged of its inherent class character), and portrayed in 'legitimate' public discourse instead as the inevitable cultural collision between reified national communities possessed of irreconcilable values. As a writer for the *New Statesman* commented sardonically in October 1914:

It seems to be one of the deepest instincts of nations to get an enemy – honestly if they can, but to get him anyway – and to hate him with all their might... If one's enemy does not commit atrocities, one has to invent them for him in order to hate him as he requires to be hated.¹⁵⁹

The British state's identitarian turn was corporealised in the country at large by the brutal mistreatment of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Germans most of all) by a seething native population.¹⁶⁰ The body politic gushed xenophobia like sweat. Not only Germans, but any and all denizens of Britain whose appearance, accent, or cultural practices marked them as outsiders now risked harassment or worse amidst this smothering miasma of patriotic hate. Frightened Jewish shopkeepers frantically scrubbed any sign of their religion from their storefronts and moved to proclaim publicly their unimpeachable 'Britishness' in an attempt to head off the ever-lurking threat of pogrom. Popular rage at war profiteers fused with ancient canards about Hebraic money-grubbing, whilst the popular association of Jews with Germany in the British mind inflamed the nation's latent antisemitism, culminating in a wave of brutal assaults and even lynchings across the country over the course of 1917.¹⁶¹ The particular form of ultra-aggressive, pseudo-Darwinist nationalism which manifested across belligerent societies during the war years was of relatively recent vintage, having developed alongside the New Imperialism of the 1870s as a solvent for social tensions during a period of rapid democratisation. As Perry Anderson writes:

¹⁵⁹ *New Statesman*, 10th October 1914.

¹⁶⁰ An indicative local case study is Michael Reeve, "'The Darkest Town in England': Patriotism and Anti-German Sentiment in Hull, 1914–19', *International Journal of Regional & Local History* 12.1 (2017), 42–63.

¹⁶¹ David Cesarani, 'An Embattled Minority: The Jews in Britain During the First World War', in Tony Kushner & Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1990), 61–81; Stephanie Seketa, 'Defining and Defending Valid Citizenship During War: Jewish Immigrant Businesses in World War I Britain', *Enterprise & Society* 22.1 (2021), 78–116.

The chauvinism of the *Belle Époque* was an imperialist discourse of superiority. Its functions were twofold. On the one hand, it served to mobilise the population of each state for the intensifying inter-imperialist competition of the period and for the tasks of colonial conquest. On the other hand, it served to integrate the masses into the political framework of the capitalist order, at a time when the suffrage was beginning to be extended to sectors of the working class. The reigning chauvinism operated to neutralise the risks of that extension of the vote, displacing social tensions from class to national antagonisms. It is no accident that the architects of electoral reform in this period were so often also fomenters of the new jingoism – Disraeli in England, Bismarck in Germany, Giolitti in Italy.¹⁶²

In the case of Britain, the nationalist-identitarian wartime state which the Lloyd George regime built after 1916 manufactured enemies not only out of those who asserted different identities to the officially sanctioned (especially German), but also those members of the autochthonous ethnic community, such as E.D. Morel and Bertrand Russell, who tendered opposition to the politics of national identity *tout court* on universalist grounds. Indeed, the British government's incarceration of metropolitan dissidents like Morel – taken as part of the general globalisation of the practice of political internment throughout the Empire and its coterminous adoption by Britain's imperial *confrères* – stands in direct antecedent to some of the most dismal events of the twentieth century. The violent, punitive and exclusionary state-nationalisms cultivated by belligerent governments across Europe during the Great War must be understood as directly ancestral to that most radical form of identitarianism ever practiced: fascism, the continuity of which with the ideology and practice of liberal imperialism is often elided.¹⁶³ Such a statement is not intended as

¹⁶² Perry Anderson, 'Internationalism: A Breviary', *New Left Review* 14 (2002), 5-25, 12.

¹⁶³ As argued by Ishay Landa, *The Apprentice's Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). On fascism as fundamentally a politics of identity, see Brian Ault, 'Joining the Nazi Party Before 1930: Material Interests or Identity Politics?', *Social Science History* 26.2 (2002), 273-310; Anton Pelinka, 'Identity Politics, Populism, and the Far Right', in Ruth Wodak & Bernhard Forchtner (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2017), 618-29. The case for understanding identitarian particularism as the

hyperbole.¹⁶⁴ Anderson again: 'Fascism was [merely] an imperialist chauvinism raised to a higher power'.¹⁶⁵

The communitarian core of protofascism – by which subjects are forcibly ascribed an *identity* and thence designated as *insiders* or *outsiders* with regards to the monolithic political community – may be witnessed at work in wartime Europe most clearly in the massive expansion of state recourse to the apparatus of purest exclusion, that which Agamben named as the very *acme* of modern biopolitics: the concentration camp. As a piece of political technology, the camp exists precisely at the crossing point of Capital-Nation-State, philosopher Kojin Karatani's conception of the interlocking Borromean trinity which constitutes and sustains the bourgeois order: it instantiates Capital's reduction of the human to a bodily fact to be managed logistically; the nation's identitarian, racialised logic of exclusion; and the sempiternal 'exceptionality' of reason of state.¹⁶⁶ During the Great War, tens of thousands of men of German descent (some settled in Britain for decades) were dragged from their homes or grabbed off the street and sent to rot in internment camps for the 'crime' of their parentage, in a brutally efficient programme of ethnic cleansing which the historian of nationalism Sven Oliver Müller describes as 'the worst pogrom of 20th century British history'.¹⁶⁷ Many of the detainees forced unwillingly through the gates of the camps would never leave by them. Pneumonia and influenza ripped through the open air prisons; so, damningly, did a wave of suicides, with

antithesis of emancipatory politics is made by Todd McGowan, *Universality and Identity Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

¹⁶⁴ I am certainly not the first to apperceive protofascism in Lloyd George's wartime regime. See Brock Millman, 'The Lloyd George War Government, 1917-18', *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 3.3 (2002), 99-126; and cf. *idem.*, 'HMG', 439: 'Had the polarisation of Britain continued, Lloyd George's national rally... might even have become the nucleus of a "white" reaction'.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, 'Internationalism', 14.

¹⁶⁶ Kojin Karatani, 'Beyond Capital-Nation-State', *Rethinking Marxism* 20.4 (2008), 569-95; *idem.*, *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* (Durham, NC: DUP, 2014), 1-28. See also Agamben, 119-80; Julian Hoppit, 'Nation, State, and the First Industrial Revolution', *Journal of British Studies* 50 (2011), 307-31.

¹⁶⁷ Sven Oliver Müller, 'Who is the Enemy? The Nationalist Dilemma of Inclusion and Exclusion in Britain during the First World War', *European Review of History* 9.1 (2002), 63-83, 64.

despair and psychic distress widespread enough among inmates to acquire a blackly comic nickname: *Stacheldrahtkrankheit*, or 'barbed-wire disease'.¹⁶⁸

The concentration camp was first developed in the European imperial periphery during the late 19th century as a method of racialised political repression before being imported back to the metropole for the management of domestic dissident.¹⁶⁹ At the turn of the century, the British Empire was the foremost (though far from sole) practitioner of the form.¹⁷⁰ Following prototype efforts in the grim labour compounds constructed in the late nineteenth to discipline African colonial workers, Britain's first major deployment of this new disciplinary device had come with the Boer War, during which thousands of Afrikaner civilians were herded into squalid, disease-riddled pens by red-coated soldiers.¹⁷¹ Back in the metropole, Capital and state worked hand in glove to whip up nationalist sentiment against those rare voices of dissent who dared speak out against the British treatment of Boer prisoners. Emily Hobhouse (1860-1926), the humanitarian campaigner, was ridiculed and dismissed by the British media in her efforts to bring the atrocities perpetrated in the Empire's concentration camps to the attention of the world. Lord Kitchener (1850-1916), the most callous practitioner of punitive detention on the Veldt, scorned her

¹⁶⁸ Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combat Internees During the First World War* (Manchester: MUP, 2012), 123-65.

¹⁶⁹ On the genesis of the concentration camp in *fin-di-siècle* imperial governance, see Jonathan Hyslop, 'The Invention of the Concentration Camp: Cuba, Southern Africa and the Philippines, 1896-1907', *South African History Journal* 63.2 (2011), 251-76; Dan Stone, *Concentration Camps: A Short History* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 11-33; Aidan Forth & Jonas Kreienbaum, 'A Shared Malady: Concentration Camps in the British, Spanish, American and German Empires', *Journal of Modern European History* 14.2 (2017), 245-67; Andreas Stucki, '"Frequent Deaths": The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps Reconsidered, 1868-1974', *Journal of Genocide Research* 20.3 (2018), 305-26; Philip Havik *et al.*, 'Empires and Colonial Incarceration in the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 47.2 (2019), 201-12.

¹⁷⁰ Aidan Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism: Britain's Empire of Camps, 1876-1903* (Oakland, CA: UC&P, 2017).

¹⁷¹ James Robbins Jewell, 'Using Barbaric Methods in South Africa: The British Concentration Camp Policy During the Anglo-Boer War', *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 31.1 (2003), 1-18; Elizabeth van Heyingen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013). 'Prototype efforts': Lindsay Weiss, 'Exceptional Space: Concentration Camps and Labour Compounds in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa', in Adrian Meyers & Gabriel Moshenska (eds.), *Archaeologies of Internment* (New York: Springer, 2011), 21-32.

dismissively as ‘that bloody woman’.¹⁷² Those few journalists willing to defy the government line and report on the camps were swiftly burked; the radical H.J Massingham (1888-1952), for instance, was stripped of his editorship of the *Daily Chronicle* for his criticism of the government.¹⁷³

Beyond the brutal extremity of internment, the general intensification of the tenor of the British state’s biopolitical remit within the metropole itself during the Great War was expressed through a panoply of apparatuses – the widely-loathed Central Control Board, for instance, established to regulate and reform the nation’s drinking habits (rarely a path to sustained popularity).¹⁷⁴ But far more sinister than simple meddlesome paternalism was the rapid tumescence of a clandestine and frighteningly independent surveillance bureaucracy, established under the auspices of counterespionage and assimilating techniques of state control previously honed against feminists, radicals, and anti-colonialists: ‘a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception’, *qua* Foucault.¹⁷⁵ As Millman writes:

By 1915, both the army and the police were beginning to make the equation that dissent against the war equalled opposition to the war, which made dissenters, by definition, suspicious persons and potential spies. What this meant, of course, was that powerful

¹⁷² Rebecca Gill & Cornelis Muller, ‘The Limits of Agency: Emily Hobhouse’s International Activism and the Politics of Suffering’, *Safundi* 19.1 (2018), 16-35.

¹⁷³ Morgan, ‘Boer War’, 3-5. See also Jacqueline Beaumont, ‘The British Press and Censorship during the South African War’, *South African Historical Journal* 41 (1999), 267-89; Stephen Miller, ‘Politics, the Press, and the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa’, *International Journal of Military History & Historiography* (2023), forthcoming.

¹⁷⁴ Robert Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain during World War One* (Liverpool: LUP, 2013), 93-120.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, *Discipline*, 214. See Nicholas Hiley, ‘Counter-Espionage and Security in Great Britain during the First World War’, *English Historical Review* 101.400 (1986), 635-70; Richard Thurlow, *The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1994), 47-73; Daniel Larsen, ‘Intelligence in the First World War: The State of the Field’, *Intelligence & National Security* 29.2 (2014), 282-302. For the antebellum prehistory of British state surveillance of dissenters, see Daniel Brückenhäus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905-1945* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 8-41; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *We Know All About You: The Story of Surveillance in Britain and America* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 56-74; Vlad Solomon, *State Surveillance, Political Policing and Counter-Terrorism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2021), esp. 195-256. The *longue durée* is covered by Edward Higgs, ‘The Rise of the Information State: the Development of Central State Surveillance of the Citizen in England, 1500–2000’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14.2 (2001), 175-97.

and pervasive machinery designed to counter espionage could now be deployed against dissent.¹⁷⁶

One of the more potent of the various organs of the wartime intelligence-gathering *dispositif* was the Parliamentary Military Secretary Department, Number 2 Section – the notorious PMS2 – responsible for drawing up lists of individuals involved in left-wing or pacifist activity to be subjected to continual monitoring by the state.¹⁷⁷ As would be the case with the American security state after World War II, the British intelligence apparatus set its own remit and interpreted it broadly as the license to police ‘subversion’ wherever it was found with little to no democratic oversight.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, some of those members of MI5 and PMS2 most directly involved in the wartime monitoring and detention of radical liberals, socialists, and pacifists, like the infamous spook Maxwell Knight (1887-1968), would go on to collude with British Fascists between the wars: a fruitful collaboration rooted in a shared determination to destroy the left, making quietly effective use of Knight’s sophisticated methods of clandestine informational warfare.¹⁷⁹

vii.

The system of informational surveillance and control developed by the British government to suppress dissent would soon entrap E.D. Morel and prompt his incarceration. In 1916, the War Office issued instructions for Morel’s mail to be continually intercepted and searched, with any attempt to export overseas ‘matter which might have been used by the enemy for the purpose of his propaganda’ to be seized and destroyed. Despite his receipt of an official warning to this effect, Morel persevered with his efforts to disseminate his anti-

¹⁷⁶ Millman, ‘HMG’, 421.

¹⁷⁷ Nicholas Hiley, ‘Internal Security in Wartime: The Rise and Fall of PMS2, 1915-1917’, *Intelligence and Nation* 1.3 (1986), 395-415; Aled Eirug, ‘The Security Services in South Wales during the First World War’, *Welsh History Review* 28.4 (2017), 753-84, 771-3.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Loch Johnson, *America’s Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society* (Oxford: OUP, 1989); Douglas Stewart, *Creating the National Security State* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2008).

¹⁷⁹ John Hope, ‘Surveillance or Collusion? Maxwell Knight, MI5, and the British Fascist’, *Intelligence & National Security* 9.4 (1994), 651-75. On the elite network of fascists and fellow travellers which would mycelate within the interwar British polity, see Bernhard Dietz, *Neotories: The Revolt of British Conservatives Against Democracy and Political Modernity (1929-1939)* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

war writings as broadly as possible, arranging for his friend and comrade, the novelist Ethel Sidgwick (1877-1970), to transport copies of his work to neutral Switzerland, from which hub they might be copied, translated, and disseminated across the combatant nations. Unfortunately for Morel, this plan was discovered by the state surveillance apparatus. His home and offices were raided by the police, incontrovertible proof of his conspiracy to export 'seditious' material abroad was discovered, and he was promptly hauled before a tribunal to receive punishment. Despite his offense qualifying only as a misdemeanour under existing law, and not an especially grievous one at that, the judge nevertheless did not hesitate to deny Morel bail, sentencing him to six months of hard labour among the general population of Pentonville prison.¹⁸⁰ In light of his treatment at the hands of the state, one cannot help but conclude with Cline that 'Morel's prosecution was plainly a politically motivated effort to silence him'.¹⁸¹

Morel was radically transformed for the worse by his imprisonment, an appalling experience of solitude and suffering which contributed significantly to his post-bellum political embitterment. We have broached already the concept of the traumatic encounter with the Real in the context of the mutilated Congolese. Now it was Morel's turn to be inflicted with a subjective wound which left splinters in the psyche – a 'limit experience' that caused the very architecture of his self to buckle under extremities of existential pressure. The prison regime of hard labour, isolation, and humiliation would have degraded and damaged the most resilient young man, and Morel was a sensitive middle-aged journalist already prone to bouts of despair and nervous exhaustion (especially following the execution of his great friend and ally Roger Casement by the British state the previous year). The catastrophic damage which incarceration inflicted upon Morel proffers an obvious biographical explanation for the shocking viciousness and radicalism which would characterise Morel's campaigning after his release. Contemporary psychological research suggests that traumatic experiences of victimisation (of which incarceration ranks among the most acute) can galvanise an individual's receptivity towards radical and aggressive forms of political engagement, a subjective transformation

¹⁸⁰ Millman, 'HMG', 423-4.

¹⁸¹ Cline, 112.

symptomized affectively by intense feelings of anger, hostility and conspiratorial paranoia, as well as by the desire for revenge against those perceived as enemies.¹⁸² All of these symptoms would be made publicly manifest in the dark fury Morel would unleash from his pen in the remaining six years of his life – a horribly brief span which had surely been dramatically diminished by his encounter with Britain's punitive *dispositif*, as Philip Snowden (1864-1937) (a future *confrère* of Morel's in the MacDonald government) recorded in his autobiography:

Mr Morel felt the indignity and injustice of his imprisonment... so much that it had a serious and permanent effect upon his health, and was, no doubt, responsible for his death a few years later.¹⁸³

Morel was discharged from Pentonville in January 1918 a changed and diminished man. Bertrand Russell, who would soon find himself imprisoned under the auspices of DORA, recorded his concern for his fellow traveller in a letter to Bloomsbury impresario Lady Ottoline Morrel (1873-1938):

I saw E.D. Morel yesterday for the first time since he came out, and was impressed by the seriousness of a six months sentence. His hair is completely white (there was hardly a tinge of white before). When he first came out, he collapsed completely, physically and mentally, largely as the result of insufficient food.¹⁸⁴

It soon became clear that Morel's pre-existing pessimism regarding the capacity of the UDC and the pacifist movement as a whole to help bring about a just and lasting peace had been deepened dramatically by the trauma of his

¹⁸² Ulrich Orth & Elias Wieland, 'Anger, Hostility and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Trauma-Exposed Adults: A Meta-Analysis', *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology* 74.4 (2006), 698-706; Christophe Pierre Bayer *et al.*, 'Association of Trauma and PTSD Symptoms with Openness to Reconciliation and Feelings of Revenge among Former Ugandan and Congolese Child Soldiers', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 298.5 (2007), 555-9; Elizabeth Mulcahy *et al.*, 'The Radicalisation of Prison Inmates: A Review of the Literature on Recruitment, Religion and Prisoner Vulnerability', *Journal of Human Security* 9.1 (2013), 4-14; B. Heidi Ellis *et al.*, 'Trauma and Openness to Legal and Illegal Activism among Somali Refugees', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27.5 (2015), 857-83.

¹⁸³ Philip Snowden, *An Autobiography* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934), v.1, 424.

