

# CHAT M

# HOUSE

## The Royal Institute of International Affairs

---

World Opinion and the Empire of Circumstance

Author(s): Christopher Hill

Source: *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Jan., 1996), pp. 109-131

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Royal Institute of International Affairs

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2624752>

Accessed: 13-04-2020 14:54 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford University Press* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*

---

*World opinion and the  
empire of circumstance*

---

CHRISTOPHER HILL

*The following is an edited text of the third John Vincent Memorial Lecture, delivered at the University of Keele on 5 May 1995.\**

John Vincent and his work embodied the concept that ideas and history are Siamese twins: not simply because his books were in part histories of ideas (he traced the origins of the conceptions of both non-intervention and human rights with meticulous skill<sup>1</sup>), but also because he saw ideas as potentially moving forces in history, and at the least as reflections of, or ways of, crystallizing the central preoccupations of an age. Ideas and 'events' are always in a relationship of dynamic interaction; indeed, to a degree, ideas constitute events. If the very first sentence of Vincent's major book on non-intervention says that 'Intervention is a word used to describe an event, something which happens in international relations: it is not just an idea which crops up in speculation about them,' a few lines later he is adding: 'The fact that the same word is used to describe [such] diverse phenomena turns the focus of attention from intervention as an event to intervention as a concept, in order to decide what it is that is common to each case.'<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, Vincent was fascinated by the way in which ideas were coloured differently according to the historical contexts in which they cropped up, and he was sensitive to the dangers of anachronism.

For these reasons I like to think that John Vincent would have been interested in the theme of this article, and of the lecture on which it is based: world opinion. Both are a tribute to his memory and provide me with a personal thread back to the many discussions and disputes we enjoyed from the time we

\* The author is grateful to the following people for various kinds of valuable advice with this piece: Christopher Brewin, Iain Hampsher-Monk, Mark Hoffman, Andrew Linklater, James Mayall, Jennifer Welsh and Peter Wilson.

<sup>1</sup> R. J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and international order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974) and *Human rights and international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for RIIA, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Vincent, *Nonintervention*, p. 3.

came to know each other well as room-mates at Chatham House in 1980–81. The argument is the worse for not having been subjected to John's critical eye, but it does connect with his strongly felt concerns over both the idea of an international community and the need to find space in international relations for the voices of those who are not properly represented by states and by governments—particularly the starving and oppressed. The last sentences of *Human rights and international relations* speak of the 'thin and uneven' spread of cosmopolitanism which nonetheless 'does expose the internal regimes of all the members of international society to the legitimate appraisal of their peers. This may turn out not to have been a negligible change in international society.'<sup>3</sup>

The idea of world opinion, as we shall see, contains within it both conventional/communitarian and transformationalist/cosmopolitan notions of international community. These two levels of meaning are often confused and are therefore confusing, but there are also creative possibilities in the overlap. If we can clarify the various meanings of world opinion, and also show that they have certain things in common, this may do something towards reversing the mutual closures by which the various schools of thought about international relations increasingly tend to dismiss each other. There is currently a dangerous tendency abroad for those who focus primarily on states, and those who take a globalist perspective, to engage in a dialogue of the deaf—if indeed in any dialogue at all. This is wholly unnecessary, given the evident strength of both state and non-state forces in international politics. It is reminiscent of the various methodological hostilities over behaviouralism, traditionalism and post-modernism that have provided great but ultimately distracting entertainment in academic international relations. John Vasquez has pointed out that much behaviouralism was actually realist, while James Der Derian and Timothy Dunne have pointed to connections between the 'English School' and some constructivist theory.<sup>4</sup> Conflict and argument are necessary and healthy, but entrenched denunciations and mutual neglect are not.

The concept of world opinion has been both denounced and neglected since its heyday between the world wars.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the predicated idea of an 'international community' (without some kind of community it is difficult to imagine opinion being generated, while conversely opinion is a product of any

<sup>3</sup> Vincent, *Human rights*, p. 152. In this work Vincent discussed at some length what is now commonly referred to as the communitarian/cosmopolitan debate. See also note 28 below, and Mark Hoffman, 'Normative international theory: approaches and issues', in A. J. R. Groom and Margot Light, eds, *Contemporary international relations: a guide to theory* (London: Pinter, 1994), pp. 29–38. Chris Brown's 'International political theory and the idea of world community', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds, *International relations theory today* (Oxford: Polity, 1995), pp. 90–109 is a stimulating discussion of the possibilities implied by a world community as distinct from those implied by a community of states.

<sup>4</sup> John Vasquez, *The power of power politics: a critique* (London: Pinter, 1983); James Der Derian, ed., *International theory: critical investigations* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Timothy Dunne, 'The social construction of international society', *European Journal of International Relations* 1: 3, September 1995, pp. 367–89.

<sup>5</sup> The only recent scholarly treatment apart from that of Marcel Merle (see note 29 below) is the thoughtful analysis, with a case-study on the impact of trans-European opinion, on the Intermediate Nuclear Forces debate in the 1980s, of Kjell Goldmann, *The logic of internationalism: coercion and accommodation* (London: Routledge, 1994), ch. 3.

community) has also been treated sceptically. Ken Booth, in the John Vincent Memorial Lecture last year, attacked the idea of an 'international community' as 'a piece of G7 propaganda'.<sup>6</sup> He went on to give five reasons for not taking the term seriously: the international community is based on states; it is non-reciprocal; it is partial; states behave selfishly; and it 'has not been normatively successful after 350 years'.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to tilt at that of my predecessor. But I do start from the position that while there are important elements of truth in all Ken Booth's propositions on this point, there is rather more to the idea of community than he allows, and that the idea of world opinion gives us an entrée into discussing the nature of the common *circumstances*, or environment, in which we all, decision-makers and citizens, find ourselves embedded at the end of the twentieth century.

In order to do this I shall do three things: I shall explain my use of terms; I shall examine the historical background and uses of the idea of 'world opinion'; and I shall venture a reassessment with a view at least to establishing parameters for a debate which ties the concept into wider and more familiar concerns in the contemporary study of international relations.

## Defining terms

'World opinion', or the ideas which are contained within it, is the main subject of what follows, and most people have some idea of what it might refer to. The same cannot be said of the phrase which forms the second half of my title, 'the empire of circumstance'. This was one of John Vincent's favourite phrases. He took characteristic pleasure in its combination of the pithy with the faintly archaic, but said I might think it 'too Burkean' for our joint book.<sup>8</sup> That was not my view, as I understood the tinge of irony, even oxymoron, through which it would signal that an empirical approach is a necessary but not sufficient way of understanding the world.<sup>9</sup> Its meaning, in any case, is straightforward enough.

<sup>6</sup> The lecture has been published as Ken Booth, 'Human wrongs and international relations', *International Affairs* 71: 1, January 1995. See p. 121, where the sentence now reads 'a term of propaganda used by the governments of the G7 states'.

<sup>7</sup> Booth, 'Human wrongs', pp 122–3.

<sup>8</sup> 'Empire of circumstance' was to be the title of a textbook on international relations to be jointly written by myself and Vincent for the publisher Hutchinson (as it then was). Adam Roberts has also referred to John's liking for the phrase. See his John Vincent Memorial Lecture (the first), published as 'Humanitarian war: military intervention and human rights', *International Affairs* 69: 3, October 1993, p. 449.

