



City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Davies, D. (2015). Critiquing global capital and colonial (in)justice: Structural violence in Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) and *Economic Imperialism* (1920). *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 50(1), pp. 45-58. doi: 10.1177/0021989414555209

This is the submitted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/20314/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989414555209>

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

Critiquing global capital and colonial (in)justice: structural violence in Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) and *Economic Imperialism* (1920)

Dominic Davies, University of Oxford, UK

Abstract

By drawing on theories of structural violence and applying them to Leonard Woolf's first novel, *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), this article argues that the fictional work allowed Woolf to think through certain political, legal, social and cultural issues that would later inform and enhance his extensive engagement with, and critique of, global capital and colonial and international judicial systems. Whilst some critics have argued that *The Village in the Jungle*'s perspectival infiltration into the daily lives of colonised subjects operates as an extension of colonial discourse, this article argues that in fact it is this unusual if not, at the time of its publication, unique perspectival orientation that enables the novel's interrogation of structural violence. Written from a victim-oriented perspective, the novel excavates the varying layers of structural violence as they are spread both socially and also geographically to show how the colonial administration and its legal system are complicit with, if not actively facilitating, the exploitation of Ceylon by the structures of global capitalism, as well as highlighting the ramifications of the unevenly developing capitalist economy that slowly sutures the island into these cross-national networks. The article

concludes by arguing that the novel's excavation of structural violence is directly related to, and lays important foundations for, Woolf's thought on exploitative imperialisms and the international judicial system, The League of Nations (of which he was an architect)—as articulated in his later polemic work, *Economic Imperialism* (1920).

Keywords

structural violence, Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle*, *Economic Imperialism*, Ceylon, uneven development, social justice, global capital

Introduction: from *Economic Imperialism* to *The Village in the Jungle*, and back again

Europeans, as we have seen, have approached Africa and Asia from the point of view: ‘What profit, what economic advantage can we get out of these two continents?’ The answer is obvious to anyone who has been educated in the school of capitalism; just as the holder of capital in Europe has been enabled to exploit the worker and consumer economically for his own profit, so the white man, armed with the power of the modern State, and the weapons of modern war, and the technical knowledge and machinery of modern industry and modern finance, can reduce to subjection, and then exploit economically for his own profit, the land and labour of the less developed Asiatic and African. (Woolf, 1920: 101-102)

Leonard Woolf’s *Economic Imperialism*, published in 1920, from which the above passage is taken, drew on the work of, and self-consciously aligned itself with, a contemporaneous cross-border and ever-growing anti-imperial movement. Woolf’s thesis in the book accounts for imperialism’s economic exploitation as part of the logic of European capitalism. The continental scale of Woolf’s geographical designations—‘Africa and Asia’—and the global scope of his over-arching

argument, gesture to the ways in which this analysis excavates the structurally violent economic effects of imperialism at an international level. *The Village in the Jungle* was published just seven years earlier in 1913 and written in the few months after Woolf's return from Ceylon, where he had worked as a colonial administrator. Conversely to the later work, the novel is distinctly local in its historical, political and sociocultural context. This article will demonstrate and interrogate the way in which the locality of Woolf's first novel exposes the different forms of violence that are built into the structures of profit-drive imperialism and colonial judicial administration, charting both the emergence of these concerns in Woolf's own thought, and in the colonial discursive field on a more general scale. , Though by no means a straightforward anti-imperial document, as other essays in this special issue also demonstrate, the novel's engagement with the context of rural Ceylon and its peripheral colonised population, I argue, actually exposes the ramifications of global imperial structures, by way of what Vittorio Bufacchi might call, through his reading of Johan Galtung, its 'victim-oriented' perspective (2007: 83). By drawing on the concepts of direct and indirect, or 'structural', violence outlined by both these theorists of violence, as well as others, the article will put his early fictional interrogations within the context of Woolf's later polemic writing, *Economic Imperialism*. This will show how the novel lays the groundwork for his more self-consciously anti-imperial, and global, thought.

Economic Imperialism was published as part of ‘The Swarthmore International Handbooks’ series, appearing alongside titles such as Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson’s *Causes of International War*, George Peabody Gooch’s *Nationalism* and Raymond Postgate’s *The Workers’ International*, all of which were also first published in 1920. This body of work taps into an emerging textual and political network of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist critique that was global in its reach. The remit of the series was, as the editor’s foreword tells us, ‘to inculcate the international rather than the nationalistic way’ of analysing global problems, with the ultimate ‘object of peace in the world’ (Bufacchi, 2007: 8). This work had grown out of the socialist and anti-imperial circles of the Fabian Society, with its roots in the thought of Karl Marx, Frank Podmore, George Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, among others. Both Leonard and Virginia Woolf would later become members of this society.¹ The work drew particularly on the writings of J.A. Hobson, whose own insights into imperial exploitation were first worked out in his *War in South Africa* (1900) before being honed and theorised in his slightly later *Imperialism, A Study* (1901). Hobson’s analysis of imperialism would be re-deployed explicitly in critiques of global capitalism by figures such as Vladimir Lenin in his *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1933). Woolf’s anti-imperial work of

