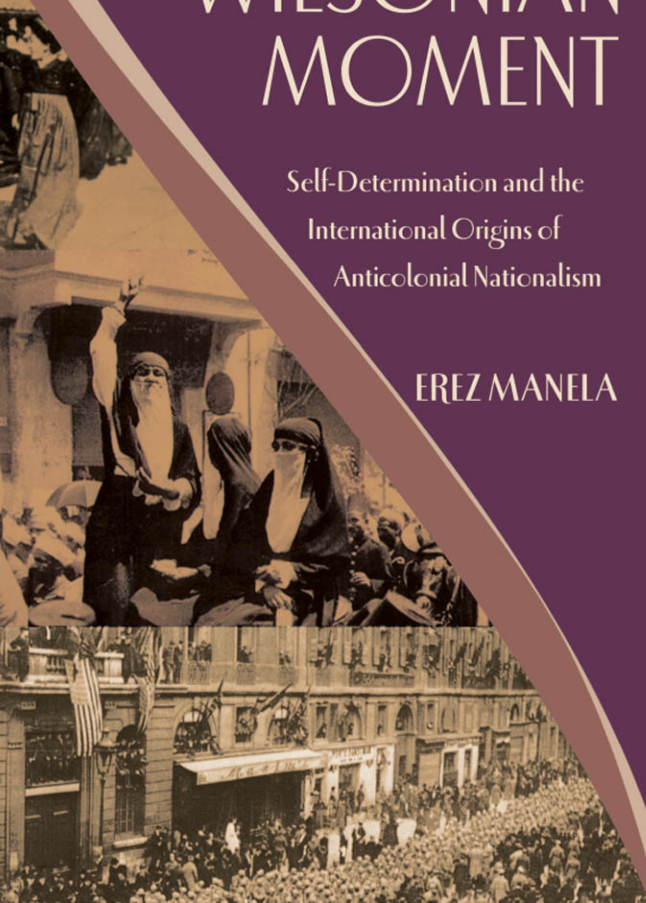
The WILSONIAN MOMENT

Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism

EREZ MANELA



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To

Bracha Manela

and the memory of

Yechiel Moshe Manela

and

Luba and Yitzhak Kornblit

It is not enough, I feel, to refer to these investigations as "Tales of the Old Wrangler."

Granted, the appellation could be stretched to fit; but one might, with as much justification, condense the whole of human history to "Anecdotes of the Famous and the Misguided."

—David Mamet, *Wilson: A Consideration of the Sources*

PREFACE

This book began with an unexpected discovery. I had set out to write a paper on U.S. contacts with Egypt before World War II, since I suspected (and still do) that the single-minded focus on the postwar period in most histories of U.S. relations with the Middle East had left some important stones unturned, even undiscovered. I began going through the State Department files on Egypt starting with World War I, and immediately came across a telegram from the Egyptian nationalist icon Sa'd Zaghlul to Woodrow Wilson, lavishing praise on the U.S. president and beseeching him to support Egypt's struggle for self-determination against Britain. I came upon one such message, and then another, and another. It soon became clear that the vast majority of the material on Egypt in the State Department files between the fall of 1918 and the spring of 1919 consisted of such documents: telegrams, letters, petitions, pamphlets, sent to Wilson not only by Zaghlul himself but by a long list of leading politicians, parties, professional organizations, women's groups, student groups, Egyptian organizations abroad, and even private Egyptian citizens, moved to write to the president of the United States as he arrived in Paris for the peace conference.

It was an intriguing discovery. I had seen no mention of this response to Wilson in the histories of Egyptian politics I had read, except perhaps in passing. I still wrote the paper on U.S.-Egyptian contacts in the interwar years,[1] but also mentioned the discovery to a colleague, who in turn told me the famous story about the man who would later become known as Ho Chi Minh, who was in Paris at the time of the conference and also petitioned Wilson for support in the Indochinese struggle against France. But Ho and Zaghlul were not the only anticolonial nationalists in 1919 searching for new allies, languages, and methods in their quests to challenge imperialism. As I read more about this moment in the histories of other colonial societies, what came into focus was a story of a broad anticolonial nationalist upheaval that was inherently international. After all, it could not be an accident that the 1919 Revolution in Egypt, which erupted as the British tried to suppress Zaghlul's activities, occurred simultaneously with the March First movement against Japanese rule in Korea, the launching of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, or nonviolent resistance movement in India, and the anti-imperialist May Fourth movement in China. There was, I found, much already written about each event within the respective national historiographies, but no substantial attempt to place them all together within a single field of vision, to frame them, as I have come to see them, as component parts of a single historical moment.

There is, of course, no shortage of writings on the international history of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.[2] This literature, however, tends to focus on the perspectives of the great powers and the problems of the European

settlement that occupied much of the conference. Since historians have generally followed the priorities and interests of the leading peace negotiators themselves, far less has been written about the perceptions and actions of the peoples in large swaths of the colonial or non-European world. The historical treatment of those extra-European issues that did receive a measure of attention at the peace table, such as the post-Ottoman settlement in the Middle East, has also emphasized great power perspectives and actions and minimized the agency of local actors.[3] Accounts of the international history of 1919 have said even less—in fact, often nothing—about the experiences of peoples in regions that the great power leaders did not discuss during the peace negotiations, such as India, Egypt, Korea, or French Indochina.[4] In the standard narrative of the peace conference, non-Western regions and peoples figure most often as inert masses of territory and humanity that the great powers carved up in an unprecedented expansion of imperialism.

