

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Images of international thinkers

Patricia Owens 

Somerville College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Email: [patricia.owens@politics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:patricia.owens@politics.ox.ac.uk)

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## Abstract

This article analyses photographic portraits of three international thinkers – Merze Tate, Margery Perham, and Susan Strange – to shed new light on the intellectual and disciplinary history of International Relations (IR). Photographic portraits are ubiquitous, and feminist intellectual recovery projects lend themselves to photographic representation. But IR's historians have neglected portraits. Drawing together two thriving IR subfields for the first time, visual studies and international intellectual history, this article demonstrates the theoretical and historical gains from analysing portraits of international thinkers. When read alongside other primary and secondary sources, portraits can enable new ways of seeing IR's history and specific thinkers, offering a distinctive and powerful resource for new narratives about the professional, gendered, and racialised contexts of international thought.

**Keywords:** disciplinary history; gender; images; International Thought; portraits

## Introduction

The intellectual and disciplinary history of International Relations (IR) is a flourishing interdisciplinary field. As a corrective to ahistorical ‘canons’ of great thinkers, intellectual and disciplinary historians study past ideas in historical and political context. This work has nuanced accounts of IR's intellectual traditions; challenged the notion of ‘classical’ or ‘canonical’ thinkers; interrogated IR's disciplinary history; and adopted diverse methodologies and different normative and political commitments.<sup>1</sup> Taken as a whole, IR's intellectual and disciplinary historians have introduced new themes, temporalities, and geographies of international thought.

Much of this work has focused on well-known, even canonical thinkers and their wider intellectual milieu.<sup>2</sup> However, more recent cross-disciplinary work often takes the form of recovery history, recuperating the international thought of those hitherto marginalised, particularly women and people of colour.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of recovery history is exactly that, to recuperate thinkers

<sup>1</sup>Ian Hall, *Dilemmas of Decline: British Intellectuals and World Politics, 1945–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Lucian M. Ashworth, *A History of International Thought* (London: Routledge, 2014); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Jan Stöckmann, *The Architects of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>2</sup>Edward Keene, *International Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Robbie Shilliam (ed.), *International Relations and Non-Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2011); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, Kimberly Hutchings, and Sarah C. Dunstan (eds), *Women's International Thought: Towards a New Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Patricia Owens, *Erased: A History of International Thought Without Men* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025).

neglected due to intersectional forms of violence. It makes neglected or misunderstood thinkers visible, often quite literally.

Keisha N. Blain's recent study of Black women internationalists includes 10 individual or group portraits.<sup>4</sup> Owens and Rietzler's edited volume on women's international thought displays 10 photographs.<sup>5</sup> A *Global Studies Quarterly* special issue included 9 portraits of women international thinkers. Immi Tallgren's edited collection, *Portraits of Women in International Law*, exhibited 44.<sup>6</sup> An exhibition in London presented objects and images of women's international thinking, including a dozen photographs.<sup>7</sup> Blogs and Twitter/X posts circulate portraits of thinkers such as Susan Strange.<sup>8</sup>

Portraits are generally a neglected source in IR's intellectual and disciplinary histories, but feminist intellectual recovery projects are clearly drawn to such visual representation. Indeed, the history of modern feminism and photography are inextricably linked. The term *féminisme* was coined in 1839, the same year the photographic process of the daguerreotype was first made publicly available.<sup>9</sup> By the early 20th century, when IR was forming as an intellectual field, new ideas about women's political and intellectual roles were produced and disseminated through the popular medium of photography. Photographs reflected, shaped, and circulated images of the modernist 'new woman' as educated, professional, and internationalist.<sup>10</sup> They could also often challenge racial stereotypes. W. E. B. DuBois compiled a series of photographs of African Americans as 'an anti-racist visual archive' for the 1900 Paris Exposition.<sup>11</sup> The 'nineteenth-century's most photographed American,' Frederick Douglass consistently presented an image of the dignity and power of the Black intellectual.<sup>12</sup> Recent recovery histories build on these visual strategies to introduce new ways to recognise the gendered and racialised histories of international thought.

