From law to history: The politics of war and empire

TARAK BARKAWI

Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE

Email: t.k.barkawi@lse.ac.uk

Abstract: The Internationalists argues that the outlawry of war in 1928 created the modern international order. This review essay critiques this single-cause account of world history. It shows how The Internationalists relies on statistics that obfuscate the character of war and on a juridical model of international politics that makes liberal empire invisible. I argue that war making by Asian and African peasants played more of a role in bringing about decolonisation than peacemaking by Western lawyers.

Keywords: decolonisation; empire; international law; war

To the strategy of Dien Bien Phu, defined by the colonized peoples, the colonialist replies by the strategy of encirclement—based on the respect of the sovereignty of States.

Frantz Fanon (1967: 55)

In the imaginary posited by The Internationalists, a few European and American legal thinkers, officials and advocates came up with some ideas about outlawing war and initiated the birth of the ‘modern global order’ (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: xv). The primary mechanism by which they did so was a treaty, the Kellogg–Briand Pact. But what really mattered were their ideas, which ‘became embedded in institutions that restructured human relations, and in the process reshaped the world’ (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: xxi). Of determining significance in world history, then, are ideas about the law. Termed ‘magical’ by one reviewer, this thesis fetishises international law and imputes extraordinary historical powers to legal scholars like the authors (Hull 2018: 26). Unsurprisingly, they find this reassuring: ‘If law shapes real power, and ideas shape the law, then we control our fate.’ (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: 423).

The Internationalists reprises a liberal account of modern international order, but presents the outlawry of war in 1928 as its lynchpin. Hathaway and Shapiro argue that this key change in international law, along with the
refusal to recognise conquered territory, caused a ‘global revolution’ in the twentieth century (2017: 415). ‘Compulsion by war was over. The era of global cooperation had begun’ (2017: 305). Not only was the legal thinking behind Kellogg–Briand ultimately responsible for ending war as a legitimate means of conquest, but also for decolonisation and the rise and survival of small states after 1945 (2017: 338, 351). They purport to empirically establish all this by reference to the quantitative study of war and sovereign territory. Hathaway and Shapiro’s liberalism-plus-statistics strategy, like that of the democratic peace, renders complex and many-sided histories as the outcome of a single cause.

This book is unlikely to convince anyone who is not already both a liberal and a positivist. It does not engage substantively with other accounts of world order or with histories of warfare, imperialism and capitalism. A mash of genres, their text amounts to a feel-good story in which a few white men saved the world, and proves they did so with numbers. In appropriating historical agency for some, *The Internationalists* denies it to others. Anti-colonial movements, exhausted empires, and the titanic military struggles of the world wars, not to mention the world economy, pale in significance to the four Internationalists and their ideas. After all, how can a book that claims to be ‘at its core, a work of intellectual history’ also be an analysis of transformations in world order? (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: xx). Only by mistaking histories of international legal thought and advocacy for those of social and political relations.

*The Internationalists* confounds scholarly reviewers with the dark arts of trade publishing. One points out that it reaffirms ‘a conventional approach to international legal history that many scholars have critiqued as descriptively omissive and normatively problematic’ (Bradley 2018: 5). ‘Anecdote and colourful characters abound’, notes another (Mazower 2017). Biography, diplomatic dramas, Nazis, university intrigue, and extraneous detail like Klieg lights rivet readers more readily than analyses of the social movements and forces behind changes in the law. The book does not place itself ‘in conversation with historiography on the outlawry movement or Paris Peace Pact’. The ‘relevant historiographic debates’ are simply absent (Strong 2018: 1, 3). What Hathaway and Shapiro provide instead are narratives of legal ideas and their bearers, on the one hand, and statistical proofs concerning the decline of interstate war and territorial conquest, on the other. Correlation stands in for causation.

