

# Postcolonial Paradoxes, Ambiguities of Self- determination and Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking after Empire*

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Jenna Marshall   
University of Kassel, Germany

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## Introduction

In *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Adom Getachew writes ‘the task of building a world after empire remains as much ours as it was theirs’.<sup>1</sup> Getachew signals the ethical stakes at play within the current neoliberal globalisation conjuncture: rising global inequality, deepening social antagonisms, and market logic with impunity in the face of the climate emergency. Anticolonial worldmakers, she insists, stood to radically reorder the world not on realist *realpolitik* or even liberal institutional internationalism but rather on anticolonial principles of non-domination and egalitarianism. Such positions warrant greater interrogation, which Getachew achieves, as the meteoric rise of the global 1 percent continues unabated at the expense of growing precarity of the proverbial ‘99’. For the global South, Oxfam disclosed in their 2019 report that 26 individuals’ assets were equivalent to those of 3.8 billion people, who make up the poorest half of the planet’s population.<sup>2</sup> Unequal wealth and income

1. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-determination*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 13.

2. Public Good or Private Wealth? Universal Health, Education and Other Public Services Reduce the Gap Between Rich and Poor, and Between Women and Men. Fairer Taxation of the Wealthiest Can Help Pay for Them, 21 January 2019. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/public-good-or-private-wealth>. Last accessed April 26, 2020.

## Corresponding author:

Jenna Marshall, University of Kassel, Nora-Platiel-Straße, 1, Kassel, Hessen 34127, Germany.  
Email: [jenna.marshall@uni-kassel.de](mailto:jenna.marshall@uni-kassel.de)

distribution not only concern the world's poor. Within the wealthy global North, millions face veritable hunger and malnutrition leading to increased mortality rates.<sup>3</sup>

The task for reimagining a more democratic and redistributive world thus makes *Worldmaking after Empire* pertinent, timely and relevant, as activists and scholars alike urgently seek to offer prescriptive measures for global governance that can potentially yield progressive redistribution of the world's resources.<sup>4</sup> My hope with this essay is to advance this reimagining, first by reflecting on Getachew's contributions that mobilise our inquiry and debate into the imperial character of the international system and its normative and political foundations. Then, by offering up additional pathways that lengthen an appreciation of postcolonial cosmopolitanism to redress some of the erasures, exclusions, hierarchies that persisted after decolonisation. This article concludes with a brief mention of Haiti and how its Revolution might attune us to emancipatory horizons on which contemporary global re-imaginings of justice might be built.

## The Imperial Character of International Order

Central to Getachew's intervention is situating empire at the heart of the study of international order. This intervention forms part of a broader sustained growth in recent years within political theory and noticeably in the field of International Relations (IR) on the colonial question.<sup>5</sup> Much of this scholarship is revisionist in its attempts to excavate the histories of imperial domination as foundational to the construction of the modern global system and the economic and political institutions that emerged. *Worldmaking after Empire* succeeds in broadening conventional theorising of empire and as such the alien rule thesis adopted by orthodox scholars. Getachew shows how this performs a double negation in its refusal to acknowledge the multiple registers of power and domination as well as the ways these forms of domination undermine any possibility of sovereign equality.<sup>6</sup> Getachew convincingly demonstrates the mechanisms of imperial domination as productive power. Thus, one reads domination and dependency not 'as exclusion

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3. In Wealthy Canada, Millions Go Hungry: Report, 20 January 2020. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/wealthy-canada-millions-hungry-report-200120070208864.html> Last accessed April 26, 2020.
  4. Jan Aart Scholte, Lorenzo Fioramonti, and Alfred G. Nhema, eds., *New Rules for Global Justice: Structural Redistribution in the Global Economy* (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2016), 2.
  5. See for example, Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Kimberly Hutchings, 'Decolonizing Global Ethics: Thinking With the Pluriverse', *Ethics & International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2019): 115–25; Julian Go and George Lawson, eds., *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Robbie Shilliam, ed., *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2010).
  6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin Harmondsworth, 1977), 194; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 216.

