THE JOURNAL OF
COMMONWEALTH
LITERATURE

Article

The Journal of Commonwealth Literature
2015, Vol. 50(1) 19–32

DOI: 10.1177/0021989414555207
jcl.sagepub.com
SAGE

Leonard and Virginia Woolf: Writing against empire

Anna Snaith
King's College London, UK

Abstract

This essay reconsiders the intellectual relationship between Leonard and Virginia Woolf by focusing on the congruence of their writings on empire. It argues for a trans-generic approach by reading Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), alongside Leonard's *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), for which Virginia carried out extensive research. Leonard has been recognized by scholars as one of the foremost anti-imperialists of the interwar period, but more nuanced attention to the resonance between their work reveals that Virginia anticipated the focus on economic imperialism so crucial to *Empire and Commerce*. Turning on a phrase that echoes across their writing — "buying cheap and selling dear" — the piece explores the ways in which the Woolfs, in the tradition of J.A. Hobson, exposed and explored the violent capitalist motivations behind colonialism in the search for cheap labour, new markets, and raw goods. Furthermore, in their differing ways, Leonard and Virginia Woolf were attuned to the connections between cultural production and imperial trade networks.

Keywords

Anti-colonialism, economic imperialism, empire, *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, Leonard Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, Virginia Woolf

Scholarship on Virginia Woolf has turned its attention increasingly to the representation of empire in her writing. This has manifested itself in a reordering of the Woolf canon, with texts such as *The Voyage Out* (1915) or "Thunder at Wembley" (1924) coming to the forefront. It has also meant engagement with the way London monumentalizes empire in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), for instance, or *The Years* (1937) as a novel peopled by the colonial returned. Virginia Woolf's family was populated on both sides by men (and women) engaged in empire work. Her mother was born in India to a family

Corresponding author:
Anna Snaith, King's College London, Virginia Woolf Building, 22 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6NR, UK.
Email:anna.snaith@kcl.ac.uk

of Anglo-Indian administrators. Relatives on her father's side were abolitionists: her great-grandfather, James Stephen, was an ally of William Wilberforce, and his son, another James Stephen, drafted the 1833 legislation that ended slavery. It is surprising, however, that relatively little attention has been paid to one of the most significant routes by which Woolf would have gained knowledge about colonial issues: her husband, Leonard. After his work for the Colonial Civil Service in Ceylon between 1904 and 1911, he became one of the most significant theorists of anti-imperialism in Britain in the interwar period.

This article will argue for a more intertwined reading of the Woolfs' engagement with imperialism. It will achieve this by reading trans-generically — not by comparing their two "village in the jungle" novels — but by setting *The Voyage Out* (1915) alongside Leonard Woolf's *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920). We already know, from Virginia's letters and diaries and Leonard's autobiography, the extent of Leonard's familiarity with his wife's writing, but the depth of her knowledge of his nonfiction texts has been less clear. The recent discovery by Michèle Barrett of close to 800 pages of notes taken by Virginia as research for Leonard's *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920) reveals that she was not just a passive reader of this text but a collaborator if not co-author (Barrett, 2013). I want to suggest, however, that even before undertaking this research, Virginia was thinking about empire in terms similar to those Leonard would articulate in his wide-ranging and ground-breaking study. This essay, then, offers new perspectives on Leonard Woolf's anti-imperialism by highlighting points of convergence with Virginia Woolf's fictional work. This more collaborative or symbiotic intellectual relationship between the Woolfs has been obscured by deep-rooted accounts of Leonard as his wife's guardian or minder. The persistence of such readings of the marriage (confirmed and reinforced by the 2002 film version of *The Hours*) is evidenced by the fact that these notecards have lain untouched for so long.

In the later 1920s and into the 1930s, the Woolfs shared their views on imperialism through their work at the Hogarth Press, a key disseminator of fiction by colonial writers as well as a notable publication route for anti-imperialist thought. C.L.R. James published *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* in 1933 as No. 16 in Hogarth's *Day to Day* political pamphlet series. James had arrived in Bloomsbury from Trinidad the year before, and it is telling that an intellectual who would go on to become one of the twentieth century's most significant postcolonial theorists identified the Hogarth Press as a suitable publisher for one of his earliest works of anti-colonialism. Subsequent titles in the series included: W.G. Ballinger, *Race and Economics in South Africa* (1934); Leonard Woolf, *The League and Abyssinia* (1936); Leonard Barnes, *The Future of the Colonies* (1936) (Woolmer, 1986: 199). Mulk Raj Anand, the Indian nationalist and writer, worked for the Press as a proof-corrector and published stories with John Lehmann's New Writing series (see Snaith, 2010). Other key writers on empire included Norman Leys (*Kenya* [1924], *Last Chance in Kenya* [1931] and *The Colour Bar in Africa* [1941]) and Sydney Olivier (*The Anatomy of African Misery* [1927] and *White Capital and Coloured Labour* [1929]), whose *The Myth of Governor Eyre*, on the brutal suppression of the 1865 uprising in Jamaica, had been published alongside James' pamphlet. The Press published the first book in English by a Kikuyu writer: Githendu Parmenas Mockerie's *An African Speaks for His People* (1934).