Debating whether a single-cause account of world history is right or wrong legitimates the idea that such a thing is possible. *The Internationalists*’ frequent use of capitalised simplifications like Old and New World Order, and repeated italicised plays on *Might was/was no longer Right*, signal that political ideology, rather than history, is primarily at issue. This point
inspires the approach I take below. I seek to make visible the ideological nature of *The Internationalists* by demonstrating its ahistorical character. Although unconcerned with historiography, the book presents itself as a kind of history that makes an argument about change over time in international politics. I will show that the book conceives its key concepts ahistorically, defining war and conquest in fixed statistical and juridical terms. The only thing that changes historically in the book is international law, which then changes everything else. This kind of world historical claim possesses ideological productivity because it denies history to all but that which is fetishised. This conjuring trick enables the book’s Anglo-American politics. These erase the historical agency of nearly everyone but a few white Westerners, while disabling critique of liberal war and empire.

War making, much of it by Asian and African peasants, played more of a role in ending colonial empires than Western peacemaking or law-making. The AK-47 was more significant than the pen. However, imperial rule, and the uses of force necessary to sustain it, adapted to the UN world of newly independent states. New forms of hegemony and intervention arose, operating in and through the sovereign states system. War and rule over others, like international law, changes historically.

### I. The law, the salon and historical change

A distinction between an Old World Order and a New World Order forms the core of Hathaway and Shapiro’s argument, with the 20 years’ crisis of the interwar era as a transitional period. In the Old World Order, the laws of war did not distinguish between the aggressor and the defender, between right and wrong. This meant that the spoils of war, territory and wealth, were legitimate. A captured province could be incorporated into the sovereign territory of the victorious state and recognised as such by other states. Outlawing aggressive war as a legitimate means to revise sovereign borders effected a fundamental change in this legal system. In the New World Order, the law denied legitimacy to aggressive military means of acquiring territory. With the UN Charter, beyond self-defence, decisions about the legitimate use of force to enforce rights were to be taken at the international level. This new system pressures states to use cooperative rather than violent means to pursue their interests. Operating in concert with international organisations, states deny recognition to occupied territory when aggression does occur, and otherwise sanction and ‘outcast’ aggressor states. Neutrality towards outlaw states is no longer possible, the international community siding with those whose rights are violated. Trade flourishes while small and weak states can now survive.
Hathaway and Shapiro place central emphasis on the outlawry of war in their version of liberal world order. This was the distinctive achievement of the Kellogg–Briand Pact. In the best parts of their book, a kind of narrative intellectual history, they show how some of the Pact’s language, and the thinkers, advocates and officials who developed it, played roles in the Nuremberg trials and the drafting of the Atlantic and UN Charters, decisive moments in shaping international relations after the Second World War. The political science part of the book juxtaposes this change in international law with quantitative data on the decline after 1928 in the number of interstate wars and in the square mileage of legally-recognized conquests. The idea is that the former caused the latter: ‘The change in the legal rules operated like a sudden shock to the system’ (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: 341).

‘Ideas matter’ the authors of The Internationalists emphasise misleadingly (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: xxi). Few argue they do not, but the question of their role in social order and historical change is one of the most fundamentally contested issues in inquiry. Hathaway and Shapiro do not situate themselves among debates about the role of ideas, ideology, or discourse in history and politics. The two major moves of the book, the historical narratives about international law and the statistical analyses of war and conquest, combine to imply a drawing room theory of historical change. Legal thinkers and activists write treatises and letters, give lectures and speak to officials, and largely through these kinds of civil society, public sphere means, manage to change history. In the book’s historical episodes, power plays roles in shaping ideas, as when the Dutch East India Company tasks Hugo Grotius with writing a brief legitimating ownership of seized goods. But in the book’s position, its analysis, power does not produce, shape, or select ideas, or transform their meaning in practice.