<sup>9</sup> In fact I have not been able to find the phrase in Burke, despite assistance from Burke scholars. In Vincent's own writing there is a reference to 'the discussion of human rights in international politics as appealing to the empire of reason and not merely to that of power, or circumstance', but no attribution to Burke (or to anyone) is given, and indeed the sentence comes at the end of a discussion of John Stuart Mill's phrase 'the despotism of custom'. I have concluded that 'empire of circumstance' is probably after Burke, even if it could easily have been written by him. See R. J. Vincent, *Human rights and international relations*, p. 56. Mill's phrase comes from *On Liberty*, in Mary Warnock, ed., *Utilitarianism* (London, Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1962), p. 201.

'Empire' is used in its eighteenth-century sense of the overwhelming 'sway', rule or dominance of a given phenomenon,<sup>10</sup> and 'circumstance' to refer to the *context* in which actors or ideas play out their roles. The 'empire of circumstance' thus means here the idea that circumstances, rather than hope and abstraction, have the final say in shaping our lives, praxis and experience. This does not rule out the point that praxis includes the realm of ideas, and that so-called 'events' will themselves be in an important sense the product of theory. Our environment is constituted of actors, actions, ideas and feelings, as well as the physical world. At the *a priori* level these all have equal status. On the other hand, experience is not *solely* to be explained in terms of theory. Balances of power, correlations of forces, geographical position, the means of production, social class, levels of technology, will all variously have a lot to do with what happens and what does not happen, and their substance is not solely a matter of linguistic and theoretical *meaning*. Historical context is also of central importance. Particularity of place, person and time is in a permanent relationship of creative tension with generality. Lord Byron epitomized the problem; in *Sardanapalus* he claimed to be both 'a slave to circumstance, and impulse'. Romantic in general, he was very much Byron in particular.

### The nature of world opinion

The link between the empire of circumstance and world opinion begins with the realist argument that something as general, even mystical, as world opinion cannot truly exist, and that it is therefore in large part a notion invented or manipulated by those who hold power, for their own nefarious purposes. Opinion in general is too remote from 'circumstance', from the material world of movers and doers, for us to be sure of its significance. Public opinion at home is something which politicians, who pretend these days simply to be engaged in steering their governments on the basis of what they pick up on the radar screen of the opinion polls, are adept at inventing, ignoring and finessing. How much more malleable, then, must be opinion across the 'world', itself a phenomenon of whose existence at levels beyond the geographical we are by no means sure?<sup>11</sup> This was the sceptical view of Hans Morgenthau after the salutary lessons of the interwar period, and it would not be short of supporters today.

Morgenthau was in fact slightly ambivalent about world opinion. He conceded that it might exist as 'a general sentiment' but not as something restraining national foreign policies. He argued that:

<sup>10</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1928 edition, cites David Hume as referring in 1777 (*Essays and Treatises*) to 'the empire of philosophy [which] extends over a few'. For a similar, modern use see Justin Rosenberg, *The empire of civil society* (London: Verso, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> For a useful taxonomy and source-book on world opinion see Mark Hunter Madsen, 'The image and impact of world opinion: foreign policy-making and opinion abroad', unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1985.

## *World opinion and the empire of circumstance*

For a scientific civilization that receives most of its information about what people think from opinion polls, world opinion becomes the mythical arbiter who can be counted upon to support one's own, as well as everybody else's, aspirations and actions. For the more philosophically inclined, the 'judgement of history' fulfils a similar function. For the religious, there is 'the will of God'.

And he quoted Walter Lippmann's 'brilliant analysis' of Woodrow Wilson:

As you go further away from experience, you go higher into generalization or subtlety. As you go up in the balloon you throw more and more concrete objects overboard, and when you have reached the top with some phrase like the Rights of Humanity or the World Made Safe for Democracy, you see far and wide but you see very little.<sup>12</sup>

For Morgenthau there are few channels by which any genuinely supranational opinion can resist governments. Ultimately the notion was a dangerous chimera, because at some times it encouraged the thought that aggressive power could be halted by general disapproval alone, and because at other times it provided a spurious legitimacy for the actions of the merely strong and self-interested—as undoubtedly the 'international community' does on occasions today.

My argument in the end will be that Morgenthau got the story only half-right, even for his epoch, and that it is a mistake to dichotomize state power and world opinion too sharply, just as it is to do the same with ideas and circumstances. In other words, there is an important degree of interpenetration—but not an identity—between commentary and practice. But before developing this point it is important to survey the origins and course of the talk about 'world opinion' in international relations, and to indicate what it might mean in contemporary world affairs.

'World opinion' is largely a twentieth-century term, but its origins can be traced back at least as far as Kant. Martin Wight talks about a form of international public opinion in ancient Greece under the name *eunoia*, or a general feeling of approval, but talk of 'the public', as of 'nationalism', seems to me an anachronism before about 1776 and the emergence of both the nation-state and a concept of accountability.<sup>13</sup> Kant's concept of a world confederation required a regular dialogue on what kind of political behaviour between states was desirable. The very diversity of states would promote debate, freedom and opposition to war. Moreover, his approach to law emphasized the importance of *publicity*, in the sense of the exposure of injustice and the right of criticism, as well

<sup>12</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace*, 5th rev. edn (New York: Knopf, 1978), pp. 274–5, 270.

<sup>13</sup> See the chapter on 'International public opinion' in Martin Wight's *Systems of states* (Leicester: Leicester University Press/LSE, 1977), pp. 67–72.

as simple transparency. This would apply at least to relations between republics.<sup>14</sup> At much the same time Jeremy Bentham was emphasizing the importance of the tie between reason and opinion, and the crucial importance of civilized public opinion as a moral sanction.<sup>15</sup> Later, Richard Cobden and John Bright laid down the foundations of functionalism by their policy-geared insistence on the twin roles of trade and public opinion in binding states together. 'No one has believed more strongly than Cobden in international cooperation, though not through governments.'<sup>16</sup> There was no explicit talk of international opinion ('world' would have been an anachronism when Africa, China and Japan had still not been forced into the Europe-based states-system), but the appeal to a tribunal other than governments was a sign of things to come.

It was the Hague Conferences (what a disciple of Cobden called in 1912 'a sort of World-Duma'<sup>17</sup>), together with the First World War and the effect of these events on Woodrow Wilson, that finally led to rampant talk of 'world opinion'. Of course, the conflict of 1914–18 was largely known right up to 1939 as 'the Great War' rather than the First *World* War, but from that time on it was not uncommon to hear politicians talking about 'world opinion' as something that, when it was not constraining their own actions, might be mobilized against others.<sup>18</sup> This was the time when a global system of states was evidently coming into being, and when there were still hopes that such a system might live up to the domestic analogy by writing its own laws, isolating wrongdoers and fostering a common value-system.<sup>19</sup> What Correlli Barnett

<sup>14</sup> See W. B. Gallie, *Philosophers of peace and war: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 35; Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 24, 84–5, 125–30. Of course, publicity in the sense of transparency, of 'dispelling all distrust of the maxims employed' (Kant in Reiss, p. 130) is not the same as engaging in dialogue with a public, but the link forwards to Woodrow Wilson's idea of an open diplomacy reinforced by a watchful public may readily be seen.