These publications certainly speak more of Leonard's imprint than Virginia's: many of them coming to him via his work for the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International and Imperial Questions in the 1920s. Prior to Barrett's discovery, it was known that in 1917 Virginia was researching and indexing for Leonard (V Woolf, 1977: 229n) and that she was familiar with the published work: "I'm reading it for the second time — to me it seems superb" (V Woolf, 1976: 413). She also uses a phrase from one of Leonard's epigraphs — "Ce chien est à moi" from Pascal's *Pensées* — in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In the Leonard Woolf Archive at the University of Sussex are 783 folios covered with Virginia's notes: some typed, some handwritten. The notecards represent extensive empirical data on international trade, taken, as Barrett describes, from British Consular Reports and books on European contact with Africa. The fact that these notes have only recently come to light indicates the persistence of limited and misguided accounts of Virginia Woolf's engagement with politics. It was assumed that she could only have had a passing interest in the politics of empire; our critical narratives go a long way to determining what we find in the archives. These research notes are hugely significant, therefore, in what they reveal about Virginia's knowledge of European colonial relations with Africa and for what they indicate about the intellectual working relationship of the Woolfs.

I want to build on these findings by suggesting that Virginia did not just act as an unacknowledged scribe or secretary for Leonard's ground-breaking volume, but that she had actually anticipated his central thesis about the economic motivations behind imperial expansion in her first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915). It was not simply that by carrying out research for Leonard, Virginia went on a crash course on imperialism in Africa, but that she was already conceiving of the colonial encounter as one based on exploitative economic relations. My aim here is not to pinpoint exact lines of influence in one direction or another, but to highlight congruence in the writing of husband and wife so as to suggest a more flexible and mutual intellectual relationship between them. It is also to recognize, amidst a reconsideration of Leonard's 1913 novel, the significance of his non-fiction writing and the need, when considering anti-colonialism in the modernist period, to read across the fiction/non-fiction divide.

Critics have noted the intertwined composition and content of their two "village in the jungle" novels. Although Virginia had started work on her first novel in 1907, its gestation was protracted and she was revising *The Voyage Out* after she read *The Village in the Jungle* (1913/2008) in manuscript in 1912. As Mark Wollaeger argues, Virginia "changed three crucial tightly-linked scenes" including the river trip undertaken by the English tourists to visit a native village (2003: 52). The novel's young protagonist, Rachel Vinrace, dies after this trip and her encounter with a village of indigenous women. But the novels are also very differing projects. Leonard's detailed depiction of Sinhalese village life from the inside is, as he wrote, "the symbol of the anti-imperialism which had been growing upon me more and more in my last years in Ceylon" (L Woolf, 1964: 47). His focus on the "Sinhalese way of life" as opposed to the "dreary pomp and circumstance of imperial government" suggests a desire to see from the position of the colonized, if not a position of envy. He describes being "obsessed" and "fascinated" with jungle life: he "tried vicariously to live their lives" (L Woolf, 1964: 47–8). As Dominic Davies and Priyasha Mukhopadhyay explore in detail in this special issue, he depicts the

various effects of empire: the legal, economic, and bureaucratic systems that marginalize and make vulnerable Silindu and his family; the position of the headman, Babun, who uses the system of fines and debts for his own profit, and the power held by those who speak English. For all the limitations resulting from Leonard's European vantage point, such as the representation of the jungle itself as malign space, the novel is a remarkable attempt to think transculturally. When compared, for example, with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899/1990), which delineates the violent abuses of imperialism yet relies on a dehumanizing and homogenizing representation of indigenous peoples, *The Village in the Jungle* (1913/2008) seems more akin to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in its desire to depict the workings of a community from the inside, as Nisha Manocha discusses at greater length in this issue. In *The Voyage Out*, by contrast, Virginia's emphasis is, characteristically, on the colonizer and the links between imperialism, patriotism, and patriarchal control. The indigenous peoples encountered on the river trip are described in terms of an unchanging, eternal primitivism: "So it would go on for ever and ever […] those women sitting under the trees" (V Woolf, 1970: 289).[1] In a similar way to the African peoples in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (with which Leonard and Virginia were surely in dialogue), they function, in part, as a catalyst for the European protagonist's moment of enlightenment/horror as symbolized by the tropical disease that ultimately kills Rachel.

But instead of contrasting these two novels, I want to investigate the Woolfs' shared articulation of economic imperialism. This resonance is encapsulated in a repeated phrase in *The Voyage Out* and *Empire and Commerce in Africa*: the concept of "buying cheap and selling dear". The profit motive is central to the exploitative trade relations that frame the contact between Europeans and South Americans in *The Voyage Out*. Mr and Mrs Flushing, who instigate the trip up the Amazon, are bohemian travellers, artists, and art collectors who buy up indigenous goods to sell to women for enormous profit in London. When Rachel visits Mrs Flushing's hotel room she finds the room covered with her paintings. Mrs Flushing, with a paintbrush in her mouth, opens her wardrobe and tosses "a quantity of shawls, stuffs, cloaks, embroideries, on to the bed" (237). As Rachel moves to touch them, again, she "dropped a quantity of beads, brooches, earrings, bracelets, tassels, and combs among the draperies" (238). "'My husband rides about and finds 'em'", she explains, "'they don't know what they're worth, so we get 'em cheap. And we shall sell 'em to smart women in London'" (238). The river excursion is a chance to replenish their stocks. In this crucial central scene — which was extended after Virginia read her husband's novel — she outlines, in microcosm, the global economic and political dynamics on which imperialism depends.