Similar gaps exist, not surprisingly, in the literature on the U.S. role in the First World War and at the peace conference, with most of it focused on the interactions between the United States and its principal allies.[5] The impact of Wilsonian rhetoric in Europe has gotten some attention, but the perspectives of those beyond the continent remain largely absent.[6] Despite the central role that many authors assign to Wilson in the history of U.S. relations with the world—one described the past one hundred years as a "Wilsonian century," and another called Wilson "the hinge" of twentieth-century American foreign policy—Wilson's impact and image in much of the world remains unexplored.[7] Little wonder, then, that one recent survey of the literature, which emphasized the anti-imperial strain in Wilson's wartime thinking, concluded that "new studies of the expectations and disappointments generated by Wilsonian rhetoric are sorely needed,"[8] and another has noted that understanding how "the call for self-determination fired the imaginations of countless nationalists in the colonial world . . . is the most fertile ground for further writing about Wilsonianism."[9]

Such observations are part of the growing call among historians to "internationalize" the history of the United States.[10] Most of the recent work that has risen to this challenge has interpreted the task as showing how the impact of the world at large has been reflected in American history; that is, how aspects of the American historical experience, whether political, social, or cultural, unfolded within and have been shaped by a broader international context.[11] But there is another possible meaning, less often pursued, to the call to internationalize U.S. history, which is to examine how the United States has been reflected in the world, in the histories of other societies. This perspective is represented, for example, in recent work on the histories of anti-Americanism in regions such as Latin America or the Middle East.[12] But anti-Americanism is but one facet of the mirror that the world has placed

before America. As the history of what I call the "Wilsonian moment" in the colonial world shows, a positive, even idealized image of America has been no less, and perhaps more influential in the history of the American impact on the world.[13] Moreover, in historical experience the attitudes of anti- and pro-Americanism are often closely related. As the history of the Wilsonian moment also shows, the roots of the former are firmly planted in the latter, feeding as they do on the fluctuating but ever-present gap between the promise of America's rhetoric and ideals and the realities of its policies and practices.

Thinking about the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world also provides an unusual perspective on the history of anticolonialism and decolonization, surely among the most important historical processes of the twentieth century. Much of the history of anticolonial movements has been written as if it occurred solely within the boundaries of the emerging nation, or of the imperial enclosure from which it emerged. Thus, the history of the Indian nationalist movement is written as part of Indian history, or of British imperial history; the history of Chinese nationalism as part of the history of China, and so on. The circular logic of this practice is easy to expose—Chinese nationalism in a sense "produced" China, and is therefore part of Chinese history—but it has not been easy to transcend. Nationalist histories have, of course, been challenged vigorously by historians of postcolonial societies, but such projects have tended to question the national and imperial frameworks by adopting subnational perspectives; that is, to historicize and denaturalize the national enclosure by breaking it down to its component parts, rather than by showing how it was forged in the first place within the broader context of international events.[14]

When we expand our field of vision and place anticolonial nationalist histories within an international context, it is easy to see, as Prasenjit Duara observed, that "after World War I, the circumstances for decolonization were generated as much from the international situation as any other."[15] This was not just due to the emergence of revisionist powers like the United States and the Soviet Union, but also, perhaps no less importantly, due to the establishment, for the first time, of international institutions and norms that allowed, indeed invited anticolonial nationalists to challenge colonial powers in an external arena, circumventing and thereby weakening the imperial relationship. This is why, as we will see, Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India in 1919, was so worried over the admission of India into the League of Nations as a founding member, and why the Indian nationalist B. G. Tilak was so hopeful over the same event, despite the fact that Indian representation there remained under full British control. Though the League and its mandate system have traditionally been viewed as little more than fig leaves for empire, historians are now beginning to explore the importance of the notion that they introduced, that colonial powers were answerable to institutions and

mechanisms higher than themselves, a notion that would evolve in the postwar decades into a powerful tool for undermining the legitimacy and therefore the viability of the arrangements of empire.[16]

Once we remove the Eurocentric lens through which the international history of 1919—and indeed, international history in general, especially prior to the Second World War—has most often been viewed, central events and experiences pertaining to non-European peoples come into focus, both enhancing our view of the international history of the period and illuminating those events and experiences themselves in a new light. Geoffrey Barraclough suggested some time ago that the shift away from the West as the focal point of modern history is one of the central features of the twentieth century, and close attention should therefore be paid to the rise of non-Western actors as active participants in world affairs. Examining contemporary history from non-Western perspectives, he wrote, "cuts into the past at a different angle," crossing traditional lines of inquiry, casting "doubts on the adequacy of the old patterns" and suggesting "the need for a new ground plan." Among other things, he said, it illuminates the transition from what he called the "old world" to the "new world" of international relations—from a world of empires to one of nation-states—a transition that acquired "a separate identity and an existence of its own" by 1918.[17] It is with the emergence of this new world into its own that this book is centrally concerned.

With a project of this scope I have inevitably accumulated even more than the usual share of debts in the course of the research and writing. The numerous research trips I made to far-flung archives on several continents would not have been possible without generous funding from many sources, including International Security Studies at Yale, the Dan David Prize scholarship, the George C. Marshall/Baruch Fellowship, the W. Stull Holt Fellowship of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale, the John Perry Miller Fund at Yale, and the Clark/Cooke Fund at Harvard. Much of the work of revising and preparing the manuscript for publication was done during a sabbatical year funded by grants from the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Both International Security Studies at Yale and the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard provided welcoming intellectual communities at critical stages of the work, and for this I thank them.