from' but as a 'partial and burdened form of inclusion' into international society, where 'differentiated space that included sovereign states, quasi-sovereigns, and colonies', were 'organized through relations of hierarchy'. For the end of direct colonial rule came at the cost of 'onerous obligations' with 'only limited or conditional rights' for non-European states which anticolonial agitators bitterly contested.<sup>7</sup>

Getachew's use of an expansive empire analytic offers the reader a substantive recasting of sovereign equality and the constitutive nature of hierarchy within the international system. Characterised as IR's founding principle, sovereignty is generally deployed as an abstract and seldom-contested concept in the field, with some exceptions.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Getachew historically situates this organising principle as endemic to the shaping of the modern colonial system, and the differentiated modes of sovereignty within the postcolonial context as hierarchical rather than hegemonic.<sup>9</sup> In short, theorisations of sovereignty avoid acknowledging a methodological nationalism that is inescapable from its social and racialised histories of empire. The success of this foregrounding gives rise to the book's central argument: decolonisation was not a universalisation of a Westphalian sovereignty where inclusion signified equality amongst newly-recognised nation-states. Rather, it meant on the part of anticolonial thinkers a *worldmaking*: a reinvention of self-determination that superseded the confines of the nation-state to demand the dismantling of multiple registers of international structures of unequal integration and racial hierarchy: juridical, political, and economic institutions in the international realm to secure nondomination.

One of the key contributions of the book is the historicising of decolonisation. The underexplored moment,<sup>10</sup> offers critical insights into the demands for racial equality and global justice, but of equal importance, the paradoxes and contradictions that emerged by those who advanced an international body politic beyond the legacies of the colonial era. Drawing on DuBois' global colour line, Getachew advances the international mobilisation of ideologies and practices of racial domination manifested in discourses of the legitimacy to govern. As such decolonisation is the background for previously colonised peoples to make claims towards post-imperial international imaginaries through rather than in opposition to the nation-state. As to the contradictions inherent to these imaginaries, Getachew is not concerned with 'tracing the failures, pitfalls, and reversals of anticolonial nationalism to endemic features of nationalism', but rather (states) that such failures are indicative of 'emerging from historically produced contradictions and dilemmas'.<sup>11</sup> *Worldmaking* to some degree brings into conversation the limitations of the

7. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 18.

8. Kerem Nisancioglu makes the case for a constitutive relationship between race and sovereignty in Kerem Nisancioglu, 'Racial Sovereignty', *European Journal of International Relations* (2019). In the postcolonial context, on the African state rendered as transient, see Amy Niang, *The Postcolonial African State in Transition: Stateness and Modes of Sovereignty* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

9. Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, 33.

10. Also see Quỳnh N. Phạm and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions* (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2016).

11. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 28.

decolonising strategies of self-determination and the ambiguity of conceptual resources on which anticolonial thinkers drew.

There is also a sustained reappraisal of non-Western agency, albeit fraught, that is indicative of the book. It does well to challenge the colonial amnesia and epistemic silences that render the contributions of non-Western intellectual thought invisible and repositions these thinkers as global figures that exists beyond mimicry or despotism to offer alternative frameworks for global governance. *Worldmaking* sets us up for a deeper appreciation of strategies of resistance and survival against domination in political and economic registers both through experimentation at regional level in terms of Federalism, and at the international by establishing the New International Economic Order (NIEO).