The recent circulation of images of women international thinkers can be understood as a visual response to the patriarchal and racist history of IR. I read the use of these images as *recovery portraits*. Drawing on photography's evidentiary power, the elementary act of display is a visual assertion of the existence of a thinker, another way of repudiating IR's all white male canon. The non-appearance of women in IR's history is further exposed as an erasure. With its varying forms and functions, there is something particular about the portrait, the drawing, painting, or photograph of a person, that makes it an especially attractive genre of recovery history: subjects are purposefully gazing back, asserting their presence. They offer a documentation of presence with enormous symbolic value. This use of recovery portraits tends towards *recuperative representation*. Once-marginalised figures are reinstated, and the display is intellectually, even emotionally satisfying for those engaged in feminist recovery work.

Yet the clear tendency in IR's recent recovery histories is one of photographic display but not visual analysis. Tallgren's important collection, *Portraits*, probes the significance of portraits in fashioning authority in the international legal profession and reinstates images of some of the erased

<sup>4</sup>Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (eds), *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>6</sup>Immi Tallgren (ed.), *Portraits of Women in International Law: New Names and Forgotten Faces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Special Issue on Women's International Thought, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 3:1 (2023).

<sup>7</sup>LSE Library and WHIT Project, 'Public exhibition on women and the history of international thought', 5 May–2 September 2022, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220705172842/https://www.lse.ac.uk/library/whats-on/exhibitions>.

<sup>8</sup>Nat Dyer, 'Susan Strange: A great thinker or a "journalist"?', Earthrise (5 March 2019), available at: <https://www.earthriseblog.org/susan-strange-a-great-thinker-or-a-journalist/>.

<sup>9</sup>Emma Lewis, *Photography: A Feminist History* (London: Ilex, 2021).

<sup>10</sup>Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup>Shawn Michelle Smith, "'Looking at one's self through the eyes of others': W. E. B. Du Bois's photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition", *African American Review*, 34:4 (2000), pp. 581–99 (p. 581).

<sup>12</sup>John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass* (New York: Liveright, 2015).

but includes little interpretation of the images themselves.<sup>13</sup> Despite being an obvious method of historical and theoretical interpretation, we currently lack a study that interprets images of international thinkers or offers a reflexive account of the feminist desire for recuperative representation. In this regard, international intellectual historians can learn from one of IR's other thriving subfields. To visual studies scholars, photographs are a mine of historical and theoretical knowledge and subjective relations.<sup>14</sup> In IR, scholars have examined, among other things, the international politics of 'iconic' photographic images, the studio photography aesthetic of portraits of Taliban fighters, portraits of famine victims, and how presidential 'selfies' can evoke authenticity and intimacy.<sup>15</sup> Taken together, this work suggests that photographs, including portraits, are part of the way historical meanings and subjects are produced. They are polysemic, with several possible meanings.<sup>16</sup> Their use and interpretation are shaped by the political and personal investments and intellectual projects of photographers, subjects, curators, and viewers.<sup>17</sup>

Building on and extending visual studies to IR's intellectual history, I argue that the use of photographic portraits in recent recovery histories does more than display and represent historical women as biographical subjects. They help to imagine the desired subjects that the recovery project means to discover, women international thinkers. Portraits are also a way in which the *sitter* seeks to craft their own identity and persona. They convey an idea of an individual and their intellectual and political context, how they fashioned themselves through their choice of clothes, posture, body language, facial expression, how they look at the camera, stand or sit, how they perform gender, race, class, and intellectual power. The location, the presence of other objects, and the composition also tell us about the subject and context. When read alongside other primary and secondary sources, portraits can enable different ways of seeing IR's disciplinary and intellectual history, elicit more emotional responses, and offer a distinctive and powerful resource for new narratives about the professional, gendered, and racialised contexts of international thought.