<sup>15</sup> F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the pursuit of peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 81–91, discussing Bentham's 'Plan for an universal and perpetual peace', written between 1786 and 1789.

<sup>16</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The trouble makers* (London: Pimlico edn, 1993), p. 62 (first publ. Hamish Hamilton, 1957). Taylor said that the following (characteristic) words of Cobden during the Don Pacifico debate of 1850 'deserve to be printed in letters of gold': 'The progress of freedom depends more upon the maintenance of peace, the spread of commerce, and the diffusion of education, than upon the labours of cabinets and foreign offices' (p. 53). See also J. A. Hobson, *Richard Cobden: the international man* (London: Ernest Benn, 1968), pp. 387–409 (first publ. 1919).

<sup>17</sup> G. H. Perris, cited by Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about peace and war* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, not all were blithely optimistic about the impact of public opinion, world or national. Norman Angell, for example, always had forebodings about its vulnerability to passions and to press manipulation. See J. B. D. Miller, *Norman Angell and the futility of war: peace and the public mind* (London: Macmillan, 1986), esp. chs 1, 3, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Even the official British commentary on the Covenant of the League of Nations, published as a White Paper in 1919, said that 'the public opinion of the civilised world' was 'the ultimate and most effective sanction' of the Covenant. Cited in E. H. Carr, 'Public opinion as a safeguard of peace', *International Affairs* 15: 6, November–December 1936, p. 855. In another part of this article Carr quoted Charles Manning, but strangely did not apply the latter's dictum to public opinion and the League. "'The showman", remarks Professor Manning, "who proposes to 'put on' a turn with elephants flying in formation will have realised only a part of his purpose when he has planned the formation in which he wishes the animals to fly"' (pp. 853–4).

later termed the 'old sentimental Cobdenite illusions'<sup>20</sup> had finally captured the commanding heights of international policy. Even in the dark days of 1940 Lord Halifax could be found worrying about Britain attracting 'the execration of the world' for preventing foodstuffs arriving in continental Europe.<sup>21</sup>

The failure of the German people to overthrow Hitler, and then the Cold War, put paid to such illusions for the system as a whole, and deflected thoughts about common opinion either into the separate subsystems of 'the West' and 'the communist world', or into the world of new states anxious for acceptance in the international community. In 1962, for example, the Pakistani government issued a propaganda booklet criticizing India and quoting the international press as evidence of support from 'world opinion'; but of 36 citations only one was from a non-Western publication. In such conditions there were few sources for constructing the profile of world opinion, and by that time the phrase itself was beginning to have the smell of mothballs.<sup>22</sup> This brings us to the fact that 'world opinion' should not be defined too literally. It should also be understood as a synonym for other notions which have sprung up over the years in its place. The most common substitutes nowadays are 'international public opinion', 'the view of the world community', or simply 'the world', 'humanity' and 'civilization'. Recent examples include the newspaper headline 'The World Watches to Avert Genocide' (in Burundi),<sup>23</sup> and Vice-President Gore's talk of climate change being the 'greatest problem facing civilisation'.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the end of the Cold War in its turn may be expected to breathe new life into the notion of world opinion, and indeed there have been premature straws in the wind, with phrases like 'the common European home', 'the new world order', the 'end of history', 'global governance' and other instant characterizations of the supposed new unities. With events like the 1995 protests against French nuclear tests in the Pacific, explicit references to world opinion itself may soon become common once more—if, as we shall see, with a rather different orientation from that of the 1920s, with its emphasis on governments and on domestic opinion acting on the home government.<sup>25</sup> But whatever the exact words used—and this article for the most part relies on 'world opinion' as a convenient shorthand—the underlying concept, of the force of attitudes and expressed opinions beyond the confines of a single state, is very much alive, and indeed indispensable to a proper understanding of international relations. All but the most unreconstructed realists would accept

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Ceadel, *Thinking about peace and war*, p. 179.

<sup>21</sup> Public Record Office, records of the War Cabinet, CAB 65/8, WM 208(40), 19 July 1940.

<sup>22</sup> *World opinion on Kashmir*, Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, Rawalpindi, November 1962.

<sup>23</sup> *The Independent*, 5 April 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Said by Gore at the World Climate Summit at Berlin: *The Independent*, 8 April 1995.

<sup>25</sup> The Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, for example, was cited in the London *Evening Standard* of 6 September 1995 as having 'condemned Paris for flying in the face of world opinion'. He was reported as having said: 'I am deeply disappointed that France has chosen to ignore the protests of a whole world.'



that any given government is likely to be concerned about the views held of it—i.e. not just the actions taken—by elements abroad, particularly when these views might amount to a consensus; at the extreme, to a general condemnation. (This is not to say that states cannot also ride out such condemnation.) In terms of the familiar paradigms of international relations thought, sophisticated traditional realists, together with most varieties of liberal and the less materialist among the structuralists, should all be able to find a fairly central place for world opinion in their world-picture. For the post-positivist wave, of course, opinion, in the form of the various discourses of political life, holds centre stage.

If, for example, one holds to one or more of the following diverse propositions, taken from a range of approaches to international relations, then it seems to me *ipso facto* that world opinion is being allowed into the analysis in some form: that it is unwise for states to allow themselves to become isolated; that respect for international law is desirable, and depends in part on breaches being exposed; that the observance of international 'regimes' rests on more than the assessment and reassessment of interests; that the debate about human rights is one that necessarily rests on a universal conception of humanity over and above the conditions of a particular society; that states are increasingly outflanked by those who control international capital movements and 'confidence' in financial markets; that the solution to pressing ecological problems depends significantly on the willingness of people to change personal attitudes and habits of behaviour. These arguments appeal to us differentially according to our broad stance on international relations. What they have in common is a tacit recognition of the importance of opinion, image, expectations and debate to outcomes at the world level. For most of us, in other words, international politics goes well beyond the calculus of tangible power, whether that power resides in governments, in courts and other rule-making bodies or in economic classes. For the thinking realist, liberal or structuralist there will always be wide margins of uncertainty in explanations where such factors as opinion may come into play.

But whose opinion? So far I have been careful not to suggest that the sources of world opinion lie in any particular group, especially states, but I cannot go much further without trying to unpack and then reconstruct the notion.

'Public opinion' is the parent concept of 'world opinion', but there is no direct domestic analogy to be made. Even though public opinion within a state is inherently an imprecise notion, often abused, we at least know its boundaries and accept some of its measures—polls and jammed switchboards in Whitehall, or letter-writing campaigns to Congress—as evidence contributing to a knowledge of what the public feels. We know that within a state every adult has a potential voice via some medium of public opinion, even where there are no formal democratic institutions. But for world opinion there is much greater uncertainty. There are no genuinely global opinion polls which conceptualize humanity as a whole and attempt to summarize the 'world mood' at any given

time. Perhaps it would be a meaningless gesture were it to be attempted. Even the established Eurobarometer polls inside the European Union are still fundamentally statist, in that they set up their task in terms of comparing the various national sets of opinions and *subsequently* inferring an aggregated Euro-view. The same was true of the extensive Japanese 'Youth of the World Survey' of 1977–8.<sup>26</sup> In these circumstances there is clearly a great deal of potential for decision-makers, and indeed their critics, to treat world opinion as a blank page on which they may draw their preferred image.