For Hathaway and Shapiro, there is little gap between the idea and the change that follows. In Mark Mazower’s work on the ‘ideological origins’ of the UN system, there is a distinction between the racial and imperial thinking behind the system and any role these ideas played in how it operated or what became politically possible within it (2009: 191, 203). Hathaway and Shapiro mention other actors and acknowledge the importance of Allied victory in 1945 in creating the New World Order. They also propose a general mechanism – outcasting – that pressures sovereign states to behave legally. But they repeatedly emphasise the decisive significance of ideas in their account, specifically the idea of outlawing aggressive war (2017: xxi, 248, 342, 414, 422–3). The outcome of World War II, outcasting, and other actors are there to help realise the idea in its relative purity. For Hathaway and Shapiro, the legal idea lies at the crux of the change in world order. The Internationalists treats ‘law as if its explanatory
power [was] almost unlimited’ (Hull 2018: 26). In this totalising way of thinking, there is little attention to, or space for, other social relations and processes to shape either the law or its historical consequences and effects. They and their human bearers effectively disappear.

II. War, empire and conquest

Decolonisation and the rise of the new states occupy an important place in Hathaway and Shapiro’s argument. For them, the rise of the new states, the survival of small and weak states, and the phenomenon of fragile states shows that the rules of the Old World Order no longer applied. They statistically chart the decline of territorial empire from 1928 and 1945 and attribute it to the outlawry of war. (2017: 347–51). They do not deal with empire or imperialism as concepts or historical processes. Rather, they conceive the world as consisting of the sovereign territories of states, colonies included, as if in the map colour of their coloniser. The Internationalists presents no territorial concept other than that of the European sovereign state system, nor any account of the relationship between power and territory in world politics or how and why this might change over time. Empire and colony become merely the sites for European legal and political dramas to play out. Early in the book, it is Grotius and the doings of the Dutch East India Company that ‘change the world’; later, the legal and diplomatic efforts of the Internationalists that did so (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: 4). Empire and colony have a ghostly but constitutive presence in the book, until the new states spring forth when released by the outlawry of war, their sovereign territorial square mileage then appearing as ‘independences’ (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: 350).

Historically, the era of the world wars exhausted the European empires, disrupted their economies, and internationalised colonial territories and conflicts. Scholars like Susan Pedersen (2015), Neil Smith (2003), Erez Manela (2007), Cemil Aydin (2007), Adam Tooze (2014), Odd Arne Westad (2007) and Mazower (2009), among others, give us insight into the ways in which empire and world war shaped the post-1945 world of sovereign states. Many imperial officials and thinkers saw the benefits of such a world. A political economy of ‘development’ would replace sovereign responsibility for impoverished populations. The United States had long practised a form of ‘anti-colonial imperialism’ in Latin America, China and elsewhere and saw the UN as in part a globalisation of this strategy (Williams 1972 [1959]; Grandin 2007; Smith 2003). The industrialisation and totalisation of war had culminated in devastating conflicts that upended the European-dominated world and undermined its racial order. While the Japanese shamed
the white powers on the battlefield, the Nazis torpedoed Europe’s humanist and world-leading identity at home. Having ruled in the colonies through ethnic division and invented tradition, the Europeans left bitter communal conflicts in their wake, ripe for continued outside influence. These and other cleavages were parsed and overlaid by the ideological binary of the Cold War. The superpowers, in the shadow of nuclear weapons and total war, pursued their contest in the Third World through new forms of covert action, proxy war, and police and military assistance. Histories of empire and world war produced the world that came after. The regions of the world have co-constitutive, entwined histories with multiple and combined determinations.

By contrast, *The Internationalists’* image of world politics drains war and empire of historical content:

For hundreds of years, war shaped and reshaped the world’s borders, moving the lines back and forth, causing states to grow and shrink . . . After 1928, that changed. For the first time in history, states refused to recognize conquests. (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: 335)

The lines in question are sovereign territorial lines. Empire involves spheres of influence, hegemonies, and other kinds of juridically informal arrangements. It also operates through clients and indirect means of rule, and its territorial expression can take the form of control over markets and sources of labour, as well as strategic choke points, enclaves, and entrepôts. The spatial orders of modern empire exceed and overlay the sovereign territorial organisation of the world, both before and after 1945, if in different ways.