In *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, Leonard writes:

> Whatever be the cause, it is certain that at no time in the history of the world has there existed a society of human beings dominated by such a universal economic passion as ours is. It is the passion of buying cheap and selling dear. The commodities which we desire to sell dear and to buy cheap differ from person to person: some of us deal in wheat and cotton goods, others in labour, others in the product of the intellect or imagination. But in all these transactions […] we unconsciously accept the same principle, ideal, and even obligation: to make a profit […] by selling in the dearest and buying in the cheapest market.

> The application of this principle to the relations of Europeans to Africans is undoubtedly the fundamental cause of the African problem. Europe has treated the African and his land simply as something to make a profit out of, something which it could buy very cheap and sell very dear (L Woolf, 1998: 360).[2]

Leonard's critique here, of course, is of capitalism: "the capitalist system in Europe produces the exploitation of Africa" as the profit-driven search for cheap labour and goods moves ever outwards (362). The echo of this repeated phrase and its application to the economic motivation behind colonialism suggests the intellectual and political symbiosis in the Woolfs' writing. Well before she was involved in preparing Leonard's fullest articulation of economic imperialism, Virginia Woolf saw the colonial relationship in these terms rather than one based around the "civilising mission" or the "white man's burden". In Leonard's obsessive repetition of the phrase "buying cheap and selling dear" we can hear an echo of many of the colonialist aspects of Virginia's first novel, which Leonard thought "extraordinarily good" (L Woolf, 1964: 81).

The Voyage Out examines the interconnected systems of patriarchal and imperial control through focus on the education and development of a young woman. As Jed Esty (2007) has explored, Woolf's motif of interrupted or uneven development registers the ways in which empire complicates narratives of linear and progressive national development. Rachel, like colonial space, is figured as blank site of possibility, there for the moulding and educating: "there was no subject in the world which she knew accurately" (30). Throughout the novel she is continually given books to read as those around her attempt to conquer or cultivate her. But as Esty writes, "Rachel's uncultivated selfhood is not just […] figured in the colony; it is in some sense routed through colonialism itself as a system of exchange and production (2007: 81). Woolf suggests a "deep structural link between fictions of adolescence and the politics of colonialism" (Esty, 2007: 72). This is written into the formal properties of the novel given that Rachel's curtailed courtship with Terence Hewet also signals the rupture of the conventions of the novel genre itself in the unfulfilled marriage plot. Through set scenes (a picnic, a dance) Woolf rewrites Austen's novels and figures her own experimental "voyage out" as a novelist.

The novel opens with Helen Ambrose's realization that London is a "city of innumerable poor people" (8). The West End, with its glittering commodities, "electric lamps", and "vast plate-glass windows", is only a "small golden tassel" on a "vast black cloak" (8). Helen's realization that the capitalist economy relies on a vast army of exploited labourers leads her to imagine herself as a prostitute "pacing a circle all the days of her life round Piccadilly Circus" (8). Without the means to financial independence, she would be forced to become a commodity herself. Woolf, like Marx and Engels before her, considers the gender implications of an inequitable economic system: women are commodities on the streets or on the marriage market. Right from the opening of the novel, economic systems (London is figured as a giant factory) come under scrutiny. In a series of defamiliarizing moves Woolf depicts attempts to "voyage outside" or see beyond these systems. She uses the conventional "English(wo)man abroad" genre to examine the links between literal voyaging and the perspectival shift beyond conventional ways of seeing. She alludes, also, to novels by the likes of Henry James and E.M. Forster which depict young Englishwomen experiencing various kinds of awakenings while on European tours. Yet her characters' voyages seem to confirm rather than challenge their Englishness.

Woolf's various defamiliarizing tactics are also employed to undercut narratives of imperial pride or superiority. As the tourists pull away from England on their boat, the *Euphrosyne*, the heart of empire becomes a "shrinking island", its inhabitants insignificant insects (28). But the vessel is a trading ship, ploughing the routes of Rachel's father's rubber and hides trade. Rachel's father, Willoughby, "loved his business and built his Empire" (19), which relies on "his triumphs over wretched little natives who went on strike and refused to load his ships" (194). Not only does his success depend on the exploitation of native workers, but Helen suspects him of "nameless atrocities with regard to his daughter, as indeed she had always suspected him of bullying his wife" (20). As in *Three Guineas* (1938), where Woolf will go on to link the fascist dictator to the controlling patriarch, Willoughby treats his employees and family with the same violent control. The MP Richard Dalloway, a guest on the *Euphrosyne*, imagines the history of Conservative policy: it "gradually enclosed, as though it were a lasso that opened and caught things, enormous chunks of the habitable globe" (47). In the same way, he sexually assaults Rachel: women and colonial territories are there for the taking. For his wife Clarissa, being on board ship makes her reflect on what it means to be English: "One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages" (47). Women, too, are complicit in the jingoist narratives as they reflect men, their warships, and their conquests back at twice their natural size.