The opportunity to call in the world in support of one's own interests is often taken. Britain and the United States continue to work towards ensuring that Gaddafi's Libya and Saddam's Iraq are pariah states in the international community as well as irritating particular adversaries. Iran looks beyond states to the peoples of the world for support against the Great Satan, while Colonel Gaddafi, appealing recently against UN sanctions on air travel from Libya to Mecca, said that 'the international community knows it is a sin to prevent pilgrims from visiting God.'<sup>27</sup> States wishing to build coalitions, satisfied powers defending the existing order, fideist states, some revisionists, may all wish to claim the support of the international community. Conversely, the inward-looking, the isolated, the out of step will tend either to decry or to ignore the idea of world opinion. But there are few Enver Hoxhas or Ne Wins these days, and certainly no hard-and-fast rule about only the big battalions seeking to claim world opinion for themselves.

The confusion generated by competing claims may be partially resolved by distinguishing between two important and diverging meanings of world opinion. These are the *opinion of states*, individually and collectively, and the *opinion of people*, beyond their national identities. These broadly coincide with the communitarian and cosmopolitan levels of debate in normative international relations theory.<sup>28</sup> In the world of practical politics there is a good deal of slipping and sliding between these meanings, while behind the distinction lie the further problems of the differences between how people *do* talk about world opinion, and how they *might* or *should* talk about it. Moreover, there will never be one, consensual view at either level, but rather degrees of agreement and division, varying from a broadly supported orthodoxy to an inchoate state of fragmentation, depending on the issue and the time.

<sup>26</sup> See George H. Gallup, *The international Gallup polls: public opinion 1978* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1980), pp. 373–402. Two thousand young people in each of eleven countries were questioned between 25 November 1977 and 6 January 1978.

<sup>27</sup> 'Libya's pilgrims throw off sanctions shackles', *Guardian*, 21 April 1995.

<sup>28</sup> The famous Hidemi Suganami–John Vincent 'egg-box' metaphor for international relations helps us here (Vincent, *Human rights and international relations*, pp. 123–4). While the egg-box of international society protects the essentially self-contained states (eggs) from cracking each other open, 'cosmopolitanist morality has us all out of the egg-box, cracked, and into an omelette'. We are in a world society of people, not an international society of states. See also Andrew Linklater, *Men and citizens in the theory of international relations* (London: Macmillan/LSE, 1982), esp. pp. 184–206.

Ultimately, the issue is whether or not these two kinds of opinion coexist in a single community, or whether they talk wholly past each other in their separate 'life-worlds', as Habermas would put it.

*The opinion of states*

The first way of looking at the problem focuses on the collective opinion of states.<sup>29</sup> If there is any such thing as the 'society of states' then that society will from time to time produce more or less shared views on great issues of the day. Indeed, it is arguable that without such a capacity a society of states cannot survive. On the other hand, as John Vincent pointed out,<sup>30</sup> the 'current phase of world politics' is one in which 'the system of states does somehow survive in a culturally plural world.' With competing value-systems at work in a system of 180-plus states, any common opinions may be more the product of coincidence, similar to the way in which left and right sometimes find themselves in temporary alliances of convenience, than genuine convergence.

Nonetheless, the creation of a 'parliamentary' dimension for interstate relations from 1919 onwards, with its attendant quality of 'publicity' for major conflicts and shared concerns, leads governments often to talk as if collectively they do produce a world opinion. Cultural pluralism does not rule out, indeed it necessitates, some elements of dialogue. The General Assembly of the United Nations may lack formal power, but it is a place where positions can be mobilized and Resolutions agreed which at times can articulate or even help to define the *Zeitgeist*. The 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples' of 1960 was one such. It is generally agreed to have helped strip the last vestiges of legitimacy from the idea of empire, just as the earlier Trusteeship Council reports had helped to establish the principle, in the words of Rupert Emerson, that 'the "private" colonial possessions of the powers were open to public international scrutiny.'<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the Soviet Union was surprised in the early 1980s to discover the extent of the condemnation among UN member states, and in the Non-Aligned Movement in particular, of its invasion of Afghanistan, and in the long run this may have contributed to the weakening of Moscow's will for the fight in that country.

The difficulty with the General Assembly and its associated agencies and conferences is not that there will be many occasions when there is no obvious consensus, but that there are many instances of majority views simply being ignored by recalcitrant and/or powerful states. This is as true of Western states

<sup>29</sup> Called 'official opinion' in Marcel Merle's thoughtful analysis; he thinks that it has never been 'a question of empty posturing': *The sociology of international relations* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), p. 355.

<sup>30</sup> In 'Edmund Burke and the theory of international relations', *Review of International Studies* 10: 3, July 1984, p. 213.

<sup>31</sup> Rupert Emerson, 'Colonialism, political development and the UN', in Carol Ann Cosgrove and Kenneth J. Twitchett, eds, *The new international actors: the UN and the EEC* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 171.

ignoring demands by the Group of 77 for economic change in the 1970s as of Brazil rebuffing Western pressures in the 1990s for environmental controls.<sup>32</sup> This would occur even if the General Assembly were the only parliamentary forum in which states generate debate, but of course it is not. The UN itself is surmounted by the elite grouping of the Security Council and its five permanent members. For decades the stalemate in this institution diverted opinion-forming debate into other fora, but in recent years their discussions and Resolutions on such questions as safe havens for the Kurds, or responsibility for the war in Bosnia (including the innovation of the War Crimes Tribunal) have set the tone for wider debates on such key issues as humanitarian intervention and double standards over aggression, respectively. Like it or not, the majority of states in the system respond to the terms of reference set by Security Council debates, just as domestic opinion is shaped by the articulate and the powerful.

To a lesser extent this is also true of self-arrogating summits like the Group of Seven. Boris Yeltsin's anxiety to join the G7 (symbolized by his being the first Russian leader to wear a dinner jacket at a summit dinner, incidentally<sup>33</sup>) may just be the product of a desire to share the multiple photo-opportunities for domestic exploitation, but it also betokens a sense that this is an inner grouping which influences world-wide attitudes (it can hardly be said to take decisions) on issues such as trade, reflation and conditionality. It does so largely through the positions taken up by the strongest states, but as an embryonic Economic Security Council it has also provided a focus for the debate on whether globalization can and should be managed by states.

Such a self-appointed *directoire* of attitude-formers does, however, get world opinion and the international community a bad name. The G7 states (including the EU, in the form of three member states and the European Commission) represent 750 million people, or around 15 per cent of the world's population—that is, the richest and dominant segment. Even the permanent members of the Security Council (the P5), which include China and Russia, represent less than one-third of the world's population. Not surprisingly, there has been a wave of recent interest in reforming the Security Council to make it 'more representative'; one interesting proposal, from Italy, was for 20 semi-permanent and rotating members to be appointed, who would between them represent 'the vast majority of the countries which contribute in men, public opinion and means to the realization of the universal design of the United Nations',<sup>34</sup> including almost all the important population centres in the world.