*The Internationalists’* vision of the international system reflects the classical debate over international order between realists and liberals. For both, sovereign states are the main actors and war is an ever-present possibility in a self-help system in which states are ultimately responsible for their own security. For realists, as long as ‘anarchy’ (or the absence of a common power) defines the system, historical transformation consists mainly of change in the number and relative power of the major states. For liberals, by contrast, international trade and cooperation, international institutions, and/or the spread of liberal democracy ultimately can mitigate the problem of war, transforming the system. With an ambit between Hobbes and Kant, this debate reflects the early modern milieu in which international legal thought itself developed. This intellectual world before Hegel and Marx conceives sovereign states as more or less rational ‘persons’ in some version of the state of nature. This debate has two notable and related features. First, it conceives international politics Eurocentrically; it is all about what happens between the major states in the global North.
Second, fundamental moments in world history affecting most of the people and places on the planet do not register as major changes in the international system. These include the conquest of the New World, the worldwide expansion of European rule, or the rise of the capitalist world economy.

To call the sovereign territorial image of the modern international system ‘spare’ or ‘reductionist’ is an understatement. Note specifically how it limits conceptions of historical difference and change. Wars are wars; states are states. At the same time, it sets up the possibility of a transformation in the system by solving the problem of international war. One of the totems of 19th century liberal thought then can be called upon to open the door to a better world: civilisation, free trade, international cooperation, or democracy. Hathaway and Shapiro add the Internationalists and the outlawry of war to this mix. The realist-liberal debate, having whisked away any other kind of historical change, sets up the world historical role of their heroes. In the political science portion of their book, they turn to the quantitative study of war to prove their case.

III. Clausewitz and the correlates of war

As with empire, The Internationalists does not have much to say about war as a concept or historical process outside of its construction in international law. Instead, the book makes use of datasets on the number of wars fought since 1816 by member states of the international system. Also used in the democratic peace literature, these Correlates of War (CoW) datasets rely on the same sovereign territorial image of the international system as that found in international law. Sovereign recognition determines who counts as a member state. Juridical criteria define the data. In this respect, the argument of The Internationalists and the numbers used to prove it have a tautological relationship. For one reviewer, this works to define war and conquest ‘virtually out of existence’ (Glennon 2017: 6).

CoW defines interstate war as war between two or more sovereign states, while civil war occurs within the territory of a sovereign state (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). An evolving category of extra-systemic/extra-state war is used for those conflicts that do not fit. For violence to amount to ‘war’ for CoW, the combatant states must suffer at least 1000 battle deaths among their organised armed forces over the course of a year. By fixing the definitions of sovereign states and of wars across time and place, claims can be made about the incidence and rates of types of war. These claims appear as ‘facts’ requiring explanation. Examples include the decline of interstate war and the rise in civil war since 1945, or that no two states coded as ‘democratic’ have waged interstate war on one another since the data begin. Without the statistical observation that interstate war has declined...
since 1928, much of the explanatory air goes out of *The Internationalists’ outlawry thesis. Yet even crediting this observation in the first place requires accepting the theories of war and the international system implicit in the CoW data (see Freedman 2017: Part Two, for a recent critique of CoW by a historian).

As with empire and sovereignty, CoW-type data sets up a tension between formal, juridical relations, on the one hand, and changing modalities for making war, on the other. As Michael Mann notes, the idea that civil wars have increased while interstate wars have declined obscures significant outside involvement, across a range of dimensions, in wars coded as civil since 1945 (2018: 52–4). CoW data is rigorously collected and revised, but only within its own terms. Fighting through proxies or clients, a common feature of imperial warfare, can fail to register in CoW data, or be mischaracterised, as I will discuss below. The CoW approach to collecting data on war is ahistorical on principle. For CoW, in so far as is possible, states and wars are defined by the same criteria across time and place. War is not something that changes and has histories of its own, histories which shape the character and nature of politics, society, and international order. For CoW, scientifically speaking, each interstate war is the same as another, subject only to variation in the number of combatants and casualties. The Second World War becomes a data point, interstate war number 139 in the CoW data.