These claims are supported by archival research and analysis of portraits of three thinkers, African American diplomatic historian, Merze Tate (1905–96); the leading white thinker on the late British Empire and decolonisation, Margery Perham (1895–1982); and white British international political economist Susan Strange (1923–1998). The first section shows the necessity and limits of recuperative representation and, drawing on Roland Barthes, outlines the methods for analysing the portraits and explains their selection. The second section analyses the images, beginning with a semiotic analysis of what is most amenable to a recuperative reading. I develop themes of trailblazing and racial representation; physical and sexual energy and professional success; and the discourse of the 'exceptional' woman. I then examine elements in the portraits that are more personally resonant and that challenge elements of the recuperative reading, allowing the development of additional themes of success/failure; whiteness and spinsterhood; and motherhood and

<sup>13</sup>Tallgren, 'Re-curating the portrait gallery of international law', in Tallgren (ed.), *Portraits of Women in International Law: New Names and Forgotten Faces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 3–44.

<sup>14</sup>Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Verso, 2000 [1980]); Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2010). For early work on photography in IR, see David Campbell, 'Salgado and the Sahel: Documentary photography and the imaging of famine', in Felix Debrix and Cynthia Weber (eds), *Rituals of Mediation: International Politics and Social Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 69–96; Lene Hansen, 'How images make world politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib', *Review of International Studies*, 41:2 (2014), pp. 1–26; Roland Bleiker (ed.), *Visual Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018); Lene Hansen and Johan Spanner, 'National and post-national performances at the Venice Biennale: Site-specific seeing through the photo essay', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 49:2 (2021), pp. 305–36.

<sup>15</sup>Hansen, 'How images'; Jennifer Chao, 'Portraits of the enemy: Visualizing the Taliban in a photography studio', *Media, War & Conflict*, 12:1 (2019), pp. 30–49; Bleiker, 'Mapping visual global politics', in Bleiker (ed.), *Visual Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1–29 (p. 10); Håvard Rustad Markussen, 'Inscribing security: The case of Zelensky's selfies', *Review of International Studies* (2023), pp. 1–19. FirstView.

<sup>16</sup>Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the image', in *Image, Music, Text*, selected and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 32–51 (p. 39).

<sup>17</sup>Graham Clarke (ed.), *The Portrait in Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992); Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

gender performance. The conclusion summarises the main findings, relating them to broader questions about recovery history and methods and wider contemporary efforts to address legacies of empire in British IR.

### Beyond recuperative representation

Given the magnitude of the erasure, recent scholarship on women's international thought has focused on the basic and necessary work of recovery and analysis. That is, identifying women thinkers, reading their work, arguing for its recognition, and showing its significance for understanding IR's history and current organisation.<sup>18</sup> Much of this new work adopts the long-standing feminist strategy of visual representation to assert the significance of those recovered.<sup>19</sup> Think of this as a form of recuperative representation, a concept borrowed from but distinct from Jane Haggis's use of 'recuperative history' in her account of 1990s scholarship on white women and colonialism.<sup>20</sup> Those recuperative histories, Haggis claimed, included white women's 'voices' but did little to challenge dominant accounts of either colonialism or the category of 'women'.

In this article, recuperative representation refers to the visual display of images as recovery portraits, that is, primarily for the purpose of reinstating *women's presence* where they were assumed to be absent. Often, the image appears alongside an account of the subject as a trailblazer, a figure of intellectual stature who has overcome gendered and/or racialised oppression.<sup>21</sup> To some extent, recuperative representation is essential, part of the very nature of recovery history. Given the degree to which women's ideas have been erased, and repeatedly so, generations of feminists have been forced, again and again, to recover and reassert the value of women's intellectual production.<sup>22</sup> Insisting on the presence and groundbreaking role of a thinker might be the most immediate and appropriate reading.

This is a compelling initial interpretation of **Figure 1**, an image of Merze Tate at Oxford taken between 1932 and 1935. Historian and Tate biographer Barbara D. Savage recorded a short audio-visual description of the image for a public exhibition, describing Tate as embodying 'pride and success'.<sup>23</sup> Tate was about to become the first African American to earn a graduate degree at Oxford. Since women and people of colour are largely missing from IR's canon, there is something recuperative about an image of Tate in an iconic location. Savage's account emerges in the context of projects that demonstrate Tate's exceptional status and intellectual achievements and which situate her within a wider cohort of neglected thinkers.<sup>24</sup>

To look beyond recuperative representation does not necessarily undermine the initial reading but introduces further layers of interpretation. There are at least three additional interpretative strategies to supplement (or critique) such a reading. First, in a move reflected in the difference between women's and gender history, and since gender itself is performatively constituted, we can

<sup>18</sup>J. Ann Tickner and Jacqui True, 'A century of International Relations feminism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:2 (2018), pp. 221–33; Owens, Rietzler, Hutchings, Dunstan, *Women's International Thought*.