Numerous archivists and librarians facilitated my research. The staff at the Academia Sinica in Taipei maintained their cheer in the face of my Mandarin and went beyond the call of duty in helping me to decipher some hastily scrawled characters in hand-written missives of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. At the National Archives of India they spared no effort in tracking down errant

documents, and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, with peacocks roaming the grounds, was perhaps the most charming archive I have worked in; the only possible competitor was the French Army archive in Vincennes, housed in a grand chateau on the outskirts of Paris. The archivists at the U.K. National Archives in Kew and the British Library's India Office Records were unfailingly helpful and efficient, as were those at the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and at the Library of Congress. My appreciation also goes to the staff at the French Foreign Ministry archive in the Quai d'Orsay, and at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, the University of California–Berkeley, the University of Missouri–Columbia, the Hoover Institution at Stanford, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, and the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.

Opportunities to present my research to scrutiny have been invaluable to the development and refinement of my ideas throughout the course of the project. I thank the organizers, panelists, and audiences at numerous forums, including the SHAFR annual meetings in 2000 and 2003, the international history colloquia at Yale and Harvard, the Graduate Conference on International History at Harvard, the China workshop at Yale, and the Korea Institute workshop at Harvard. My work has benefited from the hospitality and critical acumen of Wm. Roger Louis and the British Studies seminar at the University of Texas at Austin; Peter Feaver and the Triangle Institute for Security Studies at Duke University; Mark Mazower and the Center for International History at Columbia University; Mike Reynolds and the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University; Eric Vettel and the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library in Staunton, Virginia; Jun Furuya and the Symposium on Rethinking American Studies in Tokyo, Japan; and last but not least, of the Global History Network, run by Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier in Germany and the United States.

The history departments at Yale, where I was a student, and at Harvard, where I now teach, have been exemplary homes for my intellectual pursuits. I am grateful to the many colleagues who have offered advice, support, and intellectual stimulation, including Sven Beckert, David Blackbourn, Sugata Bose, Vince Brown, Nancy Cott, Mark Elliott, Niall Ferguson, Andy Gordon, Akira Iriye, Mary Lewis, Charles Maier, Terry Martin, and Trygve Throntveit. John Milton Cooper and Thomas Knock welcomed me into the community of Wilson scholars and offered constant encouragement. Betsy Bartlett, Gregg Brazinsky, Mark Caprio, Israel Gershoni, Durba Ghosh, Leonard Gordon, Barbara Keys, Susan Pedersen, Mona Russell, and Jeremi Suri each read parts of the manuscript in its various incarnations and made countless helpful suggestions. I am especially grateful to those generous souls who took the time to read the entire text and offer detailed comments, including David Armitage, Elizabeth Borgwardt, William Keylor, James Kloppenberg, Frank

Ninkovich, Daniel Sargent, and Jay Winter. Lien-Hang Nguyen kept up morale over countless cups of coffee, Matthew Connelly lent inspiration over beer and tonic water, and Einat Wilf cast her famously discerning eye. It goes without saying that I bear sole responsibility for the errors that remain.

I am indebted to John Lewis Gaddis, without whom the project would have never been conceived, and to Paul Kennedy and Jonathan Spence, who supported it from the outset and offered steady encouragement and advice. Susan Ferber, my editor, showed great enthusiasm for the book when it was still scattered chapters and has shepherded it with her trademark professionalism and good cheer. I would also like to acknowledge the research assistants who helped with various pressing tasks at the last stages of the work: Noah Hertz-Bunzl, Ying Qian, Kevin Yang, and Nancy Zhang. Some passages in this book appeared previously in articles published in the journals *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12:4 (2001) and the *American Historical Review* 111:5 (2006), and in an essay included in Wm. Roger Louis, ed., *Yet More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005). I thank the respective editors and publishers for their permission to use them here.

Finally, thanks are due to my family. My wife, Noga, and my daughters, Romi, Maya, and Daria, who joined us at various stages of this project, have been a constant source of comfort, humor, and wisdom. My parents, Jonah and Tova Manela, and my siblings, Lilach, Oren, and Alon, all lent encouragement and support over the course of many years. This book is dedicated to my grandparents, whose history deserves a book of its own.

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NOTE ON NAMES

In rendering the names of persons and places that originate in non-European languages, I have generally tried to use the transliteration systems that are most common in the recent English-language literature. For Chinese, I used the pinyin system (e.g., Mao Zedong rather than Mao Tse-tung, Shandong rather than Shantung, and Guangzhou, not Canton) and for Arabic, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) system (though without diacritics, except in the bibliography). I made exceptions, however, in cases where this practice would have made familiar names unrecognizable to nonspecialists (e.g., Wellington Koo rather than Gu Weijun) and gave the alternate versions in parentheses at first mention. Names of East Asian persons are given in the Asian order (last name first), except when the "Western" variants are used (e.g., Syngman Rhee).

In the case of Indian names, I have simply given them as they appeared in the English-language sources I used. For names that had alternate spellings in the sources I chose the more prevalent form, but gave the alternate version in parentheses at first occurrence (e.g., Poona and Pune).