In *The Internationalists*, war is primarily an object for moral condemnation rather than for analysis. Hathaway and Shapiro variously see war or particular wars as a departure from civilisation, absurd, irrational, and evil, even the ‘greatest evil’ (2017: xiv, 97–8, 395). At one point, they assert that the ‘modern attitude is to regard wars as uncontroversially bad’ (2017: 9). This is quite clearly wrong. Within and beyond the West many have seen and continue to see much to value in war in modern times, certainly if their willingness to start them is any measure. But one reason Hathaway and Shapiro might think otherwise is because the Second World War was such a profound historical happening. Arguably, the actual historical experience and (now receding) memory of modern total war, and the many forms of mass death and suffering it brought, undermined the legitimacy of major war fought in the West. Anti-war thinkers and social movements, including those concerned with legal change, reflected rather than drove these processes.

Notably, even raising this possibility requires an historical conception of war. The world wars, for example, are often interpreted as in part a European civil war, a framing that draws out the interwoven domestic and international histories that produced the conflicts. For Mann, in a recent survey, quantitative data sets on war show that war has not so much declined
as transformed, particularly with respect to regional variation in where it is fought and who does the suffering (Mann 2018; see also Malešević 2010: Pt V; Shaw 2005). Since 1945, one is much less likely to die in war in the global North than in the global South. Yet many manage to find in the statistics of war proof, rather than indictment, of Western civilisation.

I have been emphasising the problems historical change poses for scientific approaches to empire and war. But there are also political challenges. Hathaway and Shapiro read Carl von Clausewitz’s point about war being the continuation of politics normatively, as meaning that, in the Old World Order, war was a legitimate means for pursuing aims and righting perceived wrongs. ‘Might was Right’ (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: xv). The language of the Kellogg–Briand Pact renouncing the use of war as an instrument of national policy seemed ‘a clever twist’ on the aphorism attributed to Clausewitz (Hathaway and Shapiro 2017: 121). But in locating war amid the ‘continuation of political intercourse’, Clausewitz was emphasising the ways in which war shaped, and was shaped by, social and political relations (1976: 605). This meant, most fundamentally, that war was historical, in ways ‘more than’ a chameleon that changed its stripes in different eras and contexts (Clausewitz 1976: 89). War is transformed by changes in context, social, technological, political, and otherwise. Leaders responded creatively to conventions and constraints, inventing new means to match their purposes. The violent brew of war all too often undermined their intentions with its own dynamics and direction, drawing combatant states and societies into constitutive embrace. Think here of how the Vietnam War shaped United States’ politics, society and culture, as well as its continuing conduct of war, well into the 21st century.

For Clausewitz, the political nature of war posed challenges to scientific theories of war, particularly with respect to the question of whether or not a war was actually happening (1976: 604; cf. Barkawi 2016: 203). The political context of war post-1945 involved not only the UN world of sovereign states, but also that of the Cold War. As one reviewer points out, this topic is mentioned just three times in The Internationalists despite covering half the period since the outlawry of war (Strong 2018). The Cold War internationalised civil wars in distinctive ways, especially when coupled with the anti-imperial tenor of the times and norms of sovereign non-interference. In 1954, in one of a number of operations of its kind, the US overthrew the government of Guatemala by means of a covertly organised invasion. The US saw the Guatemalan regime as susceptible to communism, while its land reform policies threatened US agri-business. In early versions of the CoW data, this conflict was coded as a civil war, with the explanation that ‘there was no formal American participation in this war, although the CIA armed, trained and financed the winning
rebels’ (Small and Singer 1982: 324) The CIA had raised a small force of mercenaries, provided them with an air force, and invaded Guatemala from Nicaragua and Honduras. CoW’s use of the notion of no ‘formal’ US participation reflects another juridical feature of the data: a sovereign state’s official armed forces have to be involved in order for a state to be coded as participating. The use of covert instrumentalities – CIA, seconded US military personnel, foreign mercenaries, the multinational pool of anti-communist pilots in the CIA’s proprietary airline Civil Air Transport – was sufficient in this and other cases to exempt Guatemala from the category of interstate war (Barkawi 2001; Barkawi and Laffey 1999). This is so even though the CIA operation was approved at the top levels of the Eisenhower administration (Gleijeses 1991: 243).