<sup>32</sup> For a useful survey of the legal and institutional context of the UN's handling of environmental questions see Patricia Birnié, 'The UN and the environment', in Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, eds, *United Nations, divided world: the UN's roles in international relations*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> At the Naples G7 summit: *La Repubblica*, 3 May 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speech by Foreign Minister Beniamino Andreata to the 48th General Assembly of the UN (my translation).

As it happens, the opinion of states has other channels of self-expression apart from the G7 and P5. Regional organizations are the most obvious alternatives. They exist these days not so much to reduce tariff levels as to pursue political goals such as the promotion of identity and the amplification of *voice* in international relations. ASEAN is one of the oldest and best examples. Its member states have achieved a higher profile than would have been possible without a collective identity, and the increasingly loud and confident criticisms of Western values emanating from the governments of Singapore and Malaysia<sup>35</sup> have been made against a background of fraternal support, rather than the kind of vulnerable isolation in which Nyerere's Tanzania and Gaddafi's Libya existed. It was, indeed, interesting that in recent years Colonel Gaddafi looked (albeit in vain) to his membership of the Arab Maghreb Union as a means of coming in from the cold. Other similar platforms for the expression of non-establishment views have been CARICOM and the Contadora group, both struggling to emerge from under the shadow of the US-dominated OAS. Conversely, membership of the European Union has given a voice to states like Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg to which they could never otherwise have aspired. Even states which can have no hope of ever joining the EU now clamour for a 'political dialogue' with it. More than 30 states or groups of states currently enjoy such privileged dialogues with the EU.

Beyond regional groupings, there are the larger associations, like the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement. Even in their heydays these groupings were nothing more or less than giant official pressure groups for the promotion of certain particular concerns in international relations, of which anti-racism and an opposition to the domination of international relations by the great powers have been the most prominent. Weak states needed the focal points and the relative anonymity which they provided. Furthermore, in the Commonwealth at least, the richer Western states were forced to answer for their attitudes in week-long heads of government meetings—not always a comfortable experience.<sup>36</sup>

There are other elements of the world of states which also provide some justification for the view that an 'international community' of sorts exists, generating a range of competing opinions. International law is perhaps the most important. Geoffrey Best has produced important work which supports the undramatic but quietly convincing argument that the law of war and

<sup>35</sup> Summarized by Michael Leifer in 'Tigers, tigers, spurning rights', *Times Higher*, 21 April 1995. For a powerful example see the article by the Permanent Secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kishore Mabhubani, 'The Pacific way', *Foreign Affairs* 74: 1, January–February 1995; also Fareed Zakaria, 'A conversation with Lee Kuan Yew', *Foreign Affairs* 73: 2, March–April 1994.

<sup>36</sup> See James Mayall, 'The Commonwealth in Cyprus', *The World Today* 49: 12, December 1993, pp. 239–41 for the view that the Commonwealth 'has never been very good at geopolitics' and that it has 'been attempting to define a role for itself as the architect of an international civil society based on a common commitment to human rights and multi-party democracy'. So far, Mayall continues, it has clearly failed in the attempt.

human rights, *when combined with political forces*, can increasingly subject states to some inconvenient pressures.<sup>37</sup> In other words, first, the climate of opinion on what is and is not acceptable in the behaviour of states has been slowly changing; and second, the change can be ascribed in part to international legal processes which do not simply occur at the behest of the powerful. The area of international law is one of the most significant 'epistemic communities' in world affairs, given the amount of time which very high-level state officials spend in analysing and disputing particular issues and in relating them to a highly developed body of knowledge.<sup>38</sup> It was ironic that just before the USSR disintegrated, its government had agreed to accept the compulsory jurisdiction clause of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on six international human rights conventions. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had chosen to bring the Soviet Union into the common discourse on law and rights.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, one should not exaggerate the importance of international law in the area of high politics and fundamental values. The United States simply sidestepped the ICJ's judgment against it over Nicaragua. On the other hand, the Reagan administration cared sufficiently about the process to withdraw from the optional clause on compulsory jurisdiction, so as not to be subjected to more of the same, while its very high-handedness has led to a certain notoriety—and what is notoriety other than Woodrow Wilson's version of 'publicity', or an uncomfortable form of global exposure? Because of the limited but real structure of the international community of states, the United States was caught on a Morton's fork over Nicaragua. This was why fundamentalist Iran, previously dismissive of the value of due process, sought a judgment from the ICJ that the US had violated civil aviation Conventions with its shooting down of an Iranian airbus in July 1988.<sup>40</sup>

Another way in which the views of the international community may be gauged in rough and ready fashion is sanctions. The degree of sanctions taken against a given miscreant state is quite a good indicator as to whether the actions concerned really outrage such a range of states as is hoped by some. Apartheid South Africa was shaken by the degree of sporting isolation in the 1980s, whereas Milosevic's Serbia has clearly not been as much of a pariah as its enemies pretend. In 1995 the United States has discovered the same to be true over Iran.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey Best, *War and law since 1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), and 'Justice, international relations and human rights', *International Affairs* 71: 4, October 1995.

<sup>38</sup> See, *inter alia*, F. D. Berman, 'The international lawyer: inside and outside foreign ministries', in Christopher Hill and Pamela Beshoff, eds, *Two worlds of international relations: academics, practitioners and the trade in ideas* (London: Routledge, 1994). The idea of 'epistemic communities', or the ideas held in common by policy-makers, commentators and publics, derives from the work of Peter Haas. See the special issue of *International Organization* 46, Winter 1992, edited by Haas and entitled *Knowledge, power and international policy coordination*.

<sup>39</sup> David J. Scheffer, 'Non-judicial state remedies and the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice', *Stanford Journal of International Law* 27: 1 (4), 1990, p. 146, n. 298.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117–19, 131–7.

<sup>41</sup> Various Western states have been busy rebuilding their trade links with Iran, despite injunctions from Washington: *La Repubblica*, 3 May 1995.

Individually, these manifestations of judgementalism among states may not amount to much. Taken together, however, they provide mechanisms which mean that the powerful elite of states does not always control the agenda even of intergovernmental discussions, while the majority of weaker and poorer states are not wholly muzzled. Nor should it be automatically assumed that because a dominant state succeeds in orchestrating an expression of view then the resulting consensus is necessarily specious or hypocritical. Clearly the United States used a range of sticks and carrots to put together an anti-Saddam coalition in 1990–91. But it had been earlier conspicuously unsuccessful in attracting support from states such as Syria, and there can be little doubt that most governments at the time wished to signal their strong disapproval of Iraq's invasion of its neighbour. Even at the level of intergovernmentalism, therefore, there are intermittent expressions of collective opinion which should be seen as more than mere smokescreens put up by hidden persuaders. It is true that we may need to relabel this phenomenon 'international opinion', to distinguish it from the more popular manifestations of 'world opinion'.

### *Cosmopolitan world opinion*

It is to sources of world opinion other than the 'community of states' that we now turn; namely, the possibility that human beings can engage in a dialogue on the international level which may include governments but is not confined by them. This is the second part of the scenario arising out of the Woodrow Wilson tradition, with the public able to make coalitions with other democratic forces abroad as well as being able to put pressure on its own government.<sup>42</sup> It was accordingly dismissed by Carr and Morgenthau. Since the 1950s, however, writers such as Alger, Burton, Falk and Rosenau have presented arguments of a cosmopolitan hue which suggest that the various transnational processes in which citizens influence global events without necessarily going through their own governments are of increasing significance.<sup>43</sup> And they are right.