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Vellacott, 231. Cf. Cline, 113: 'Mary Morel returned from her first visit [to Pentonville] fearing for [Edmund's] sanity, and he experienced both a psychic debacle and a physical collapse in the weeks after his release'.

imprisonment. Writing to Trevelyan after his release, a cynical Morel admitted that ‘we none of us believe in our hearts that we can... affect the actual terms of the peace’. Convinced now that there was little chance of the war being concluded by the Allies in a satisfactory manner, one that would accurately address the root causes of the conflict as he had diagnosed them and materially act to prevent a second outbreak, Morel informed Trevelyan that ‘our real work lies during, but especially *after* the settlement’.¹⁸⁵ As Cline has identified, a single common factor endowed E.D. Morel’s political and journalistic endeavours in the post-war years with meaning and coherence. They were all ‘directed toward a single goal: the destruction of the Treaty of Versailles’.¹⁸⁶ Morel’s dissatisfaction with the new world order being forged in Paris – that unprecedented experiment in international engineering which the president of the newborn Czechoslovak state, Tomáš Masaryk (1850-1937), memorably dubbed ‘a laboratory sitting atop a vast graveyard’ – was keenly felt (and pronounced upon) long before the treaty was signed.¹⁸⁷ In early 1919, he issued a memorandum to the General Council of the UDC readying his comrades for the renewed struggle would soon be upon them, this time against the inadequacies of the forthcoming peace: ‘The pressure of Democracy must everywhere be applied to bringing about future revisions and adjustments’.¹⁸⁸ Thus, by the time the Draft Treaty was first published at the end of April, Morel and the UDC were set already on a war footing of their own, prepared to lay siege to the terms of the settlement from its very moment of foundation.

Morel’s assault on the Treaty focused especially upon Article 231, the notorious ‘War Guilt Clause’, which placed sole responsibility for the outbreak of the war squarely on Germany’s shoulders: a ‘fable’ and a ‘phantasy’, one which must be dispelled to ensure lasting peace in Europe. As he would later claim, the most important revision demanded of the post-war settlement was ‘psychological, not economic. It is labelled paragraph 231 of the Versailles

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Cline, 117. On the inarguable failure of the wartime campaign to wrest democratic control of foreign policy away from the international power elite, see Megan Donaldson, ‘The Survival of the Secret Treaty: Publicity, Secrecy, and Legality in the International Order’, *American Journal of International Law* 111.3 (2017), 575-627.

¹⁸⁶ Cline, 116.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Laboratory’: quoted in Robert Gerwarth, ‘The Sky Beyond Versailles: The Paris Peace Treaties in Recent Historiography’, *Journal of Modern History* 93.4 (2021), 896-930, 899.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 117.

Treaty'.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Morel understood that the British public were far more responsive to the economic argument against Versailles (as advanced by J.M. Keynes) than to his own dark premonitions of a second, greater war. He was thus determined to exploit the happy accident of the Keynesian sentiment's mass dissemination, despite his personal conviction that 'no economic readjustments, no fixing of reparations at a reasonable figure' would solve the failings of Versailles.¹⁹⁰ In the immediate aftermath of the war, he focused primarily on the abject suffering of the German population, characterising the Allied impositions on the defeated nation as 'a cunningly devised and intricate system of economic and financial strangulations whose barely concealed purpose is to so enslave, starve and break the spirit of a great people as to make their recovery utterly impossible'.¹⁹¹ He would soon realise, however, that the more effective tactic was to appeal to enlightened British self-interest, rather than to humanitarian sympathy for the vanquished enemy.

Simultaneous to his argument that the demand for reparations was destroying the German economy, Morel also advanced the obverse case that reparations would ultimately lead to the *increase* of German economic power at the expense of the British. Germany's payments could only be met via a concomitant increase in German exports; thus, in the long run Germany would find herself reinvigorated and the British themselves the 'chief sufferers' of Versailles. As Cline notes, this self-contradictory clutch of arguments – that Germany would both be crippled by reparations and reinvigorated by them at Britain's cost – seems grounded less in serious engagement with the political economy of post-war Europe than in a set of *moral* suppositions regarding the peace struck at Paris: 'Since he regarded most of the Allied statesmen as little better than war criminals, he assumed in advance that any treaty of their making would be unjust'.¹⁹² Such a patently inequitable settlement, in Morel's eyes, could only ever bear poisoned fruit; it was simply not yet clear quite which species of disaster would be thereby birthed.

¹⁸⁹ F15/4/3, *New Leader*, 19 Sep 1924; *Nation*, 2 Dec 1922.

¹⁹⁰ F15/4/3, *Nation*, 2 Dec 1922.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Cline, 118.

¹⁹² Cline, 116.

American President Woodrow Wilson, formerly the object of Morel's deep admiration, was now subjected to the lash of his pen; the sense of hopes disappointed is palpable in his writing of the period. The immediate post-war period, the so-called 'Wilsonian moment', was the apogée of the cerebral American leader's global influence and reputation.¹⁹³ In Europe, adulation was near-religious in its intensity, exemplified by the slogans and salutations which accompanied his triumphal progress through the continent in the winter of 1918-19: 'Hail the Champion of the Rights of Man', cried the citizens of Brest; 'Welcome to the God of Peace' was proclaimed in Rome. There were further heights of hyperbole still to scale. The Milanese called him 'the Saviour of Humanity' and 'The Moses from Across the Atlantic'.¹⁹⁴ One shudders to think of the messianising effect of such slavering tributes on a subjectivity already characterised above all by 'priggishness, vanity and arrogance' – not to mention deep-seated racism.¹⁹⁵ As Robert Gerwarth writes:

Wilson may have been publicly celebrated for the principle of self-determination, but many anticolonial activists privately saw him for the white supremacist that he was.¹⁹⁶

Even bearing in mind his near-pathological contrariness and the baleful effects which prolonged exposure to Wilson's personality induced in the average observer, the intensity of Morel's *volte-face* is still surprising. The President had, after all, made the Morelian critique of secret diplomacy an important part of his own public position on the conflict, as in his war message to Congress in April 1917:

We have no quarrel with the German people.... It was not upon their impulse that their government acted in entering this war. It was not with their previous knowledge or approval. It was a war

¹⁹³ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), esp. 15-54.

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), 194-5

¹⁹⁵ 'Priggishness': Tombs & Tombs, 503. On Wilson's racism and its relevance to his politics, see Stephen Skowronek, 'The Reassociation of Ideas and Purposes: Racism, Liberalism, and the American Political Tradition', *American Political Science Review* 100.3 (2006), 385-401; Lloyd Ambrosius, 'Woodrow Wilson and *The Birth of a Nation*: American Democracy and International Relations', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18.4 (2007), 689-718.

¹⁹⁶ Gerwarth, 'Sky', 915.

determined upon as wars used to be determined upon in the old unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers and wars were provoked and waged in the interest of dynasties or of little groups of ambitious men who were accustomed to use their fellow men as pawns and tools.... Cunningly contrived plans of deception or aggression, carried, it may be from generation to generation, can be worked out and kept from the light only within the privacy of courts or behind the carefully guarded confidences of a narrow and privileged class.¹⁹⁷

Yet Morel was not the only previously sympathetic observer to experience bitter disappointment with Wilson's post-war performance. Keynes, in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920), tendered a gently withering assessment of the donnish American leader:

The President was not a hero or a prophet; he was not even a philosopher; but a generously intentioned man, with many of the weaknesses of other human beings, and lacking that dominating intellectual equipment which would have been necessary to cope with the subtle and dangerous spellbinders whom a tremendous clash of forces and personalities had brought to the top as triumphant masters... This blind and deaf Don Quixote was entering a cavern where the swift and glittering blade was in the hands of the adversary.¹⁹⁸

We might recognise in this post-triumphal *tristesse* a growing awareness among Wilson-watchers of a previously-elided gap between the President's own personal ideology and the secular liberal internationalism of Keynes (and Morel) which, paradoxically, had come to operate discursively under the signifier 'Wilsonianism'. As historian Jeremy Menchik writes:

Wilson's liberalism was not grounded in natural law and sovereignty like Kant's perpetual peace: it was rooted in the Christian origins of democracy, America's providentially derived

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Richard Striner, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Burden Too Great to Bear* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 105-6.

¹⁹⁸ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), 39-41.

leadership of the world, and cooperation between Christian states.¹⁹⁹

To take the leader of the American republic's rhetoric about national self-determination seriously, meanwhile, meant also to deliberately look the other way from the United States' own hemispheric imperial ambitions – as prosecuted by Wilson himself through military interventions in Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico (alongside the continuation of long-term projects of domination in Cuba and Panama) to secure stable access to resources and markets.²⁰⁰ Actually-existing Wilsonianism, it was becoming clear, meant the inviolability of the sovereignty of *white* countries, as the Japanese discovered to their bitter shock with the defeat of the racial equality clause at Versailles.²⁰¹ The glaring exception to this policy was the Soviet Union: Wilson despatched American troops to intervene against the Bolshevik government between late 1917 and the end of the Russian Civil War in 1922, as did its wartime allies Britain, France, and Japan, backstopped at home by a fearmongering press campaign in favour of military action.²⁰² As Perry Anderson acidly observes:

¹⁹⁹ Jeremy Menchik, 'Woodrow Wilson and the Spirit of Liberal Internationalism', *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 22.2 (2021), 231-53, 233.

²⁰⁰ Alan McPherson, 'Wilsonian Interventions, 1913-19', in *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 72-94. See also Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 89-130; Ellen Tillman, *Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-Building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNCP, 2016), 53-77; Jamie Bisher, *The Intelligence War in Latin America, 1914-1922* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), 285-309; Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2017), 150-76; Lars Schoultz, *In Their Best Interest: A History of the U.S. Effort to Improve Latin Americans* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2018), 43-69; Alex Bryne, *The Monroe Doctrine and United States National Security in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: PM, 2020), 93-129; Alex Beckstrand, 'Woodrow Wilson and the Struggle of Civil-Military Relations during the Punitive Expedition of 1916-1917', *Journal of Military History* 68.2 (2022), 372-98.

²⁰¹ See Marilyn Lake & Harry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 284-309.

²⁰² Michael Jabara Carley, 'Allied Intervention and the Russian Civil War, 1917-1922', *International History Review* 11.4 (1989), 689-713; Charlotte Alston, 'British Journalism and the Campaign for Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-10', *Revolutionary Russia* 20.1 (2007), 35-49; Damien Wright, *Churchill's Secret War With Lenin: British and Commonwealth Military Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-20* (Solihull: Helion, 2017); Sergey Grishachev & Vladimir Datsyshen, 'Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War and Japanese Troops in Russia's Far East, 1918-1922', in Dmitry Streltsov & Nobuo Shimotomai

From the outset, internationalism in [the] American sense simply meant the readiness and will to extend US power to Eurasia.²⁰³

Characteristically, it was in the post-war moment of Wilson's international ascendancy that Morel decided to publicly repudiate his former admiration for the American president. Over the course of the negotiations at Versailles, Morel wrote, Woodrow Wilson had shown his true colours, standing revealed as 'an empty rhetorician, inebriated by flattery, infirm of purpose. It was Wilson's betrayal of his own admirable principles, in fact, that lent Versailles its 'peculiar moral odiousness'. But Wilson's failure to secure an acceptable peace owed less, in Morel's view, to personal weakness than an unwillingness to grapple with the systemic failings in European statecraft that had themselves precipitated the war: in other words, secret diplomacy. Wilson's actions had fallen short of the 'open diplomacy' he had promised. Instead, he had become hemmed in by the 'secret treaties' and agreements struck between the Allied governments over the course of the war, 'enveloped... in that secrecy which he had in advance forsworn'.²⁰⁴ Wilson's brainchild, the new League of Nations, also received short shrift from Morel – this in spite of the fact that one of the UDC's most concrete suggestions to combat secret diplomacy had been the creation of a supranational body for the resolution of disputes without resort to war.²⁰⁵ Morel contended instead that the League was nothing more than a victors' cabal, a method of solidifying the unjust international settlement as laid out in Versailles, and was thus 'part of a larger instrument legalising the most fearful injuries ever inflicted upon any nation in modern history'.²⁰⁶

(ed.), *A History of Russo-Japanese Relations Over Two Centuries of Cooperation and Competition* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 137-51.

²⁰³ Anderson, 'Internationalism', 24.

²⁰⁴ All quoted in Cline, 117.

²⁰⁵ The signal overview of the League of Nations in the context of interimperial competition is Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: the League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 2015). On the League's emergent function as the guarantor of global capitalism (and thus of the tradition of Kantian commercial peace), see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: OUP, 2015). A fascinating recent study of the League in the context of the High Modern informational revolution is Carolyn Biltoft, *A Violent Peace: Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2021).

²⁰⁶ *Foreign Affairs*, Oct 1923, 71.

The failing of the League most frequently cited by later observers – its essential adynamia as a practical peace-keeping body – was, perversely, celebrated by Morel as a sign that the unjust state of affairs created by the Paris peace might later be rectified. This would have been impossible had a stronger institution with greater transnational disciplinary *puissance* been birthed from the peace.²⁰⁷ Thus, one of the last of his lifelong sequence of crusades was his opposition in 1924 to the League's Draft Treaty of Mutual Assurance, a proposal by free trader and pacifist Lord Robert Cecil aimed at strengthening the League's collective security apparatuses against national aggression.²⁰⁸ On similar grounds, Morel also opposed the activities of the League of Nations Union (LNU) – an organisation founded by British liberal internationalists in an attempt to bolster domestic enthusiasm for the new body.²⁰⁹ Its core membership was drawn from the milieu of mainstream liberalism to which Morel had once belonged and which he had now decisively repudiated; its first president was, of all people, Sir Edward Grey, Morel's long-time adversary and living embodiment of the sins of 'secret diplomacy'. Applying the language of A.J.P. Taylor, historian of the LNU Helen McCarthy has dubbed the organisation the 'acceptable face of troublemaking', an apposite assessment, which highlights both what was shared by Morel and the LNU and what was fundamentally distinguished them.²¹⁰ Though both were internationalist and pacifistic in principle, Morel's was a far thornier and less easily digestible presence in British discourse. Morel had once made trouble by pressing for a peace settlement and a League of Nations; now that these had manifested, he made trouble by rejecting them.

The jugate issues of German territorial loss after Versailles and of the plight of ethnic-German minorities in the new states of east-central Europe

²⁰⁷ Cf. Haakon Ikononou, 'The Administrative Anatomy of Failure: The League of Nations Disarmament Section, 1919–1925', *Contemporary European History* 30.3 (2021), 321–34.

²⁰⁸ Peter Yearwood, '"A Genuine and Energetic League of Nations Policy": Lord Robert Cecil and the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, 1922–1923', in *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy, 1914–1925* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 211–50.

²⁰⁹ Daniel Gorman, 'Liberal Internationalism, the League of Nations Union and the Mandate System', *Canadian Journal of History* 40.3 (2005), 449–78.

²¹⁰ Helen McCarthy, 'The Acceptable Face of Troublemaking', in *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1914–1918* (Manchester: MUP, 2011), 1–14.

would have tragic consequences in the decades to come.²¹¹ Both were addressed by Morel during these years, in terms both sympathetic and sensationalist. His rhetoric here seems tangibly more florid than that of his earlier campaigns, particularly in his easy evocation of sexual assault to convey the sense of Germany's national violation. Polish acquisition of German territory was described as a 'rape', as well as 'an astounding act of robbery', and the remaining ethnic Germans living there had been 'placed at the disposal, like so much cattle, of M. Paderewski and his friends'. Morel was equally scathing about the purloinments carried out by Czechoslovakia, Italy and France against their prostrate enemy-victims. The Czechs were subjecting the German minority of the Sudetenland to abuse 'in aggravated degree', Morel opined miserably. Malverse too was the opportunistic Italian theft of South Tyrol from the corpse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with no concern for the inculcation of future resentment; the terms of the treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon imposed on the two halves of the erstwhile Habsburg Dual Monarchy were, if anything, even more punitive than those of Versailles.²¹² The reacquisition of Alsace-Lorraine by France, meanwhile, seemed to Morel merely 'the injustice of 1871... repeated. An old sore in the international body which was in the process of healing when the war broke out is reopened'.²¹³

In these transfers of ethnic German populations unto the regiment of foreign states and hostile majority populations, Morel saw the birth of vicious resentment and the cradle of future conflict:

Misery and suffering are once again inflicted upon tens of thousands of people in these provinces and the seeds of hatred sown with lavish hands.²¹⁴

²¹¹ See Rogers Brubaker, 'Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives', *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 18.2 (1995), 189-218; Laura Robson, 'Capitulations Redux: The Imperial Genealogy of the Post-World War I "Minority" Regime', *American Historical Review* 126.3 (2021), 978-1000.

²¹² As argued vigorously by Arnold Suppan, *The Imperialist Peace Order in Central Europe: Saint-Germain and Trianon, 1919-1920* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2019).

²¹³ Quoted in Cline, 119. See also Michael Heffernan, 'History, Geography, and the French National Space: The Question of Alsace-Lorraine, 1914-1918', *Space & Polity* 5.1 (2001), 27-48.

²¹⁴ Quoted in Cline, 119.

Not only did it seem to Morel that Germany was being falsely blamed for the outbreak of European war, but it appeared she alone was now also to be denied the universal right to national self-determination which had been proclaimed in ringing Wilsonian tones from the pulpit of Versailles.²¹⁵ The optimistic dreams of 1919 seemed to be withering on the vine. As one British civil servant wrote despairingly in October of 1923:

Of Europe generally one can only write with a feeling of profound humiliation. It has returned to the worst traditions of what is known as the old diplomacy. Everything is decided by force or blackmail.²¹⁶

Morel's proposed solutions to the failures of the post-war settlement and the continued suffering of the German people, made in various public journals over the early 1920s, were motivated by an enduring belief in the best of the idealism of 1919. They were not uncommon propositions in British foreign policy circles of the moment. Yet to modern ears, they have a somewhat sinister edge: an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria, the annexation of the Sudetenland by a now unified German nation, and a territorial reckoning with Poland.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ On the gradual process by which ethnic self-determination was adopted as a central tenet of 'Wilsonian' principle over the course of the war, see Eric Storm & Maarten van Ginderachter, 'Questioning the Wilsonian Moment: The Role of Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Dissolution of European Empires from the *Belle Époque* through the First World War', *European Review of History* 26.5 (2019), 747-56; Xosé Núñez Seixas, 'Wilson's Unexpected Friends: The Transnational Impact of the First World War on Western European Nationalist Movements', in *idem.* (ed.), *The First World War and the Nationality Question in Europe: Global Impact and Local Dynamics* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 37-64.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Gordon Martel, 'The Prehistory of Appeasement: Headlam-Morley, the Peace Settlement, and Revisionism', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 9.3 (1998), 242-65, 265 n.37.

²¹⁷ Cline, 118-9.