<sup>19</sup>Owens and Rietzler, *Women's International Thought*; *Global Studies Quarterly* 2023; Tallgren, *Portraits*.

<sup>20</sup>Jane Haggis, 'White women and colonialism: Towards a non-recuperative history', in Clare Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 45–75.

<sup>21</sup>Barbara D. Savage, 'Beyond illusions: Imperialism, race and technology in Merze Tate's international thought', in Owens and Rietzler (eds), *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 266–85.

<sup>22</sup>Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983).

<sup>23</sup>Barbara D. Savage, 'Poster audio guide', Public Exhibition on Women and the History of International Thought, 2022, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220705172842/https://www.lse.ac.uk/library/whats-on/exhibitions>. Savage was invited to record a short audio-visual description of the Tate image to assist visually impaired visitors. Joanna Wood and Katharina Rietzler, 'Curating Women's International Thought' (9 May 2022), available at: <https://whit.web.ox.ac.uk/article/curating-womens-international-thought>].

<sup>24</sup>Savage, 'Beyond'; also see Barbara D. Savage, *Merze Tate: The Global Odyssey of a Black Woman Scholar* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024).



**Figure 1.** Merze Tate. Courtesy WMU Archives & Regional History collection.

examine how the subject performs their gendered and racialised identity.<sup>25</sup> This can shed further light on a thinker's self-fashioning but also the gendered and racialised history of the wider IR field and the imperialism in which it began. Second, we can look for elements that might resist or qualify an initial recuperative reading. The subject may indeed be a trailblazer, but some elements of the image may point to a different way of telling this story. Third, we can ask reflexive questions about why an image may be particularly resonant to different viewers. There is an obvious gap between the subject and their representation, and between how the subject sought to represent themselves and subjective responses to the image. We might ask why a recuperative reading is desirable in feminist recovery work and how this shapes the way an image is deployed as a critique of IR's history.<sup>26</sup>

One of the key texts for understanding affective responses to photographs is French philosopher Roland Barthes's photo essay *Camera Lucida*, a meditation on his reaction to the death of his mother.<sup>27</sup> First published in 1980, *Camera Lucida* theorised how specific photographs become personally meaningful by drawing a distinction between two concepts, the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is the semiotic analysis of what is present in a photograph, interpreted with knowledge of its social and historical contexts. For example, Tate as a Black woman in Oxford wearing academic dress in the foreground of iconic buildings can be understood in the context of what we know about IR's racist histories and of Tate herself. The *studium* allows for the recuperative reading: *Merze Tate as trailblazer*. The *studium* reconciles the photograph 'with society' and produces the cultural understanding of what the photograph might represent.

For Barthes, the *punctum*, in contrast, is a detail in the photograph, perhaps something off centre, that elicits a more emotional and subjective but nonetheless analytical response unrelated to the cultural codes of the *studium*. A 'photograph's *punctum*', Barthes wrote 'is the accident which

<sup>25</sup> Joan W. Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> On positionality/reflexivity in IR, see Jack L. Amoureux and Brent J. Steele (eds), *Reflexivity and International Relations: Positionality, Critique, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Barthes, *Camera*.



pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).<sup>28</sup> In the image of Tate, the *punctum* might be the iron railings, her bicycle, her tight grip on its handlebars, her cap, or some other detail. The specific *punctum* depends entirely on the individual viewer. But it is the 'co-presence' of *studium* and *punctum*, cultural and personal, that makes certain photographs so potent.