¹ See Pease ER (1916) *The History of the Fabian Society* for a comprehensive account of the trajectory of the society during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and the sorts of anti-imperial and socialist thinking to which it gave birth. See especially ‘Chapter VII: Fabianism and the Empire, 1900-1’.

the 1920s was especially crucial to the development of this tradition of thought. In surveying these texts, and tracing these networks, there emerges a central and recurring concern: to critique the ostensible veil of a beneficial and ‘civilising’ imperialism in order to show how it was in fact laying the foundations for the contemporary global capitalist system and its pervasive, often violent, economic inequalities. Hobson, Woolf and Lenin all demonstrate the ways in which these global structures facilitated violence against the exploited at a local level: be they the working class populations of the imperial country itself, as Hobson outlines, or those in the most peripheral corners of the colonies, as argued by Woolf.

The interrelation between capitalism and imperialism as two separate, but mutually sustaining, modes of exploitative practice was a crucial point of interrogation. As Hobson wrote, imperialism ‘implies the use of the machinery of government by private interests, mainly capitalists, to secure for them economic gains outside their country’ (1988: 94). The distinction between imperialism and capitalism—or the metonyms employed by Hobson of ‘flag’ and ‘trade’, respectively—enabled his analysis to invert what he calls the ‘dogma that “Trade follows the flag”’, so that, in fact, the flag can be seen as following, and enabling trade (Hobson, 1988: 33). In so doing, he brings the economic structures of capitalism to the fore as a driving force for imperialism, and exposes the profit-oriented motivations that underpin the imperial project and its various associated

ideologies. This analysis reverberates through the work of Lenin, as well as Woolf, where it is further extended. Lenin's study focuses on the underlying forces driving global economic exploitation. His insights into the 'unevenness and irregularity' of capitalist development resonate throughout this article, particularly when it turns to the contextual socio-geography of *The Village in the Jungle* (Lenin, 1934: 57-58). This formula is likewise developed by Woolf: as he defines it, 'Economic imperialism is only the logical application of capitalism and its principles to internationalism' (1920: 101).

A capitalist imperialism: the case of Ceylon

Though Ceylon is not mentioned specifically in Woolf's *Economic Imperialism*, British colonisation of the island was fundamental in suturing the country into a global capitalist economy through the production of one cash crop in particular: coffee. The coffee industry which flourished between the 1830s and 1870s enmeshed Ceylon on various structural and socioeconomic levels in the world trading system in ways that the cinnamon trade, run by the Portuguese and Dutch in the 17th and 18th centuries, had not. Ceylon's resulting reliance on its plantation economy left it vulnerable to a precarious and fluctuating global market, while enriching and impoverishing different segments of its internal society. Through the importation of Tamil labour from the Indian subcontinent, the physical

transformation of the central highlands from untamed forest into coffee farms, and the infrastructure built to transport the product to the coastal ports (and thus undercut native transport systems on which the British were otherwise completely dependent), British economic motivations, or ‘coffee capitalism’, completely altered the island’s social and geographical landscape (Holt, 2011: 136-137).

Though the thriving coffee industry came to a sudden end in the 1880s, after the emergence of a coffee leaf fungus that destroyed the plants, possibly due to ‘the extent of monoculture in the planting districts’, profitable plantation crops continued to dominate and define the development of the Ceylonese landscape (Holt, 2011: 139). Various arterial transportation routes were constructed between the rubber (which had been introduced by the colonial government and British entrepreneurs),² tea, cocoa and coconut plantations and the coastal ports. This development reduced travel and communication time and increased export profits. However, these plantations were located around the centre of British power in Colombo, leaving huge swathes of the colonised landscape undeveloped beyond the infrastructures and architectures of colonial power. As Lenin theorised on an international scale in 1933, this social and geographical transformation took place ‘unevenly’. It intensified spatial and economic inequalities and social fragmentations that would come to bear

² Rubber, too, was a plantation crop originally foreign to the island, introduced by the colonial government and British entrepreneurs in the second half of the nineteenth century.

on political situations in Sri Lanka throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. Nevertheless, between 1880 and 1914, plantation economies such as Ceylon's 'enjoyed a period of aggressive growth', especially in the latter half of that period (Holt, 2011: 146-147). This growth was largest in the rubber industry, resulting in the intensification of these processes both leading up to and during Woolf's time in Ceylon.