IV

Morel the Demagogue: The Black Horror



Figure 9: A.M. Cay, 'Die Schwarze Schmach!'

Franzosen im Ruhrgebiet (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1923)

i.

The 'Black Horror on The Rhine' affair was a startling and shameful blot on the career of E.D. Morel. Beginning in April 1920, Morel became the public face of an international propaganda campaign falsely alleging that black African troops stationed by the French army in the Rhineland were responsible for a wave of sexual atrocities against German women and children, and that German girls were being forced into brothels in order to satiate their savage sexuality. The decision not only to participate in but to take a leading role in shaping this racist campaign was a coherent one from the point of view of Morel's single, overwhelming political goal in the immediate post-war years: namely, a nympholeptic assault upon the injustices of the Versailles peace, no matter the collateral damage and with no qualms regarding methodology. The all-consuming commitment to 'the Cause' which had constituted the subjective foundation of Morel's heroism during the Congo reform campaign now led him into dark places. Yet the value for the historian in studying the Black Horror is derived not so much from gawping at the reputational autodefencement of an otherwise decent man, but rather in observing the many forces working through the World at large which we can locate through close scrutiny of the event. As Fredric Jameson writes:

The external world, however ugly or depressing, can never be inert or meaningless, if only because it has been historically produced and has its meaning in historical production.¹

The Black Horror campaign was directed against the decision made by France to man a section of its occupying force stationed in the Rhineland after the Great War with 'coloured' troops. Of the 200,000 French troops garrisoned on the Rhine after Versailles, around 25,000 were drawn from the colonies. These were mostly recruits from Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, but their numbers also included a number of sub-Saharan 'black Africans' from Senegal, Cameroon, and the Sudan (on whom the subsequent moral panic would be disproportionately focused), alongside a smattering of Asian troops from the Empire's holdings in Indochina.² The French were very well aware that this

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 34.

² Sandra Maß, 'Von der "Schwarzen Schmach" zur "Deutschen Heimat": Die Rheinische Frauenliga im Kampf gegen die Rheinlandbesetzung, 1920-1929', *Werkstatt Geschichte* 32 (2002), 44-57, 44 n.2.

decision would cause discomfort among the occupied Germans. Indeed, that discomfort was a central recommending factor in the decision. One staffer at the French Ministry of War noted with satisfaction in 1920 that the Moroccans garrisoned on the Rhine were 'doing marvellously; the Germans are very much afraid of them'.³ Another psychological aspect of the deployment of French colonial troops, besides the infliction of racialised humiliation, was a reminder to the defeated Germans of the depth of France's reserves of manpower, as General Charles Mangin (1866-1925) explained:

France does not stop at the Mediterranean, nor at the Sahara...
She extends to the Congo... She constitutes an empire vaster than
Europe, and which in half a century will number 100 million
inhabitants.⁴

Germany, meanwhile, had just experienced the geopolitical ignominy of being forcibly stripped of her own (already insubstantial) colonial possessions by the victorious Powers. The spiteful French message was clearly received in Berlin; as Lord Derby, Britain's ambassador to France, reported back to Whitehall in April 1920, 'I cannot think of anything more calculated to irritate the Germans'.⁵ Yet France's controversial decision to recruit colonial forces for deployment on the European mainland received the green light from the British delegation at Versailles – 'so long as M. Clemenceau did not train big nigger armies for the purpose of aggression', as Lloyd George light-heartedly warned his counterpart.⁶

The spark which transmuted the ambient racial animus and simmering resentment felt by many Germans into an organised campaign was the Hauptwache incident of 7 April 1920. Following the use of armed troops by the German government in the demilitarised zone along the Rhine to suppress the Ruhr uprising, France, arguing that the Treaty of Versailles had been contravened, moved to occupy Frankfurt. Swiftly after mobilisation, a regiment of Moroccan soldiers, surrounded by a jeering mob in the Hauptwache square, fired into the crowd, killing nine. Part of what made the massacre a viable pole

³ Quoted in Keith Nelson, 'The "Black Horror on the Rhine": Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy', *Journal of Modern History* 42.4 (1970), 606-27, 613.

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 613.

⁵ Quoted in Sally Marks, 'Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience', *European Studies Review* 19 (1983), 297-334, 297.

⁶ D.H. Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant* (London: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1928), v.1, 116.

around which to spin international sympathy was that it saw the first open condemnation of French policy by the British government since the conclusion of hostilities. The very next day, Diego von Bergen (1872-1944), Germany's ambassador to the Holy See, sent a telegram to a contact in the Weimar Foreign Office, remarking that the shootings would give impetus to German complaints regarding 'the use of coloured troops, which is a mockery of civilisation', and to alert foreign governments to 'the general crimes committed by these troops'.⁷ The Foreign Office immediately began to compile reports on the misdeeds of occupying soldiers, which were then sent on to journalists. The *Daily Herald*, Britain's premier left-wing daily of the time, carried the news the following morning, making sure to stress the race of the offending soldiers. As the headline declared: 'Frankfurt Runs Red with Blood: French Black Troops Use Machine Guns on Civilians.'⁸ From the very start, the Black Horror campaign emerged out of a direct collaboration between the German government and foreign sympathisers in the dissemination of (mis)information, of whom Morel would come to be the most valuable.

The stage was now set for a dramatic intervention. In a front-page *Daily Herald* article published April 10, underneath a headline screeching 'Black Scourge in Europe – Sexual Horror Let Loose by France on The Rhine – Disappearance of Young German Girls', E.D. Morel unleashed the full fury of his rhetorical powers against the French for 'thrusting her black savages... into the heart of Germany'.⁹ These 'primitive barbarians', the reader was told, were carrying sexual diseases across the countryside, raping as they went; after all, the 'sex impulse' of the black man was a 'more spontaneous, fiercer, less controllable impulse than among European peoples hedged in by the complicated paraphernalia of convention and laws', and thus '*must be satisfied upon the bodies of white women*'.¹⁰ Furthermore, as Morel reports in lurid euphemism, 'for well-known physiological reasons, the raping of a white woman by a negro is nearly always accompanied by serious injury and not infrequently has fatal results.' This project to 'ruin, enslave, degrade, dismember [and]

⁷ Quoted in Julia Roos, 'Nationalism, Racism and Propaganda in Early Weimar Germany: Contradictions in the Campaign Against the "Black Horror on the Rhine"', *German History* 30.1 (2012), 45-74, 49.

⁸ *Daily Herald*, 9 April 1920.

⁹ E.D. Morel, 'Black Scourge in Europe', *Daily Herald*, 10 Apr 1920.

¹⁰ E.D. Morel, *The Horror on the Rhine* (London: UDC, 1920), 10, italics in original.

reduce to the lowest depths of despair and humiliation a whole people' was, we learn, the brainchild of the spiteful and militaristic French government. The invitation to racial panic was couched in respectably class-conscious logic, as befitted the *Herald's* ideological bent. Morel warned the proletariat of Europe that:

If the manhood of these races, not so advanced in the forms of civilisation as ourselves, are to be used against the Germans, why not against the workers here or elsewhere? ¹¹

On this point, Morel was picking up his own thread where he had left it in *The Black Man's Burden* (1919), in which book the fear of France using her legions of 'Negroes, Malagasies, Berbers [and] Arabs... in the interest of a capitalist and militant Order' had been given voice.¹² This argument was itself a recapitulation of an enduring radical liberal anxiety regarding the potentially deleterious impact of the brutal methods of government cultivated in the imperial sphere on metropolitan political freedoms, descending from Charles James Fox (1749-1806) in the 1790s via Cobden and Bright to the Fabians and John Hobson (1858-1940) at the turn of the century:

It is... a nemesis of imperialism that the arts and crafts of tyranny, acquired and exercised in our unfree Empire, should be turned against our liberties at home.¹³

The blood shed by colonial soldiers on European soil in the Hauptwache incident seemed to Morel to validate the long-standing warnings sounded by his intellectual forebears regarding the threat posed to democracy by the return of the imperial repressed.

Morel had also previously touched on the issue of black sexuality, noting in passing that Africans were 'a race inspired by Nature... with tremendous sexual instincts' in the context of France's colonial battalions as recently as

¹¹ All quotes from Morel, 'Black Scourge'.

¹² E.D Morel, *The Black Man's Burden* (Manchester: National Labour Press, 1919), 223.

¹³ J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1902), 160. See Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism During the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19.1 (1991), 1-23.

March 1920.¹⁴ The genealogy of the concerns which would crystallise into the Black Horror can therefore be clearly traced through Morel's post-prison writings. Yet the venomous racism on display in 'Black Scourge', especially its obsessive focus on the allegedly rapacious nature of black male sexuality, represented novel rhetorical territory for Morel, far beyond the patronising, quasi-anthropological tone of his earlier work; Helena Swanwick, in her history of the UDC, is at pains to describe the 'agonies of sympathy' which *her* Morel experienced for 'his beloved black man'.¹⁵ Now, it seemed, Morel was ready and willing to activate the deliquescent racial fears of white Europeans, casting aside his humanistic principles to galvanise his rabid campaign against the Versailles peace.

The *Herald* would continue to publish along the lines laid out by Morel over the following weeks, emitting further inflammatory screeds which it called editorials beneath headlines such as 'Black Peril on the Rhine' and 'Brutes in French Uniform'.¹⁶ 'The Mayors of German towns', the paper claimed, 'are compelled by the French authorities to provide brothels for the primitive sexual passions of these men.'¹⁷ Other left-wing publications also took up the sword. The venerable socialist newspaper *Commonweal* cried:

All honour to Mr Morel... for exposing the foul abomination perpetrated by the French Government in sending a horde of Senegal savages to the occupied territory... One would feign believe that no white race exists that would compel a foe to hand over its women to the lust of a black soldiery.¹⁸

As for Morel himself, 'Black Scourge' would prove to be only the first salvo in a campaigning project he would pursue for the next two years. Drawing on a lifetime of experience in the field of propaganda, Morel modulated the thrust of his argument to suit the prospective readership of any given article. In the ILP's own *Labour Leader*, for instance, Morel stoked fears about the potential usage

¹⁴ E.D. Morel, 'The New Peril', *Daily Herald*, 27 Jan 1920; *idem.*, 'The Employment of Black Troops', *Nation*, 27 Mar 1920.

¹⁵ Swanwick, 187.

¹⁶ 'Black Peril on the Rhine', *Daily Herald*, 12 Apr 1920; 'Brutes in French Uniform', *Daily Herald*, 13 Apr 1920.

¹⁷ *Daily Herald*, 12 Apr 1920.

¹⁸ *Commonweal*, 17 Apr 1920.

of a colonial army – a ‘passively obedient instrument of... capitalist society’ – to crush Europe’s independent-minded working class.¹⁹ For the more bourgeois readers of *Foreign Affairs*, by way of contrast, the elements of the scandal involving purported sexual immorality were pushed to the forefront.

In June, Morel produced a longer pamphlet entitled *The Horror on the Rhine*, which served to inflame a volatile situation further still, turning the screws tighter in the emotional manipulation of his audience. His rhetorical capabilities when working in the melodramatic mode of the ‘imperial gothic’ have already been discussed in the context of *Red Rubber*, in which work the modalities of *fin de siècle* literary horror were tapped to elicit fear and hatred of the Leopoldian nightmare in the Congo. In *The Horror on the Rhine*, Morel returns to the well, this time in service of racial fearmongering, resuscitating the tropes of infandous desires and unknown dangers lurking in the undergrowth that would be familiar to readers of colonial fiction:

In ones and twos, sometimes in parties, big, stalwart men from warmer climes, armed with sword-bayonets or knives, sometimes with revolvers, living unnatural lives of restraint, their fierce passions hot within them, roam the countryside. Woe to the girl returning to her village home, or on the way to town with market produce, or at work alone hoeing in the fields. Dark forms come leaping out from the shadows of the trees, appear unexpectedly among the vines and grasses, rise from the corn where they have lain concealed. Then - the panic stricken flight which often availleth not...²⁰

Using the additional space with which a published work furnished him compared to a *Herald* editorial, Morel now included some eighty reports of individual incidents concerning the visitation of the rapacity of the occupying troops on innocent German *Jungfrauen*. Here is a representative sampling:

Reported from Frankfurt – April, 1920 (doctor’s deposition attached). ‘Black’ French soldier forces his way into a woman’s house, assaults her with extreme violence almost strangling her,

¹⁹ E.D. Morel, ‘The Slave Owner Spirit Again’, *Labour Leader*, 22 Apr 1920.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

drags her to the floor, sticks a knife in it within reach of his hand while he rapes her. When she is released, she rushes from the house, and seeing a party of French soldiers, complains. She is told in reply that her assailant has not been home for two and a half years, that these things must happen. One of the soldiers, pointing to her fair hair, remarks that the black soldiers are especially partial to blondes.

Reported from Porz – Easter, 1920. Attempted rape of a woman of sixty-five by a ‘Coloured’ soldier.

Reported from Elsdorf – May 15, 1920. Attempted rape of a woman of thirty-five; failure after desperate resistance; great violence used.²¹

Girls lucky enough to escape sexual assault and murder at the hand of black soldiers were nevertheless not free from danger, or so the reader is informed. Such was the poverty of post-war Germany under the yoke of Versailles that many young women had been forced into prostitution to avoid starvation, servicing the allegedly outsized lust of the Africans. This was the reason for the outbreak of syphilis in the Rhineland: the venereal disease, Morel writes, was carried by ‘a large proportion of the African troops’.²²

Morel’s account was in one sense based entirely in fact: the starvation of the German people was very real. Britain’s wartime application of the methods of liberal economic warfare (what we today would call ‘sanctions’) against the Central Powers, throttling Germany’s access to food and agricultural material, starved three quarters of a million civilians to death (killing a greater number than would the Allied strategic bombing campaign in World War Two) whilst stunting and immiserating millions more.²³ We must recognise here the intersubjective extremities of resentment and rage precipitated by a full-blown crisis of human socio-energetic reproduction in Germany – an experience of acute material privation and systemic humiliation which was alien to that of

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²² *Ibid.*, 17-19. On the pseudoscientific white supposition of uncontrollable black lust, see Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present* (London: Virago, 2007), 89-118.

²³ Phillip Drew, ‘Blockade and the Civilian Population’, in *The Law of Maritime Blockade: Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 81-90.

the British.²⁴ Such extreme collective suffering can warp the self-sense of a community for generations. As the affect theorist Sara Ahmed has articulated it: 'Together we hate, and this hate is what makes us together'.²⁵ The memory of the fatal hunger which Britain inflicted on Germany would be assimilated into the radical revisionism of the 1930s. The promise of a full belly for oneself and one's children was absolutely central to the political appeal of the National Socialists ('No More Turnips', the slogan ran). When the Nazis invaded the USSR in 1941, furthermore, they made effective use of British strategic doctrine as deployed in the previous war, instituting a policy of prepensive starvation which killed millions of Soviet citizens.²⁶

Morel correctly perceived the internalisation of humiliation and hatred in post-war German society as the probable cause of a second war, even more bitter than the last. Indeed, the true danger of the alleged sexual disgraces perpetrated in the 'Black Horror', he argued, was not so much in the suffering caused to individual Germans, but the poisonous seeds now being sown in the soil of the Rhineland by France and her allies with regards to the geopolitics of the future, as becomes apparent at the climax of the pamphlet. The concluding peroration is worth quoting in full, as it strikes directly at the heart of the matter as Morel conceived of it:

The question for us is: Are our infant sons to be doomed to a violent and senseless death in manhood because French militarism is sowing the seeds of ineradicable hatreds in Europe? Are we to reap the crops? Are we, presently, to suffer once again because German boys are being told today: 'They obtained our surrender under false pretences. They promised us an honourable peace. We laid down our arms. When we were helpless they forced us to sign a Treaty which condemned us to death-in-life. They went on starving us for months and months. They stole our

²⁴ On the social 'limit experience' (*sec.* Bataille) of mass starvation as the crucible for transgenerational communal hatreds, *cf.* Cecil Rice & Jarlath Benson, 'Hungering for Revenge: The Irish Famine, the Troubles and Shame-Rage Cycles, and their Role in Group Therapy in Northern Ireland', *Group Analysis* 38.2 (2005), 219-35.

²⁵ Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text* 22.2 (2004), 117-39, 118.

²⁶ Gesine Gerhard, *Nazi Hunger Politics: A History of Food in the Third Reich* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 19-45, 85-101.

territory. They seized our colonies. They filched our coal and iron. They laid hands upon the property of our citizens abroad. They piled humiliation upon humiliation on us. All this they did. These things we can forget, though hardly. But that was not enough. They inflicted upon us the supreme outrage. From the plains and forests, from the valleys and the swamps of Africa they brought tens of thousands of savage men and thrust them upon us. *Boys, these men raped your mothers and sisters!* This, neither you, nor we, nor they, must ever be allowed to forget.²⁷

In this final peak of demagogic coloratura, the Black Horror is transformed into a superheated metonym for the entire calamitous psychosocial experience of post-war German humiliation. This insight strikes at the heart of Morel's motivation for ringmastering the whole nauseant affair. The weapons of race hatred, sexual paranoia, and moral panic were tools Morel had consented to wield in order to keep fighting his lonely war against the diplomatic-militaristic machine of Great Power politics. He was willing to mactate his own reputation on the altar of demagoguery, adjudging the damage he was wreaking to be justifiable collateral, in order to try and head off the greater evil he foresaw in embryo: a second war, more terrible than the last, born out of the Carthaginian peace struck at Versailles. In this sense, we may adjudge that Walter Benjamin had the right of it in 1926:

To stress one's own love of peace is always the close concern of those who have instigated war. But he who wants peace should speak of war. He should speak of the past one ... and, above all, he should speak of the coming one.²⁸

ii.

²⁷ Morel, *Horror*, 22.

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Peace Commodity (1926)', trans. Esther Leslie, in Ursula Marx *et al.* (eds.), *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs* (London: Verso, 2007), 56-7.