Interestingly, in choosing her colonial setting, Woolf opts for a fictional location rather than one that would have been familiar to her British readership. The colony, Santa Marina, has had, rather like Rachel, an uneven history, passed back and forth between colonizing powers. Woolf offers a potted history of the colony and how

> for want of a few thousand pounds and a few thousand men, the spark died that should have been a conflagration […] All seemed to favour the expansion of the British Empire, and had there been men like Richard Dalloway in the time of Charles the First, the map would undoubtedly be red where it is now an odious green. (87)

This then is the hidden side of empire, the sites of defeat that mean "English history denies all knowledge of the place" (87). Here again, Woolf undercuts or defamiliarizes British superiority and the notion of the successful, progressive movement of imperial expansion. Santa Marina represents a "voyage out" from the British empire, or at least a journey to a different kind of colony populated by bohemian tourists in "search of something new" (88).

Amongst these tourists are the Flushings, whose professed aesthetic motivations are entangled with a desire for profit. Mr Flushing is a collector of South American artefacts; Mrs Flushing is an aristocratic, bohemian artist, with a penchant for Augustus John and a hatred for anything more than twenty years old (196). Husband and wife mine Santa Marina for all it can give them. Mr Flushing — like a "very persuasive shopkeeper" — tells Rachel that "there might be prehistoric towns, like those in Greece and Asia, standing in open places among the trees, filled with the works of this early race. Nobody had been there; scarcely anything was known" (240). In *Melymbrosia*, the manuscript version of the novel, Mr Flushing imagines: "There may be rubies diamonds all kinds of precious stones beneath there; it's the country of the future" (V Woolf, 1982: 208).

In depicting a river journey by steamer in search of commodities, Woolf rewrites Conrad's tale of the violent effects of the ivory trade in the Belgian Congo. The trip is figured as a journey "into the heart of the night" (269), an excursion paralleled by the opening voyage down the Thames which evokes the Nellie, in Conrad's tale, moored on the same river while Marlow tells his story. As in *Heart of Darkness*, the colonial encounter is marked by temporal "regression". The tourists are repeatedly compared to Elizabethan voyagers; they are confronted with the same, unchanging scene and they arrive with the same desire to "colonise the world" (268–9). But "the time of Elizabeth was only distant from the present time by a moment of space compared with the ages which had passed since the water had run between those banks" (268). The encounter is a confrontation with the primeval: a temporary suspension of the ceaseless movement of modernity.

When they reach the village, Mr Flushing moves in to barter and collect his goods, but the tourists are faced with the "motionless inexpressive gaze" of the indigenous women, who continue about their work, feeding their babies, plaiting straw or kneading dough (288). They stare, "curiously not without hostility", but "soon the life of the village took no notice of them; they had become absorbed into it" (289). Again the move is a deflationary one; the tourists become insignificant and Helen is overcome with "presentiments of disaster" and the fragility of human life (290). The novel attends to the constructedness of narratives of national and imperial grandeur; Rachel is reading Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (198).

Two years after the publication of *The Voyage Out*, Leonard was commissioned to write a study of international trade by the Fabian Society. The project narrowed in focus to Europe's trade with, and exploitation of, Africa, but also expanded to become a vast, empirical study based on reams of data. *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* was published in 1920 by the Labour Research Department and George Allen and Unwin. Woolf was, in the 1920s, "the Labour movement's leading anti-imperialist thinker" and that same year he co-drafted the policy document that committed the Labour Party to the goal of a "political system of self-government" in Africa (P Wilson, 2003: 84). Leonard's thesis, briefly stated, is that in the late nineteenth century, imperialism moved into a new phase, one driven solely by economic gain. The reason for this shift, according to Woolf, was the reorganization of the nation state around efficiency and economic acquisition. "Nationalism", he notes, "wherever it has appeared, has applied itself most violently to economic ends" (10). Joseph Chamberlain, advocate of a system of colonial preferential tariffs, is a key figure in this narrative. For Chamberlain, Woolf argues, imperial prestige and power is not an end in itself but a means to profit: empire is commerce (18). Woolf quotes Chamberlain's famous 1896 speech to the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce: "commerce is the greatest of all political interests" (13). The supposed duty of the European nation state to protect and maximize its commercial interests has resulted in the use of its power in the world outside the nation for the benefit of those within its borders (16).