The WILSONIAN MOMENT

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Introduction: A Spring of Upheaval

For a brief interval, Wilson stood alone for mankind. Or at least he seemed to stand for mankind. And in that brief interval there was a very extraordinary and significant wave of response to him throughout the earth. So eager was the situation that all humanity leapt to accept and glorify Wilson—for a phrase, for a gesture. It seized upon him as its symbol. He was transfigured in the eyes of men. He ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah. Millions believed him as the bringer of untold blessings; thousands would gladly have died for him. That response was one of the most illuminating events in the early twentieth century. Manifestly the World-State had been conceived then, and now it stirred in the womb. It was alive.

And then for some anxious decades it ceased to stir.

—H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*

In June 1919, Nguyen Tat Thanh, a twenty-eight-year-old kitchen assistant from French Indochina, set out to present a petition to the world leaders then assembled in Paris for the peace conference. The document, entitled "The Claims of the People of Annam," echoed the rhetoric of the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, who had recently emerged in the international arena as a champion of the right of all peoples to self-determination. In the tumultuous months following the end of the First World War, Wilson was hailed around the world as the prophet of a new era in world affairs, one in which justice, rather than power, would be the central principle of international relations. The young man from Indochina, who signed the petition as Nguyen Ai Quoc, or "Nguyen the Patriot," sought a personal audience with the American president to plead his people's case before Wilson. According to some accounts, he even rented a formal morning suit in preparation for the occasion. The meeting, however, did not materialize. Wilson probably never even saw Nguyen's petition, and he certainly did not respond to it. Within less than a year the man, who would later become known to the world as Ho Chi

Minh, adopted Bolshevism as his new creed, and Lenin replaced Wilson as his inspiration on the road to self-determination for his people.[1]

Ho's experience in the wake of the Great War was far from unique. The war, which had begun in August 1914, lasted more than four years and left many millions dead. When the armistice was finally declared on November 11, 1918, millions around the world celebrated the end of the carnage and hoped that the peace would bring a different world. The war saw the collapse of several major empires: the Russian empire of the Romanovs, the Austro-Hungarian empire of the Habsburgs, the Ottoman Empire, and the German empire under the Hohenzollerns. It delivered serious blows, too, to some who were among the victors: Britain and France both suffered great losses, human and economic, that left them far weaker than they had been before the war. The United States, on the other hand, was the one major power to emerge from the war more powerful, economically, militarily, and politically. Its material and financial resources had underpinned the Allied war effort, its entry into the war in April 1917 appeared to have tipped the scales in favor of the Allies, and, finally, the armistice agreement had been based on the principles outlined in Wilson's famed Fourteen Points. When the U.S. leader shortly thereafter announced his decision to travel to Europe to participate personally in the peace negotiations—an unprecedented move for a sitting American president—he seemed to be poised to lead the world into a new era in international affairs.

The major leaders who convened for the peace conference in Paris in January 1919 were concerned mainly with fashioning a settlement in Europe. But Europeans were not the only ones who had high hopes for the conference. For colonized, marginalized, and stateless peoples from all over the world—Chinese and Koreans, Arabs and Jews, Armenians and Kurds, and many others—the conference appeared to present unprecedented opportunities to pursue the goal of self-determination. They could now take the struggle against imperialism to the international arena, and their representatives set out for Paris, invited or otherwise, to stake their claims in the new world order. A largely unintended but eager audience for Wilson's wartime rhetoric, they often imagined the president as both an icon of their aspirations and a potential champion of their cause, a dominant figure in the world arena committed, he had himself declared, to the principle of self-determination for all peoples.

Based on these perceptions, groups aspiring to self-determination formed delegations, selected representatives, formulated demands, launched campaigns, and mobilized publics behind them. They composed and circulated a flood of declarations, petitions, and memoranda directed at the world leaders assembled in Paris and directed at public opinion across the world. Many of the petitioners adopted Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination and the equality of nations to formulate their demands and justify their aspirations, both because

they found his language appealing and, more importantly, because they believed it would be effective in advancing their cause. They quoted at length from the president's Fourteen Points address and his other wartime speeches, praised his plan for a League of Nations, and aimed to attract his support for their struggles to attain self-determination.

Hundreds of such documents, many addressed to President Wilson himself, made their way to the Paris headquarters of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace at the Hôtel Crillon, but most got no further than the president's private secretary, Gilbert Close. The president read only a small fraction of them, and he acted on fewer still. The complex and contentious issues of the European settlement were foremost on his mind during his months in Paris, and relations with the major imperial powers—Britain, France, Japan—loomed larger in the scheme of U.S. interests as Wilson saw them than did the aspirations of colonized groups or weak states. Though the dispensation of territories that belonged to the defunct empires—German colonies in Africa and the Pacific, Ottoman possessions in the Arab Middle East—was an important topic in the peace negotiations, the leading peacemakers had no intention of entertaining the claims for self-determination of dependent peoples elsewhere, least of all those that ran against their own interests. To himself and to others, Wilson explained this lapse by asserting that the peace conference already had enough on its plate and that the League of Nations would take up such claims in due time.