The First World War was a global war, and the colonies and possessions of the European empires worked double duty as both combat theatre and infrastructural backstage for the belligerent powers.²⁹ Between 1914 and 1920, Britain sluiced £143 million out of India to help sustain its war effort, along with the subcontinent's stores of wool, cotton, and paper. French West Africa sent palm oil to the metropole, while North Africa supplied food, until a pair of devastating harvest failures in 1917 and 1918 precipitated famine. Crucially for our study, the imperial powers did not merely extract goods from their peripheries, but also soldiers. In German East Africa, where much vicious fighting took place, the local economy was ravaged by the centripetal effects of the presence of two clashing European armies sucking money, materiel and men into their maw, with widespread use of impressment wreaking havoc on native societies. Allied victory here was eventually decided by an intervention from, of all possible saviours, the *Force Publique* of the Belgian Congo, the conscript army previously notable for enforcing discipline on the rest of the black population during the Leopoldian era through generous application of the *chicotte*.³⁰

While the recruitment and deployment of 'coloured' troops to fight colonial wars in the periphery was uncontroversial standard practice for European imperial Powers, the Great War also saw the emergence of a novel phenomenon: the mass importation of men born in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and a panoply of other overseas holdings to serve as workers and soldiers assisting in the struggle for supremacy back on the 'home soil' of metropolitan Europe itself. This was a strategic innovation available only to the Entente (the Central Powers lacking meaningful colonial possessions not engaged at that

²⁹ See, *inter alia*, Richard Fogarty & Andrew Tait Jarboe (eds.), *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Context* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Robert Gerwarth & Enez Manela, 'The Great War as a Global War: Imperial Conflict and the Reconfiguration of the World Order, 1911-1923', *Diplomatic History* 38.4 (2014), 786-800; Ana Paul Pires *et al.* (eds.), *The Global First World War: African, East Asian, Latin American and Iberian Mediators* (London: Routledge, 2021); Maartje Abbenhuis & Ismee Tames, *Global War, Global Catastrophe: Neutrals, Belligerents and the Transformations of the First World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

³⁰ Christian Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their Deployment in Europe During the First World War', *Immigrants & Minorities* 26.1-2, 111-33, 112. For the atrocities committed by the *Force Publique* in the Congo, see Hochschild, *Ghost*, 123-9.

very moment in desperate defensive struggles), and, even within that alliance, was largely confined to the two great aristocrats of nineteenth-century *haute impérialisme*, Britain and France.³¹ Between them, the old rivals deployed over 400,000 colonial workers behind their lines to help sustain the titanic logistical effort required to fight it – digging trenches, working in factories, driving ambulances and so forth. These workers were drawn from South Africa and Algeria, Jamaica and Vietnam, Egypt and China, Fiji and Madagascar. Wherever the Union Flag or the *Tricolore* flew, men were harvested for the war effort.³²

More striking to observers at the time, however, was the mobilisation of colonial troops to serve in *combat* on the European front. The British, who had despatched a million Indians to fight and die in the dust of Mesopotamia, also sent 150,000 soldiers from the same country into battle on the Western front from September 1914 onwards, with understandably stimulating effects on the anti-imperial consciousness of those who survived their encounter with industrial warfare.³³ On the other hand, many British decision-makers were leery about the prospect of deploying African troops outside their home continent, despite the best efforts of a vocal colonial lobby to convince them otherwise. As Winston Churchill pontificated to the House of Commons in May 1916:

Let us think what historians of the future would write if they were writing a history of the present time and had to record that Great Britain was forced to make an inconclusive peace because she forgot Africa; that at a time when every man counted... the Government of Great Britain was unable to make any use of a mighty continent... It would be incredible; but it is taking place... What is going on while we sit here, while we go away to dinner, or home to bed? Nearly 1,000 men – Englishmen, Britishers, men of our own race – are knocked into bundles of bloody rags every

³¹ Italy also inexplicably attempted to press-gang 2,700 Libyan soldiers into Alpine warfare in August 1915, but most of them died of pneumonia almost immediately: Koller, 114.

³² *Ibid.*, 113.

³³ *Ibid.*, 113. See also Sharmishtha Roy Chowdhury, *The First World War, Anticolonialism and Imperial Authority in British India, 1914-1924* (London: T&F, 2019).

twenty-four hours... Every measure must be considered, and none put aside while there is hope of obtaining something from it.³⁴

Josiah Wedgwood (1872-1943), Morel's radical liberal ally who, in 1914, had resigned his post as an MP to drive armoured cars for the Navy before being wounded in action at the Dardanelles and invalided home, concurred with the man who had planned that operation. 'Churchill backed up my efforts to get coloured peoples recruited for the Army', Wedgwood later recalled:

As concerns the coloured army he was no doubt anxious for men, I for raising the status of the coloured races; and we failed because the War Office thought it undesirable to put coloured people on a par with white men. It might put ideas into their heads.³⁵

Wedgwood here perhaps protests too much regarding the distinction between Churchill's *realpolitik* agenda and his own apparently enlightened position. As he informed the *Daily Chronicle* with startling honesty in November 1916, when asked why a black army was necessary:

Because we do not want all the whites killed - to put it bluntly. To slow down the rate of killing of our own men and to eke out the finest race on earth.³⁶

Black troops did indeed fight on the Western Front for the British Army, but they were mostly individual volunteers drawn from the scattered communities of British-born black men in port cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff. These 'Black Tommies' puzzled the military authorities, who felt uncomfortable posting black soldiers in 'regular' white battalions but were unable to invoke the spectre of colonial rebellion, which had long served as the go-to rebuttal to the idea of training African soldiers in the European mode of warfare, when applied to a handful of patriotic young men from Toxteth and Tiger Bay. Thus, a smattering of black Britons found themselves deployed to France and Belgium, whilst others were shuffled quietly out of sight and mind into postings with the British West Indies Regiment, resolving the quandaries

³⁴ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 5th series, vol. 82, col.2023 -5.

³⁵ Josiah Wedgwood, *Memoirs of a Fighting Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1941), 134-5.

³⁶ Quoted in David Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial African Army', *Journal of African History* 20.3 (1979), 421-36, 425.

which their status posed to white British authorities by means of negation.³⁷ In interacting with their new West Indian comrades, some of these young men would come into contact for the first time with the effervescent Black Atlantic network of cultural and intellectual contacts, awakening to the notion of a shared, multinational 'Blackness' among the African diaspora, in ways which would become increasingly important to world racial politics after the war.³⁸

The French, contrastingly, would far more readily embrace the idea of deploying colonial troops to the European theatre. In France, the realisation of the necessity of recruiting African soldiers to serve as proxies of the state far away from the metropole had been reached during the 19th century, during the acquisition of vast territories which would become French West and Equatorial Africa, with the first battalion of African military corps was established by the French authorities as far back as 1857.³⁹ They were to be called the *tirailleurs sénégalais* – a misleading name, as the force's soldiers were recruited from across all of French sub-Saharan Africa, not merely Senegal. The advantages of recruiting black troops to serve the Empire in their native lands seemed obvious to some French military planners. African soldiers were more resistant to the climate and the native diseases of the 'Dark Continent' than their white counterparts. They were also cheap to employ, as black troops were only paid a fraction of what white Frenchmen received. Moreover, the public at home were far less discomfited when they happened to get shot and killed *en masse*. Metropolitan troops were thereby freed up to secure *la patrie* against the true threat to France in these years: the Kingdom of Prussia, soon to be succeeded by the newly united nation of Germany.⁴⁰ This was seen as being of especial importance in light of the widespread panic in official circles regarding France's stagnating population at a time when total available manpower was still regarded as the *sine qua non* of military success, especially compared to

³⁷ Ray Costello, *Black Tommies: British Soldiers of African Descent in the First World War* (Liverpool: LUP, 2016), 13.

³⁸ Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNCP, 2011), esp. 23-44; Owen Walsh, "'The Human Ocean of the Coloured Races': Interwar Black Internationalism, Marxism, and Permanent Revolution", *Labour History* 63.4 (2022), 503-17.

³⁹ Pierre Bouvier, *La Longue Marche des Tirailleurs Sénégalais: De la Grande Guerre aux Indépendances* (Paris: Belin Éditeur, 2018), 13-62

⁴⁰ Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore, MD: JHUP, 2008), 19.

Germany's demographic effervescence.⁴¹ Anxieties about the pejoration of national *puissance* were thus darkened by a sense of sexual insecurity, as French failure to perform demographically measured up unfavourably to the evident fruits of mass German copulation.

For Charles Mangin, a square-jawed Lieutenant Colonel born in the limitrophe *département* of Moselle, shortly before his family's expulsion when that region was annexed by Germany in 1871, it was obvious that the 'warrior instincts' of the black soldiers under French command were being unduly limited by their use being confined to the frontier. Mangin, in his influential 1910 book *La Force Noire*, argued instead that African soldiers should be employed in the defence of the French homeland itself, not just in the Empire: a catholicon for the problem of falling metropolitan birth rates which so distressed France's military planners. Indeed, this absorption of the colonial *évolué* into the army of the metropole would present itself as a mark of the success of France's *mission civilisatrice*.⁴² Another French commander, General Joseph Gallieni (1849-1916), whose experience in Africa mainly consisted of gory innovations in the field of counterinsurgency by dint of his role as the military governor of Madagascar, remarked that same year that:

The warrior qualities of the Senegalese can no longer be contested. Proud to serve under the orders of the French leaders, it is impossible to treat them as simple mercenaries; in the service of our flag they constitute, on the contrary, elite troops which it would be regrettable not to deploy.⁴³

Gallienni is here gesturing towards a longstanding European belief in the inherent capacity of black Africans for unspeakable and mindless violence.

⁴¹ Joe Lunn, "'Les Races Guerrières': Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers During the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 34.4 (1999), 517-36, at 519. On demographic anxiety, see Andrés Horacio Reggiani, 'Procreating France: The Politics of Demography, 1919-1945', *French Historical Studies* 19.3 (1996). 725-54, 729-36; Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: DUP, 2009), 21-51.

⁴² Ruth Ginio, 'French Officers, African Officers, and the Violent Image of African Colonial Soldiers', *Historical Reflections* 36.2 (2010), 59-75.

⁴³ Quoted in Ginio, 63. See Michael Finch, *A Progressive Occupation? The Gallieni-Lyautey Method and Colonial Pacification in Tonkin and Madagascar, 1885-1900* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 168-222.

Given that the central purpose of the soldier's profession is violence, it might be argued that it made little sense to condemn African soldiers for it. Yet in the Western mind, as historian Ruth Ginio puts it:

The violence associated with African soldiers was not the regular sort one would expect of any soldier. It was a savage and barbaric violence that ostensibly defied the rules of Western warfare.⁴⁴

One ambiguity of African violence, as it was conceptualised in the parlours and coffeehouses of Europe, had been central to the debates regarding the abolition of the slave trade – namely, whether the brutality of the African (here taken as a given) resulted ineluctably from his inherently savage nature, or emerged instead out of external factors acting on him, in particular the existence of the slave trade itself.⁴⁵ To take one example, most in the French government and military regarded their North African possession Algeria as inherently and bloodily violent by the nature of its society and history, and indeed held firm on this point well into the wars of decolonisation in the 1950s and '60s.⁴⁶ It was thus the task of the coloniser to keep this 'savage' violence and chaos firmly in check.

Mangin, who would later earn the nickname '*le Boucher*' for his sanguine attitude towards the lives of his soldiers, himself juggled dextrously with the moral quandaries posed by 'African violence', both accepting its reality and praising its utility on the battlefield whilst simultaneously denying and domesticating it by emphasising the degree of assimilation to France and Frenchness undergone by the *tirailleurs*. The Lieutenant-Colonel stressed the boon to soldiering which black troops' 'boiling blood' and 'fearlessness in the face of death' gave them – alongside, Mangin claimed, the underdeveloped nervous systems of Africans, which meant that they experienced pain to a far lesser degree than white people.⁴⁷ Yet the 'fury' which was unleashed in combat by

⁴⁴ Quoted in Ginio, 61.

⁴⁵ Richard Reid, 'Revisiting Primitive War: Perceptions of Violence and Race in History', *War and Society* 26 (2007), 1-25.

⁴⁶ See James McDougall, 'Savage Wars? Codes of Violence in Algeria, 1830s-1990s', *Third World Quarterly* 26.1 (2005), 117-31.

⁴⁷ Cf. Nietzsche's racist comments on the suffering of 'Negroes... taken as representatives of prehistoric man' in *Genealogy*, 49: 'The curve of human capacity for pain seems in fact to fall off extraordinarily abruptly, once past the upper ten thousand or ten million of the higher culture...'

black soldiers should also be read as quintessentially 'French', Mangin argued, giving body to the ancestral heritage of France's martial traditions of *élan*:

In future battles, these primitives, for whom life counts so little and whose young blood flows so ardently, as if avid to be shed, will certainly attain the old 'French fury', and will reinvigorate it if necessary.⁴⁸

The 'Frenchness' of the violence practiced by the *tirailleurs*, Mangin claimed, could be especially acutely observed in the violent contempt exhibited for other, 'savage' Africans by these semi-assimilated black troops, who now sat on a higher rung of civilisation than before as a result of their (still incomplete) cultural tutelage.⁴⁹

On a less elevated level than Mangin's ponderings on nature, nurture, and nation, some in France simply found the effect which their 'savage' recruits had on putative enemies to be ghoulishly gratifying. In one newspaper article from autumn 1910, the author remarked (*avec une certaine jouissance*) on the outrage being exhibited in the German press at the prospect of France's deploying Africans to serve in Europe, perhaps against white Germans: surely that psychological impact alone made Mangin's proposal a winner? Many German fighting men would never have encountered black men before. The novelty and limitations of the German Empire meant that people of colour had far less of a presence in the metropole than in France or, especially, Britain. If German soldiers were thus afraid of fighting Africans, that gave them great added value in the propugnation of *la patrie*.⁵⁰ This same conclusion was reached by many in France's military hierarchy. The intellectually influential General Henri Bonnal (1844-1917) argued in favour of Mangin's idea that in the 'coming war... the "black" troops will have no rivals when it is a matter of delivering the final shock'. As such, they should serve on the front lines, to maximise the effect of their 'savage impetuosity in attacks with the bayonet'. Similarly, General Hippolyte Langlois (1839-1912) proposed applying the

⁴⁸ Quoted in Lunn, 'Racial Preconceptions', 523. On the perseverance of *élan* as a French martial ideal up to *la Grande Guerre*, see Dimitry Queloz, *De la Manoeuvre Napoléonienne à l'Offensive à Outrance: La Tactique Générale de l'Armée Française, 1871-1914* (Paris: Economica, 2009).

⁴⁹ Ginio, 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

‘warrior qualities’ of the ‘black race’ to ‘modern warfare’, as ‘their cold-blooded and fatalistic temperament [would] render them terrible in attack’.⁵¹ The positive appraisal of African soldiers was thus based on foundationally racist premises about black brutality, violence and savagery. During the war, this would have concrete effects on the experience of colonial troops. After the French military hierarchy settled on the idea of the *tirailleurs* as bloodthirsty shock troops (especially after Mangin’s promotion to a position in French High Command), African soldiers were disproportionately tasked with carrying out risky attacks – with concomitantly bloated casualty rates.⁵²

Between 1914 and 1918, France deployed to the Western Front some 172,800 soldiers from Algeria, 134,300 from West Africa, 60,000 from Tunisia, 37,300 from Morocco, and 34,400 from Madagascar, along with an additional 44,000 men from Indochina (the so-called ‘*armée jaune*’).⁵³ The colonial regiments were a mixture of volunteers and conscripts; as with white soldiers in the metropole, the ratio swung dramatically towards conscription the longer the war dragged on. Many targets of French impressment attempted to avoid being forcibly recruited, with methods ranging from self-mutilation to flight into the bush, alongside clonic outbreaks of mass armed resistance, especially in Algeria.⁵⁴ Joost van Vollenhoven (1877-1918), the Rotterdam-born Governor General of French West Africa, was driven to distraction by the damage being inflicted on the long-term stability of France’s colonial project by the domestic enthusiasm for the recruitment of a *force noire*:

Recruiting the black army out of volunteers is a utopia; its creator has been mistaken, facts have proved this so dramatically that this issue can no longer be discussed... Since the beginning of the war, recruitment has become a hunt for men... Out of recruitment has resulted an unpopularity that has become universal from the very day when recruits were asked to serve in Europe and grim, determined, terrible revolts started against the white man, who had hitherto been tolerated, sometimes even loved, but who,

⁵¹ Both quoted in Lunn, ‘Racial Preconceptions’, 524-5.

⁵² Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 83-7.

⁵³ Lunn, ‘Racial Preconceptions’, 527.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

transformed into a recruiting agent, had become a detested enemy, the image of the slave hunters he had defeated and replaced himself.⁵⁵

By the end of 1917, Vollenhoven was resisting all moves by the French government to step up recruitment in West Africa, eventually resigning his post over the issue. 'If we really need new *tirailleurs*', he informed his superiors in exasperation, 'we will have to recruit them forcibly, running the risk of a general revolt'.⁵⁶ Returning to his old regiment on the Western Front, he was instead shot through the skull at the Second Battle of the Marne.

France deployed her first colonial units to the Western Front in the autumn of 1914. The West African soldiers who fought in Picardy in September of that year were the first sub-Saharan Africans ever to man the front lines of a European war. In accordance with the pronouncements of Mangin *et al.* on the hereditary suitability of Africans as shock troops, black soldiers were moved to the front line when a push was imminent. As French propaganda put it, through a haze of romantic mystification:

From the very first hour on, African regiments had the privilege to occupy the most dangerous posts, which permitted them to enrich their book of traditions and past glory.⁵⁷

A different way of phrasing it would be that the French army used African men as cannon fodder and were perfectly happy to admit it. Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929) could not be accused of mincing his words to the French senate in February 1918:

We are going to offer civilisation to the Blacks. They will have to pay for that... I would prefer that ten Blacks are killed rather than one Frenchman – although I immensely respect those brave Blacks – for I think that enough Frenchmen are killed anyway and that we should sacrifice as few as possible!⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 116-7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 120.

Joe Lunn, the premier historian of the Senegalese wartime experience, has demonstrated through an analysis of casualty statistics that Clemenceau near-enough got his wish: the likelihood of any given West African soldier being killed during his time at the front was two and a half times greater than that for a white soldier, and three times greater or more for men unlucky enough to hail from an ethnic group prized by the French for their so-called 'martial' traditions.⁵⁹ As the Senegalese communist Lamine Senghor (1889-1927) observed bitterly after the war:

You have all seen that, during the war, as many Negroes as possible were recruited and led off to be killed... We know and are deeply aware that, when we are needed to lay down our lives or do hard labour, then we are French; but when it's a question of giving us rights, we are no longer French, we are Negroes.⁶⁰

The presence of African soldiers on the front lines, their reputation for carnage, and the gravity of their nemetic task made a powerful impression on some white *poilus*. The young communist Henri Barbusse (1873-1935), a future *compagnon de route* of Morel's in the post-war internationalist 'Clarté' movement, recorded his impressions of an African regiment passing by in *Le Feu* (1916), his semi-fictionalised account of his war experience:

They march past with faces red-brown, yellow or chestnut, their beards scanty and fine or thick and frizzled, their greatcoats yellowish-green, and their muddy helmets sporting the crescent in the place of our grenade. Their eyes are like balls of ivory or onyx, that shine from faces like new pennies, flattened or angular. Now and again comes swaying along the line the coal-black mask of a Senegalese sharpshooter... We watch them in silence. These are asked no questions. They command respect, and even a little fear... They are going, of course, to the first line. That is their place, and their passing is the sign of an imminent attack. They are made for the offensive... We talk over the characteristics of

⁵⁹ Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), 140-7.