Woolf then moves on to the effects of this triad of nationalism, industrialization, and commercialization on Africa: economic slavery and political subjection. The search for markets and raw materials, he argues, resulted in the violent conversion of the whole of Africa and Asia into "mere appendages of the European state" (10). The African policy

of the European states has, he states, "been comparatively simple and direct. It is the policy of grab" (55). After discussion of the "scramble for Africa" — complete with maps that starkly depict the internal colonization of the continent between 1880 and 1914 — Woolf focuses primarily on North and East Africa (Algeria, Tunis, Abyssinia, Zanzibar, as well as the Belgian Congo). The focus, then, is as much on French, Italian, and Belgian imperialism, as on British. Pages of charts detailing European colonization and including territories acquired and their populations, dates of acquisition, square mileage of colonized areas provides another mode through which to register the subjection of Africa to the "full dominion of European states" (59).

He then goes on to examine the effects of economic imperialism on both colonizer and colonized, arguing that in fact the profits derived from the possession of colonial territories (either in terms of raw materials or new markets) are negligible and only benefit private financiers and traders. In page after page of detailed empirical evidence regarding imports and exports, Woolf proves that "the economic beliefs behind economic imperialism are dreams and delusions" (330). In the section on British East Africa, for example, extensive data demonstrates that "British possessions there are of negligible importance to British industry, whether as sources of supply for raw material or as markets for manufactures" (334). Not only that, he articulates the effects of imperialism on native populations. In British East Africa, he describes the "remarkable fact that not one single acre of this land is either leased or sold to the native inhabitants of the country" (338). The Masai, dispossessed of their land by Europeans, have been forced into effective slavery:

> The white settler has taken the best land from the native. The Reserves are to be cut down until they are unable to support the native population: thus the native will be forced out of the Reserve, and in order to escape starvation will be compelled to work upon the white man's land for the wage offered to him […] then we Europeans are to congratulate ourselves because, as Mr Chamberlain explained, we are not only doing good to ourselves by getting cheap labour, but also doing good to the natives by convincing them "of the necessity and dignity of labour" at twopence a day. (351)

The detached register is punctuated now and again with impassioned moments denouncing the "evils" of economic imperialism: "Slavery, drink and rifles, and the bloodshed and degradation which capitalism, in its hunger for profits and dividends […] has carried into every bay and river and forest of Africa, can never be atoned for" (259). *Empire and Commerce*, like *The Voyage Out*, works in conversation with *Heart of Darkness*, given Conrad's emphasis on the murderous effects of the search for valuable commodities. More specifically, Leonard treats the colonization of the Congo region by King Leopold of Belgium. Here, however, the question of register is paramount. Woolf states that he does not "propose to enter" into the "incredible brutality" of the system (311) but to offer an empirical and factual account of the period of Belgian rule. He will rely on "official documents and treaties" rather than the "atmosphere of temporary passion and prejudice" generated by "the books or evidence of, for instance, Mr. E. D. Morel" (304). Morel, along with Roger Casement, had exposed the atrocities committed by King Leopold, in journalism and his book *The Scandal of the Congo:*

Britain's Duty (1904). Woolf knew Morel through the Union of Democratic Control, which he joined in 1915 (D Wilson, 1978: 93). Woolf goes on to investigate the Belgian Congo as an instance in which the rhetoric of international government masked private economic gain. While economic theorists of empire have subsequently found flaws in Leonard's argument — its Eurocentrism, its overemphasis on economics and formal imperialism, its implication that mid-Victorian imperialism was fuelled by differing motives — what is significant here is the scope and depth of Woolf's deconstruction of imperialist rhetoric and propaganda.

Woolf's argument is clearly influenced by the writing of J.A. Hobson, particularly *Imperialism: A Study* (1902/1988), the first systematic treatment of capitalist imperialism. In turn, Lenin's *Imperialism: Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) acknowledges his debt to Hobson, as Dominic Davies' article in this issue further explores. Leonard reviewed Hobson's *Towards International Government* in 1915 and knew of him via the Union of Democratic Control founded in 1914 in opposition to the outbreak of war (D Wilson, 1978: 93). Hobson was sent by the *Manchester Guardian* to report on the Boer War, where he saw first-hand how the diamond and gold mining industries had dictated colonial policy. Like Woolf after him, Hobson stresses that rather than being crucial to Britain's economic prosperity, imperialism is a drain on the nation's resources:

> Absorbing the public money, time, interest and energy on costly and unprofitable work of territorial aggrandisement, it thus wastes those energies of public life in the governing classes and the nations which are needed for internal reforms and for the cultivation of arts of material and intellectual progress at home. Finally, the spirit, the policy, and the methods of Imperialism are hostile to the institutions of popular self-government, favouring forms of political tyranny and social authority which are the deadly enemies of effective liberty and equality. (Hobson, 1902/1988: 152)

Imperialism, as a doctrine of civilizational progress or moral destiny, is entirely exploded: it is "a depraved choice of national life, imposed by self-seeking interests which appeal to the lusts of quantitative acquisitiveness" (Hobson, 1902/1988: 368). He, unlike Woolf, treats a range of factors — patriotism, philanthropy, missionary zeal — but argues ultimately that the main driver is financial, specifically the outlet for surplus wealth in foreign markets and investments. The economic motivation is buttressed by "the verbal armoury of Imperialism" (Hobson, 1902/1988: 207). Woolf would, in later writings such as *Imperialism and Civilization* (1928), relinquish his insistence on mono-causalism. While he continued to argue that economic factors were the primary motivation behind imperialism, he allowed more space for secondary drivers such as prestige, power, and religious or cultural domination. Interestingly, too, in *The Voyage Out*, Virginia Woolf distributes a range of motivating factors amongst the travellers to South America, from the desire for newness or authenticity to a belief in cultural and political superiority.

