Mazower, Mark: *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009. ISBN: 978-0-691-13521-2; 236 S.

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Evaluating the history of the United Nation (UN) is, and has been, a constant object of controversy among historians and political scientists. While books such as Paul Kennedy's 'The Parliament of Man' (2007)[1] have praised the UN's capability to adapt and take up further responsibilities in a changing global environment, critics have pointed at the discrepancy between the somewhat lofty promises of the UN Charter and the UN Millennium Goals and the apparent failures to prevent the humanitarian disasters in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, or Darfur.

Although the British historian Mark Mazower is neither a critic of the UN nor skeptical of multilateralism in general, his monograph forwards a critical evaluation of a part of the institution's history that has so far remained largely untainted: the UN's foundation. In his effort to de-contextualize and re-contextualize the UN's beginnings, Mazower's book brings the reader back to its foundational moment, a moment in which political thinkers tried to make sense of the fading hegemony of the British Empire and the ideological considerations that had accompanied this process.

The reader witnesses this through the eyes of a selection of political theorists and statesmen of the day. With the help of the biographical sketches of Jan Smuts, Alfred Zimmern, Raphael Lemkin, Joseph Schechtman, and Jawaharlal Nehru, Mazower makes an important point: the UN was neither a plain triumph of Wilsonian idealism, nor foremost a reaction of the anti-Hitler coalition to the atrocities of Nazism and humanitarian catastrophe of WWII, as stated in the UN's official historiography.[2] Instead the making of the UN should be understood as a final attempt – after the League of Nations' (LON) failure – to reconcile the British Empire's vision of global order with twentieth-century realities. The foundation of the UN thus becomes „the endgame of empire" (p. 14) with the ideas of British imperial strategists, more than any other influence, determining the conceptual blueprint of the UN.

The content of „No Enchanted Palace" is divided into two larger arguments. The first argument of the book (discussed in the chapters one, two, and four), centers on aspects of continuity between the LON and the UN, which Mazower considers „in many ways a continuation" of the earlier body, (p.14) and the transition of the early UN from a means to preserve the British imperial system to an effective instrument of decolonization. Chapter one and two focus on the two imperial internationalists, (p. 18) Jan Smuts (South Africa's former Prime Minister) and the British scholar Alfred Zimmern; both of them key thinkers of the British Commonwealth idea, the LON, and, later, the UN. Although having different opinions on various issues, both Smuts and Zimmern truthfully believed in the British Empire as a central pillar of a peaceful world order. In their understanding Britain, however, would need an international body like the UN to cement her alliance with the United States, the new global superpower, to deliver on that promise. The quest for world peace, for them, was not a legal but an „ethical struggle" (p. 29). Having made the connection between British imperialism and the foundation of the UN, the author poses a crucial question about the organization's architects true intention: „Could it be [...] that the United Nations started out life not as the instrument to end colonialism, but rather [...] as the means to preserve it?" (pp. 30-31). What eventually led to the UN's involvement in decolonization is the subject of chapter four. In this chapter, Mazower explains how the protest of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, against South Africa's discriminatory treatment of Indian immigrants at the General Assembly, became the first incident in which the UN managed to outgrow the imperialist background of its architects and turned into a powerful platform of decolonization.

[1] Paul Kennedy, The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present and Future of the United Nations, New York 2006.

[2] Comp. United Nations, History of the United Nations <http://www.un.org/aboutun/unhistory/> (03.01.2012).

In the second argument of the book (discussed in chapter three), Mazower comes back to some of his earlier writings and takes a closer look at an aspect in which the UN principles differ from those of its predecessor the LON: the relationship between minority rights and human rights.[3] Although an intriguing read, this second argument seems, at times, somewhat out of place, considering that the overwhelming part of the book discusses the British imperial context of the UN's foundation. Unfortunately, Mazower does not make a substantial effort to merge these two arguments in his book. Through the stories of several wartime analysts – most importantly two Jewish émigrés Joseph Schechtman and Raphael Lempkin – Mazower shows how the legalist approach of the LON minority rights policies had failed to prevent the destabilization of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s and how policy makers therefore started „advocating legal safeguards for *individual* human – as opposed to collective, minority– rights" (p. 124). As a result the „UN Charter made no mention of minorities" and stressed instead the principles of nation sovereignty and the rights of the individual (p. 141); a compromise also necessary to secure the United States' and USSR's support.

Surprisingly enough, Mazower's analysis makes little mention of the Atlantic Charter (1941), the negotiations at Dumbarton Oaks (1944), the Conference of Yalta (1945), or the internationalist movement in the United States that has helped to keep the dream of a strong organization for world peace alive throughout the interwar period and WWII. In fact, Soviet or American influences in general receive little attention. Instead Mazower directs the reader's attention to some long-neglected aspects and individuals, which is one of the biggest advantages of the book and, at the same time, one of its shortcomings. Towards the end of the book, one begins to wonder, if the author might have taken too many factors out of the equation. Be that as it may, Mazower offers a number of plausible explanations for some of the oddest contradictions surrounding the UN's creation, like the fact that the spiritually uplifting preamble of the UN Charter was written by Jan Smuts, an outright white supremacist who believed the UN to be an „instrument of a white man's alliance that could withstand [...] other oppositional racial forces" (p. 165).

Looking at the extensive body of literature he produced over the last two decades, Mark Mazower seemed to be the ideal candidate to provide a new, refreshing perspective on the subject. Books like 'The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century' (1997), 'Dark Continent: Europe's 20th Century' (1998), and 'Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe' (2008) established Mazower, who is currently holding a professorship of World Order Studies and History at Columbia University, as one of the leading authorities of twentieth-century European history.[4]

The author's choice to concentrate on a small set of individual actors fulfills a double function in his book: Firstly, it reminds readers that the history of institutions such as the UN can neither be exclusively explained with grand transitions in global history and politics, nor with the systematic abstractions of classical international relations scholarship. Mazower brings the individual as carrier of political thought and representative of a certain zeitgeist back into focus of political history. Secondly, Mazower's choice makes his book highly accessible and engaging to readership beyond students and scholars of UN history. The book is, over all, a fascinating read not just for those interested in the foundation of the UN but also for those readers who want get an insight into the political thinking of the late British Empire and the emergence of new human rights discourses during the interwar period and thereafter.

HistLit 2012-1-026 / Martin Walter über Mazower, Mark: *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*. Princeton 2009, in: H-Soz-Kult 13.01.2012.

[3] See Mark Mazower, Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe, Daedalus 126 (1997) 2, pp. 47-63, idem, The Strange Triumph of Human Rights. 1933-1950, The Historical Journal 47 (2004) 2, pp. 379-398.

[4] Mark Mazower, The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century: Historical Perspectives, Oxford 1997; idem, Dark Continent: Europe's 20th Century, London 1998; idem, Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe, London 2008.