Many in the colonial world who had followed Wilson's increasingly dramatic proclamations in the final months of the war, however, came to expect a more immediate and radical transformation of their status in international society. As the outlines of the peace treaty began to emerge in the spring of 1919, it became clear that such expectations would be disappointed and that outside Europe the old imperial logic of international relations, which abridged or entirely obliterated the sovereignty of most non-European peoples, would remain largely in place. The disillusionment that followed the collapse of this "Wilsonian moment" fueled a series of popular protest movements across the Middle East and Asia, heralding the emergence of anticolonial nationalism as a major force in world affairs. Although the principle of self-determination was honored in Paris more in the breach, the events of 1919 established it at the center of the discourse of legitimacy in international relations. Thus, the Wilsonian moment began the process that Hedley Bull called "the expansion of international society" in the twentieth century. It launched the transformation of the norms and standards of international relations that established the self-determining nation-state as the only legitimate political form throughout the globe, as colonized and marginalized peoples demanded and eventually attained recognition as sovereign, independent actors in international society.[2]

This book is an effort to reconstruct the story of the colonial world at the Wilsonian moment. Most historians have told the story of the Paris Peace Conference from the inside out, focusing on the views and actions of the leaders of the great powers of Europe and North America. This book aims to tell it from the outside in, from the perspectives of peoples who were on the margins of the peace conference and of international society more generally. The period on which the narrative centers opened with the U.S. entry into the war in April 1917, when it began to appear that Wilson would play a major role at the peace table, and ended with the conclusion of the Versailles Treaty in June 1919. During this time, Woodrow Wilson's vision for the postwar world was disseminated to a growing global audience, and, when peace came, colonial peoples moved to claim their place in that world on the basis of Wilson's proclamations. The crucial period—the Wilsonian moment itself—lasted from the autumn of 1918, when Allied victory appeared imminent and Wilson's principles seemed destined to shape the coming new world order, until the spring of 1919, as the terms of the peace settlement began to emerge and the promise of a Wilsonian millennium was fast collapsing.

The use of the phrase the "Wilsonian moment" to describe this eventful time does not suggest that Wilson alone conceived or articulated the vision that became so intimately associated with him. Others, including the British prime minister David Lloyd George and, much more forcefully, the Russian Bolshevik leaders V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, had preceded Wilson in advocating a peace settlement based on the principle of self-determination. Nor does the term imply that rhetoric alone was responsible for creating the far-reaching expectations that so many entertained in the wake of the war. The experiences of the war itself, with its unprecedented decimation of human lives and the myriad political, social, and economic dislocations it caused, served as the crucial context for the articulation and dissemination of the Wilsonian message and shaped the perceptions and responses to it. Nevertheless, the term the "Wilsonian moment" captures the fact that, during this period, the American president became for millions worldwide the icon and most prominent exponent of the vision, which many others shared, of a just international society based on the principle of self-determination. His name, and in many cases also his image, came to symbolize and encapsulate those ideas, and Wilson appeared, for a brief but crucial moment, to be the herald of a new era in international affairs.

In retrospect, of course, we know that the Wilsonian moment ended in ignominious collapse, its promise fading into bitter disillusion. But if we are to see the events of the time in their proper context, we must suspend for a while this retrospective knowledge. It may be tempting, for example, to construe the ideological essence of 1919 as a clash between Wilsonian and communist internationalism; "Wilson vs. Lenin" is the influential phrase that Arno

Mayer coined some decades ago.[3] But while the Wilson versus Lenin framework is helpful, as Mayer used it, for understanding the struggle over the European Left at the time, it cannot be extended to the colonial world in 1919. Socialist ideas were influential among some colonial intellectuals at the time, and the Russian Bolsheviks also used the language of self-determination, but until late 1919 Wilson's words carried far greater weight in the colonial world than Lenin's. The United States, after all, was a leading world power whose intervention in the war had appeared to tip the scales in favor of the Allies; Wilson had set the terms of the armistice and seemed poised to do the same for the peace settlement. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were struggling for control of a land that was devastated by the war and were engaged in a brutal civil war whose outcome was far from certain. It was only after the collapse of the Wilsonian moment and the stabilization of the Soviet state that Lenin's influence in the colonial world began to eclipse Wilson's.

Wilson's promise of a new world order captured imaginations across the world. In the wake of a war whose consequences were widely felt, his words captured the attention not only of political elites but also of much broader publics, even if their meanings and implications varied considerably among different groups. Some, of course, remained skeptical, and they were soon joined by many others who grew disillusioned with their erstwhile hero as the developments in Paris and elsewhere failed to fulfill their expectations. But for a while, from mid-1918 to the early spring of 1919, the future of international society seemed to belong to Wilson's vision and to depend on his influence as the leading figure in world affairs. The Wilsonian moment, therefore, should be examined and understood as an international phenomenon not because every individual on the face of the planet was aware of Wilson's rhetoric, but because the scope of its dissemination and import transcended the usual geographic enclosures of historical narratives.