Peter Wilson has convincingly suggested that in the 1920s and 1930s Leonard Woolf "assumed Hobson's mantle as Britain's foremost anti-imperialist theorist" (Wilson, 2003: 83). What Leonard brought to the debate was much fuller and more carefully researched evidence for Hobson's thesis. As Barrett describes, reviews of *Empire and Commerce* repeatedly praised the research carried out for the project (2013: 87). Leonard

acknowledges one of his research assistants, Alix Sargent-Florence, for her "valuable help in research for Part II". The other researcher, his wife, goes unacknowledged in the text. Of the 783 five by eight inch notecards, as Barrett details, 666 were Virginia's notes taken from British consular reports on international trade. The remaining 117 cards contain notes on Virginia's reading about Africa, "mainly in the form of carefully referenced quotations rather than summaries of arguments" (Barrett, 2013: 87). Notes relating to the following books, for example, make their way directly into *Empire and Commerce*: P.L. McDermot, *British East Africa* (1895), Lugard's *The Rise of Our East African Empire*, and Wylde's *Modern Abyssinia* (1901).

Just before its publication, as Barrett records, Virginia writes in her diary: "Reading Empire & Commerce to my genuine satisfaction, with an impartial delight in the closeness, passion, & logic of it; indeed it's a good thing now & then to read one's husband's work attentively" (V Woolf, 1978: 50). This response is intriguing, given her contribution to a project that could almost be considered a collaborative work. It underscores her genuine interest in the material, suggesting that her extensive research was motivated by more than a desire to assist Leonard with a "useful but mindless task" during a period of ill health (Barrett, 2013: 110). For a writer as socially and politically observant as Virginia Woolf, this amount of reading cannot but have influenced her own writing projects. Barrett notes the possible presence of this work in *Night and Day* (1919), which Virginia was writing concurrently (2013: 118). The same might be said of the description of North's work as a sheep farmer in Africa in *The Years* (1937). Methodologically, too, the work suggests the kind of research she undertook in the 1930s in preparation for *The Years*, which started out as an essay–novel, *The Pargiters*. These scrapbooks, however, unlike her work for Leonard, included her own comments and the creative juxtaposition of newspaper clippings and quotations. Having said that, as Barrett argues, by comparing the quotes noted by Virginia with their appearance in the published work,

> [t]he research notes for *Empire and Commerce* lend credence to the view that Virginia was an unequivocal supporter of her husband's very public stance as a leading critic of imperialism. If anything, her notes are more anti-imperialist, more tending towards the damning quotation, than the final book that he published. (Barrett, 2013: 113)

In the 1930s, one can see a reversal of methodology: Virginia's polemic *Three Guineas* (1938) is full of facts and figures, and Leonard's *Quack! Quack!* (1935) focuses on the psychology of authoritarianism.

Virginia's material on Abyssinia would have been a particularly resonant aspect of her research. In 1910, while working on *The Voyage Out*, she had been involved in the infamous Dreadnought Hoax. Masterminded by Anglo-Irishman Horace Cole, a group of friends including Virginia Woolf, Duncan Grant, and Adrian Stephen boarded the HMS *Dreadnought* disguised as Abyssinian princes and their entourage. The group was in blackface, complete with false beards and moustaches. Woolf's brother, Adrian, was the translator, and although they had purchased a Swahili grammar and attempted a few words in the train on the way down to the south coast, they resorted to Greek and Latin during the escapade. No one was any the wiser. They were met by crowds, files of marines, Admiral May, and the Zanzibar anthem (as the British officials hadn't been able to source the Abyssinian anthem). They were toured around the ship, shown its intimate

details from the newest wireless equipment to the officers' bathrooms. All went to plan, despite some precarious moments involving slipping moustaches. An extra frisson was provided by the presence of the Stephens' cousin, Willy Fisher, Flag Commander of the *Dreadnought*. The prank made a mockery of British naval security and ridiculed the might of the military at this politically sensitive pre-war moment. The hoax sent shock waves through the British establishment when the news broke on the front page of the *Express* (12 February 1910). Significantly, the anti-imperialism of *The Voyage Out* centres on naval power and the sea routes of empire. In that novel, Clarissa Dalloway's response to the sight of warships, "eyeless beasts seeking their prey", seen from the *Euphrosyne* is an eroticized squeal of patriotic excitement (65).