Through an effective marshalling of archival sources, Getachew beautifully demonstrates how the immediate postcolonial afterlives of the imperial order were actively entrenched and reflected in the normative liberal frameworks of self-determination. In Chapter 2, drawing on Stephen Skowronek's concept of 'reassociation of ideas', Getachew effectively untethers Wilsonian self-determination within the League of Nations from its putative imaginaries of imperial decline to a principle actively in the service of empire by recasting the principle as 'racially differentiated'. Through an examination of the Report of the Second Sub-committee of the Sixth Committee, Abyssinia's Application for Admission to the League, Getachew contends that 'far from protecting Ethiopia's and Liberia's independence, their inclusion as member states produced the conditions for domination.'<sup>12</sup> She notes:

Through their reassociation, self-determination would mean the consent of the governed and consultation with subject peoples. . . And if consent suggested anything like democratic decision-making, Wilson and Smuts argued that racially backward people were not suited for democracy but could partake in minimal forms of consent and were owed some modicum of respect.<sup>13</sup>

For the League's architects Woodrow Wilson and Jan Smuts, the time of burgeoning self-determination is best understood—according to Getachew—as a counterrevolutionary moment that ensured a racialised international hierarchy remained and that any substantive black sovereignty was deterred. The failure of the League to uphold sovereign equality for its African member-states previews the international arrangements that would make reordering the imperial character of the international system tenuous.

## The Paradoxes of Postcolonial Sovereignty

For *Worldmaking after Empire*, the fundamental ordering of international society rests on its colonial relationships producing both hierarchies and paradoxes. Unfolding throughout its empirical Chapters 3–5, Getachew documents modes of differentiated sovereignty as the paradoxical postcolonial condition: at once liberated yet maligned to subordination. Chapter 3 charts the juridical arrangements against the worldmaking

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12. Ibid., 40.

13. Ibid., 42.

response. Here, Getachew contends that 'the right to self-determination was not continuous with prior versions of the principle. Instead, it was remade and reconstituted in response to a particular way of posing the problem of empire'.<sup>14</sup> Through an anticolonial reframing of empire as enslavement, anticolonial nationalists, over three decades from the 1930s, advanced the right of self-determination as response to this juridical illegitimacy. Yet, the demands for self-determination signaled imminent conflict, as Getachew explains that anticolonial nationalists claims for a right to self-determination through securing the passage of United Nations General Assembly resolution 1514 on the granting of Independence to colonial countries and peoples inadvertently tempered the reach of self-determination to indigenous and southern African communities by reinforcing the saltwater standard of territorial integrity.

The political component of worldmaking is the central focus of Chapter 4, which delves into the nature of postcolonial federation as an indirect salve to the problem of international hierarchy and domination. Nominal sovereignty gave way to the persistent international institutional arrangements that rendered substantive economic freedom elusive to the newly-emerging nation-states. As such, Black Atlantic federalists Trinidadian Eric Williams and Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah both set out to develop federations as 'spatial and institutional fixes for the postcolonial predicament'.<sup>15</sup> Size and scale, Getachew notes, were the central concerns of these federalists as their small economies were heavily contingent to the outcomes of metropolitan markets, reducing their ability for self-reliance.<sup>16</sup> Both short-lived federal projects were collaborations between colonial administrators and these native political elites. In the case of Africa: the Union of African States, a political formation between Ghana, Guinea and Mali under the leadership of Sekou Touré and Modibo Keita respectively. In the Caribbean: The West Indian Federation, a composite of ten islands including Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica.<sup>17</sup> Getachew accords the unravelling of both projects to William's and Nkrumah's endorsement of institutions of a centralised federation as espoused through the criticisms of Nnamdi Azikiwe and Norman Manley. She notes: 'In their preoccupation with the external postcolonial predicament, their scant attention to internal pluralism, and their turn to the United States as a model, Nkrumah and Williams fashioned postcolonial federation as a structure of augmenting and centralizing political authority'.<sup>18</sup>

For these federalists, undermining pervasive economic dependency required strong central government, a point that was rebuffed by their critics who held that such centralisation threatened to subject member states to new regional hierarchies. Despite the similarities, Williams and Nkrumah's preoccupations and criticism fell into economic and political registers respectively. In the Caribbean, 'the disagreement centered on the extent to which a federal government should play an extensive role in economic planning and development', while in Africa, the 'debate revolved around the question of whether

14. *Ibid.*, 77.