⁶⁰ Quoted in David Murphy, 'Race and the Legacy of the First World War in French Anti-Colonial Politics of the 1920s', in Ewence & Grady, *op. cit.*, 201-25, 217.

these Africans; their ferocity in attack, their devouring passion to be in with the bayonet, their predilection for ‘no quarter’.⁶¹

Barbusse’s description here is strongly reminiscent of another shocked encounter with a regiment of black soldiers, penned by a fellow veteran of the Western Front, J.R.R. Tolkien (1882-1973), whose *Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) transmutes the author’s traumatic wartime experience into a fantastical register:

‘More Men going to Mordor’, [Gollum] said in a low voice. ‘Dark faces. We have not seen Men like these before, no, Sméagol has not. They are fierce. They have black eyes, and long black hair, and gold rings in their ears; yes, lots of beautiful gold. And some have red paint on their cheeks, and red cloaks; and their flags are red, and the tips of their spears; and they have round shields, yellow and black with big spikes. Not nice; very cruel wicked Men they look. Almost as bad as Orcs, and much bigger.’⁶²

Over the course of the conflict, however, the French view of ‘their’ African troops gradually changed – softened even. Barbusse’s wary appreciation of the virtues of the violent savage gave ground to a paternalistic, patronising affection for the black ‘grown child’ placed under the tutelage and protection of France’s civilisational project.⁶³ ‘Their existence, their destiny is connected to ours’, the *Revue de Paris* declared in 1915:

It is our task to elevate them to a superior life and to protect them from German rule that everywhere has been very hard for indigenous peoples and that considers its colonies only as a field of exploitation.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, trans. Fitzwater Wray (Tucson, AZ: Fireship Press, 2009 [1916]), 36. Cf. Emmanuelle Cronier & Victor Demiaux, ‘Encountering the Other in Wartime: The Great War as an Intercultural Moment?’, *First World War Studies* 9.2 (2018), 141-50.

⁶² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: Harper Collins, 1991 [1954-55]), 631-2.

⁶³ As evidenced, for instance, by the changing depictions of black soldiers in drawings and sketches made by white French soldiers: Laurent Gervereau, ‘De Bien Trop Noirs Dessesins’, in Janos Riesz & Joachim Schultz (eds.), *Tirailleurs Sénégalais: Zur Bildlichen und Literarischen Darstellung Afrikanischer Soldaten im Dienste Frankreichs* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1989), 111-31.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Koller, 126.

This hierarchical relationship of guardian and ward was justified by reference to the then-accepted distinction between the natural aptitudes of whites and blacks for independent thought. As one French journalist opined in 1915, in an article purporting to explain to the reader ‘The Soul of the Senegalese’:

For the black man, the white man’s orders, the chief’s orders are summarised in one phrase that he repeats again and again: *y à service* [sic] ... He won’t discuss; he does not try to understand. He would kill his father, mother, wife, child, in order to obey the order he received. He is not responsible; a superior’s will is more important than his own one... In all the blacks’ acts, we find this mixture of childlike innocence and heroism... The Senegalese is brave by nature; as a primitive being, he does not analyse... For the Senegalese, his officer is everything; he replaces the absent chief of his village, his father. If the Senegalese has confidence in his chief, he does not do anything without consulting him.⁶⁵

The ideology which made the ‘coloured’ man a child in the eyes of Europeans was internalised by some black troops. Bakary Diallo, whose 1926 memoirs are a key source for investigating the experience of the Senegalese soldier in France, wrote that the *tirailleurs* were ‘children of the government’, assisted in their journey towards maturity (symbolised by assimilation to French civilisation) by their military experience.⁶⁶

One interesting facet of this transmutation of the figure of the black soldier from unleashed brute to *grand enfant* in the French public sphere, as Christian Koller has observed, was his concomitant desexualisation in the official imagination. Now a naïve helpmeet in the great ‘war to defend civilisation’, the symbolically gelded African was evacuated of his threat to white women in the metropole.⁶⁷ Yet, beneath the propaganda, doubts still lingered in the minds of the white French. Former nurse Lucie Cousturier (1876-1925), who had treated Senegalese soldiers in the military hospital at Fréjus, recalled the attitudes of the general population in her 1920 book, *Des Inconnus Chez Moi*:

⁶⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 124-5.

⁶⁶ Cullen Goldblatt, ‘Bakary Diallo’s Force-Bonté (1926): A Complicit Critique of French Humanity’, *Research in African Literatures* 50.4 (2020), 182-201, 185.

⁶⁷ Koller, 125.

In April and May of 1916 we were very anxious about our future friends... There was simply no crime that one could put beyond them: drunkenness, theft, rape, epidemics... ‘What will become of us?’ the farmers’ wives moaned... ‘We cannot let our little daughters go out alone anymore because of those savages. We do not even risk going out alone ourselves any more... Imagine! If you were in the hands of those gorillas!’⁶⁸

iii.

The peculiarly perfervid tone of the German-instigated controversy over France’s use of black troops to police the occupied Rhineland was first and foremost a by-product of its status as a front within a much broader conflict, namely the propaganda war which raged between those two nations over the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.⁶⁹ World opinion had first been turned against Germany during the conflict, ever since the *Reichsheer*’s much-publicised ‘rape of Belgium’ in 1914, reflecting the Allies’ far more dextrous handling of the global media apparatus. The novel importance of the informational front in the war came as a surprise to the German military. One internal memo from 1918 describes the discovery thereof, and the realisation of their rout by the Allies in said arena, as ‘one of the most depressing experiences of the war for the German people’.⁷⁰ Many in the German power elite – politicians, capitalists, journalists

⁶⁸ Quoted in Koller, 125.

⁶⁹ For a coldly realist reading of the Versailles ‘peace’ as continuation of the war by other means (and, indeed, as active preparation for the next on the part of the victorious Powers), see Eckart Conze, *Die Große Illusion: Versailles 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2018).

⁷⁰ Quoted in Elisabeth Fondren & John Maxwell Hamilton, ‘The Universal Laws of Propaganda: World War I and the Origins of Government Manufacture of Opinion’, *Journal of Intelligence History* (2023), forthcoming, 2. Germany’s global propaganda defeat was nevertheless not for lack of effort after the need for graft was belatedly recognised: see Anne Rosenbush, ‘*Por la Pátria y por la Verdad*: Germany’s Effort to Maintain Spanish Neutrality during the First World War’, in Maria Fernanda Rollo *et al.* (eds.), *War and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (Lisbon: Instituto de História Contemporânea, 2013), 19-26; Chad Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2017); Stratos Dordanos, ‘German Propaganda in the Balkans during the First World War’, *Balkanica* 49 (2018), 69-78; Elizabeth Fondren, ‘Fighting an Armed Doctrine: The Struggle to Modernize German Propaganda During World War I (1914–1918)’, *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 23.4 (2021), 256-317; Carla Russ, *¡A los Americanos!*:

etc. – pinned the blame for their rout on this front on Britain's stranglehold on informationality, especially its control over the physical means of dissemination, which pressurised the news agencies of neutral countries to tender their implicit support for the *Entente*.⁷¹ Ludendorff was especially eloquent on the subject of Britain's success in the international war of words:

We were hypnotised... as a rabbit by a snake. [British propaganda] was exceptionally clever, and conceived on a great scale... In the neutral countries we were subject to a sort of moral blockade.⁷²

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was even more effusive in his praise:

What we failed to do in this direction was made up by the enemy with really unheard-of skill and ingenious deliberation. I learned infinitely much more from the enemy's war propaganda... It was limited to a few points of view, calculated exclusively for the masses, and it was carried out with untiring persistency. Basic ideas and forms of execution which had once been recognized as being right were employed throughout the entire war, and never did one make even the slightest change. At the beginning it was apparently crazy in the impudence of its assertions, later it became disagreeable, and finally it was believed.⁷³

Propaganda warfare between the Powers continued after the Armistice, with the public exchange of (entirely justified) accusations of colonial atrocity between the British and German governments drawing (also entirely justified) charges of hypocrisy.⁷⁴ 'If errors in native policy should be the basis for exclusion

Deutsche Propaganda in Lateinamerika während des Ersten Weltkrieges (1914–1918) (Darmstadt: wbg, 2022).

⁷¹ Heidi Tworek, 'Oligopolies of the Past? Habermas, Bourdieu, and Conceptual Approaches to News Agencies', *Journalism* 21.12 (2020), 1825-41, 1833.

⁷² Quoted in Marquis, 493.

⁷³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. John Chamberlain *et al.*, (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941 [1925]), 228, 240.

⁷⁴ Mads Bomholt Neilsen, 'Delegitimizing Empire: German and British Representations of Colonial Violence, 1918-19', *International History Review* 42.4 (2020), 833-50. See also Christina Twomey, 'Atrocity Narratives and Inter-Imperial Rivalry: Britain, Germany and the Treatment of "Native Races", 1904-1939', in Tom Crook *et al.* (eds.), *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad, c.1830-2000* (London: PM, 2011), 201-25.

from future colonial activities', fulminated the Frankfurter economist Moritz Bonn (1873-1965), 'there is hardly a nation who should be entitled to keep its colonies!' ⁷⁵ Well, quite. Nevertheless, with the defeat of the Central Powers, there came a perverse sliver of hope: now, at least, international sympathy might be garnered for Germany's plight. This attitude was reflected in a report by the Foreign Ministry's propaganda division in December 1918. The Allied victory, the report observed, had at last entified 'a sort of compassion and sympathy' for Germany:

The great suffering of the [German] people, when presented in the right kind of way... [could] lead to a sea change of world opinion.⁷⁶

The central plank of the new German propaganda in the post-war period would be the struggle against the Treaty of Versailles. In 1920, future Chancellor Gustav Stresemann (1878-1929) thunderously demanded that

the revision of the Versailles peace is made the centre of a government propaganda, which hammers the injustice perpetrated on Germany home into the awareness of our people, into the awareness of the entire world.⁷⁷

His will was done. By 1922, Lloyd George was facing questions in the Commons as to whether he was aware that 'the German wireless press service from Nauen was spreading anti-British and anti-French propaganda around the globe'.⁷⁸ As a veteran combatant of these press wars, E.D. Morel had already developed firm and trusting professional relationships with liberal figures within the German establishment, some of whom were now responsible for planning and executing the post-war government's press war: Prince Max of Baden (1867-1929), Count Max Montgelas (1860-1938), and Max Weber, as well as a host of less notable individuals across a panoply of semi-official pressure groups and propaganda

⁷⁵ Quoted in Stuart Ward, 'The European Provenance of Decolonisation', *Past & Present* 230 (2016), 227-60, 234.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Elisabeth Piller, 'German Child Distress, US Humanitarian Aid and Revisionist Politics, 1918-24', *Journal of Contemporary History* 51.3 (2016), 453-486, 459.

⁷⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 461 n.24.

⁷⁸ *Hansard*, v.151 col.835, 6 Mar 1922. See Heidi Evans, "'The Path to Freedom'? Transoceanic and German Wireless Telegraphy, 1914-22', *Historical Social Research* 35.1 (2010), 209-36.

outlets, for whom Morel represented an opportunity to bypass the general obloquy to which Germany's own state organs had become subject.⁷⁹

A disdain for (and fear of) black colonial troops had already become widespread in Germany over the course of the Great War. Field Marshal Hindenburg (1837-1934) recalled how:

When there were no tanks, our enemy had sent black waves against us. Waves of black Africans! Woe to us when these waves reached our lines and massacred, or worse, tortured our defenceless men! [Yet] it is not at the black who performed such atrocities that indignant humanity will point an accusing finger, but at those who brought these hordes to the soil of Europe to take part in the so-called struggle for Honour, Freedom, and Justice. The blacks were slaughtered in their thousands.⁸⁰

In 1917, the German Colonial Office proclaimed that French use of colonial armies constituted a threat to European civilisation as a whole, backed up by the national press, who whipped up fear that Germany was being besieged by the whole 'coloured world'.⁸¹ It was these anxieties which Morel sought to reactivate with his assertion that, during the war, these same black men who were presently occupying the Rhineland had 'stuffed their haversacks with eyeballs, ears and heads of the foe'.⁸² France was condemned across the German media for introducing 'uncivilised elements' into 'civilised' Europe, thereby violating the moral norms of warfare. The press focused obsessively on accounts of ostensible atrocities committed by black soldiers: rape, summary executions, mutilation of corpses and so on.⁸³

German upset regarding the presence of African soldiers was thus entirely sincere and not merely a propagandistic affectation. Indeed, during negotiations at Versailles, the German delegation was instructed to ensure that 'coloured troops should not be made a part of the army of occupation'.⁸⁴ France's

⁷⁹ Cline, 125-30.

⁸⁰ Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, trans. F.A. Holt (London: Cassell & Co, 1920), 384.

⁸¹ Nelson, 'Black Horror', 608.

⁸² Morel, 'Scourge'.

⁸³ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 85.

⁸⁴ Mitchell, 141.

decision to deploy colonial soldiers regardless struck German nationalist *amour propre* to the quick:

The deployment of coloured troops of the most inferior culture as overseers of a population of such high spiritual and economic importance as the Rhinelanders is an intolerable violation of the law of European civilisation.⁸⁵

So fulminated President Friedrich Ebert, the dull-eyed Social Democratic leader who had months before concluded his exterminationist suppression of the German socialist revolution with help from his new allies on Germany's emergent fascist right, many of whom had themselves developed their capacity for extreme violence (including mass rape) in the genocidal colonial wars waged against the Herero and Nama in German South-West Africa.⁸⁶ Methods of repression honed in the periphery against racial 'inferiors', including sexual terrorism, were thus neatly transplanted to the metropole and applied to the working class, just as Morel had warned – even if, in reality it was the white colonial police rather than the 'coloured legions' who bloodily imposed the will of Capital on the European proletariat.

Morel's entry into the affray on the Rhine was manna from heaven for postbellum German propagandists. The catastrophic outcome of the war had rendered sympathetic foreign figures like Morel immeasurably precious to the Weimar government, as official German state organs had by this time become thoroughly discredited in the international public sphere. Indeed, such was the low reputation of German propaganda outlets that the Foreign Office now issued instructions to friendly journalists 'to render unrecognisable the official origins' of the information with which it furnished them.⁸⁷ Although the German government allowed foreign activists like Morel to be seen to be taking the lead in the campaign, it nevertheless buttressed their claims both overtly and

⁸⁵ Quoted in Peo Hansen & Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 23.

⁸⁶ Regarding the German soldier's education in 'exterminationism' on the African periphery and the centrality of rape to the self-sense of the Freikorps, see Klaus Theweleit's seminal *Männerphantasien* (Berlin, Matthes & Seitz, 2019 [1977-8]). The offenses themselves are detailed and contextualised in Elisa von Joeden-Forgy, 'Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Herero Genocide', in Dagmar Herzog & Chelsea Schields (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 316-26.

⁸⁷ Roos, 'Nationalism', 50.

covertly, with special reports issued from the Reichstag and the Ministry of the Interior detailing, for example, the purported number and cost of brothels established for 'coloured' troops.⁸⁸ *The Horror on the Rhine*, much to the delight of such bodies, was an immediate *éclat* inside and, more importantly, outside Germany. Two editions of 5,000 copies sold out in less than a month. Within the year, eight editions had been sent to the press in a variety of languages, including French, Dutch, and Italian.⁸⁹ Despite the best efforts of the Allied Rhineland Commission, German-language copies nevertheless found themselves into the hands of eager readers, much to Morel's gratification. 'This Pamphlet has now been officially prohibited from circulating throughout the entire Occupied area', the front cover of the booklet's eighth edition pompously declared, 'but the truth will not be stifled'.⁹⁰

Back home in Britain, Morel's new campaign was met with a broadly supportive response from the left. At the meeting of the Trade Union Congress that September, every delegate was furnished by the UDC with a complimentary copy of *The Horror on the Rhine*.⁹¹ J.W. Kneeshaw (1878-1960), the Christian Socialist and UDC activist who counted himself among Morel's most loyal friends and supporters, reported in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* that the pamphlet produced a 'profound impression' upon the assembled trade unionists: 'I was astonished at the number who came and expressed their views about it to me.' The delegation was left, Kneeshaw reported triumphantly, with 'a feeling of physical and spiritual revulsion'.⁹² Kneeshaw also penned a review of the booklet for the ILP's house paper, the *Labour Leader*, now edited by the esteemed socialist activist and ILP founding member Katharine Glasier (1867-1950). Glasier had taken over the paper *in extremis* in 1916, with circulation dropping like a stone under the auspices of the eloquent and idealistic pacifist Fenner Brockway. The running of the paper had not been made easier by the fact that the editor found himself repeatedly jailed by the British government for his opposition to the war, with Brockway's experience of hard labour and solitary confinement even more onerous than Morel's own traumatic

⁸⁸ Nelson, 'Black Horror', 618-9.

⁸⁹ Robert Reinders, 'Racialism on the Left: E.D. Morel and the "Black Horror on the Rhine"', *International Review of Social History* 13.1 (1968), 1-28, 6.

⁹⁰ Morel, *Horror*, 1.

⁹¹ Reinders, 6.