In 1910 Abyssinia was a potent symbol of colonial resistance and independence in the face of Italian invasion attempts. This symbolism would, of course, intensify into the 1930s with Rastafarianism and the Italo-Ethiopian war on which Leonard would publish *The League and Abyssinia* in 1936. Leonard Woolf notes in *Empire and Commerce* that: "the position of Abyssinia in Africa is peculiar. To-day it is the only native State which has retained even the semblance of independence" (140). Virginia Woolf read and took notes on three source texts for the "Abyssinia and the Nile" chapter of *Empire and Commerce*: Augustus Wylde's *Modern Abyssinia* (1901), C. de la Jonquière's *Les Italiens en Erythrée* (1897), and Jean Darcy's *France et Angleterre: Cent Années de Rivalité Coloniale L'Afrique* (1904) (Barrett, 2013: 96). She also read and took notes in Italian on a book by Dr Lincoln de Castro, *Nella Terra de Negus: pagine raccolte in Abissinia* (1915), which finds its way into *Empire and Commerce* only through a passing reference (Barrett, 2013: 93). These sources inform Leonard's account of Menelik's "crushing victory at Adowa on March 1, 1896" (Woolf, 1989: 173). "At Adowa", he writes, "the Italian hopes of an Empire of Ethiopia were definitely and dramatically destroyed" (173). In *The Voyage Out*, too, Abyssinia/Ethiopia appears in the context of Roman imperialist designs on North Africa that echo those of contemporary Europe. Rachel reads from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*: "His generals, in the early part of his reign, attempted the reduction of Aethiopia and Arabia Felix" (173). As Rachel learns, the Romans are thwarted by climate and "the unwarlike natives" are protected from invasion (173). The links with the earlier descriptions of Santa Marina's colonial fortunes are plain to see.

In *Empire and Commerce*, Leonard looks specifically at the European missionary presence in Africa as "the thin edge of the wedge of European imperialism" (145). He details how, through the London Society of the Conversion of the Jews in Abyssinia and the Church Missionary Society in Uganda, the work of church, business, and state are intertwined. In *The Voyage Out*, the tourists attend chapel and hear a sermon by Mr Bax. This is a crucial scene in the novel in terms of Rachel's awakening: "for the first time in her life […] Rachel listened critically to what was being said" (231). Bax's sermon revolves around Europeans' "duty to the natives" and the importance of sympathy and human connectedness in the context of empire. "The success of our rule in India, that vast country, largely depended upon the strict code of politeness which the English adopted towards the natives", he intones (234). Rachel is "enraged" by the hypocrisy and emptiness of Christian rhetoric. She figures the congregation as sheep and limpets, "tamely praising and acquiescing without knowing and caring" (236). This prefigures the encounter on the Amazon River. It too is a Conradian moment of "disgust and horror": "with the violence that now marked her feelings, she rejected all that she had implicitly believed" (236, 232).

Virginia suggests here (as Leonard would go on to do) the ways in which discourses of brotherly love masked the violent effects of mercantile greed.

As this comparative reading demonstrates, setting *The Voyage Out* alongside *Empire and Commerce* not only elucidates the congruence of Leonard and Virginia's work, but also reminds us of the ways in which Virginia's novel pre-empts Leonard's later theoretical writings. From her very first novel, she was figuring the capitalist underside of imperialism and was linking imperial control to the workings of patriarchy and religion. Interestingly, at the close of *Empire and Commerce*, Leonard connects the "evils" of capitalist imperialism to "prostitution, wife-beating, and marriage" (361). Again, he uses the phrase, "buying cheap and selling dear", to encapsulate a social philosophy of competition (361). But the juxtaposition of these texts also highlights discontinuity. In contrast to Leonard's scathing exposé of the violent effects of European colonization in Africa, in *The Voyage Out* the Flushings' exploitation of the South American peoples appears to have no effect. The villagers stare back, neither concerned nor interested. More generally, by depicting the thwarted British presence in South America (as opposed, for example, to the effects of Spanish or Portuguese imperialism in the region), Woolf downplays the effects of empire in favour of depicting the psychological, social, and cultural factors that drive people to control and tyrannize. The Flushings' enterprise is small-scale but in the frequent references to South America as the land of the future, the reader can see how the seemingly benign river trip operates on a continuum with a much more violent encounter (as depicted in *Heart of Darkness*).

Putting these texts in conversation with one another also highlights the limitations of the Woolfs' anti-imperialism and their inability to imagine or account for full subjecthood for colonial peoples. Leonard's repeated reference to "non-adult races" and his underlying insistence on the non-civilized state of African peoples parallels the depiction of the South American villagers in *The Voyage Out* as eternally primitive and unchanging. In his closing section of *Empire and Commerce* headed "The Future of Africa", Leonard deliberates on the "social revolution" required to put an end to the exploitation of Africa by European states. Only when "the social philosophy of capitalism and competition, the ideal of profit-making and buying cheap and selling dear" gives way to another system of "beliefs and desires" will the interests of Africans be realized (361). He envisages a future in which

> the "native" is no longer to be regarded as the "live-stock" on Europe's African estate […] but as a human being with a right to his own land and his own life, with a right even to be educated and to determine his own destiny. (359)

An international system of trusteeship, run by the League of Nations, for example, if it continues to operate on the profit motive will merely continue the current state of slavery: "economic imperialists will rebaptize themselves in the waters of internationalism and put on the white garments of a League of Nations" (367). Woolf moves back and forwards between what he calls utopian dreams of a fundamentally reimagined relationship between European and African and acknowledgement that a League-run system of mandates, while open to abuse, is an improvement on the current situation and a possible transition to self-government. Written while the issue of mandates was being debated at

the Paris Conference, this section segues between practical lists of conditions and hope for a "new generation of men" (366).