15. *Ibid.*, 108.

16. *Ibid.*, 109.

17. The additional eight Leeward islands of Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent.

18. *Ibid.*, 121.

the common goals of African states required political union or could be accomplished through a less demanding form of integration'.<sup>19</sup> Despite its collapse, Getachew reminds us that, far from an abject failure, the Black Atlantic projects of federation 'offered an institutional form that could achieve redistribution and address both the political and economic aspects of neocolonial domination. In new regional economies, nationalists found a way out of their entrapment as primary goods exporters and could approximate self-sufficiency within these larger markets'.<sup>20</sup>

With federation disavowed, a new strategy attendant to economic dependence and its political consequences were needed. Chapter 5 traces the establishment of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) as such a strategy. Getachew considers the NIEO as the 'most ambitious project of worldmaking' that sought:

to address a wide array of global economic questions, including the ownership of natural resources on land and in the seas, the relationship of multinational corporations to state authority, and the transportation and distribution of traded goods. But at its core, this project sought to address the unequal relations of trade between developing and developed nations.<sup>21</sup>

For Getachew, proponents of the NIEO 'envisioned international nondomination as a radical form of economic and political equality between states that would finally overcome the economic dependencies that threatened to undermine postcolonial self-government'.<sup>22</sup> Central to this claim is the presupposition of a mutually reinforcing relationship between foreign economic exploitation and political subordination where, 'postcolonial states were subject to the vagaries of the international market in ways that persistently limited postcolonial nation-building'.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on the political thought of postcolonial statesmen Michael Manley of Jamaica and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Getachew illustrates the politicisation of the global economic system that situated economic inequality in the international (imperial) division of labour. Fashioned as a Third World solidarity, NIEO proponents advanced an internationalisation of welfarism where the bargaining power of postcolonial states would be amplified, the planning and coordination of equitable redistributed internationally instituted, and democratic decision-making ensured.<sup>24</sup>

In similar fashion to preceding legal and political attempts, several inherent tensions of the economic component of worldmaking are revealed. A key limitation was the NIEO's silence on wealth and resource distribution at the supranational level. Postcolonial world makers, pursuant to their demands for redistribution on the principle of equity, sought to realise their interests within existing international institutions that 'remained antagonistic to their demands'.<sup>25</sup> Here, the book gestures towards a broader problematique: the need for new global institutions predicated on redistributive justice while further entrenching existing (imperial) arrangements. Exemplary of this was the handling of

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19. *Ibid.*, 132.

20. *Ibid.*, 141.

21. *Ibid.*, 144.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 145.

25. *Ibid.*, 169.

structural adjustment programmes and the rejection of the UN General Assembly as the 'appropriate site for international economic decision-making'.<sup>26</sup> Redress for legal, political and economic inequalities established through 400 years of African enslavement and indigenous dispossession required a 'building up' of alternative institutions.<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house',<sup>28</sup> thus, the inability of these anticolonial worldmakers to build up meaningful enfranchisement is profound and telling to the amorphous nature of imperial exploitation and its technologies of domination.

Towards the end of the book, despite an acknowledgement of the ruination of anticolonial worldmaking, Getachew remains optimistic. The 'critical resources' on which anticolonial worldmaking rest might be exhausted but Getachew's repoliticising of global governance decision-making reminds us that the neoliberal conjuncture is incapable but not inevitable. As she insists:

Part of the task of this book has been to show that even instances that appeared as moments of closure. . . were occasion for reformulating the contours of an anti-imperial future and enacting new strategies to realize this vision. On this view, the fall of self-determination marks not only a dead end but also a staging ground for reimaging that future.<sup>29</sup>

The cultivation of contemporary anti-colonial imaginaries finds support with social movements like Black Lives Matter, offering new energies in the wake of the paradoxes of postcolonial sovereignty and the collapse of worldmaking anticolonialism. These movements map new conceptual grammars of liberation and nondomination by repoliticising global blackness eroded under the guise of colourblind neoliberal globalisation agenda by exposing the intersectional manifestations of global inequality and precarity.