One criticism of *Camera Lucida* is that Barthes was unable to experience or convey the *punctum* outside his own positionality and inclinations.<sup>29</sup> According to Shawn Michelle Smith, Barthes's reading of photographs with African American subjects were informed by his 'deep-seated cultural anxieties about race and sexuality'.<sup>30</sup> Just as photographs are not an unmediated form of representation, there is no affective response that is not mediated by social and political position, in this case Barthes's own cultural knowledge and position as a French late colonial white male. Nonetheless, the *punctum* that pricked Barthes was still poignant and particular to him, allowing him to make a particular argument, and can be analysed in these terms. With Barthes, then, we may make a distinction between a visual analysis that draws on the cultural (historical, social) codes, the *studium*, and a feature that has particular personal resonance, the *punctum*, which is shaped by political and intellectual investments and knowledge.

Hansen and Spanner recently used Barthes's *studium-punctum* distinction to analyse international relations in images at the Venice Biennale.<sup>31</sup> I use the distinction to approach portraits of international thinkers, to allow me to make a particular argument about the three mid-20th-century figures of Tate, Perham, and Strange. I selected these figures as they are all part of the emerging archive of images of women international thinkers; they were each recognised as exceptionally important in their day; all self-defined as women; and none have received the analysis they deserve in IR. This includes Strange, the most recognised historical woman in the field. Recovery history not only analyses marginalised figures but uncovers new contexts and ways of seeing thinkers who are well known. I use the image of Strange to show, for the first time, how she actively constructed her persona and to unfold a story about the IR discipline more broadly.

Tate, Perham, and Strange also form a cohort due to links between them, and their place in an historical narrative about IR's relation to empire and decolonisation. While intellectual and disciplinary historians have paid much attention to empire, there has been little to no engagement with the most important white British thinker on empire at its end, Margery Perham. In selecting three academic women, I do not assume that elite universities are the only or best location of international thought, but that recovery history must include them. Recovery portraits of figures outside academe are a necessary counter-archive not only to IR's all white male canon, but to Tate, Perham, and Strange.<sup>32</sup>

There are multiple photographs of these thinkers in circulation online or in their archives. I selected portraits that not only tell a story about a singular figure but were also most theoretically potent in the context of feminist recovery, that is, where both *studium* and *punctum* reveal the strengths and limits of recuperative representation. While none of the images selected are iconic, with an exceptional level of recognisability, they are all circulated in the context of each thinker, and there is some overlap in the semiotic elements of each image. I read them as portraits because they are staged and artistic representations, with subjects looking at the camera. Strange's image is a professional headshot. Tate's image was also highly staged and likely planned in advance. We do not know whether the image of Perham was spontaneous or planned, but it meets the basic conventions of portraiture. I read them all as *recovery* portraits and as enabling a narrative about the gendered and racialised history of IR.

<sup>28</sup> Barthes, *Camera*, pp. 27, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 110–13.

<sup>30</sup> Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 16–17.

<sup>31</sup> Hansen and Spanner, 'National'.

<sup>32</sup> Part of the LSE Library and WHIT Project 'Public Exhibition' was devoted to Black internationalist women.

When analysing each portrait, I begin with what is known about its staging, context, and circulation. I then analyse the main semiotic elements, drawing on archival and other primary sources including autobiographical writing and oral history, which I contextualise using secondary sources to present a *studium* reading. I then offer a *punctum* reading of each image that some other readers will not share. It is my more personal interpretation shaped by my position as a white woman in the British academy undertaking recovery history in the same location as two of the figures under discussion, increasing my own personal investment in the research, and likely shaping my more critical orientation towards Perham and Strange. I draw on this *punctum* response and further archival and secondary sources to examine what is resistant to a recuperative reading, shedding further light on the thinkers, IR's histories, and feminist recovery work. In using both images and archives, going back and forth between what is shown and not shown in the image, I offer an analysis that is different to either solely using the image alone or only analysing the thinker's work and biography.