Direct and indirect violence: from Orwell to Žižek

Working as an Assistant Government Agent in mostly peripheral jurisdictions in British Ceylon between 1907 and 1911, Woolf functioned as an intermediary between the plantation sector, with its landscape deeply enmeshed in the physical networks of colonial capitalism, and the rural provinces that lay beyond these imperial networks. However, it was not the uneven development and economic exploitation that first struck Woolf. Rather, he was affected by the direct, often unjust, colonial violence inflicted by the judicial system of which he himself was a part, and which *The Village in the Jungle* was to explore. On 29 September 1907, shortly after his arrival in the country, Woolf recounted an experience in a letter to his friend, Lytton Strachey:

I saw a most appalling spectacle the other day. I had to go (as Fiscal) to see four men hanged one morning. They were hanged two by two. I have a strong stomach but at best it is a horrible performance. [...] They are led up on to the scaffold & the ropes are placed round their necks. I have (in Kandy) to stand on a sort of verandah where I can actually see the man hanged. The signal has to be given by me. The first two were hanged all right but they gave one of the second too big a drop or something went wrong. The man's head was practically torn from his body & there was a great jet of blood which went up about 3 or 4 feet high, covering the gallows & priest who stands praying on the steps. (Spotts, 1989: 133)

Woolf's graphic account of a colonial execution anticipates, with astonishing likeness, George Orwell's 'A Hanging', a short essay published in 1931. The similarities between the two texts are revealing. In both, the prisoners remain anonymous, and neither writer reveals to their intended audience—a broad readership for Orwell, only a close friend for Woolf—the crime for which the prisoners are being executed. Both accounts seem to suggest, albeit implicitly, that the violence of the spectacle (note Woolf's use of the word 'performance'), in all its pronounced and vivid brutality, renders the original crime irrelevant. Whereas Orwell's essay situates itself in a more explicitly defined discourse of anti-

imperialism, Woolf's account is not sculpted or crafted with any polemical underpinning due to both its discursive location and implied reader. However, it is striking that two figures whose biographical trajectories share so much—both were colonial administrators and readers of Kipling turned anti-imperialists—should be moved to write about such a similar event: an act of direct, apparently unjustifiable, colonial violence.

The comparison between the two authors has been made before, most recently by Douglas Kerr in 2008. Kerr's analysis of Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934) alongside *The Village in the Jungle* sheds light on the eurocentricity of the former. However, more significantly, both for this article's purposes and for Kerr's, the analysis also elucidates the striking geography and perspectivism of the latter. 'The novel seems [...] to turn inside out the usual Eurocentric topographies of colonial fiction', writes Kerr, the result of which is 'a sort of singular symbolic decolonization, in its project of giving autonomy to the point of view of people for whom a colonized space is not a possession but a native habitat' (2008: 158; 160). As Chandani Lokugé and Ruvani Ranasinha in this special issue also observe, this analysis of Woolf's novel as a document of radical anti-imperialism marks a significant shift in Kerr's thought on *The Village in the Jungle*. In an article published a decade earlier, Kerr embedded the novel within Woolf's other writings on Ceylon—diaries, letters, autobiography—to argue that the fictional text's ability

to dissociate ‘itself from the colonial project’ in fact enabled it to exercise ‘over its representations of native life a more complete discourse authority than the most missionary of colonial powers ever aspired to’ (Kerr, 1998: 273). Though admitting the novel is ‘a remarkable accomplishment in realist representation’, Kerr argued in this article that *The Village in the Jungle* ‘is also a sheer compensatory fantasy of omniscience’ (1998: 270).

By taking issue with Kerr’s earlier argument and developing his later one, this article argues that Woolf’s novel can be understood as a remarkably early and profoundly interrogative critique of the structural violence that pervaded British Ceylon at the turn of the twentieth century. These terminologies must here be clarified: structural violence does not operate in the same way as forms of direct violence, such as the vivid hanging of Woolf’s account. As Johan Galtung, the original theorist of structural violence, wrote:

We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as *personal* or *direct*, and to violence where there is no such actor as *structural* or *indirect*. [...] whereas in the first case these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons as actors, in the second case this is no longer meaningful. There may not be any person who directly harms another person

in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances. (1969: 170-171)

The historical applicability of Galtung's theory to early nineteenth-century Ceylon is rooted in the uneven development that, as has already been shown, transformed the island's geographical landscape. He argues that it is both the uneven distribution of resources—'as when income distributions are heavily skewed, literacy/education unevenly distributed, medical services existent in some districts and for some groups only, and so on'—and the uneven distribution of 'the *power to decide over the distribution of resources*' that drives various forms of inequality and that, in turn, underpins structural violence (Galtung, 1969: 170-171). This uneven distribution of both resources and the power to distribute those resources is, as we shall see, built into the social structure described by *The Village in the Jungle*.