There are five categories of actor who shape international opinions in this way: churches, secular moral leaders, business, mass media (news and

<sup>42</sup> As early as 1892, in his lectures at Princeton, Wilson had asked himself the question: 'Do the nations of the world constitute a community?'. He had answered in the affirmative on the grounds that Roman law was increasingly the basis of all Western [sic] legal systems, that commerce of goods and ideas was spreading, and that Christianity was disseminating common principles of 'civilization'. This was clearly, in its ethnocentrism, a view of its time, but Wilson also referred to the way in which the 'imperative forces of popular thought and the concrete institutions of popular representation' would underpin this community, and it was this strand of his thought which was to become most influential after 1918. See Thomas J. Knock, *To end all wars: Woodrow Wilson and the quest for a new world order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 8–9.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Chad Alger, 'Effective participation in world society: some implications of the Columbus study', in Michael Banks, ed., *Conflict in world society* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984); John Burton, *World society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Richard Falk's notion of 'citizen-pilgrims' in his 'The global promise of social movements: explorations at the edge of time', in Richard Falk, *Explorations at the edge of time: the prospects for world order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); James N. Rosenau, 'Toward a new civics: teaching and learning in an era of fragmenting loyalties and multiplying responsibilities', in James N. Rosenau, *The study of global interdependence* (London: Pinter, 1980).

entertainment), and cross-national pressure groups. What they have in common is a central involvement in major issues, in some of which states struggle to be more than peripheral.

The spiritual leaders of churches have a particular capacity to create transnational opinion. Millions of Catholics, particularly in the old Spanish colonies, continue to be influenced by the prohibition on birth control, while the Pope's strong stance against abortion and in favour of traditional roles for women is an important intervention in social affairs in all types of society. Conversely, the tendency of educated Catholics to ignore in large numbers inconvenient papal teachings, such as that on contraception, constitutes the most practical way of expressing opinion: voting with your feet. Other Christian leaders such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and, increasingly, American evangelists such as Billy Graham are also capable of reaching millions through publicity and their own organizational networks. This is to an even greater extent true in the Islamic world, where the imams have provided one of the few effective responses to Western materialism, leading thousands of young women to take up the veil and abruptly calling into question the fragile modernity of states like Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and Algeria—to say nothing of forcing Salman Rushdie into hiding and murdering his translators.<sup>44</sup> This is truly Rosenau's concept of 'emulative linkage' in operation, a statement in one society which evokes a sympathetic and imitative response in another.<sup>45</sup>

This can apply even across the developmental divide, in the reverse of the normal direction from the centres of capitalism outwards. It is notable, for example, that black males in the United States, finding themselves without identity in their own society, are increasingly turning to an external referent, Islam, to provide dignity and direction, encouraged by developments abroad. In this they are being led by individuals like Louis Farrakhan, who are willing to ignore the inevitable charges of treason levelled against those who turn for their values to foreign sources. Islam is now said to be the fastest-growing religion in the United States.

This brings us to the role of what may be termed the 'secular saints', those individuals capable of providing inspiration and moral leadership beyond their own communities, even if in a less structured way than that of formal religions. It was once estimated that the boxer Muhammad Ali was the most well-known person in the world, which if true was a fact of some political significance, as the former Cassius Clay had refused the draft over Vietnam and had embraced Islam as a symbol of brotherhood between American blacks and the Third World. Mike Tyson has taken the same path as Ali. Sport and entertainment

<sup>44</sup> Ernest Gellner has said that 'A puritan and scripturalist world religion [like Islam] does not seem necessarily doomed to erosion by modern conditions. It may on the contrary be favoured by them': *Postmodernism, reason and religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> James N. Rosenau, 'Theorizing across systems—linkage politics revisited', in *Global interdependence*; Rosenau here reviews his original formulation of the concept of 'linkage', made in *Linkage politics* (New York: Free Press, 1969).



create their own world network of irresistible trivialities, but just occasionally—as with the sporting embargo of South Africa or the Mexican soap operas so popular on Russian television—they tap into deeper feelings. Charismatic popular heroes in particular can have surprisingly wide and deep effects. John Lennon's murder gave his artistic pacifism a mythic quality for millions around the world, which should not be underestimated as a factor in generational change in attitudes to war and authority.

In the realm of more conventional politics, there have been many key individuals who have possessed a charisma that went beyond borders. If Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh were little more than convenient icons to alienated Western youth in the 1960s, there can be no doubt that figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mao Zedong, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, and less dramatically Daniel Ellsberg and Andrei Sakharov, have had substantial impacts on a political constituency which has reached beyond their own generations, let alone their own country. Very often they have been assisted further by institutions with the capacity to provide some international legitimacy for the actions of key individuals. The Nobel Prize Committee and the Pugwash meetings have been prominent in this respect, as well as in influencing global debates at the less spectacular functional and professional levels.<sup>46</sup> The recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Joseph Rotblat of Pugwash looks like a calculated attempt to mobilize opinion further against French nuclear tests in the Pacific, as well as a recognition of the impact of scientific opposition to the bomb across the world.

Individuals with transnational influence are usually critics of an unjust order, whether at home or on the wider stage—although they do not have to be permanently in opposition, as the lives of Jean Monnet and Ayatollah Khomeini illustrate. Compensation for the hardships consequent on ploughing a lone furrow can sometimes be gained from the way in which persecution can project a message onto an international screen. Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Milovan Djilas are good examples. Like Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma today, they have needed to stimulate some form of world opinion to sustain them in their own domestic struggles.

Intellectuals and academics like Professor Rotblat do not *per se* create world opinion in the sense that their ideas reach an extensive global audience, but they do work on a transnational basis, and look all the time towards functional contacts with fellow-experts, regardless of nationality. An idealized picture of *idées sans frontières* should be qualified by an understanding of the extent to which academic life has now become a business like all the rest, with all the competition and secretiveness that implies; but it is at least a genuinely

<sup>46</sup> But note the cautionary remarks about Pugwash's interpenetration with governmental forces made by Jean Klein's 'Des savants contre la guerre nucléaire: le mouvement Pugwash', in Michel Girard's valuable collection *Les individus dans la politique internationale* (Paris: Economica, 1994).

multinational business, where the market for ideas thrives more or less independently of states' attempts to control it.