Later versions of the CoW data downgraded the event to a Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) as the number of dead combatants, in the low hundreds, did not reach the CoW threshold for war. This illustrates how the 1000 battle deaths criteria is actually a measure of war’s intensity, rather than of its nature, the exchange of violence. The modalities chosen by the US for this use of violent means to pursue political objectives reflected the domestic and international context that the US faced, as well as the relative weakness of its Guatemalan opponents. Guatemala retained its sovereign independence and territorial integrity both before and after the affair, even though its government had been changed by an act of force by another sovereign state. The superpowers conducted much of the Cold War in Africa, Asia, and Central and Latin America through similar means; Guatemala is not an isolated case. Eastern European states also retained their sovereign independence throughout the period of Soviet empire.

One other point needs to be drawn from Guatemala. In the decades after the 1954 intervention, CoW records three Guatemalan civil wars. As with the world wars, CoW’s criteria disaggregates wars that are socially and historically conjoined. In 1954, reformist forces that had won at the ballot box were defeated by military means. Thereafter, the opposition took to the hinterland and a cycle of violent repression and insurgency began. The US continued to participate, but through the modality of military advice and support to the Guatemalan government, an often essential lifeline for the survival of its Third World clients, who might otherwise have fallen to insurgencies, which had their own outside sources of support. This 30 years’ war and other violence in Guatemala wove together domestic and international strands, military, economic, and political. Juridical and statistical insistence on separating out incidences and types of war misconstrues how war was made in the Cold War.
IV. The politics of empire

Part of what Guatemalans were fighting with the vote and the rifle was a US-dominated order in Latin and Central America developed behind the Western Hemispheric longitude of the Monroe Doctrine, one of those curious qualifications of state sovereignty that so often signal empire. France-Africa is another example (cf. Martin 1995). Behind these lines, hegemonic powers have right of first intervention. For Carl Schmitt, the Monroe Doctrine was a prime example of how imperial territorial orders contradicted what he called European Public Law, or the laws and conventions of the sovereign state system in Europe. Mashing genres, The Internationalists devotes more space to castigating Schmitt for his anxious personality, back-stabbing career tactics, and Nazi politics than in dealing with his geographic concepts (2003 [1950]). The authors seize on the connection between Grossraum, Schmitt’s term for large imperial areas, and Hitler’s Lebensraum (2017: 240–3). That Schmitt was a Nazi should not let Pax Americana off the hook. What happens in The Internationalists is that an Anglo-American version of the Second World War occludes Anglo-American empire. Missing along with it is the role of war, not its outlawry, in ending formal empire.

On Hathaway and Shapiro’s telling, the Atlantic Allies defeated the Old World Order (2017: 213). They see the Atlantic Charter as a global manifesto of the New World Order (2017: 192). Winston Churchill interpreted the third point of the Charter, on the right of peoples to self-determination, as applying only to those under Nazi occupation (Thorne 1978: 102). A year after signing, Britain locked up the leaders of the Indian National Congress and violently repressed an India-wide uprising rather than promise independence after the war. Later, in discussions around the idea of the UN organization, Churchill refused even to discuss ‘self-government for peoples who are without history or tradition’. He underscored: ‘We will not give up one acre of ground; we haven’t the least intention of breaking up the Empire or letting it fall to ruin’ (quoted in Smith 2003: 363–4). Britain, France, Holland and Portugal fought a number of wars to retain their colonies or shape their futures after 1945. Some of these struggles were major conflagrations. Most of the combatants, and by far the greatest proportion of the dead, were Asian and African peasants who made history by fighting and dying in wars.