Bufacchi, in his discussion of the benefits and limitations of Galtung's theory, unpacks two further aspects of it that are central to this article's discussion of Woolf's novel. The first, Bufacchi writes, is that Galtung's theory 'forces us to think of violence from the perspective of those who are at the receiving end of such acts' (2007: 83). Clearly, *The Village in the Jungle*'s victim-oriented perspective is, as Kerr also argues, one of its defining features (Kerr, 2008: 160). Secondly, whereas Galtung uses the terms 'structural violence' and 'social injustice' interchangeably

(1969: 171), Bufacchi makes an important distinction between the two. This distinction sheds light on the trajectory of Woolf's own thoughts on notions of imperial violence and colonial injustice. Though acknowledging that 'violence and social justice are inseparable', Bufacchi interprets them as two distinct spheres. He does so in order to argue that it is through 'an improved awareness of the concept of violence' that 'a better understanding of injustice' can be developed, thus enabling 'the aims and scope of social justice' to be outlined with greater clarity (Bufacchi, 2007: 3). Woolf's novelistic interrogation of structural violence thus initiates and facilitates, this article argues, the notions of justice interrogated explored in his later polemic, *Economic Imperialism*.

James Gillingham (1996: 2), too, expands usefully upon Galtung's definition of structural violence, showing how it is written into the make-up of a society so deeply that it is 'normally invisible'. Not only is this form of violence distinct from acts of direct or, what he terms, 'behavioural violence', such as homicide and capital punishment: it is, in fact, 'the main cause of behavioural violence on a socially [...] significant scale' (Gillingham, 1996: 192). The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) builds further on these notions of visible and invisible violence. 'Obvious signals of violence', Žižek points out, are acts of direct or behavioural violence (Žižek, 2008: 1): the depiction of Babehami's fatal wound—'a great hole was blown in the back, and the skin around it was blackened and burned' (Woolf, 2008: 136)—

is one of *The Village in the Jungle*'s most vivid and graphically violent descriptions. However, Woolf's novel disentangles itself from what Žižek calls 'the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent' (2008: 1). The narrative's geographical and perspectival shift to characters 'who occupy the bottom rungs of society' (Gillingham, 1996: 192) performs a 'stepping back' from this moment of direct violence, allowing the reader 'to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts' (Gillingham, 1996: 192 ; Žižek, 2008: 1-2). Žižek, like Gillingham, maintains that this form of violence is usually 'invisible' (Žižek, 2008: 2): however, Woolf's novel throws these invisible contours into relief, producing sustained critique of the structural violence enabled by the governmental apparatus of Ceylon.

Critiquing structural violence in *The Village in Jungle*

Silindu's concluding act of direct, visible violence is contextualised in the narrative leading up to that climactic moment. The text explains his behaviour as a reaction to, or even production of, the structural violence of which he is a victim. *The Village in the Jungle* makes it clear that the ongoing suffering of the villagers is a result of the socioeconomic formation within which they are bound. After all, it is not only the ethnicity, but also the poverty of the novel's central characters that, as Christopher Ondaatje has noted, distinguishes Woolf's text from 'the vast majority'

of contemporaneous colonial literature (2005: 237-238). If we are to accept the novel's own introductory priorities, shortly after the much-discussed opening description of the jungle, the narrative raises two other dominant and interrelated themes: firstly, the sterility of the earth, and the poverty, hunger, and disease to which this gives rise (Woolf, 2008: 14), and secondly, the violent effects of these socioeconomic circumstances. Fewer than ten pages into the novel, Dingihami, Silindu's wife, dies giving birth to their twin daughters. This is not an isolated incident: in the same paragraph, we are told that Silindu's sister, Karlinahami, lost her husband just two months earlier. 'Misfortune had fallen upon her', we are told, 'the misfortune so common in the life of a jungle village' (17). Here are two obvious symptoms of structural violence. It is at first invisible because, in these cases, 'childbirth' and 'disease' are understood as the underlying causes of death. But there is a broader horizon lying beyond these explanations, one that Woolf's novel excavates through its victim-oriented perspective and circumstantial detail. Childbirth and disease are not causes of death in and of themselves: it is rather their poverty, the socioeconomic predicament of the poorest villagers, that transforms childbirth and disease into potentially fatal experiences.