Quite apart from Wilson's own intentions when he uttered the words of the Fourteen Points address or his other well-known speeches, different groups and individuals adopted the language of self-determination to varying extents and adapted it to varying circumstances. Perhaps most famously, it was used by many of the national groups that emerged from the wreckage of the Habsburg and Romanov empires in East-Central Europe, and helped shape the postwar settlements that created Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as independent states.[4] But the language of self-determination was also adopted by groups that made claims directed at the victorious powers, either to demand political independence, as in Ireland, or to ask for recognition of rights within an existing polity, as with leading African-American activists like W. E. B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter.[5] The adoption of the language of self-determination, moreover, was

not limited to groups that saw themselves as oppressed or marginalized. In fact, as the H. G. Wells quote that opens this chapter testifies, a wide array of progressives and radicals in Europe and North America entertained for a time near-millennial expectations for a more peaceful world order based on Wilsonian principles.[6]

The focus of this book is on the specific significance of the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world, defined broadly as the dependent or semi-dependent territories that encompassed at the time almost all of Asia and Africa.[7] Even within these narrower geographical and conceptual bounds, however, an effort to cover the colonial world in its entirety would have yielded either a broad, general synthesis or else required a multivolume work of encyclopedic proportions. On the other hand, telling the story of the Wilsonian moment in only one region or within a single group would have failed to capture fully the international context of the experiences of colonial peoples at the time, and would have forgone the insights that a broad, integrated perspective can provide. In order to combine fine-grained detail with a broad perspective, therefore, the book focuses on the experiences of four groups: Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Koreans. It recounts the responses of these four emergent nations to the Wilsonian moment, probing their evolving perceptions of its challenges and opportunities and tracing its impact on their rhetoric, actions, and goals. It also reconstructs the sprawling international campaigns they launched, in which diasporic communities and unprecedented popular mobilizations both played important roles, and relates them to the broad, transformative protest movements that erupted in all four places in the spring of 1919. Nationalism, as an ideology and as a form of political practice, evolved conceptually and historically within an international context, and it cannot be fully understood outside that context.

There were, of course, many differences among these societies in their histories, structures, and relationships to imperialism. Still, Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Koreans shared important elements of historical condition and experience. All four societies had long histories as integrated socioeconomic and political entities and well-established elites imbued with consciousness of distinct cultural and historical identities. Moreover, in each of these four societies there had developed by 1914 influential groups of literate, socially mobile individuals, whose members were conversant in Western languages and ideas and had begun to develop and circulate notions of national identity articulated in modern idioms.[8] The Wilsonian moment presented these elites with unprecedented opportunities to advance claims in the name of these emerging national identities and thus bolster and expand their legitimacy both at home and abroad. The language of self-determination and the international forum afforded by the peace conference prompted nationalist leaders to rethink their strategies, redefine their goals, and galvanize larger domestic

constituencies than ever before behind campaigns for self-determination. In the spring of 1919, sweeping protest movements against imperialism erupted almost simultaneously in all four societies: the May Fourth movement in China, the launching of Gandhi's nonviolent resistance movement in India, the 1919 Revolution in Egypt, and the March First movement in Korea.

In all four societies, and not only there, the period between 1917 and 1920 saw a sharp escalation of resistance to imperial penetration and control and the emergence or realignment of institutions and individuals that would play central roles in subsequent anticolonial struggles. In Egypt, Sa'd Zaghlul, a veteran political figure who before the war had long worked within the British-controlled political system, now established a delegation that demanded the opportunity to put before the peace conference a claim for Egyptian independence. To lead this campaign, Zaghlul, who is remembered in Egypt as the "Father of the Nation," established a new political party that came to dominate Egyptian politics in the interwar years.[9] A similar shift from accommodation to confrontation occurred in India's relationship with the empire during the same period, as the Indian National Congress, which before the war adhered to moderate positions toward the empire, became a vehicle for mobilizing resistance to it. By 1920, the Congress came under the control of Mahatma Gandhi, who had himself shifted in 1919 from a position of firm if critical support for Indian membership in the British empire to one of determined opposition to it. The newfound radicalism of the Gandhian Congress augured an era of nationalist struggle that culminated in the dissolution of British rule in 1947.[10]

In China, the May Fourth protests that erupted in response to Chinese disillusion with the Wilsonian promise unleashed broad currents of change in the realms of thought, culture, literature, and politics. In the wake of May Fourth, protests against foreign influence in China broadened and intensified. Among the intellectual and political classes, the erstwhile admiration for the liberal ideals advanced by Wilson was widely replaced with a growing interest in other ideologies as models for building a strong Chinese nation and establishing its status and dignity internationally. And in Korea, too, the March First movement, which began as an effort to draw the attention of Wilson and the peace conference to Korean claims for independence, escalated and broadened the resistance to Japanese colonial rule. In the Korean case, even more than in the others, diasporic organizations played a crucial role in the movement, establishing a provisional government in exile headed by Syngman Rhee, a long-time independence activist and former acquaintance of Wilson at Princeton University. The provisional government survived, though barely, through the interwar years, and in 1948 the United States helped the tenacious Rhee actually attain the position he had claimed since 1919, the presidency of an independent Korean republic.[11]

As this convergence of transformative events around the spring of 1919 suggests, one of the central features of the Wilsonian moment was its simultaneity across the boundaries of nations, regions, and empires within which the histories of the anticolonial movements of the period are usually enclosed. It was a brief but intense period in which people across the world directed attention and actions toward the drama unfolding in Paris, with the U.S. president as its leading protagonist. In part, the story of the Wilsonian moment is one of the articulation and circulation of ideas, most prominently the idea that all peoples had a right to self-determination and the related notion of a liberal international order structured around a league of nations in which all members would be equal in status if not in power. The emergence of Wilson's ideas about the postwar international order, their gradual articulation and refinement in his wartime rhetoric, and their dissemination—both intentionally through the efforts of U.S. wartime propaganda, and circumstantially through the contemporary infrastructure of global communications, which was dominated by pro-Allied news agencies such as Reuters—are all important components of the story told here.