## The Ambiguities of Self-determination

Despite its contributions, the book at times reads as an official narrative of patriarchal respectability that renders invisible hierarchies generated from the postcolonial condition. For this reason, I will focus on a central limitation of *Worldmaking*. Discussions on nation-building and self-determination are deafeningly silent on gender and class ideology. Getachew offers some recognition to the peculiarity of the anticolonial worldmaking projects pursued in the book, citing the 'distinct creole ideology of anti-imperial imperialism'<sup>30</sup> yet little is discussed, apart from short biographical notes on their elite British schooling. For feminist scholars, the rise of native anticolonial worldmakers like Williams, Nkrumah, Manley and Azikiwe is made possible through their assimilation

26. Ibid., 173.

27. Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 25–6.

28. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2012), 112.

29. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 181.

30. Here, she cites Joshua Simon, *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin American Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

into British cultural norms and expectations at the expense predominantly of folk women. For Sonya Rose, the postwar moment gave way to a redefining of patriarchy to include the previously foreclosed black working-class to engender a 'working-class respectability'. As such, working-class leaders promulgated an ideal of 'respectable manhood' that emphasised the 'self-improved' workman who knew how to conduct himself with proud restraint'.<sup>31</sup>

Owning to this newly-afforded privilege, a secession of power by the colonial authorities to the native anticolonials was enmeshed in a politics of patriarchal respectability whereby a hypermasculinity substituted as acceptable politics.<sup>32</sup> There is a robust historiography on the erasure of women from narratives of anticolonial struggles.<sup>33</sup> The deliberate sidelining of female political participation exposed the permissibility of injustices for the sake of sovereignty. Thus, a significant aspect of the global political reordering of the postwar era was – to Getachew's point – the way in which differentiated sovereignty was realised through unequal inclusion. But absent from her analysis are the ways in which postwar projects for self-determination hierarchised and ultimately made invisible certain voices in the nation-building effort. The mark of respectability extended to brown middle-class men also meant the mark of civility and reason. Colonial impositions of gender as much as civilisational hierarchies reinforced the structuring of empire and normative frameworks of self-determination but at a grave loss. Consequently, advancing an oppressive logic of a second-class citizenship to women and the poor in the black Atlantic world skirted a radical understanding of decolonisation and the imaginaries it foregrounds, one where dichotomous hierarchies of humanity could be dismantled.

This effacing of voice and vision speaks to broader concerns of silence to multiple worldmaking projects at the time of decolonisation in the text. Extending its meaning opens up the terms on which decolonisation can be conceived and, importantly, by whom. The fundamental issue of decolonisation, left unattended, was the collective claims to self-determination. Instead, worldmaking anticolonial elites ordained unilaterally a mimicry of a Westphalian conceptualisation of political identity limiting the boundaries on which radical imaginaries of social and political life could be realised.

To be clear, doubts arise not with Getachew's analysis of the failures of the worldmaking projects within juridical, political and economic registers. Rather, questions emerge that suggest pluralism and critical intellectual resources played a limited role to the worldmaking agenda. This premise is no more evident than the federation projects. I will use the remainder of this essay to complicate Getachew's postcolonial cosmopolitanism drawing attention to the ambiguities of self-determination cleaved to a conceptual apparatus detached from their lived experience but through which a Western intellectual superiority is maintained.

31. Ibid., 156.

32. Sonya O. Rose, 'Gender and Labor History: The Nineteenth-century Legacy', *International Review of Social History* 38, no. 1 (1993): 145–62.

33. Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 2005); Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Honor Ford-Smith, 'Una Marson: Black Nationalist and Feminist Writer', *Caribbean Quarterly* 34, no. 3–4 (1988): 22–37.