The novel's excavation of these layers of structural violence is written into the plot as it engages with structures of governance from the perspectival (and geographical) periphery. Silindu, his sister, and his daughters—and Babun after his

marriage to Punchi Menika—are located on the outskirts of a complex structural administration. They are trapped in a cycle of exploitation, through a system of perpetual loans and ongoing debt that profits the middlemen; headmen such as Babehami. An early passage in the novel introduces this process of exploitation that not only serves as the socioeconomic context of the plot, but that is in fact fundamental in driving it forward:

With the reaping of the *chenas* came the settlement of debts. With their little greasy notebooks, full of unintelligible letters and figures, they descended upon the *chenas*; and after calculations, wranglings, and abuse, which lasted for hour after hour, the accounts were settled, and the strangers left the village, their carts loaded with pumpkins, sacks of grain, and not unfrequently the stalks of Indian hemp, which by Government order no man may grow or possess [...] In the end the villager carried but little grain from his *chena* to his hut. (26)

This highly significant (and hence extensively analysed) account of the collection of debts from the village, maps the simultaneous presence and absence of the colonial government, the partiality or ‘irregularity’ of which, to use Lenin’s terminology, here enables the debt-collectors’ exploitation of the villagers. As Galtung would describe it, the power to distribute or, in this case, accumulate

resources is *itself* unevenly distributed. The ‘strangers’ who arrive in the village draw their power both from their geographical affiliation with the centres of the imperial government, and from the authority of the ‘written word’ that is nothing more than ‘unintelligible letters and figures’ to the villagers. The latter occurs with systematic regularity as a trope throughout the novel. The narrative thus excavates the layers of structural violence that are embedded within, and caused by, the uneven development of Ceylon’s socio-geographical terrain. This uneven geography of governmental hierarchies perpetuates the island’s internal socioeconomic divisions, as colonial exploitation is displaced outwards from the imperial capital, Colombo. As a result, the most peripheral and poorest Ceylonese suffer the most acute consequences.

The uneven deployment of colonial authority gestures towards the working out of another strand of Woolf’s thought, one that is fundamentally bound up with the economic underpinning of colonialism. This line of thinking finds a more direct articulation, though on an international scale, in *Economic Imperialism*: the subservient relationship of the colonial legal system to a profitable capitalist economy. The technology of writing and the symbolic authority of the colonial government is used by the middlemen and the debt-collectors, as can be seen from the passage quoted above, only when it suits the profitability of their own machinations. When it comes to the trading of ‘Indian hemp’, for example, which, as the text makes quite clear, is prohibited by the colonial government, the ‘strangers’

disregard the very laws they invoke to justify their profitable debt-collection. This selective adherence to governmental power can only be exploited in this way, once again, because of the geographical dispersal and ‘irregularity’, as opposed to regulation, of that power itself.

In his autobiography, Woolf himself explained the level of power that the Government Agents in each Ceylonese district necessarily had to invest in these headmen, describing them as the ‘machinery’ of the ‘government’ (1964: 55-56). Such a deferral of power across space was necessary because of the geographical expanse of Ceylon. Its limited communications systems and infrastructural routes prevented the coordination of a centralised governmental apparatus (De Silva, 1973: 219). Woolf’s novel makes clear that it is this gap between the layers of the governmental structure—a space not only geographical but also temporal (in terms of travel and communication time)—that makes it possible for the headmen to abuse their power and for a systemic corruption, that exploits the poorest and most peripheral Ceylonese, to flourish. As DCRA Goonetilleke argued in an article that appeared in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* nearly four decades ago, it is the ‘unevenness’ of the administrative development ‘that seems to be the source of the whole tragedy’ (1975: 73). This is an unevenness that once again echoes Lenin’s (1934: 57-58) assessment of the capitalist underpinnings of colonial development and, likewise, lays the foundations for what Galtung describes as structural violence.

In an attempt to regulate governance, Government Agents and their Assistants kept daily diaries that were ‘periodically transmitted to Colombo for the information of the Governor and other offices of the central government’.. Woolf’s own diary is one small example of this astonishing project, a ‘continuous daily record extending over 130 years [...] of work done by the colonial government in every single province and district of Ceylon’ (Woolf, 1962: xxix; xxxiii). However, Douglas Kerr perceptively points out that the documentation they provided was necessarily limited, *by their authors, for their readers*: though the diaries ‘never admit to addressing anyone [...] they are written with the awareness that they will be read by a higher authority.’ Kerr continues: ‘Through the diaries, the higher authorities could keep an eye on the district officer as well as on the district’ (1998: 265). Kerr makes these observations in his 1998 article, arguing that, as a different form of colonial discourse, *The Village in the Jungle* carried out a function that the diaries were never able to. The diaries’ aspirations to ‘omniscience’ are ‘thwarted’ through their inability to construct a panoptical view of the Ceylonese landscape and its peoples—they acknowledge the physical impossibility of monitoring, in any form of totality, such a large geographical space. In the novel, however, Kerr argues that Woolf was ‘immediately able to inscribe a span of knowledge over those lives in fictional discourse which could never have been achieved in actuality’ (1998: 267).