This leads us to the third category of actors with the capacity to shape global opinions. Taken as a whole, business is capable of influencing opinion on issues well beyond its own concerns. The logics of technology and production shape consumer tastes, and once given a foothold can advance with staggering speed, as has been evident in southern China in recent years. We should be wary of generalizations about the ability of McDonalds or Coca-Cola to transform established social patterns while the forces of nationalism and the state are perfectly capable of absorbing consumer culture to their own ends: witness the chillingly normal pictures from Belgrade, where people dressed like us go shopping (despite sanctions) or watch football while sustaining a quasi-fascist state. Nonetheless, the global drive in the 1990s towards liberal democracy would have meant little without the associated advance of capitalist enterprise—it is the values of the free market which have really advanced on fronts as surprising as Mozambique and Vietnam, Shanghai and St Petersburg. This impact on both elite and mass, encouraged by Western governments but driven more substantially by private investment and speculation, is a somewhat more robust form of 'world opinion' than the classically envisaged high-mindedness over war and peace, inevitably vulnerable to government counter-measures. The undermining of support for communism within the Soviet bloc was, as Fred Halliday has pointed out, more the result of the slow dissemination of 'popular culture, the media, fashion, and in broad terms the image of what constitutes the good life' than of any formal decisions in the West.<sup>47</sup> But once the opening to the East had been provided by Gorbachev's initiatives, business raced to take advantage, giving an irresistible boost to the demands for change.

Within the realm of international business, it is the mass media that have the most obvious role in articulating what hearts might feel and minds deduce. Though it has now become tiresome to hear talk of 'the CNN factor', without Reuters, Agence-France Presse and the BBC World Service—to say nothing of the cable and satellite revolution driven by US and Australian money, which has made the nightly weather forecast intercontinental and beamed the O. J. Simpson trial into Indian villages—the 'world news' would not be such a familiar phenomenon. These organizations have helped to create our conceptualization of 'the world', and of planet earth, and the G77 states were quite right a decade or so ago to focus on their importance in determining the 'international information order', even if misguided in some of their attempts at reform.

The mass media feed off themselves and (apart from the thin elite of 'quality' journalists) are more interested, as the French Situationists pointed out in the 1960s, in whichever 'spectacle' is currently bewitching us than in creating a serious and educated mass debate. Although the interactive electronic

<sup>47</sup> Fred Halliday, *Rethinking international relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 214.

revolution has already begun, for the time being the mass media, however transnational in their scope, are still one-way in their flow: a powerful form of information and propaganda, but rarely a channel for the expression of grass-roots views; and they no more speak for the world than they do for their domestic public opinion. This does not stop them, of course, continually being mistaken for the voice of the common man and woman.

The last of the five categories of transnational opinion-formation is that of pressure groups. Whereas domestically we might focus on direct manifestations of citizens' views, through demonstrations, picketing, phone-ins, non-payment of taxes and the like, at the international level such things are virtually impossible. There are the 'emulative linkages' already mentioned, as protest in one society spills over into another—the END movement against cruise and Pershings in the 1980s is the best recent example—and it is not unknown for people to shed their national vestments and demonstrate spontaneously over an international issue (witness the recent popularity of the Canadian flag in Cornish fishing villages). The flight of the Vietnamese boat people also generated a good deal of global publicity. But for the most part citizens' action requires a sophisticated degree of organization at the international level.

Too much of this organization is quasi-official, such as the 'Five Institutes Report' from Chatham House and its European partners.<sup>48</sup> The most interesting cross-national pressure groups—Amnesty, Greenpeace, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross—throw light on the previously invisible, give voice to the repressed or inarticulate, and generally raise people's consciousness on issues where parochialism is the normal order of the day. They are able to badger governments precisely because they are known, despite the efforts of counter-propaganda, not to be the creatures of particular states or vested interests. They speak *from* people who regard themselves as having a second passport as a world citizen, and *for* those who are victims of particular states, and in some cases of the state-based system itself. Their very failures, as with the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*, human rights abuses in Turkey, or the long struggle of the 'mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' over the fate of the 'desaparecidos' in Argentina, often act as an international inspiration and serve to draw even more attention to the guilty parties.

The creation and persistence of these organizations—largely but not entirely transnational within the confines of the West—is one of the major differences between today's world and that of the interwar years, when pacifist and socialist pressure groups flourished but could not free themselves from the cage of the state.<sup>49</sup> Even if states still ignore or manipulate pressure groups, and the great

<sup>48</sup> Karl Kaiser *et al.*, *The European Community: progress or decline?* (London: RIIA, 1983).

<sup>49</sup> But see Michael Joseph Smith's careful balancing of new hopes against the old vulnerabilities of the liberal tradition to political abuse in his 'Liberalism and international reform', in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel, eds, *Traditions of international ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 219–21.

decisions on war and peace are still taken behind windows which are soundproofed from the unruly crowd outside, some of the preconditions for the creation of a more or less genuine transnational opinion are now being put into place. West Europeans, for example, do not always agree with each other, but they do increasingly share the same discourse. Wherever they live they find it legitimate to comment on Berlusconi's cabinet appointments in Italy, on the treatment of animals in France and on corporal punishment in Britain. Further afield, the sense of a cosmopolitan dialogue is more fragile. International opinion is a meaningless concept for dissidents inside Iraq. But even in drastic circumstances, the ability of pressure groups to influence some governments, to dispose of some resources and to capture some news headlines is a significant quality, not lost, for example, on the Iraqi opposition in exile. Moreover, in the longer term, the slow oozing of the transnational tide into hidden corners may gradually prepare the ground for such bottled-up change as that which hit Spain after Franco. Governments might control the *expression* of opinion, but opinion itself is still the final private space.

Looking back at these five types of transnational opinion, I conclude that there is sufficient evidence for us to believe (1) that a world of opinion does exist beyond the conversations which governments have with each other, and (2) that this world impacts significantly on governments, and more directly on the lives of us all, living as we do in states but often projecting our thoughts well beyond them. It is, of course, true that for the majority physical existence is still remarkably confined. There are many Americans in small towns who keep away from the big cities, let alone foreign travel. In Tuscany, likewise, it is not just the very poor for whom Rome is another world and Brussels, Paris and London places they may never visit. And these are observations from developed states with excellent transport systems. Those who inhabit the 'small world' of academic travel and e-mail should not forget that most people still have deeper and more particular roots, subnational as much as transnational.

But if the majority still lives a relatively static life, physically and mentally, the size of the more mobile minority has increased significantly to the point where a critical mass for sustaining transnational debates may have been reached. Although there is obviously no animate, coherent world opinion, and we remain well short of the global civil society canvassed in recent literature,<sup>50</sup> it is equally crude to assume that all expressions of concern about life beyond our own borders are at the mercy of states—and this leaves aside the rational-choice-influenced view whereby we express an opinion and help to determine world culture every time we buy a foreign-made washing-machine.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing world politics: the emergence of global civil society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21: 3, Winter 1992; on the underlying theoretical debate see Andrew Linklater, 'Dialogue, dialectic and emancipation in international relations at the end of the post-war age' (a review of James Rosenau *et al.*'s, *Global voices: dialogues in international relations*, Boulder, CO, Oxford: Westview, 1993), in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 23: 1, Spring 1994.

<sup>51</sup> As suggested by Kenichi Ohmae, *The borderless world: power and strategy in the interlinked economy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).

The two extremes of pie-in-the-sky liberal internationalism and cynical realism are both inadequate in terms of accommodating the transnational level of discourse and its multiple actors. It is important that we should not take refuge in either of the two great myths: on the one hand that cosmopolitanism will ultimately prove irresistible, and on the other that, in Carr's words, 'power over opinion cannot be dissociated from military and economic power.'<sup>52</sup> There *is* room in the middle for some of the 'cosmopolitan aerobics' for which Ken Booth called last year over human rights,<sup>53</sup> so long as we have a clear sense of what may be feasibly expected from whom, and of what dangers as well as gains may be expected from the revival of an idealist approach to international relations.