Getachew is well aware of the problems arising from Williams and Nkrumah's appropriation of the United States of America 1776 Revolution as the proto-revolutionary model for political organisation. She notes: 'It is unsettling that anti-imperialists, who had critiqued empire as enslavement and international racial hierarchy, would model their vision of an egalitarian postcolonial federation on the United States'.<sup>34</sup> Striking is their use and Getachew's acceptance of their claim to an Anglo-Saxon inheritance 'through their invocation of American independence', becoming 'heirs to the tradition of 1776'.<sup>35</sup> Of concern is Getachew's relenting posture: 'in failing to engage alternative models outside of their Anglo-American inheritance, Nkrumah and Williams demonstrate the ways in which the appropriation of political ideas occurs in circumscribed contexts and is shaped by existing and inherited imperial spaces'.<sup>36</sup> I argue that the inheritance claim here is tenuous.

Inheritance brings to the surface one element of domination that Getachew does not take up in the book, that of episteme. And more importantly the ways it informs internalised hierarchy and subordination. For anticolonial worldmakers, economic exploitation was the central tenant of colonialism 'where colonies produced raw materials for the metropole and consumed its manufactured goods. This economic exploitation had required political subordination, and as a result independence and autonomy were central to overcoming colonial exploitation'.<sup>37</sup> A meaningful contribution of decolonial scholarship is the revival of episteme to questions of decolonisation. Consensus surrounds the presupposition that the durability of colonial domination and its present afterlives necessitates a global epistemic ordering that creates the conditions on which political and economic life is possible. To reduce intellectual inheritance to an imperial power, in the case of Nkrumah and Williams, suggests that the power to know and govern knowledge in the pursuit of societal and economic arrangements fell comfortably within the boundaries that legitimise hierarchy and domination. Knowledge, how it is produced and by whom, becomes inseparable from economic arrangements that deepen or reduce exploitation, or the political considerations that expand or foreclose civic participation.

As a result, within the book, there is scant attention to alternative worldmaking projects and imaginations of social and economic life in the wake of a prescient post-imperial order. For 'radical' intellectuals, self-determination prompted the need for self-identification, and the method for transmitting this awareness required a communication approach to render intelligible this cultural alterity, or 'nation language'.<sup>38</sup> This language, according to Kamau Brathwaite, excavated from the suppressed beliefs and values systems of the quotidian 'folk communities' stood to articulate new horizons as well as crystallise memories and experiences as legitimate aspects of a cultural heritage.<sup>39</sup> In problematising inheritance as an epistemic question, subjugated knowledges are

34. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 117.

35. *Ibid.*, 112.

36. *Ibid.*, 118.

37. *Ibid.*, 112.

38. Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984), 7.

39. Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World. Vol. 6* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 92.

repurposed as critical intellectual resources on which marginalised/colonised people might build.

Despite their convictions, these worldmakers occupy a liminal space that deepens the ambiguous tendencies of their self-determination project. They are induced into and become fragmented by a colonial world where to be black signifies the ontological 'Other'. Essentialised as lacking mature cognitive rationalities, they are neither backward subalterns nor enlightened subjects, owing to their assimilation and later mastery of colonial schooling. Yet, their phenotype and native status demand they reside outside of the realm to govern alternative imaginaries on their own terms. The selection of the US, an imperial power, is thus not an aberration to an anticolonial worldmaking project. It parallels the internalised colonisation suffered by these elites that insists on the superiority claims of Western modern political projects through naturalised acceptance. Building on Getachew's postcolonial cosmopolitanism from this perspective, serves to expand the boundaries of who gets included in reconfiguring social, economic, and political life. But also, brings serious questions on the value and purpose of intellectual resources in the absence of acknowledging alternative, and at times, competing knowledge traditions.