⁹² J. W. Kneeshaw, 'The Outlook', *Foreign Affairs*, Oct. 1920.

incarceration. Glasier had successfully repaired the *Leader's* finances and circulation in Brockway's stead, but her tenure was marked by bitter internal disagreements over the Soviet Union, most notably between the editor and the aggressively anti-Bolshevik liberal socialist Philip Snowden, who wrote a regular column for the paper (and whose wife Ethel (1881-1951), Fabian feminist and founder of the wartime Women's Peace Crusade, spent April of 1920 singing Morel's praises to unsuspecting dinner party guests: 'God bless the *Daily Herald* for printing E. D. Morel's article!').⁹³ In his review of *The Horror on the Rhine* for Glasier's publication, Kneeshaw presented Morel's racial demagoguery as the natural continuation of that paper's opposition to capitalist wars of aggression:

Here is Militarism stripped of its pompous grandeurs and glorifications and shown in a queue at the door of a brothel.⁹⁴

The campaign against the deployment of black soldiers in the Rhineland was thus positioned as a natural outgrowth of wartime resistance to European capitalist militarism – an argument also given voice by UDC veteran Norman Angell, who contended in 1921 that 'the arming of the African negro... is the Servile State in its most sinister form; and unless Europe is itself ready for slavery it will stop this reintroduction of slavery for the purposes of militarism'.⁹⁵

Within the British public sphere more broadly, the Black Horror campaign surfed on a riptide of *remontant* Francophobia, as the solidarity of wartime curdled into resentment and recrimination. In *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Robert Graves (1895-1985) recalled the bitter mood percolating in post-war Oxford:

Anti-French feeling among most ex-soldiers amounted almost to an obsession. Edmund [Blunden], shaking with nerves, used to say at this time: 'No more wars for me at any price. Except against

⁹³ *Daily Herald*, 12 Apr. 1920; Chris Wrigley, 'Glasier, Katharine St John Bruce [née Katharine St John Conway], (1867–1950)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-42338.jsessionid=484288745D9CDB6FC7FD3254E20C349>.

⁹⁴ J. W. Kneeshaw, 'The Horror on the Rhine', *Labour Leader*, 2 Sep 1920.

⁹⁵ Norman Angell, *Fruits of Victory* (London: W. Collins, 1921), 325.

the French. If there's ever a war with them I'll go like a shot'. Pro-German feeling was increasing. Now that the war was over and the German armies had been beaten, it was possible to give the German soldier credit for being the best fighting-man in Europe. I often heard it said... that we had been fighting on the wrong side; our natural enemies were the French.⁹⁶

Francophobia was evinced at the highest levels of British government quite as much as among grumbling undergrads. Maurice Hankey (1877-1963), Lloyd George's Cabinet Secretary, noted during the wrangling at Versailles that 'I find the French full of intrigue and chicanery of all kinds'.⁹⁷ In the spirit of fairness, we ought to acknowledge that the feeling was decidedly mutual. A young French officer called Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), nicknamed 'The Great Asparagus' by his peers at military school on account of his great height and his unbearable pomposity, later recalled that he came out of the war 'overwhelmed by general feelings of xenophobia' directed specifically and vigorously towards *les Anglo-Saxons*.⁹⁸ Even the inveterate Anglophile Georges Clemenceau, a lifelong devotee of Spencer and Mill, felt moved to declare that 'England is the disillusion of my life'.⁹⁹ Yet revulsion at the recruitment of colonial troops to act as imperial enforcers was also felt not just in Britain and Germany but also in France itself, with Romain Rolland (Morel's wartime interlocutor, correspondence with whom had provided the excuse for his arrest) contending that the deployment of black soldiers in continental Europe must be understood as 'the logical consequence of wars of extortion and of massacre in Africa'.¹⁰⁰

The most significant leftist inheritor of Morel's argument regarding the use of African troops by imperial governments as a 'passively obedient instrument of... capitalist society', employed to suppress the working class, was neither British nor French, but rather the expatriate Vietnamese intellectual Nguyễn Tất Thành (1890-1969), then resident in Paris and an active member of

⁹⁶ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), 361.

⁹⁷ Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to End War* (London: John Murray, 2001), 39.

⁹⁸ Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914-1940* (London: Arnold, 1995), 79.

⁹⁹ Robert Hanks, 'Georges Clemenceau and the English', *HJ* 45.1 (2002), 53-77.

¹⁰⁰ Romain Rolland, 'Europe and the Coloured People', *Foreign Affairs*, May 1920.

the French Communist Party's *Union Intercoloniale*.¹⁰¹ Reaching into a conceptual armoury which bore the clear stamp of Leninism, Thành opined of the Rhineland farrago that:

Imperialism has now reached a degree of almost scientific perfection. It uses white proletarians to conquer the proletarians of the colonies. Then it hurls the proletarians of one colony against those of another. Finally, it relies on the proletarians of the colonies to rule white proletarians... Only recently, French soldiers in the Ruhr were surrounded by native soldiers, and native light infantry were sent against German strikers.¹⁰²

This was the very phantasm which Morel had conjured in the minds of the radical readers of 'Black Scourge':

Are the races of Africa to be militarily enslaved, and, as an eventual result, is war to rage all over Africa in order that the ambitions of European imperialism... may be fulfilled?¹⁰³

Even amongst those who were not susceptible to the call of racial animus, the argument that troops from the colonial world might be enlisted as the fist of Capital under imperial leadership nevertheless struck a chord – one which Thành, under his assumed *nom de guerre* Ho Chi Minh, would later have good cause to recall during the fratricidal war for control of his country a generation later.¹⁰⁴

iv.

It is worth reaffirming here the fundamental disjunct between the claims of the Black Horror campaign and the reality of the occupied Rhineland. There is no valid reason for the historian to believe in an epidemic of sexual violence

¹⁰¹ 'Passively': E.D. Morel, 'The Slave Owner Spirit Again', *Labour Leader*, Apr 22 1920.

¹⁰² Bernard Fall (ed.), *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-1966* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 31, 60, 71. See also Kimloan Vu-Hill, *Coolies into Rebels: The Impact of World War I on French Indochina* (Paris: Les Indes Savant, 2011).

¹⁰³ Morel, *Horror*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Sophia Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2003), 11-42.

against German women on the part of colonial troops, as Julia Roos has exhaustively demonstrated.¹⁰⁵ This is certainly not to say, of course, that no sexual crimes were committed by occupying troops: *qua* Angela Schöler, 'like in France in 1914, [or] in Berlin in 1945... women undoubtedly became part of the booty during the French occupation of the Rhineland after World War I'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, as contemporary scholarship of rape incidence suggests, those sexual abuses which did take place at the hands of soldiers were likely underreported by their victims.¹⁰⁷ Yet amongst the Rhenish themselves (rather than in the official hysteria emanating from Berlin), the evidence suggests that occupation by men from the colonies who felt no especial animus towards Germany and its inhabitants was widely preferred to the presence of native French soldiers, who generally despised and mistreated them. As one local police commissioner stated frankly to an American journalist in 1921:

The coloured troops make no trouble for us. They do not know why they are here; they merely obey orders. They are not arrogant; they have no pride in militarism; they have no special dislike or scorn for us as Germans, and they treat us exactly as they would treat French or English or American civilians. When there is military arrogance to complain of it is rather the white troops, who are conscious of themselves as French and of us as Germans, who consciously consider us an inferior people, and sometimes make it evident in their bearing.¹⁰⁸

Between December 1918 and June 1920, Sally Marks has found, 66 charges of rape or sexual impropriety by colonial soldiers were sent before the French authorities, bringing only 28 convictions from a military hierarchy notoriously willing to make a punitive example of 'coloured' men transgressing the bounds

¹⁰⁵ Julia Roos, 'Women's Rights, Nationalist Anxiety, and the "Moral" Agenda in the Early Weimar Republic: Revisiting the "Black Horror" Campaign against France's African Occupation Troops', *Central European History* 42.3 (2009), 473-508.

¹⁰⁶ Angela Schöler, 'The "Horror on the Rhine": Rape, Racism and the International Women's Movement', unpublished paper (1995), 1-19, 1. Cf. Thomas James Kehoe, '"Women Always Drew the Short Straw": Military Power and Sexual Exploitation in the American Occupation of Koblenz, 1918-1923', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 28.3 (2019), 425-56.

¹⁰⁷ See Susan Seibold-Simpson *et al.*, 'Person- and Incident-Level Predictors of Blame, Disclosure, and Reporting to Authorities in Rape Scenarios', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36.10 (2021), 4788-814.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Marks, 'Black Watch', 300.

of proper racial conduct by way of brutal collective sanction. Of the remaining 38 accusations, several were discovered to have been made by inhabitants of areas in which no colonial troops had even been stationed; others were found to concern consensual encounters which women were subsequently pressured into reporting as assault by family or local officials.¹⁰⁹

Ultimately, however, the truth status of the Black Horror's accusation and their relationship to concrete events is less important for the historian than the significant *intersubjective* truths revealed in the expression of the panic. To understand the deep cultural roots of the Black Horror meme which Morel propagated, and explain its virality, it is essential to examine the psychic sources of the widespread male sociosexual distress experienced across the combatant nations in the immediate post-war years. There were two conjoined strands to this angst: the gendered and the racial. In his polemics, Morel was building upon pre-existing fears among men returned from the war about female erotic susceptibility and the erosion of gender norms, mingled with prejudicial beliefs about the violence and sexual insatiability of Africans. A sexualised form of racism was, and remains, integral to the ideological superstructure built and maintained by the European empires and their legates.¹¹⁰ The power of this superstructural *dispositif* to shape the material reality of imperial domination has historically been subjectively channelled through human affective responses. Affects, as Sara Ahmed has argued, are the materials out of which our sense of our bodies and their boundaries are constructed in experience. Powerful emotions of hate, fear and disgust also delineate our visceral understandings of *corporate* bodies – and of their violation.¹¹¹ Thus, the direction of emotion through the connection of race to sex, and its powerful hold over humans especially in the unconscious *purlieux* of the mind, guides the creation of psychic boundaries between notions of acceptable bodies and behaviours and the monstrous, the frightening and the grotesque. The Black Horror campaign activated the violence latent within the deep tissue of Western structures of thought regarding hierarchies of race and gender via this affective power,

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 305-7.

¹¹⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: UCaP, 2002), 41-78. Cf. Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence and Feminism in the 'War on Terror'* (London: Zed, 2013).

¹¹¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 51-109.

strengthened by a heightened state of *angst*, of traumatised longing for normalcy, endemic to European men in the immediate post-war years.

The Great War constituted one of the great crises of Western masculinity. Soldiers experienced an often-unbridgeable chasm between their sense of what a man should be and the reality of their own traumatic experiences. During the war years, a masculine warrior discourse was loudly trumpeted across European societies. Rituals, images and symbols celebrating violent manhood were woven into the fabric of daily life. Despite the reality of shell and gas, a Romantic vision of the chivalric knight featured prominently in the propaganda and popular imagery of the conflict, drawing upon the stylised, swooning form of medievalism which had flourished in the cultural imaginary of the late nineteenth century.¹¹² But the war which Europe's men encountered on the frontlines proved to be terrifyingly idiosyncratic with the heroic narratives of individual masculine self-proving these cultural scripts had conditioned them to anticipate and attempt to enact. Instead of the glory of knights in the light of God, soldiers found themselves trapped in what Paul Fussell called the 'troglodyte world' of the trenches, cowering underground in the face of dehumanised slaughter.¹¹³ Men returned home from the war not as clean-limbed heroes, but as maimed and disabled victims of mechanical horror – if they returned at all. Millions of living male bodies were ripped apart like meat in the industrial pandemonium of modern total war (Churchill's 'bundles of bloody rags').¹¹⁴ Less visibly, the rise of neurotic disorders among soldiers, encapsulated by that horrifying new phenomenon named 'shell shock' (too close to the 'feminine' disease of hysteria for comfort), undermined faith in the ideal of the conquering male warrior both among the public at large and within the minds of the soldiers themselves – especially in the chronic sexual dysfunction by

¹¹² Lisa Todd, 'An Invitation to Manliness: The Chivalric Representation of Warfare in Germany, France and Britain, 1914-1918', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Royal Holloway College (1998).

¹¹³ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), 36-74.

¹¹⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996); Kate Macdonald, 'The First Cyborg and First World War Bodies as Anti-War Propaganda', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 9.4 (2016), 348-66; Stefanos Geroulanos & Todd Meyers, *The Human Body in the Age of Catastrophe: Brittleness, Integration, Science, and the Great War* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2018), 34-77.

which the condition frequently manifested.¹¹⁵ As we know from our own time, sexual and cultural alienation are often mutually constitutive, and can be productively synthesised in the radical right's politics of murderous phallocratic *ressentiment*.

Simultaneous to this crisis of masculinity, the demands of total war had necessitated the unprecedented integration of swathes of the female population into the industrial workforce of Europe, as well as into highly socially visible jobs which carried suggestions of independence and authority, such as nursing and the operation of transport systems.¹¹⁶ In Britain, for instance, men were agog at the sight of uniformed women police patrolling public areas.¹¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, labour in Britain had usually been sexually segregated. Unrelated men and women working alongside one another was a source of social anxiety, born of the fear of inappropriate sexual conduct. It was simply not 'respectable' for a woman to work unsupervised in places where she might mingle with men.¹¹⁸ During the war, however, some women even took military jobs, usurping the comfortable homosociability of that male *sanctum sanctorum*, the British Army. Some men, it should be noted, found the sight of women in uniform sexually exciting, though many others found it disturbing (and more than a few experienced both sensations at once).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Paul Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (London: PM, 2002), 15-31; Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 125-62; Tracey Loughran, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), 149-81; Bethan Johnson, 'Sexual Dysfunction in the "Eden of Love": Psychosocial Responses to Impotence in British First World War Veterans', *Twentieth Century British History* 31.1 (2020), 27-50.

¹¹⁶ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1981]), 44-59.

¹¹⁷ Philippa Levine, '"Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War I', *Journal of Modern History* 66 (1994), 34-78.

¹¹⁸ Jane Humphries, '"...The Most Free From Objection...": The Sexual Division of Labour and Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Economic History* 47.4 (1987), 929-49, 937-42.

¹¹⁹ Lucy Noakes, '"A Disgrace to the Country They Belong To": The Sexualisation of Female Soldiers in First World War Britain', *Revue Lisa* 6.4 (2008), 11-26; Juliette Pattinson, '"Hussies", "Freaks", and "Lady Soldiers": Constructing the Uniformed Woman', in *Women of War: Gender, Modernity and the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry* (Manchester: MUP, 2020), 78-121.

Right-wing feminist campaigners like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst took decisive advantage of the plastic social situation, shoring up women's position as legitimate members of the British national community during this period of convulsive gender trouble by wrapping themselves in the flag and denigrating the masculinity (and thus, inborn right to commanding citizenship) of conscientious objectors and other men who remained on the home front.¹²⁰ The Pankhursts made their case for the civic rights of the dutiful, patriotic (*i.e.*, normative) woman by appealing to hegemonic identitarian chauvinism, and by publicly shaming dissenters, the disabled, and other men who simply did not want to die – most especially in the infamous 'white feather' campaign, which hoped to humiliate 'unmanly' nonconformists into sacrificing their lives for their country.¹²¹ Patriarchy is, of course, predicated not just on the subjection of women but also on the policing of deviant male behaviour; right-wing feminists like the Pankhursts thus beat the bounds of gender normativity even as they aspired to their own fuller political assimilation within the patriarchal bourgeois order. It is perhaps no surprise the adoption of such attitudes by women on the home front – so keen to spend the blood of young men on behalf of the nation – met with intense misogynistic resentment from the men they casually volunteered for extermination, of the kind captured in Sassoon's 'Glory of Women' (1918):

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
You make us shells. You listen with delight,

¹²⁰ On the vicious public gauntlet run by British conscientious objectors amidst a whirlwind of rabid jingoism, see Thomas Kennedy, 'Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector, 1915-1919', *Journal of British Studies* 12.2 (1973), 105-19; Lois Bibbings, *Telling Tales About Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service during the First World War* (Manchester: MUP, 2009).

¹²¹ Nicoletta Gullace, 'White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War', *Journal of British Studies* 36.2 (1997), 178-206; Anne-Marie Kilday & David Nash, 'White Feathers and Black Looks: Cowardice, Conscientious Objection and Shame in the Great War', in *idem.*, *Shame and Modernity in Britain: 1890 to the Present* (London: PM, 2017), 21-62; Stirling Moorey, 'Step Forward the Cowards! Humiliation, Shame and Countersham in Memories of the White Feather Campaign', *British Journal for Military History* 7.3 (2021), 39-56.

By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.
 You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
 And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.¹²²

The pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) described the First World War as the 'greatest sexual catastrophe ever suffered by civilised man', a conclusion particularly apposite to the German perspective.¹²³ In Germany, by the time the Armistice was signed, 85% of eligible men had served in the army. The vast majority were younger men between the ages of twenty and forty, and a great many were married. A third of all the husbands in Germany were away at the front by the end of 1915, separated from their wives for long stretches of time.¹²⁴ By the end of the war, 500,000 German women had lost their husbands to the conflict, while many of the men who did return bore little relationship to the personalities which had previously inhabited those bodies.¹²⁵ Yet the crisis of manhood instantiated by the Great War's sexual caesura – extracting millions of young men in their reproductive prime from their lifeworlds and depositing them in Hell, where there were no women – was not a German but a continental, even global phenomenon. The Tommies and *poilus* manning the trenches on the other side of the Western Front, for instance, were also deeply troubled by the absence of women from their lives. The female lacuna was a topic returned to over and over again in letters home and in trench newspapers.¹²⁶

In one such paper, we find a soldier describing the ecstatic emotions unleashed by encountering women once again after a long spell on the front lines:

¹²² Siegfried Sassoon, 'Glory of Women', in *Counter-Attack & Other Poems* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1918), 32.

¹²³ Quoted in Mel Gordon, *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2006 [2000]), 11.

¹²⁴ Lisa Todd, "'The Soldier's Wife Who Ran Away with the Russian': Sexual Infidelities in World War I Germany', *Central European History* 44 (2011), 257-78, 257.

¹²⁵ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 2018 [1998]), 80.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Stice, 'Contrast and Contact: Civilians in French Trench Newspapers of the Great War', *French History* 34.1 (2020), 43-62. Cf. Robert Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 153-91.

Here is a new sight: civilians! Better still, there are women, and some are young and pretty. What gentleness after such efforts! A pretty nape of the neck under beautiful golden hair, a slender waist, a curving leg seen passing, and at once there appears the distant image of the loved one, and the face of love. Those who have not felt this deprivation of everything that brings charm into one's life will never know how cruel it is.¹²⁷

Women, wrote another soldier in 1916, were

a whole element of the past, of the dear past which was being reborn, an evocation of happiness, shops, dancing, the reawakening of a forgotten ideal, Life with a capital L. And also the tender memory of past loves.¹²⁸

The briefest of encounters with members of the 'lost' gender could stick in the hearts of affection-deprived men. One *poilu* recalls an experience from a return to the front from leave:

Quick! Just time to jump into the metro! Luckily the lady whose job it is to punch the tickets had guessed from my outfit that I was on my way back to the front. She was quick to share my haste and then, handing back my punched ticket: 'Off you go, my friend!'. That was a year ago. The simple tenderness of her voice still moves me.¹²⁹

A young British volunteer, meanwhile, recorded the sensation of quiet reverence with which he regarded the daughter of the French family who he was billeted with, at whom 'I was quite happy just to sit and look without speaking'.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Quoted in Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War, 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France During the First World War*, trans. Helen McPhail (Oxford: Berg, 1992 [1986]), 128.