But this is not only, nor even primarily, an intellectual history, a history of the emergence, articulation, and circulation of ideas. To a greater degree, the story of the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world is one about the role of power, both real and perceived, in the dissemination, adoption, and operationalization—the conversion into purposeful political action—of the new norms of international legitimacy and practice that Wilson championed. For anticolonial nationalists, Wilson's utterances were surely attractive as well as, to some extent, also innovative. The most crucial feature of his utterances, however, was that they came from a man widely viewed at the time as the most powerful leader in the world arena, whose influence on the shape of the postwar international order, it was assumed, would be decisive. Thus, the perception of the stature of the United States as a major world power and of Wilson's commitment to his peace plan were just as important as the content of the president's wartime proclamations in creating the impact of the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world. For a time in 1918 and early 1919, Wilson, who appeared to wield extraordinary leverage over the Allies and enjoy unprecedented popularity among their peoples, seemed to possess both the will and the power to implement his vision.[12]

Wilson himself, it is true, had at best only a vague idea of how the principle of self-determination would be practically implemented even in Europe, and he devoted little attention to its implications elsewhere. Nevertheless, the president's talk about the right to self-determination and his advocacy of the League of Nations implied a new and more equitable model of international relations, and they took on a life of their own, independent of Wilson and his intentions. For colonial nationalists, the acceptance of these

principles as a basis for the armistice and their establishment as central tenets of the coming peace settlement were sufficient reasons to expect great changes in their own positions in international affairs. Wilson, in his wartime addresses, especially those that he delivered in the final months of the war, had couched his principles explicitly in sweeping, universal terms. Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Koreans, and other colonial nationalists saw little reason that they should not apply outside Europe as well as within it.

The Versailles peace is often seen as heralding the apex of imperial expansion, and indeed the empires of the victorious powers, especially the British, French, and Japanese, made significant territorial gains in the wake of the war. Empire, however, cannot survive on territorial control alone. It requires accommodation and legitimacy, at least among a portion of the populations in both the metropole and the periphery.[13] The adoption of the language of self-determination by colonial nationalists, as well as by anti-imperialists in the metropole, weakened these underlying supports of the imperial edifice. It rendered the relationship between imperial powers and subject peoples, as Henri Grimal noted, "markedly different from the idea of timeless domination which had characterized the previous period" and presented a major challenge to the legitimacy and permanence of the imperial order in the international arena.[14] As James Mayall has observed, at Versailles Lloyd George and the French premier, Georges Clemenceau, may have succeeded in the short run in outwitting Wilson in their efforts to protect the interests of their empires. But in an age of advancing popular democracy they could offer no substitute, either domestically or internationally, to the principle of self-determination "as an ordering principle for international society."[15] Rather than bolster or expand the imperial order, the events of 1919 in fact laid the groundwork for its demise.

The First World War itself had no doubt set the stage for the expectations for radical change that spread in its wake. It dealt a severe blow to the power and prestige of the leading imperial powers, and so made it easier for colonial nationalists to challenge them. The war strained the resources of the European powers, exposed as hollow their claims to superior civilization, and decimated the image of Western military invincibility already tarnished by the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905.[16] Moreover, peoples from the periphery who had made significant contributions to the Allied war effort felt it entitled them to a greater voice in their own government and in the international arena. If they could die alongside Europeans, why could they not govern alongside them? Almost a million Indians saw combat in the war and hundreds of thousands of Chinese went to Europe as laborers, and many returned home with new experiences and ideas about rights and freedom.[17] The economic crises and dislocations of the war also contributed to postwar discontent in places like Egypt and India, though this factor did not operate everywhere; in Korea, for example, the war was a time of relative prosperity.

The impact of the war alone, however, cannot explain the events that occurred in its wake in the colonial world. Despite the war's drain on European power and prestige, there was surprisingly little agitation against empire during the war itself, when the imperial powers were militarily most vulnerable, neither did uprisings break out immediately after the war ended. It is true, as a number of historians have noted, that the wartime spectacles of material destruction and moral depravity helped to launch a broad critique of Western civilization among Afro-Asian intellectuals. This insight, however, neglects the widespread if short-lived adulation of that quintessential representative of the West, Woodrow Wilson, as a quasi-millennial figure whose vision could redeem the suffering of the war and usher in a new era of peace.[18] At the time of the armistice in November 1918, nationalists across the colonial world believed that the road to self-determination passed through Paris, and they launched broad campaigns to receive a hearing there. It was only in the spring of 1919, as it became clear that their efforts to claim these rights had failed, that upheaval erupted. Thus, the campaigns to advance demands for self-determination and international equality and the subsequent failure and disillusionment helped launch major anticolonial protest movements and mobilize widespread popular support behind them.

Other factors, political and economic, figured prominently in these postwar anticolonial mobilizations. The burdens of wartime inflation and conscription among Egyptian and Indians, anger about the suspicious death of a former emperor among Koreans, and mounting industrial grievances among the rising Chinese working class were all significant in the respective uprisings of 1919. Those factors can help to account for the prevalence of popular disturbances and for the hostility toward foreign powers or colonial rulers. Alone, however, they do not explain the specific timing, character, and goals of the uprisings. The campaigns for self-determination and equality in the international arena each had roots in internal developments within each society. But they were also intricately enmeshed in the international context of the Wilsonian moment, as the demands that nationalist leaders made on the international forum assembling in Paris channeled a mix of grievances and frustrations into anticolonial uprisings in the cause of self-determination. The campaigns to lodge these demands, and the failure of the great powers to meet or even address them, helped convert the expectations for a new era in international affairs into demonstrations in the streets of Cairo, Delhi, Beijing, Seoul, and elsewhere, and endow those demonstrations with coherent meanings and purposes. The anticolonial revolts of 1919 owed at least as much to the peace as they did to the war.