### Merze Tate (1905–96) and her bicycle

The black-and-white image of Merze Tate was taken by an unknown photographer between October 1932 and May 1935, when she was in her late twenties and a graduate student studying IR at Oxford. It is held in Western Michigan University (WMU) Archives & Regional History Collection, Tate's undergraduate alma mater. The image appears on the cover of Barbara D. Savage's full-length biography of Tate and in another Savage essay on Tate; on the poster for the public exhibition on women international thinkers; and circulates online in blogs, podcasts, and news reports on Tate's life and work.<sup>33</sup>

Tate very likely staged and planned the photograph in advance; it was almost certainly taken with her own camera. Most people did not own a camera in the 1930s, but Tate was highly aware of her significance as 'the only colored American in the entire University, man or woman'.<sup>34</sup> She had sold everything and borrowed money to get to Oxford, and, as she later reflected, 'in both the lecture and drawing room, I was continually mindful of my representing a race, which is ever striving, against almost insurmountable difficulties, to reach seemingly unattainable heights'.<sup>35</sup> Tate actively managed her own legacy and would have understood the importance of the photograph as a lasting record of her achievements and presence at Oxford.

The main elements of the photograph are a full shot of Merze Tate, focused enough that the details of her clothing, the bicycle, the iron railings are clear and distant enough that some of Oxford's most iconic buildings form the boundaries. She sits on a bicycle wearing the black academic soft cap and university gown that she was expected to wear during all lectures and university ceremonies. Under her formal gown, she wears a longer lighter-coloured dress coat with large lapels, a wool skirt and a light, patterned scarf over a black neck-high top, sheer tights, and black shoes with a small heel and lighter-coloured edge that matches the coat. Tate's left foot is on the left bike pedal; her right leg is not visible but likely resting on the stone wall to balance on her stationary bike. Tate's hair is short under her cap, in waves, framing the left side of her face and in the style of the independent woman of the period. Her facial expression is hard to read. She is not obviously smiling, but her eyes shine. She is looking very slightly to the right of the camera, an engagement that suggests a certain agency. Tate appears confident and relaxed, although her left hand seems to be tightly gripping the handlebar.

All of the main features of the image can work to produce a narrative of Tate as an exceptional figure. The academic gown, Oxford's most iconic buildings, and the bicycle signify scholarship and academic success. For Savage, the most telling feature of the image is the bicycle, which Tate did

<sup>33</sup>Savage, 'Beyond', p. 270; Savage, *Merze Tate*; LSE Library and WHIT Project, 'Public Exhibition'.

<sup>34</sup>Merze Tate, Oral History Interview, Schlesinger Library, Black Women Oral History Project, 1980, p. 42, available at: [https://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger\\_bwohp/interviews](https://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger_bwohp/interviews); Savage, *Merze Tate*.

<sup>35</sup>Merze Tate, 'Three years in England', *The Ivy Leaf* (March 1936), p. 40.

not know how to ride before Oxford. 'She taught herself how', relates Savage, 'bought the bike used, painted it and made it hers. In that image then is evidence of her determination, her daring, and her ability to make a place for herself in spaces not designed with her in mind. And that is how she went on to make a career for herself as a prolific scholar.'<sup>36</sup> Savage also points to the 'rarity' of the image, a Black woman 'at a place reserved overwhelmingly for white men.'<sup>37</sup> Tate was at the intellectual centre of the British Empire in the period of its greatest extent. Here is a pioneering Black woman studying for her third degree at one of the most illustrious academic institutions in the world. This is not just an image of Tate, but an image of *Merze Tate at Oxford*. Oxford itself is a location in Tate's successful intellectual journey through some of the leading centres of early IR research, including Geneva, Harvard, and Howard University.

The *studium* analysis clearly has the potential to do work for a historical recovery project in IR. *Merze Tate at Oxford as trailblazer* is the first and most compelling reading. Yet what in the image qualifies the recuperative reading? There is the obvious cliché of the iron railing, signifying Tate's position as an outsider and the limits to any transformation she might have on a university and field steeped in class, racial, gender, and imperial hierarchy. Much of Oxford's wealth came from the enslavement of people of African descent. The tip of Tate's cap points towards All Souls, Oxford's most prestigious college and the building that housed the Codrington Library, named for the slaveholder, coloniser, and All Souls fellow. The image places Tate in the heart of Oxford. But she did not study in any of its famous buildings or even attend one of the women's colleges, such as Somerville or St Hugh's. While those colleges were poorer and less glamorous than the men's, they were still prohibitively expensive. Tate was admitted to the Society of Oxford Home Students (SOHS), established in 1879 to provide more affordable private city residences.