Mapping colonial (in)justice and global capital: moving to *Economic Imperialism*

In contrast to this discursively complicit understanding of *The Village in the Jungle*, this article argues that Woolf's novel can instead be read as a critique of structural violence that exposes not only the colonial government's inadequacies, but also the way in which those inadequacies were exploited by middlemen at the expense of the poorest. Moreover, the exploitative practices of the middlemen can simultaneously be understood as allegorical—not in any simple 'homological' sense, but as a mode of Jamesonian 'mapping' that demarcates the ideological boundaries of the socioeconomic foundations of the text—of the inherently exploitative motivations of the colonial regime and its legal system (Jameson, 2002: 32). This is perhaps most poignantly articulated through the novel's engagement with the colonial government's legal condemnation of the *chena* system. As Duncan Wilson observes in a close and chronological reading of the colonial diaries, Woolf's perspective on this legal injustice developed during his time in Ceylon, shifting from the 'conventional view that "chena-ing" destroyed valuable forest and did not contribute to agricultural progress', to the realisation that 'many villages in the district would "gradually die out"' should the poorest Ceylonese be prevented from practicing this form of cultivation. As the novel explains:

The life of the village and of every man in it depended upon the cultivation of *chenas*. A *chena* is merely a piece of jungle, which every ten years is cleared of trees and undergrowth and sown with grain broadcast and with vegetables. The villagers owned no jungle themselves; it belonged to the Crown, and no one might fell a tree or clear a *chena* in it without a permit from the Government. It was through these permits that the headman had his hold upon the villagers. (Woolf, 2008: 27)

Just as the headman draws on an imported colonial justice system to legitimise, and indeed maximise, his own exploitation of the villagers, that colonial justice system itself was underpinned by the potential profitability of the plantation economy. The British, themselves under lobbying pressure from planters, had passed the ‘Crown Land Encroachment Ordinance No.12 of 1840’. This ordinance, as Nira Wickramasinghe documents, introduced a legal system based on conceptions of property alien to rural Ceylonese societies and, as the above quotation once again demonstrates, on the centrality of the ‘written word’ as a discriminatory way of gaining access to this system. Under this legal imposition, ‘all uncultivated and periodically cultivated land, forests, *chena* (slash and burn cultivation) and pasture’ became the property of the colonial government (Wickramasinghe, 2006: 33-34). The regulation of the *chena* system, which intensified throughout the second-half of

the nineteenth century, ‘holds’ the villagers of Woolf’s novel in the cycle of debt that drives the plot forward. This system was directly connected to the broader socioeconomic development of Ceylon’s agricultural system into a plantation economy that had resulted from the infiltration of global trade into the island. Returning to Bufacchi’s interrogation of the interrelationship between violence and social justice, it becomes possible to understand how Woolf’s ‘improved awareness of the concept of violence’ within the specific context of the Ceylonese peasantry, which developed through his personal experience and his subsequent fictional depiction, actually enabled him to develop ‘a better understanding of injustice’. It also allowed him to excavate the structural limits and economic conditioning of the colonial judicial system (Bufacchi, 2007: 3).

Though the novel chiefly operates at the local level, it is also however informed by the global economic exploitation that would become Woolf’s primary concern in *Economic Imperialism*. In this later text, Woolf identifies the economic profitability of imperialism as the prime motor of European expansion. In Woolf’s words, colonization is carried out ‘not to acquire territory and complete administrative control of the population, but in order to further the economic interests of the inhabitants of the European State’ (1920: 13). Woolf also directly tackles the rhetoric surrounding ‘the moral nature and duty of imperialism’ so often deployed ‘in the speeches and writings of imperialists’ and that is ‘summed up in a phrase, “the

white man's burden". By 1920, Woolf had not merely separated the justificatory ideologies of imperialism, which included the administration of colonial justice, from the economic motivations of the emerging global capitalism that they disguise. Following Hobson's inversion of the 'dogma that "Trade follows the flag"' (1988: 94), Woolf further argues that colonial justice actually serves the interests of global capital. Thus, he demonstrates the same configuration of governmental authority as a primary facilitator of economic exploitation that was worked out in *The Village in the Jungle* seven years earlier in the specific historical context of rural Ceylon.

With the historical and political context of both works in mind, it becomes clear that the novel's omniscience does not operate, as Kerr originally argued, and as Lokugé continues to suggest in this special issue, as an extension of an all-seeing colonial discourse into the biopolitical realm of the daily life of the colonised. Instead, the construction of a victim-oriented narrative through its geographical movement outwards and perspectival rotation back inwards renders the British colonial administration and, crucially, the social and economic repercussions that reverberated beyond its regulatory structures, as the subjects of its critique. The novel operates as a discursive space that is not limited by a known reader (a superior within the colonial administration, as with the diaries, for example), exploring concerns Woolf that was unable to enunciate during his time as an Assistant Government Agent. Where Kerr configures the novel as a discursive extension of

colonial power, *The Village in the Jungle* can equally be understood as discursively located outside of the government's bureaucratic administration, albeit fundamentally in dialogue with it. In this way it gives shape to the critique that remained in the political unconscious of Woolf's earlier, non-fictional writings, the colonial diaries and private letters.