The international scope of the story of the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world is not merely an artifact of a particular historiographical approach,

and this book should not be read as an exercise that juxtaposes several distinct events for comparative purposes. Rather, its scope reflects the ways that the historical actors themselves perceived their conditions, planned their actions, and proceeded to carry out their plans. Indeed, the Wilsonian moment as it was perceived, experienced, and enacted by colonial peoples was both international and transnational in its scope, if we take "international" to refer primarily to interactions between established nation-states and "transnational" to mean actions and interactions that cross the borders of states but are not necessarily performed by them.[19] It is abundantly clear that Wilson saw himself as acting on a global stage. But an equally important insight, one to which we will return in more detail in the conclusion of the book, is that the anticolonial movements of 1919—commonly viewed in only the context of their respective national histories—profoundly transcended national enclosures in their genesis, conduct, and aims. They were shaped by transnational networks of nationalist activists who imagined themselves as part of a global wave, operated explicitly on an international stage, and aspired to goals that were specifically international; namely, the recognition of the peoples and territories they claimed to represent as self-determining, sovereign nation-states within a new international society whose structure and dynamics would reflect Wilsonian precepts.

In retrospect, it is easy to see that the expectations for a more inclusive international order that Wilson's rhetoric and global stature raised among colonial nationalists went far beyond the president's intentions and even further beyond what he would achieve. But at the time, most Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, and Korean nationalists, along with the millions who lined the streets in the capitals of Europe to cheer Wilson as he drove by in his carriage, believed that the peace conference would transform international order in ways that would help them gain the right to self-determination. They were neither naive victims of Wilson's hypocrisy nor, outside a few exceptions, radicals intent on revolutionary transformation, but rather savvy political actors who, keenly aware of their weakness vis-à-vis the British and Japanese imperial projects, sought to harness Wilson's power and rhetoric to the struggle to achieve international recognition and equality for their nations. They moved with dispatch and energy to seize the opportunities that the Wilsonian moment seemed to offer to reformulate, escalate, and broaden their campaigns against empire, and worked to mobilize publics both at home and abroad behind their movements. When it became clear that the postwar settlement would fall far short of these expectations and the visions of international equality that Wilson had evoked collapsed, these mobilized nationalists launched the simultaneous revolts that convulsed the colonial world in the spring of 1919. Despite the title of this book, it is they, and not Wilson, who are the main protagonists of the story that follows.

PART I

The Emergence of the Wilsonian Moment

On December 4th, 1918, Woodrow Wilson, the first president to leave the territory of the United States during his presidency, sailed for France aboard the George Washington, the most powerful man in the world.

—John Dos Passos, *1919*

Woodrow Wilson, true to biblical form, was a reluctant prophet, and his rise to the status of the herald of a new order did not begin until several years into the Great War. When the conflict began with a cascade of declarations of war between the European powers between July 28 and August 4, 1914, Wilson, though caught by surprise, nevertheless immediately announced that the United States would follow its long-standing tradition and observe strict neutrality in the conflict. Drawing on his long-standing notions of civilized behavior, Wilson declared on August 3 that America, unlike the other powers, would maintain its "self possession" and "calmness of thought." He called on the American people to remain neutral "in fact as well as in name" and to preserve "the dignity of self-control" so that they could serve the cause of peace.[1] For much of the first year of the war, Wilson ignored the critics, led by former president Theodore Roosevelt and Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who called for building up the armed forces of the United States in the name of "preparedness." Even as Japan entered the war on the Allied side in late August, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers in November, and Italy, initially neutral, joined the Allies in May 1915 after receiving secret promises for extensive territorial gains, the United States remained staunchly neutral.

The German submarine campaign against merchant shipping in the Atlantic, which culminated in the sinking of the British steamship *Lusitania* in May 1915 that killed 128 Americans, forced a change in the administration's position. Wilson now moved to implement preparedness, but he still resisted the calls to throw U.S. support fully behind the Allies. As the fighting increasingly jeopardized U.S. commercial interests he intensified his diplomatic efforts with the belligerents, and by May 1916, he obtained a German promise to restrict its submarine campaign. By then, moreover, Wilson began to inch away from the detached posture and back-channel contacts that had characterized his diplomacy, and started to articulate publicly an ambitious vision for the postwar world. A lasting peace, he said, required a reordering of international society on the basis of the principles of government by consent, the equality of nations, and international cooperation, but his "Peace without Victory" speech of January 1917, the first comprehensive presentation of his plan, met with a cold reception from European governments committed to victory. The following month, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, and news of a German plan to encourage Mexico to wage war on the United States—the famous Zimmermann Telegram—raised a public outcry. After several weeks of pained hesitation, Wilson came before Congress on April 2 to ask for a declaration of war on Germany. He still insisted, however, on standing apart from the European allies, styling the United States an "associated power." In taking the United States to war, Wilson hoped to ensure that he would have a dominant position in the eventual peace conference, a position that would allow him to implement his vision for the postwar restructuring of international relations.