Formal empire was brought down because it was resisted by mass mobilisations. Many of these turned violent and sectarian, as in the partition of British India, while others involved sustained warfare against colonial and neo-colonial powers. The politics of these struggles were complex. Many in both metropole and colony had sought the reform of empire or new forms of transnational federation (Cooper 2014; Lawrence 2013). Some, like Gandhi
initially, glimpsed in empire political possibilities for ending ethnic and national chauvinism, underestimating the obstacles posed by Western chauvinism and its ideology of white supremacy. Conversely, rapid decolonisation to groomed clients could be an imperial tactic to maintain continued influence or to avert larger mobilisations that would disrupt economic relations. This was the context for the quote from Fanon used as an epigram for this paper: ‘quick ... Decolonize the Congo before it turns into another Algeria’, he pokes in the same passage (1967: 55). Anti-colonial activists knew that the ethnic divide and rule of empire had left individual colonies ripe for manipulation and clientage. They sought allies, federation, and revolutionary reform at home and abroad in response. They also waged wars that ended empires, regimes, and presidencies in the metropole. Of course, war’s cruel tendency to pervert the purposes for which it was waged played upon the great anti-colonial wars of liberation. But whether for good or ill, these struggles and wars changed not only the histories of particular peoples and places, but also of world order.

As with Clausewitz, many mistake Fanon’s acute analysis of political violence and its effects for enthusiastic endorsement. He noted that events like Dien Bien Phu modify the attitude of the West, which in turn searches for new modalities of influence. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy offers an example of how, however unequally, both hegemons and subalterns shape outcomes. The policy was in part a reaction to the depth of Latin American resistance to US intervention and occupation. The Roosevelt administration instead sought to organise Latin America as an alliance of like-minded republics, an ‘empire by invitation’, while continuing to penetrate Latin societies, economies and polities by private and informal means (Lundestad quoted in Grandin 2007: 4). Latin America became a model of the ways in which the market worked as both camouflage and mechanism of continued imperialism in a world of sovereign states (Smith 2002: 373). This was the distinctive hemispheric form of Grossraum that the US would globalise after 1945. The Good Neighbor Policy was more a soft side to US extraterritorial administration than a rejection of it (Grandin 2007: 38). The coercive dimensions were not long in coming back.

_The Internationalists_ is virtually silent regarding the global South’s experience of the histories which it describes. In rushing to defend one of the Internationalists, Sumner Welles, an official in FDR’s State Department, we read that the Good Neighbor Policy ‘represented nothing less than a full throated rejection of the right to intervene’ and was ‘effectively a rejection of a muscular Monroe Doctrine’ (2017: 187, 242). Since there’s no Lebensraum here, _The Internationalists_’ seems to say, there is no issue. Yet even Eisenhower’s State Department was aware that it had violated Roosevelt’s pledge of non-intervention in 1954 (Grandin 2007: 44). But US
use of force and other means to maintain its preferred order in Central and Latin America did not rise to the level of interstate war for CoW. In fact, the US invasion of Panama in 1989–1990 fails to count as an interstate war. People in Cuba, El Salvador, Chile, Haiti, Grenada, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, among other places, might be surprised to hear that international war had been outlawed. Around the world, those living under regimes violently established and maintained by foreign powers would be equally interested to hear that ‘conquest’ was a thing of the past.

To say that *The Internationalists* is Eurocentric would be an understatement. But it would also miss the book’s Atlanticism. At a moment of existential crisis for the liberal world order, *The Internationalists* offers little but a return to 19th century liberal thought, complete with free trade. Without so much as a glimmer of recognition for what capitalism has meant for divisions of wealth and power within and between countries, the book offers a hagiography to free trade as the harbinger of prosperity, peace, and cooperation around the world (2017: 342–4). In the contemporary world, neoliberalism and the crash of 2008 helped fuel the resurgent politics of fascism and white supremacy that not only threaten to wash away the rules-based order built by the Anglo-Americans, but also to further entrench asymmetries of power wealth within and between the countries of the global North and South. How can the right-leaning, backward-looking liberalism offered by *The Internationalists* provide any meaningful bearings for our times?

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**References**