Kerr's 2008 re-evaluation of *The Village in the Jungle* similarly understands the novel as a fragment of colonial discourse that, rather than extending its power, instead gestures toward a discourse of anti-colonialism (160). But this anti-colonialism works, Kerr writes,

not so much as an indictment of colonial injustice or maladministration, but rather for the respectful attention it gives to the lives of those indigenous peoples of Ceylon whose sufferings colonialism was not large enough either to create or to alleviate. (2008: 160)

To my mind, however, this is a false distinction. By paying 'respectful attention' to the lives of the indigenous, Woolf's novel explores the ramifications of the colonial apparatus on the peripheries of its jurisdiction, interrogating colonial notions of social justice through exploring the structural violence suffered by its subjects. It thus exposes the inadequacy of a colonial legal system that fails to see the

‘invisible’ contours of the structural violence that it has facilitated. Within the discourse of the colonial legal system, only acts of behavioural violence, such as Silindu’s murders, around which *The Village in the Jungle* revolves, are punishable. This is despite the fact that both Woolf’s narratorial voice and his fictional *Hamadoru* understand these acts of behavioural violence as products of the prevalent structural violence. Woolf’s judge realises this explicitly enough, outside of the structured parameters of the law, when he confesses in an aside to his peon that ‘[i]t does not seem at all a simple case to me. I shouldn’t like to hang Silindu of Beddagama for killing your rascally headman’ (Woolf, 2008: 147). He continues:

‘He was a quiet man in the village, I believe that. He only wanted to be left alone. It must take a lot of cornering and torturing and shooting to rouse a man like that. I expect, as he said, they went on at him for years’ (147).

Comment [1]:
Needs indenting but can’t get the same degree of indent (!) on my computer!

The novel’s only representative of the colonial government and, through his significant and symbolic role as ‘magistrate’, its judicial system, here recognises the ‘ongoing’ nature of the structural violence perpetrated against the poorest villagers—throughout his confession, Silindu often refers to himself as a ‘poor man’ (146). The judge employs metaphors of behavioural violence—‘torturing and shooting’—to give shape to the invisible structural violence of which Silindu is a victim.

Furthermore, he realises that it is not only Silindu who has been driven to murder by these structural deficiencies: this economic violence is, he observes, the cause of ‘nine-tenths of crime and trouble’ across his district. But the novel’s critique takes on a further, self-reflexive dimension. Just as Woolf himself was unable to express these sentiments within the discursive space of his colonial diaries, the judge cannot produce these arguments for Silindu’s benefit in court. Rather, he is only able to make such enunciations in an unregulated discursive space outside of the legal sphere of the colonial administration, and embodied in the novel’s depiction of the symbolic space of the courtroom.

Towards the end of the novel, after Silindu’s conviction, the narrative repeatedly refers to his imminent hanging. From the moment of his conviction there are at least twelve mentions of this mode of capital punishment as an inevitable outcome. This repetition drives Silindu himself to come to terms with his fate: ‘He had no fear of the hanging now. If he had any feeling towards it, it was one of expectancy, even hope’ (164). But just as Silindu’s repeated desire to ‘end it all’ is about to come to fruition, his death sentence is retracted and a twenty year prison sentence takes its place. This invocation and then removal of the violence of capital punishment from the novel—especially within the context of the Woolf’s account of the hanging in his letter to Lytton Strachey—suggests a self-conscious interrogation of the hypocritical limits of Woolf’s own liberal sensibilities, one extending to the

double standards of the colonial legal system in which he worked for so many years. The revulsion of his colonial self against the direct violence of capital punishment finds no counterpart reaction against the ongoing structural violence perpetrated by colonialism. The novel thus exposes the hypocrisies of an imperialism that, though justified by ideologies of humanitarianism and the rhetoric of ‘civilisation’, is in fact founded on an economically profitable colonial presence that enables and perpetuates a deeply systemic structural violence.

Conclusion: towards an international judicial system

If these are issues that the novel interrogates, however, they are not problems that it solves. As TJ Barron remarks, ‘*The Village in the Jungle* is a novel; it offers no solutions, no remedies’ (2008: 59). If the target of Woolf’s critique in *The Village in the Jungle* is the colonial government, which shirks its responsibilities to its colonial subjects—by, for example, designating huge swathes of land to the production of a profitable cash crop for capitalist investors, rather than for growing food—and more specifically the colonial judicial system, which fails to recognise the ramifications of these economic conditions within its legal apparatus, what solutions does Woolf begin to formulate in his later, more self-consciously anti-imperialist work? Turning back to *Economic Imperialism* one last time, it seems that a tentative, but nevertheless important link between novel and polemic can be drawn. Though

Woolf's criticisms in this text are directed at a capitalist world system, the political responsibilities that he identifies lie with the capacity of governments, be they colonial or independent. Things went wrong, he writes, when '[p]olitics became another name for economics' (Woolf, 1920: 29). It is, for this later Woolf, the extent to which imperial governments not only fail to regulate, but actually facilitate capitalist exploitation of colonised countries on a *global* scale that causes a very real structural violence on a *local* one. *The Village in the Jungle*'s victim-oriented exploration of this violence, therefore, arguably enables Bufacchi's 'better understanding of injustice', one that enables Woolf to elaborate more fully on 'the aims and scope of social justice' in *Economic Imperialism* (2007: 3).