¹²⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 129.

¹²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 149.

¹³⁰ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai: The Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener's Army, 1914-18* (London: HMSO, 1969), 74-5. Cf. K. Craig Gibson, 'Sex and Soldiering in France and Flanders: The British Expeditionary Force along the Western Front, 1914-1919', *International History Review* 23.3 (2001), 535-79.

As the joy of encountering them evidences by way of contrast, the absence of women from the lives of soldiers inspired a deep sensation of angst and psychic distress. 'All your thoughts are of those women who are forbidden you', wrote a French soldier:

Your whole being quivers at the very thought and to your physical sufferings is added the sinister mental suffering of *le cafard* [despair].¹³¹

Those feelings were sharpened and accentuated by the widespread diffusion of pornographic illustrations and photographs, interpassive loci for feelings of loss, loneliness and emasculation as much as nepenthes for masturbatory self-comforting. Such images, recorded one trench paper, were

everywhere and all-conquering; they go right up to the front line, trail about in the dug-outs, stick on to the sides and... catch the *poilu* in his lonely sadness.¹³²

But alongside these more benign yearnings, a phenomenon which we might name *trench misogyny* had solidified among soldiers over the course of the war. A soldier's feelings of loneliness, of being forgotten by those they had left behind, could mutate into quiet fury:

You rage at feeling so lonely, so overwhelmed, so ill-defined in the distorted imagination of people back there.¹³³

That rage was often directed towards women themselves, particularly those perceived to still be enjoying sexual oblectation (perhaps in the very bed they themselves had left) while men were risking body, sanity, and life in the trenches.

The fear dwelt upon most obsessively by entrenched soldiers was the abject fantasy of cuckoldry. 'Your imaginings', a soldier wrote plainly in trench newspaper *Le Camouflet*, 'depict your wife in the arms of another man'.¹³⁴ In *Wooden Crosses* (1919), the great war novel written by the quondam *poilu*

¹³¹ Quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau, 130.

¹³² Quoted in *ibid.*, 130.

¹³³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 143.

¹³⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 131.

Roland Dorgelès (1885-1973), entrenched men grumble about reports of wives caught betraying their *maris* in the beds of their so-called ‘allies’:

Breval read his paper, far, far away from the war. ‘Set of disgusting pigs!’ he growled. ‘More women arrested in the English camp. And no tarts either, you may be sure of that – married women... I’ve been told when they catch them like that they post up their names at the Mayor’s. Talk about a blow for the husband when he’ll get to know about that!’¹³⁵

The sight of women on leave garbed in fashions different to those they had worn when the soldier had left home could arouse feelings of suspicion and resentment, particularly when those changes of clothing suggested greater material well-being or female sexual independence. While men were plunged into the incomprehensible nightmare of the Western Front, women continued to exist in the pre-war world of consumer culture – that elegant *ukiyo* of fabrics and shoes depicted in Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), with all of its attendant sensual pleasures.¹³⁶ Bitterness resulted. ‘Oh, but how they’ve changed!’, exclaimed one French soldier of women in 1916:

No more clogs, no more apron: smart polished boots, jewellery! As the *poilu* says to himself: are there still men at the rear to pay for all these fine things?¹³⁷

Soldiers feared and loathed those men who they believed to be enjoying the freedoms they themselves were denied by their military service. They masochistically pictured them as predators gluttoned with poached *jouissance*, as in this bitter complaint:

How cowardly they seem to me, those men who are comfortably settled at the rear and who try to profit from the current difficult circumstances by disturbing the noble and dignified solitude of women deprived of their loved ones and their support. I cannot think of any more basely vile or odious crime than that! While

¹³⁵ Roland Dorgelès, *Wooden Crosses*, (London: Putnam’s, 1921 [1919]), 188.

¹³⁶ Émile Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, trans. Robin Buss (London: Penguin, 2001 [1883]). See also Patricia Tilburg, *Working Girls: Sex, Taste, and Reform in the Parisian Garment Trades, 1880-1919* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), 197-235.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau, 131.

others, out there, are getting shot or lie bleeding in a hospital bed, those men whose privileged position should impose on them at least a polite reserve roam like wolves round homes where the head of the household is absent. Yes, there are roaming wolves.¹³⁸

On home leave from the front, men observed that the excitement which the novelty of their uniforms had once aroused in women – the ‘khaki fever’ of the war’s opening months – had deliquesced into pity, even contempt, as the conflict dragged on.¹³⁹ The fretting of the soldier about gaudy female clothing was mirrored in a discontentment about the toll inflicted by the war on male vanity and sexual self-respect, emblematised in their own clothes. ‘As the war drags on,’ a French soldier wrote in June 1917,

the favour with which women once regarded the *poilus*’ poverty of clothing seems to have diminished sadly. After the ‘labyrinth’ [the battle of Artois in summer 1915], a woman threw herself at a hairy and lice-ridden *poilu*, calling him ‘my hero’; after the Argonne, she received him kindly, pitying him with all her heart; now, the gentleman who arrives in his trench outfit hears only ‘Whew! How dirty they are!’¹⁴⁰

From this experience, the soldier could draw two logical conclusions: that women were sexually susceptible to novelty; and that their desires were no longer stirred by the humble, familiar *poilu*.

Male anxiety regarding female sexual impropriety (or independence), especially as regards foreigners, was also felt keenly on the home front. In May 1917, the Reichstag received a petition from a group of worthy men in Landau – priests, doctors, teachers and the like – angrily demanding that the government intercede to prevent the fraternisation of German women with

¹³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 132. Cf. Nietzsche on masochism in *Beyond*, 121: ‘We have to get rid of that foolish psychology of earlier times that held that cruelty arises only at the sight of another person’s suffering: there is also abundant, over-abundant pleasure in our own suffering, in making ourselves suffer’.

¹³⁹ Angela Woolacott, ‘“Khaki Fever” and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994), 325–47.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau, 132. Cf. Laura Ugolini, ‘War-Stained: British Combatants and Uniforms’, *War & Society* 33.3 (2014), 155–71.

prisoners of war. Citing a hundred cases across the nation to support their claim of the 'sinking morality' of women, the men positioned themselves as the voice of the decent national community: 'Good German citizens are full of anger at such events'. Such concerns about sexual morality and fraternisation with the enemy were echoed in the efforts of bureaucrats, reformers, and clergymen to police German women's behaviour on the home front throughout the war.¹⁴¹ One War Ministry official violently condemned the 'shameful' women who showed sexual interest in foreign prisoners of the war, acting in a 'base and un-German manner'.¹⁴² To this particular disgruntled *apparatchik*, the transgression of the norms of respectable sexual behaviour effected by showing interest in a foreign enemy placed these women outside of the imagined national community. 'German women and girls' complained a similarly exercised railway employee,

have been temporarily stunned into an undignified daze by the prisoner of war transports. Railway commanders should intervene with harsh measures, so that our national honour will not be sullied by such elements.¹⁴³

It was precisely the *foreignness* of the prisoners, the very quality which (so some men imagined) constituted the source of their irresistible erotic appeal for German women, that was particularly emphasised in newspaper reports of sexual impropriety. Rarely were the men themselves specifically named. Instead, they were referred to in print as simply 'the Frenchman' or 'the Russian', with such othering appellations underscoring the anti-patriotic treachery inherent in such sexual lapses: literally 'sleeping with the enemy'.¹⁴⁴ Later in the war, these prisoners would find themselves becoming the subjects of anthropological studies into 'racial difference', with much use of callipers entailed, and which inevitably produced outcomes ratifying the biological supremacy of the German male. As the years dragged on, those German women

¹⁴¹ Todd, 'Sexual Infidelities', 247. See also Brian Feltman, "'We Don't Want Any German Off-Spring After These Prisoners Left Here": German Military Prisoners and British Women in the First World War', *Gender & History* 30.1 (2018), 110-30.

¹⁴² Quoted in Todd, 'Sexual Infidelities', 261.

¹⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 262.

¹⁴⁴ Lisa Todd, "'Dishonorable" Women and "Foreign" Men: Illicit Sexuality as Challenge to the German Volksgemeinschaft, 1914-1918', in Matthias Reiss & Brian Feltman (eds.), *Prisoners of War and Local Women in Europe and the United States, 1914-1956* (London: PM, 2022), 55-75.

who became physically intimate with prisoners of war were increasingly labelled not only as 'traitors to the nation' but also 'traitors to the race', with new and sinister eugenic implications.¹⁴⁵ The German authorities soon moved to make sexual contact with POWs illegal. Thousands of women were arrested, even for such innocent behaviour as flirting and letter-writing, and some spent up to a year in jail.¹⁴⁶ The state, in the midst of a total war, was expending time, resources and bureaucratic attention on the policing of the boundaries of honourable sexual conduct among German women – proof of the magnitude of the sexual anxiety experienced by German men.

In a similar vein, French official organs responded to the Black Horror's shrill accusations of sexual misconduct by attempting to pass off responsibility for any problem of *métissage* onto German women themselves. In 1922, the *Comité d'Assistance aux Troupes Noires* published a pamphlet towards this end, drawn up by the distinguished colonial booster Camille Fidel (1878-1955) from oral testimony, press cuttings and military reports. Fidel argued that the standard of behaviour of French *tirailleurs* was no different, if not in fact superior, to that of white occupying soldiers. The women of the Rhine, on the other hand, 'appeared to have a marked predilection' for black servicemen; indeed, 'women without morals... throw themselves on the necks of the occupation troops'. Instead of a Black Horror, the Frenchman thus suggested, Germans ought to be preoccupied with

the 'white ignominy', personified by that category of German Women of all classes, who, pushed by a desire for lucre or by perverse passions, throw themselves in the arms of soldiers and officers of colonial troops.¹⁴⁷

Shedding the normative baggage of Fidel's counterpropaganda, we may note that many white German women did indeed seek consensual relationships with colonial soldiers. Germany, after all, had just experienced a catastrophic collapse in its stock of able-bodied young men with whom romantic adventures

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Evans, 'Anthropology at War: Racial Studies of POWs during World War I', in H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzel, *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 198-229.

¹⁴⁶ Todd, 'Sexual Infidelities', 264.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Ginio, 67-8.

might be pursued; it is thus hardly surprising that affectionate and erotic desires were realised in concert with the only potential recipients at hand. What's more, the colonial troops had ready money demarcated in Francs (an undeniable attraction as the Mark inflated into meaninglessness). They also carried with them the ever-exciting frisson of the 'exotic', and (as many women testified to inquisitive journalists) they were on the whole regarded as gentler and more courteous than their white equivalents.¹⁴⁸

Some Germans wished for vigilante action to be taken against those women who transgressed against conventional sexual morality by sleeping with African or Asian men. Such women's names should be published publicly; they should be spat at in the street; their hair should be shaved; they should be ostracised and marked as an outsider to the local and national communities.¹⁴⁹ During the war, women who broke the rules of gamic behaviour in Germany were frequently subjected to what was called a 'press pillory'; the print media performed a crucial disciplinary function in beating the bounds of acceptable female behaviour through public shaming. Alongside articles sneering at women who dressed like 'French hussies', or otherwise failed to comport themselves to the accepted model of the humble wife 'doing her bit', salacious and vitriolic accounts of female infidelity to husbands fighting for Germany at the front were a frequent feature, usually bearing stentorian titles like 'An Unworthy War Wife', or 'A Soldier Dies from the Sorrow of the Infidelity of his Wife'.

The stories contained within these columns were frequently about as plausible as most of the content of the Black Horror campaign, such as the lady from Saarbrücken alleged to have included rat poison among the ingredients of a cake sent to her husband at the front, in order that she might continue her dalliance with the baker. Again, though, the importance of this phenomenon lies in its discursive, intersubjective effect rather than its relationship to concrete reality (*encore une fois, les non-dupes errent*). Many of the characteristics of the trope of the dishonourable, unpatriotic woman selling out Germany on her back which would later appear in the Black Horror episode were first defined in these

¹⁴⁸ Marks, 'Black Watch', 302.

¹⁴⁹ John Boonstra, 'Women's Honour and the Black Shame: *Coloured Frenchmen* and Respectable Comportment in the Post-World War I Occupied Rhineland', *German History* 33.4 (2015), 546-69, 552.

sorts of publications. In particular, they helped to shape the obdurate meme that women at the home front were enjoying lives of libertine promiscuity with foreign lovers, dishonouring the sacrifice of German men.¹⁵⁰

As well as upending the tragic narrative of the *Mädchen* grotesquely and unwillingly violated, thus robbing it of its emotional power, it should also be noted that the particular form of sexual anxiety expressed by the ‘white shame’ counternarrative – characterised by fear of women’s independence, sexual promiscuity, and erotic fondness for all that was novel and foreign – was very much of a piece with broader post-war gender troubles and sexual neuroses. The cultural object in which such fears were concretised was the so-called ‘New Woman’: the independent, urban, androgynously coiffed and sexually promiscuous figure who haunted Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927), Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* (1929), and the nightmares of German conservatives.¹⁵¹ The New Woman as a cultural *topos* emerged as a focal ideation for male anxieties aroused by long-term trends towards increased female sexual and economic independence in the Western middle classes, a social tendency which the gender upheavals of war sharply accelerated. She was thus the twin sister of France’s gracile, epicene *garçonne*, presently arousing similar anxieties west of the Rhine. ‘Smoking, wearing short hair, dressed in pyjamas or sportswear’, fulminated one concerned Frenchman, ‘women increasingly resemble their companions!’¹⁵²

The mainstream fashion in the West at the time, by contrast, had been for women to inhabit a curvaceous body which clearly announced her gender to all observers. A representative column published in the *New York Times* in 1908 offered solemn paternal advice on ‘How the Thin Woman May Gain Flesh and Strength of Mind to Face Her Dressmaker’.¹⁵³ The place of women in the

¹⁵⁰ Todd, ‘Sexual Infidelities’, 269-73.

¹⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The New Woman’, in *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1994 [1987]), 192-218; Ann Heilmann & Margaret Beetham (eds.), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture* (London: T&F, 2004); Alys Eve Weinbaum et al. (eds.), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: DUP, 2008); Marti Lybeck, ‘The Return of the New Woman and Other Subjects of Weimar Gender History’, *Contemporary European History* 24.1 (2015), 127-37.

¹⁵² Quoted in Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilisation Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Post-War France, 1917-1927* (Chicago, IL: UCP, 1994), 70. See also Guillaume Pinson, ‘La Femme Masculinisée dans la Presse Mondaine Française de la Belle Époque’, *Clio* 30 (2009), 211-30.

¹⁵³ *New York Times*, 6 Sep 1908.

Edwardian gender order was, literally and metaphorically, corseted. Corsetry had long been an effective technology for the making of women into more visually appealing sex objects for heterosexual men by pushing up the breasts and holding in the waist, at the cost of her organ structure and her ability to breathe.¹⁵⁴ When (male) French humourists wanted to laugh at the English (which was often), they frequently sniggered at the purported *flatness* of the island's women:

The body of the English woman is serious, without those frivolous and indecent attractions which are the sad lot of the French woman.¹⁵⁵

Now, the more geometric silhouette of the New Woman presented the gaze with discomfiting ambiguities in flesh and fabric, uncertainties which had long been smothered by the pillowey exaggerations of bustle and pigeon breast. By 1926, as the curtains are still whispering on the close of the Morelian scene, we will have Coco Chanel and the Little Black Dress.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Oxford, Berg, 2001); Elizabeth Fee *et al.*, 'The Effects of the Corset', *American Journal of Public Health* 92.7 (2002), 1085; Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven, CT: YUP, 2003); David Kunzle, *Fashion & Fetishism: Corsets, Tightlacing & Other Forms of Body Sculpture* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004). See also Alan Cooper, *Patriarchy and the Politics of Beauty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018).

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Tombs & Tombs, 450-1.

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Driscoll, 'Chanel: The Order of Things', *Fashion Theory* 14.2 (2010), 135-58.



Figure 10: 'Does not tight-lacing and high heels give a charming grace and dignity to the female figure?'

Punch, 2 Oct 1869



*Figure 11: LBD by Coco Chanel
Vogue, October 1926*

V.

Many men interpreted growing female sexual independence as a symptom of perversion in the psychic realm (Alfred Kinsey's quip: 'a nymphomaniac is a woman who has more sex than you do') and a portent of general anarchy in the social (especially as the Soviet Union's pioneering experiments in female emancipation up until the Stalinist reaction lent feminism a suspiciously red patina to the bourgeois eye).¹⁵⁷ In both the French

¹⁵⁷ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), esp. 38-58. Cf Carol Groneman, 'Nymphomania: The Historical Construction of Female Sexuality', *Signs* 19.2 (1994), 337-67. On feminism and sexual liberation in the early Soviet Union, see Beatrice Brodsky Farnsworth, 'Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai', *American Historical Review* 81.2 (1976), 292-316; Jerry Pankhurst, 'The Ideology of "Sex Love" in Postrevolutionary Russia: Lenin, Kollontai, and the Politics of Lifestyle Liberation', *Alternative Lifestyles* 5.2 (1982), 78-100; Madeleine Johansson, 'Alexandra Kollontai, The Russian Revolution and Women's Liberation', *Irish Marxist*

and German cases, the idea that women might exhibit agency in choosing their sexual partners (and, most pertinently to white men, that, women might abandon them for sexual relationships with black men if given the choice) was a source of great psychic distress. Genesic anxieties were sharpened by the perennial fetishistic angst about the relative size of the black member to the white – an obsession the presence of which we may observe in the deeply unsettling medallions struck by German propagandists to ‘commemorate’ (with dark sarcasm) the imposition of the Black Shame on the Rhine. On the ‘heads’ side, we have a classically grotesque, racist caricature of a black soldier’s face, ironically captioned with the revolutionary mantra of French emancipatory politics: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. The ‘tails’ side is even more alarming. Here we observe a *Deutschen Frau* stripped naked and chained to a towering ramrod pillar topped with a helmet: an obvious symbolisation of a monstrous African member. Above her gleams the all-seeing Eye of Providence, that ancient Christian symbol taken up by 18th century revolutionaries in American and France to symbolise the benevolent gaze of God, and forever afterwards a lightning rod for conspiratorial whisperings about the occulted will of sinister international elites (imagined variously as Freemasons, Jews, Jesuits, Bolsheviks, or even that newly-conjured phantom the Illuminati, who first began to play their now-familiar role as nubilous, nefarious puppet-masters in protofascist conspiracies during the interwar period).¹⁵⁸

Review 6.17 (2017), 29-35; Joe Pateman, ‘V. I. Lenin on the "Women Question"', *Science & Society* 85.3 (2021), 302-31.