### Reappraisal

The myriad forces which I have summarized under the heading of 'world opinion' have an important and independent part to play at their various levels. Although it would be absurd to claim too much for the idea, without something like world opinion there is an analytical hole in our explanations of many issues of international politics. The world opinion held up as a beacon for the future by Woodrow Wilson is, perhaps, a figment of the imagination, a justly neglected concept. Yet decision-makers through the twentieth century have continued to have recourse to it, or something comparable, in terms which suggest a certain wariness as well as an eye for the main chance of manipulation and massage.

World opinion is, therefore, not an airy fiction which dissolves when exposed to power. It lives on in the minds of decision-makers, whose environment is never merely material. Even if you accept, as I do, that political ideas always need to be understood in their historical context, that context will always involve certain dominant notions which either motivate or inhibit the actors of the day. These ideas may be classic abstractions like 'national self-determination', or even metaphysical goals like 'redemption', but they can also be conceptualizations of how politics functions, and in the twentieth century that has meant internationally, as well as locally and nationally. 'World opinion' is one of these.

When Michael Donelan once wrote, echoing Wilson, that 'all is thought ... it is opinion which rules the world,'<sup>54</sup> he was thinking of the ultimately philosophical character of all human action. My claim is narrower, more empirical, but still ambitious. It is that the 'reality' of international relations of

<sup>52</sup> E. H. Carr, *The twenty years' crisis 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1989; 2nd edn of 1946 repr.), p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> Booth, 'Human wrongs', p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> 'Introduction' to Michael Donelan, ed., *The reason of states: a study in international political theory* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 11.

which we continually speak is in practice immensely hard to grasp, and it depends in part on where we are located. The politicians tread boldly and assume they can identify it; but they tend to hear the echo of their own voices, or at most that of the voices of other statespersons like themselves. Their world opinion is the babble emanating from the community of states. Nonetheless, they too are human beings, and most would probably agree (in principle) with Cicero, who said that 'to disregard what the world thinks of us is not only arrogant but utterly shameless.' Ordinary citizens are often understandably confused about who is speaking for whom, and with what authority. Their world opinion is largely that made by themselves, especially where organized transnationally, but intertwined with the standard *domestic* public opinion which focuses on their own government and its actions in the world. Academics specializing in IR begin with what is by now a fairly clear-cut *mappa mundi* on which there is a small place for the parliamentary life of states, whether in international organizations or expressed through publicity. But they also increasingly spend time trying to decipher a faint image of another kind of international community from that of relations between states, that is, an immanent community of individual human beings, barely visible under the dominant image of states, but indisputably there, like the image on the Turin Shroud, and with the same doubts as to its origin.

We should be sceptical of attempts to talk up international public opinion. But equally we should be willing to acknowledge the existence of multiple world opinions, and to foster an environment where they may flourish. Both the communities I have been talking about, of states and of peoples, will be the healthier for real and vigorous debate. Whatever the failings (and they are many) of the first, the current state-system, the counterfactual must always be faced: are the opinion-forming institutions of diplomacy, of international law, of the UN, so fraudulent that we could face their disappearance without a chill of fear for the future? While states continue to exist, we need more effective exchanges, more mutual obligations between them, and more attempts to build on such sense of community as now exists after the painful efforts of two centuries; not dismissive injunctions to start all over again from scratch. The idea of community inherently involves notions of reputation, opinion, dialogue and judgement, even if—as all domestic communities show—it is too much to expect a universally shared morality.

The elements of opinion and judgement in the world of states should therefore be played up, in order to maximize the extent to which governments are forced to turn outwards and become drawn into the language of mutual obligations. But further than this, the bridge between states and that other community, of people interacting despite states, should be considerably reinforced. The cosmopolitan, transnational world of people is generating more and more world opinions that are difficult to gainsay. The criticisms made of internationalism and globalism are powerful, from Milward's stress on how European states have used regional cooperation to rescue themselves, to

ecological opposition to the juggernaut of free trade, to Gellner's warning against 'bloodless cosmopolitanism'.<sup>55</sup> But once again, in the cold light of assessment, few of us—even when dismayed by Rupert Murdoch's cultural depredations—would welcome restrictions on the free movement of ideas, films, books, tourists, radio waves and all the other things which make possible the expression of transnational opinions. We increasingly treasure our abilities to step out of the state cages to which we have become accustomed, not only to interact directly, but also to subject governments to increasingly effective constraints. 1913–14 may have taught us harsh lessons about the limits of internationalism, but Auschwitz and the Gulag have spurred us to absorb these lessons and to find new ways of cutting the state down to size. In doing so we are aided by the changing conditions of modern life.

Ultimately, neither governments nor the barons of business can manage or control the anarchical flood of material which percolates through borders in the state system, even those as heavily policed as Burma's is and Northern Ireland's was. I have argued elsewhere that while domestic public opinion has few tangible levers on decision-makers it still acts as a 'notional constraint', through the law of anticipated reactions, and this interpretation can be extended to the level of world opinion.<sup>56</sup> State decision-makers listen to what their peers say and also to a generalized tumult of other voices filtered through the media, their own domestic politics and international organizations of various types. What they then actually hear is partly the result of their own predispositions and values. It will never be anything so clear-cut as the 'conscience of mankind', and engagement with international opinion will always be a dialectical process, but it may steadily be leading them to confront an ever wider set of concerns—perhaps even obligations—than those of the instrumental and the sectional. Whether national politicians wish it or not, whether in the short run they look beyond the opinion of other states or not, in the longer run they cannot avoid being enmeshed in a process of historical change. Their current 'reality' is that of global dialogue *as well as* the national and regional, of transnational activities *as well as* intergovernmentalism, of the external environment *as well as* the domestic, of ideas *as well as* guns and dollars. Any state which chose to use a nuclear weapon would face a torrent of denunciations at all levels and an immediate world crisis in consequence. They could not confine discussion to the quiet world of formal diplomacy, just as in

<sup>55</sup> Alan Milward, *The European rescue of the nation-state* (London: Routledge, 1992); Joseph Wayne Smith, *The remorseless working of things: Aids and the global crisis. An ecological critique of internationalism* (Bedford Park, South Australia: Kalgoorlie Press, 1992), in which he attacks Michael Walzer's cavalier remark that 'if, driven by famine in the densely populated lands of Southeast Asia, thousands of people were to fight their way into an Australia otherwise closed to them, I doubt that we should want to charge the invaders with aggression'; Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of liberty: civil society and its rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p. 112.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Hill, *The decision-making process in relation to British foreign policy, 1938–41*, DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1978

*World opinion and the empire of circumstance*

trying to cope with AIDS or environmental damage they are reliant on the opinions and behaviour of millions of people outside even the concept of 'control'. Equally, there is little these millions can do without the mobilizing power of governments and interstate cooperation. We are all in the same (life)boat.

The two kinds of international community come together at the points where decision-makers and citizens face the same great moral and political choices of the day. John Vincent was keenly aware of this fact and was one of the few to move easily and imaginatively across the analytical divide. He knew that all world opinions are an inherent part of that seamless web he called the 'empire of circumstance'.