Despite the omission of Ceylon from Woolf's later text, this article nonetheless suggests that the ideas pioneered in his early 'blueprints' for 'an international judicial system'—that would come to form, along with the input of many others, the League of Nations in 1919—are outgrowths of the local interrogations of structural violence made in his novel, though projected onto a global stage.³ After all, it is to the League of Nations that he turns as a solution to the exploitative practices of global capital in the concluding pages of *Economic Imperialism*:

³ See Manson JM (2007) Leonard Woolf as an Architect of the League of Nations. *The South Carolina Review*: 1-13.

So long as Western States are organised on these principles and men accept these beliefs and desires of capitalism and imperialism, they will not, in fact, regard the land and peoples of Asia and Africa as ‘a sacred trust of civilisation’ but as a field for grabbing a profit from the oil of Mosul or for obtaining cheap land and cheaper labour. [...] The League must perform its trust by helping these peoples to adapt themselves to the strenuous conditions of the modern world. (Woolf, 1920: 105; 107)

There are clearly still problematic residues of imperial ideology within Woolf’s anti-capitalist formulation of an international system of justice, manifested here in the re-deployment of imperial rhetoric and the ‘top-down’ paternalism inherent within it. Nevertheless, Woolf’s attempt to outline a politically realisable solution to global inequalities that, he saw, were direct outgrowths of economic imperialism, would come to have viable institutional currency in the second half of the twentieth century. Most important for the purposes of this article, is the way in which Woolf’s later political, anti-imperial and anti-capitalist writings are rooted in the narrative work of his first novel, *The Village in the Jungle*, which itself remains, even one hundred years on, an astonishing critique of structural violence at both local and (implicitly) global levels.

Dominic Davies

Bibliography

- Barron TJ (2008) Before the Deluge: Leonard Woolf in Ceylon. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 6(1): 47-63.
- Bufacchi V (2007) *Violence and Social Justice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Silva, KM (ed) (1973) *History of Ceylon, Vol III: From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1948*. Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaries' Company Ltd.
- Galtung J (1969) Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3): 167-191.
- Gillingham J (1996) *Violence: Reflections on Our Deadliest Epidemic*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Goonetilleke DCRA (1975) Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 9(3): 72-75.
- Goonetilleke DCRA (1988) *Images of the Raj: South Asia in the Literature of Empire*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Hobson JA (1988) *Imperialism: A Study*. Townshend J (intro) London: Unwin Hyman Ltd.
- Holt JC (ed) (2011) *The Sri Lanka Reader*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Jameson F (2002) *The Political Unconscious, Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*
London: Routledge.
- Kerr D (1998) Stories of the East: Leonard Woolf and the Genres of Colonial
Discourse. *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 41(3): 261-279.
- Kerr D (2008) Colonial Habitats: Orwell and Woolf in the Jungle. *English Studies*,
78(2): 149-161.
- Lenin VI (1934) *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. London: Martin
Lawrence Ltd.
- Manson JM (2007) Leonard Woolf as an Architect of the League of Nations. *The South
Carolina Review*: 1-13.
- Ondaatje C (2005) *Woolf in Ceylon: An Imperial Journey in the Shadow of Leonard
Woolf, 1904-1911*. The Long Riders' Guild Press.
- Pease ER (1916) *The History of the Fabian Society*. New York: E.P. Dutton &
Company.
- Wickramasinghe N (2006) *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested
Identities*. London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.
- Wilson D (1978) *Leonard Woolf, A Political Biography*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Woolf L (1920) *Economic Imperialism*. London: The Swathmore Press Ltd.

Comment [2]:
Should this not be London:
HarperCollins? Dom to check.

DD - This is the text that I have, I'm
afraid - I only take one page quotation
from it though, so if you wanted to
standardise the editions it probably
wouldn't take long to find it.

Dominic Davies

Woolf L (1962) *Diaries in Ceylon, 1908-1911, Records of a Colonial Administrator*.

Colombo: Metro Printers.

Woolf L (1964) *Growing, An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911*. London: The

Hogarth Press.

Woolf L (1990) *Letters of Leonard Woolf*. Spotts F (ed) London: Weidenfeld &

Nicholson.

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

Žižek S (2008) *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. London: Profile Books Ltd.