## **Black Sovereignty, Global Justice and the History of 1804**

One final thought. Although mentioned at the beginning of the book, Haiti sits precariously on the margins of weightier discussions of black sovereignty. Attention is paid in the text through the cases of Ethiopia and Liberia, yet Haiti offers a path to build on narratives of self-determination which the text judiciously propagates. In this case, illuminating the analytical purchase of subjugated histories and peoples to consider recasting global justice from these underexplored spaces.

The book's contribution towards a theoretical broadening of cosmopolitanism redraws the parameters of inquiry to enlist empire and the normative framework on which the imperial international order stood. Getachew's refusal of liberal internationalism attune us to systems of governance, that at once, affirms and recognises, but at the same time obscures and excludes. It affirms a liberal governance, through the enshrining of legal, economic, and political institutions at the global level that recognise individual freedom, human rights and justice. But as Getachew's postcolonial approach reveals, such normative aspirations are incapable of being realised under mechanisms of domination designed to guarantee continued exploitation and appropriation of labour and resources.

The neglect of Haiti within the text is deeply regrettable on this front. Owing to its history of self-determination: as the first and only successful slave revolt, and later the world's first black republic, its elision is quite surprising. Although Getachew situates the study as one of the Anglophone Black Atlantic, the case of Haiti requires some involvement if not at the empirical, but at the very least, the conceptual and theoretical levels of justice and recognition. The Haitian constitution emerges as a seismic political event on the very nature that liberal institutionalism espouses: producing legal arrangements on which to indiscriminately secure the rights and freedoms of all when it declared: 'there can be no slaves on this territory'. This declaration at the height of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was promulgated by the forebearers of modernity and progress, the West.

To further this point, in her 2016 essay,<sup>40</sup> sociology professor Gurminder Bhambra attempts to upend what she believes has been the sustained epistemic disavowal of the Haitian Revolution by historians and social scientists, more broadly. She puts forwards a seemingly simple question: ‘what might we learn about the birth of the modern world and its transformation if we took the Haitian revolution seriously?’<sup>41</sup> Yet as she explains, such a provocation would have profound ramifications on the entire theoretical edifice of matters of equality, democracy and citizenship within conventional scholarship.<sup>42</sup> For Bhambra and others,<sup>43</sup> Haiti’s disavowal by academics and statesmen – including the anticolonial worldmakers on which this book is based, is indicative of a racialising logic within the politics of knowledge production. By its very existence as a black republic, it was able to transform and fundamentally rupture Western notions of freedom and equality. The formerly enslaved were able to accomplish what neither the French nor the American revolutionary republics seemed compelled to achieve, that is, to dismantle slavery. For several Black Atlantic scholars, the Haitian Revolution thus remained the most challenging to Euro-Western civilisational narratives that placed black self-determination squarely in opposition to white supremacy.<sup>44</sup> At this junction, Haiti is positioned both as threat to white supremacy and emancipatory potential for black liberation. Its silencing within the academy is deliberate but also limits the worldmaking projects espoused by those who sought global justice within the book.

To end, the ambiguities of self-determination, to varying degrees, lie in the effacing of these colonial histories and subjugated knowledges in favour of a creole appropriation of an Anglo-Saxon inheritance to which an emancipatory potential could never be realised. The Haitian Revolution thus represents radical possibilities, and it is on *this* 1804 revolutionary spirit where re-imagining an anti-imperial future might be possible.

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## ORCID iD

Jenna Marshall  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3834-7590>

40. Gurminder K. Bhambra, ‘Undoing the Epistemic Disavowal of the Haitian Revolution: a Contribution to Global Social Thought’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37, no. 1 (2016): 1–16.

41. *Ibid.*, 7.

42. Here, Bhambra discusses the significance of the omission of the Haitian Revolution, and the implications of such omissions for social scientific considerations of ‘the global’ through a reading of *Society of Equals*, Rosanvallon’s 2013 English translation of his monograph originally published two years earlier.

43. See David Patrick Geggus, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks, eds. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

44. See for example Robbie Shilliam, ‘Race and Revolution at Bwa Kayiman’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017): 269–92.