¹⁵⁸ Significantly, the *ur*-texts of the modern conspiracy theory date from this precise moment: Henry Ford, *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2003 [1920]); Nesta Helen Webster, *World Revolution: The Plot Against Civilization* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2013 [1921]). Both, of course, are lineal descendants of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), first published in English in 1920 by Eyre & Spottiswood of London but circulating previously in *samizdat*.



Figure 12: Black Horror medallion (1920), by Karl Goetz (1875-1950)

Why did (does) the meme of the comparatively-larger black penis – connoting an aggressive and animalistic, hypersexuality in Western symbology – disturb white men so viscerally?¹⁵⁹ We should start with the psychoanalytic observation that all symbology is fetish, *viz.* the transmutation of a naked object into a psychically freighted sign (and for Lacan, of course, the phallus is the signifier *sans equivalent*). This brocard applies most precisely in the realm of sex, which is itself not so much *bolstered* or *enhanced* by the symbolic elevation of body parts and their interaction to the height of subjective desiring, but rather *is* this symbolic mediation itself. Without the capacity of things to *mean*, without the object of fantastical reverence (dick or cunt, orality or anality, domination or submission) through which a pleasure is given its shape, sex is nothing but the damp violence of ugly meat: ‘*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*’, as Lacan famously declared. Instead, sexual enjoyment must necessarily be imbricated with a *third intersubjective thing* beyond and between the desirers, the fantasy which is traversed – and that fantasy is always already psychosocially-constituted, coloured by the concrete reality of existence, and thus with hegemonic ideations of gender and race.

¹⁵⁹ See Elizabeth Stephens, ‘The Spectacularised Penis: Contemporary Representations of the Phallic Male Body’, *Men & Masculinities* 10.2 (2007), 85-98; Andrea Waling & Jennifer Power, ‘Masculinity, Sex, and Dicks: New Understandings of the Phallus’, *Journal of Bodies, Sexualities & Masculinities* 3.1 (2022), 1-4. ‘Animalistic’: cf. David Baumeister, ‘Black Animality from Kant to Fanon’, *Theory & Event* 24.4 (2021), 951-76.

White resentment is typically freighted with the fear that the racialised Other, in his very primitivity, may yet have access to some deeper and truer enjoyment of life than is available to the 'civilised' (*viz.*, repressed) bourgeois:

Behind [racist] complaint is the fear that others may have access to some *jouissance*, to a boundless pleasure outside their own reach. This in turn provokes a particular kind of frustration or envy. Here it is not simply that we feel dissatisfaction at the fact that others possess something that we want: we object to the very way they enjoy. This frustration over the presumed enjoyment that others experience can quickly turn into violence. It is not that we want to take from others a particular object of desire; we want to ruin their presumed enjoyment and debase them as human beings.¹⁶⁰

But the sensation of penial inferiority experienced by white males is related not just to the black man's supposedly enhanced capacity to enjoy his own *jouissance* without neurosis, but also to *induce* it in his lovers through his size and enthusiasm. The fear of symbolic castration by a rival's greater capacity to incite sexual pleasure in a woman is manifested in bitter racialised *ressentiment*, as Fanon observed:

On the genital level, when a white man hates black men, is he not yielding to a feeling of impotence or of sexual inferiority? Since his ideal is an infinite virility, is there not a phenomenon of diminution in relation to the Negro, who is viewed as a penis symbol? Is the lynching of the Negro not a sexual revenge? We know how much of sexuality there is in all cruelties, tortures, beatings. One has only to reread a few pages of the Marquis de Sade to be easily convinced of the fact. Is the Negro's superiority real? Everyone knows that it is not. But that is not what matters.

¹⁶⁰ Renata Salecl, *The Tyranny of Choice* (London: Profile, 2010), 91. On the intrinsic human pleasure taken in visiting pain and humiliation on one's *objet de ressentiment* (so often elided in sober, quasi game-theoretical analyses of political motivation), see Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 45-51; Lisiunia Romanienko, *Degradation Rituals: Our Sado-masochistic Society* (London: PM, 2014), esp. 3-30.

The prelogical thought of the phobic has decided that such is the case.¹⁶¹

Fanon's Freudian move here is undoubtedly the right one, but I must query his conclusion. Does male angst over the finitude of their sexual *puissance* really find its true target in a fetishised competitor with a bigger penis, more stamina, or whatever – in other words, in a marginally expanded *finitude*? Or rather, does the true, occluded horror of the situation for the white man not lie in his diminution in the face of an *infinity* – that is, in the endless regeneration of a newly-liberated female sexuality?¹⁶²

It is, as we have seen, impossible to disentangle the racialised anxiety and *ressentiment* expressed in the Black Horror regarding sexual performance relative to a male fantasy-Other from a primeval horror of *excessive female desire itself*: the emasculated recoil of refractory orgasmic finitude from an infinitely-rejuvenating female capacity to enjoy (and thus to *judge*), now loosed from its bonds by feminism. Modern feminism was one of the great liberatory leaps forward in the history of human civilisation; it was inevitable that such an unprecedented emancipatory break would incur a brutal and sustained counterattack from patriarchy.¹⁶³ As that hoary misogynist Nietzsche quailed in the 1880s:

[Women] want more; they are learning to make demands; they end by considering the modicum of respect [granted them] almost irritating, preferring to compete, or even to battle for their rights: let's just say that women are becoming shameless. And let us add that they are also becoming tasteless. They are forgetting how to *fear* men...¹⁶⁴

The Black Horror itself coursed with maniacal antifeminism quite as much as outright racism. It is an obvious point, but one worth repeating: every

¹⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 2008 [1952]), 122-3.

¹⁶² See, for instance, Ruth Moulton, 'Fear of Female Power: A Cause of Sexual Dysfunction', *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 5.4 (1977), 499-51; Jane Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1-18.

¹⁶³ Erika Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War: Women, Gender, and Post-war Reconciliation between Nations* (London: PM, 2008), esp. 39-70.

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 128.

(proto)fascist movement installs a hatred of feminism and female liberation as a central psychopolitical pillar – even in its appeal to women themselves, in the form of ‘emancipation from emancipation’.¹⁶⁵ As expressed by men caught in the gender trouble of the plastic post-war moment, the Black Horror’s symptomal spasm of race-hatred drew from a deeper well of misogynistic disgust and fear: fear of the monstrous-feminine, of women on top, and of the loss of sexual power.

What, precisely, is the horror of the female sexual subject for the heterosexual male? Sartre once described subjectivity’s encounter with the Other, in an image which evokes the experience of colonial policing, as the ‘rustle in the bushes’. The watcher suddenly realises, as his innards turn to ice, that he has become the watched:

Fear is therefore the discovery of my Being-as-object on the occasion of the appearance of another object in my perceptive field. It refers to the origin of all fear, which is the fearful discovery of my pure and simple object-state in so far as it is surpassed and transcended by possibles which are not my possibles¹⁶⁶

Such is the subjective *peripeteia* instantiated by the feminist’s incursion into the script of sexual enjoyment as an actor in her own right, demanding urgent redisciplinary action on the part of the patriarch to restore subjective security. Simone de Beauvoir unfurls the scientific ‘saraband of imagery’ which man

¹⁶⁵ As evidenced by the committed involvement of women in the Black Horror farrago itself: Raffael Scheck ‘Women on the Weimar Right: The Role of Female Politicians in the Deutschnationale Volkspartei (DNVP)’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 36.4 (2001), 547-60; and by the engagement of a significant minority of women with far-right politics during the interwar period: Mary Jean Green, ‘Gender, Fascism and the *Croix de Feu*: The “Women’s Pages” of *Le Flambeau*’, *French Cultural Studies* 8.23 (1997), 229-39; Julie Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain’s Fascist Movement, 1923-1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021 [2000]), esp. 43-92; Maartin van Ginderachter, ‘Gender, the Extreme Right, and Flemish Nationalist Women’s Organisations in Interwar Belgium’, *Nations & Nationalism* 11.2 (2005), 365-84; Martin Durham, *Women & Fascism* (London: T&F, 2006), 49-73. On the centrality of anti-feminism to fascism’s appeal, see Maria-Antoinetta Macciocchi, ‘Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology’, *Feminist Review* 1.1 (1979), 67-82; Maria Irod, ‘Antisemitism, Antifeminism and the Crisis of German Culture in Early 20th Century’, *Studia Hebraica* 9-10 (2009), 330-9; Francisco Cobo Romero & Teresa María Ortega López, ‘Francoist Antifeminism and the Violent Reversal of Women’s Liberation, 1936-1951’, in Peter Anderson & Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco (eds.), *Mass Killings and Violence in Spain, 1936-1952: Grappling with the Past* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 59-71.

¹⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being & Nothingness*, 288.

retroactively prunes from biology in order to justify 'the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman':

A vast, round ovum engulfs and castrates the agile spermatozoon; the monstrous and swollen termite queen rules over the enslaved males; the female praying mantis and the spider, satiated with love, crush and devour their partners; the bitch in heat runs through the alleys, trailing behind her a wake of depraved odours; the she-monkey presents her posterior immodestly and then steals away with hypocritical coquetry...¹⁶⁷

In order to sublimate this termite-anxiety experienced in the face of the blissful woman and 'the mystery, breadth, and range of her desires', patriarchal subjectivity cunningly reverses the conceptual polarity, relating masculinity instead to the infinitude of *thought*, and woman thence to the dungeon of the finite body:

Just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: there we have specific circumstances that imprison her in her subjectivity; one often says that she thinks with her glands.¹⁶⁸

But now, feminism threatened to release woman from religious moralising and medicalised objectification into full sexual subjectivity as a potentially-unlimited *enjoyer*, and this was the most frightening thing of all: the rustle in the bedchamber, *pour ainsi dire*.

In its activation of these reactionary impulses regarding race and sex, the Black Horror should thus be understood as one face of the 'cultural' swing in Europe towards radical reaction in the wake of the Great War which preceded the later 'political' swing that swept fascism to power.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the controversy over the deployment of African soldiers on the Rhineland would become an

¹⁶⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997 [1949]), 15.

¹⁶⁸ 'Mystery': Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 128. 'Just as...': de Beauvoir, 15.

¹⁶⁹ The crucial 'culturalist' reading of fascism's origins being Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1992).

important *aftognotic* reference point in the emergent historical consciousness of the German revolutionary right. Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) peppered several references to the affair throughout *Mein Kampf* (1925), first published just a few years after the Black Horror panic. ‘More than 7,000,000 [Germans] languish under alien rule’, complained the future conqueror of Europe, ‘and the main artery of the German people flows through the playground of black African hordes.’ Like Morel and his radical allies, Hitler tacked away from blaming the Africans themselves in the final analysis, and instead pinned culpability on their militarist-capitalist puppet-masters, who had brought the black soldiers to Europe in the first place. Hitler, however, chose to add a fresh, characteristic flourish to the narrative: in his telling, it was, of course,

the Jews who bring the negro to the Rhine, always with the same concealed thought and clear goal of destroying, by the bastardisation which would necessarily set in, the white race which they hate, to throw it down from its cultural and political height and in turn to rise personally to the position of master.¹⁷⁰

Another intervention on the topic, significantly closer in tone to Morel’s wartime rhetoric regarding the continental diplomatic ‘machine’ than to Hitler’s antisemitic fulmination, came from the pen of Carl Schmitt, in his April 1925 lecture on the subject of ‘The Rhineland as an Object of International Politics’. Schmitt chose to eschew the racial question altogether, striking a more moderate note than either Morel or Hitler on the topic, and focused instead on the baleful consequences of the German state’s loss of sovereign autonomy at Versailles, a legal deprivation which left the defeated population

at the mercy of an impersonal political machine, thrown into gear by unknown hands, representing not a single foreigner, but an abstract relation between foreigners, and adding the foul practice of anonymity to the gall of the foreign yoke.¹⁷¹

All moral panics eventually flame out, no matter their bitter legacies for the *demos*, and the Black Horror was no exception. In March of 1921, a New

¹⁷⁰ Hitler, 448-9, 917.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Rotem Giladi, ‘The Phoenix of Colonial War: Race, the Laws of War, and the “Horror on the Rhine”’, *Leiden Journal of International Law* 30 (2017), 847-75, 870.

York paper called *Outlook* published an article entitled 'Propaganda about the Black Troops.' The piece baldly claimed that the Black Horror campaign conducted by Morel was an active German propaganda effort designed to besmirch the international reputation of the French, based on claims which 'have been denied' and disproved.¹⁷² By this time, the air had begun to leak out of the Black Horror mythos *in toto*. Left-wing press organs like the *Labour Leader* had changed rhetorical tack, no longer slaver over the sexual proclivities of African men and returning instead to a pose of hand-wringing *bien pensance*. The paper now fretted over the deplorable arrogance of 'the white races' for choosing to uproot swathes of young black men from their homes and communities and force them to pursue 'the sordid ends of their Imperial masters'. This was a much cleaner, more respectable way to call for the removal of colonial troops from the Rhineland than the yowling hysteria of the Black Horror.¹⁷³

Within a year of Morel first breaking ground on the press campaign – *i.e.*, between April 1920 and April 1921 – the full-throated racism and sexual paranoia of the initial surge had bled out, as the evidentiary basis of the moral panic was gradually revealed to be thin-to-nonexistent. Morel himself seems to have become increasingly conscious of what he had wrought, and as time passed sought a way to extract himself from the most poisonous implications of his own words whilst simultaneously refusing to admit wrongdoing. 'I have consistently urged that this question should be publicly treated as not to give the impression that those who were instrumental in bringing the facts before the world are in the slightest degree inspired by racial prejudice', he protested limply in *The Freeman* in April 1921.¹⁷⁴ It was not the African soldiers who should be demonised, but rather 'the policy itself against which the full force of criticism should be directed'. For the victims of the press dragonnade which he had helped call into being, this was surely too little too late. Ultimately, Morel's most lasting achievement throughout the entire Black Horror imbroglio was to sabotage dismally his own reputation, in an ironic mirroring of the crusading single-

¹⁷² F15/3/4, *Outlook*, 1 March 1921.

¹⁷³ F15/3/4, *Labour Leader*, 24 Feb 1921.

¹⁷⁴ F15/3/4, *Freeman*, 27 April 1921.

mindedness which had brought about that esteem in the first place. As Nietzsche once wrote,

Once you resolve to keep your ears closed even to the best counterarguments, it shows that you have a strong character. And thus, an occasional will to stupidity.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 63.

VI

Conclusion

In 1920, E.D. Morel was selected as the Labour Party's candidate to contest one of the two seats for Dundee in the House of Commons. The Liberal incumbent was a long-time ideological opponent of Morel's: the arch-jingo Winston Churchill, who had spent much of the past year attempting to persuade the government to deploy Britain's newly-developed chemical weapons against both the Bolsheviks and the 'uncivilised tribes' engaged in rebellion across northern India.¹ It was precisely Churchill's status as the very incarnation of aristocratic militarism and imperialism, the forces Morel had spent his entire life fighting, which ultimately convinced him to run:

A struggle between Churchill and myself would inevitably resolve itself into a square fight on the issue of militarism and foreign policy... My life's work has largely been concerned with foreign policy, anti-militarism, and internationalism... The personality of Churchill – who incarnates militarism and a foreign policy making for endless wars – and my own in an electoral contest would inevitably give predominance to those issues.²

Or, as he phrased it more forcefully in private correspondence with the prominent Scottish CO Ewan Geddes Carr (1886-1979), who had also spent much of the war incarcerated in various labour camps:

I look upon Churchill as such a personal force for evil, that I would take up the fight against him with a whole heart.³

¹ Simon Jones, "'The Right Medicine for the Bolshevik': British Air-Dropped Chemical Weapons in North Russia, 1919", *Imperial War Museum Review* 12 (1999), 78-88; Clifford Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia, 1918-20* (London: Continuum, 2006), 244-47; Eric Linstrum, 'Domesticating Chemical Weapons: Tear Gas and the Militarisation of Policing in the British Imperial World, 1919-1981', *Journal of Modern History* 91 (2019), 557-85, 565-70.

² Quoted in Cline, 130.

³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 130-1.

Despite the limits which chronic ill health had placed on his electioneering abilities, in the general election of 1922 Morel was elected to the House of Commons with a thumping majority of 10,000, ousting Churchill with ease, despite the latter's insidious questioning during the campaign of whether 'a man who was not British born should be returned to the British Parliament'.⁴ In his apotheosis at Dundee, Labour activist Herbert Bryan (d.1950) joyfully exclaimed that Morel had vanquished 'one of the most prominent of his gaolers'.⁵ It would prove to be his final victory. As Cline writes, 'the final year of Morel's life was shadowed by the deterioration of his health, the thwarting of his personal ambition, and the frustration of his public goals'.⁶ In the winter of 1923, a hung parliament allowed Ramsay MacDonald, the most prominent troublemaker in the country, to enter 10 Downing Street as Prime Minister; his old ally, Morel, would form part of his government. Yet despite his burning desire to be named Foreign Secretary, MacDonald instead arrogated that office to himself in addition to the premiership. Morel's chance to reshape the Foreign Office according to his principles into something more democratic and more transparent had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

The inauguration of the first Labour government marked the end of something in British politics as well as the beginning. The MacDonald government saw the assimilation of radical extraparliamentary forces into the institutions of the bourgeois state itself, via the mediation of a committedly parliamentarist party staffed primarily by middle-class activists with strongly liberal inclinations – men, in other words, like E.D. Morel.⁷ Entry into the halls of power marked the end of something for Morel, too. There would be no more great crusades after that accursed final campaign on the banks of the Rhine. Morel proved unable to translate his genius for rabble-rousing into a meaningful role as a lawmaker, and, by this point, both his mental and physical health were rapidly failing. He began to suffer from angina, and from what he referred as 'nervous breakdowns'.⁸ A few weeks after the election of 1924, on November 12th, Morel went walking with his sister-in-law in the woods near the Devonshire

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 134.

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 130.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁷ See Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961).

⁸ Cline, 145.

village of North Bovey. Saying that he was tired, he stopped and sat to rest against the base of a tree. He passed away peacefully there, as, beneath the shading branches of the arbour, in the quiet of the autumn air, a soft and final darkness closed on the Worlds of E.D. Morel.



Figure 13: The trees of North Bovey, c.1900
North Bovey Conservation Area Character Appraisal,
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