In their respective deliberations on empire, however, both Leonard and Virginia raise the issue of the connections between cultural production and global trade systems. Leonard includes reference to "products of the intellect or imagination" in the *Empire and Commerce* passage quoted at the outset. In *The Voyage Out*, the Flushings' trade in South American artefacts profits from a metropolitan fetishization of the "primitive" as the sign of the modern. As a couple, their combined interests in ancient South American and modernist art points to the Janus-faced position of modernist aesthetics. The economics of their ethnographic motivations underscore the commodification of the non-European. As Willoughby says to his daughter, "if it weren't for the goats there'd be no music, my dear; music depends upon goats" (18). Woolf narrativizes the modernist desire for, fear of, and commodification of the "primitive". *The Voyage Out* circles around the unfulfilled search for newness, or for places outside the workings of capitalist modernity, but ultimately points to the impossibility of such a project. Early in the novel, Helen is embroidering "a tropical river running through a tropical forest, where spotted deer would eventually browse upon masses of fruit, bananas, oranges, and giant pomegranates, while a troop of naked natives whirled darts into the air" (29). The trip up the Amazon is an encounter with the already seen, a place constructed through a European lens. As Mark Wollaeger (2001) has argued, the scene suggests the native villages so popular in Empire Exhibitions of the period as well as the trend for ethnographic, colonial postcards. The tourists are already implicated in modes of viewing that commodify. Rachel's moment of awakening on the excursion — which ultimately leads to her death — can be read as an awareness of her complicity with such systems of capture.

But here Woolf also implicates herself. In finding a "new" subject for fiction, as with Leonard's *Village in the Jungle*, she also had a product to sell. Interestingly, in his autobiography Leonard spends several pages describing the twinned fortunes of *The Voyage Out* and *The Village in the Jungle* in terms of the royalties they generated (L Woolf, 1964: 87–90). Both Leonard and Virginia were, of course, sustained by the very system they were both intent on denaturalizing. Yet this awareness, along with that of empire's exploitations, was developed dialogically between and across their different writing projects. The literal repetition in their writing demonstrates, I hope, a wider symbiosis in their empire writing: one which operates across genres and in often surprising directions.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. All subsequent references to Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* are to this (1970) edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
2. All subsequent references to Leonard Woolf's *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* are to this (1998) edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

References

Achebe C (1958) *Things Fall Apart*. London: William Heinemann.

Barrett M (2013) Virginia Woolf's research for *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (Leonard Woolf, 1920). *Woolf Studies Annual*: 83–122.

Conrad J (1899/1990) *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Dover.

Esty J (2007) Virginia Woolf's colony and the adolescence of modernist fiction. In: Begam R and Moses MV (eds) *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899–1939*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 70–90.

Hobson JA (1902/1988) *Imperialism: A Study*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Snaith A (2010) Conversations in Bloomsbury: Colonial writers and the Hogarth Press. In: Southworth H (ed) *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, the Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Wilson D (1978) *Leonard Woolf: A Political Biography*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Wilson P (2003) *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth-Century Idealism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Wollaeger M (2001) Woolf, postcards, and the elision of race: Colonizing women in *The Voyage Out*. *Modernism/Modernity* 8(1): 43–75.

Wollaeger M (2003) The Woolfs in the jungle: Intertextuality, sexuality and the emergence of female modernism in *The Voyage Out*, *The Village in the Jungle* and *Heart of Darkness*. *Modern Language Quarterly* 64(1): 33–69.

Woolf L (1913/2008) *The Village in the Jungle*. London: Eland Publishing.

Woolf L (1920/1998) *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism*. London: Routledge.

Woolf L (1928) *Imperialism and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Woolf L (1935) *Quack! Quack!* London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf L (1936) *The League and Abyssinia*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf L (1964) *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911–1918*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1915/1970). *The Voyage Out*. London: Penguin.

Woolf V (1919) *Night and Day*. London: Duckworth & Co.

Woolf V (1924/2008) Thunder at Wembley. In: *Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 169–171.

Woolf V (1925) *Mrs Dalloway*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1929) *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1937) *The Years*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1938) *Three Guineas*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1976) *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2* (Ed. Nicolson N). London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1977) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 1* (Ed. Bell AO). London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1978) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2* (Ed. Bell AO). London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf V (1982) *Melymbrosia: An Early Version of* The Voyage Out (Ed. DeSalvo LA). New York: New York Public Library.

Woolmer J (1986) *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press, 1917-1938*. London: The Hogarth Press.