The *punctum* in the image is Tate's left hand tightly gripping the handlebar. Perhaps she is anxious about the quality of the photograph. Perhaps her balance on the bicycle is unstable. It resonates because it figuratively foreshadows *Merze Tate's* coming fall. On 4 May 1934, between submitting her dissertation on disarmament in the 19th century and her oral examination, Tate had a serious bicycle accident. She hurt her foot so badly that she stayed in convalescence home for 10 weeks and prepared for her oral examination without books.<sup>38</sup> The day of the accident, the Social Studies Faculty Board met to consider written examiners' reports on Tate's dissertation. Agnes Headlam-Morley and E. L. Woodward determined that Tate had not produced an original piece of research or demonstrated technical historical skills; her analysis of secondary literature was uncritical 'and without proper cohesion and arrangement.'<sup>39</sup> Only the following year, in 1935, was Tate's revised dissertation passed, with her new examiners noting its 'minor' contributions to knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

On a first reading of the image, Tate's bicycle signifies the determination, courage, and skill that defined her life and career. However, her tight grip on the handlebar points to the bicycle's role in what Tate saw as the 'first great failure' of her life,<sup>41</sup> but also why she thought she had been 'unwise' to go to Oxford at all.<sup>42</sup>

When Tate arrived at Oxford, she was the highest-achieving student in the entire history of her undergraduate institution, with an academic record of 59 As and two Bs, and had an MA from Columbia University. Despite this exceptional record, Tate's credentials were doubted at Oxford because her first degree was from a teaching college in the American Midwest.<sup>43</sup> Forced to take a probationary term on the Economics diploma, Tate lost a term of research. She was only belatedly

<sup>36</sup>Savage, 'Poster'.

<sup>37</sup>Savage, 'Poster'.

<sup>38</sup>Tate, 'Three years', p. 19.

<sup>39</sup>Minutes of Board of the Faculty of Social Studies Meetings, 4 May 1934 Examiners Appointed, OUA/FA 4/18/2/2, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>40</sup>Report of the Examiners', 14 June 1935 Minutes of Board of the Faculty of Social Studies meetings. 19281945. OUA/FA 4/18/2/2.

<sup>41</sup>Tate to Grace E. Hadow, 15 June 1934. *Merze Tate File*, St Anne's College.

<sup>42</sup>Tate, 'Oral', p. 35.

<sup>43</sup>'*Merze Tate*', n.d. *Merze Tate File*, St Anne's College. Written in the hand of Ruth F. Butler, Tutor for Graduate Students.



permitted to transfer to the graduate degree to be advised by Alfred Zimmern, Oxford's inaugural Montague Burton Professor of IR. But with Zimmern frequently in the United States, Tate received little supervision. Both Zimmern and Oxford's Social Studies Faculty Board twice approved Tate's research topic that her later examiners determined was so broad it was impossible to produce original research.<sup>44</sup> She also faced every day and institutional misogyny in ways that bore on her assessment and success. Agnes Headlam-Morley, her new advisor, claimed to find Tate 'rather difficult to deal with as every normal difficulty she encounters is transformed into a grievance.'<sup>45</sup> The SOHS Principal accused Tate of being 'pathetic' in worrying about the effects of her initial failure on her career prospects in Jim Crow America.<sup>46</sup> 'Miss Tate haunts me', claimed one administrator.<sup>47</sup>

No member of Tate's committee, which later included James Brierly and Charles Manning, LSE's Montague Burton Professor and South African supporter of apartheid, understood the originality and significance of her historical research, nor were they aware of the explicit and implicit racism of their responses.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, although also not free of institutional racism, Tate's mentors during her PhD at Harvard saw past the dismissive opinion of her Oxford examiners. As Tate recalled, since she 'had practically the dissertation' in hand when she started, she merely revised it 'here and there', which was more than sufficient for her dissertation to be awarded a Harvard PhD.<sup>49</sup> Crucially, the book version of the PhD, *The Disarmament Illusion*, which was almost identical to her Oxford dissertation, was hailed by numerous reviewers as a landmark work in the field.<sup>50</sup> According to one, it marked a shift in IR scholarship away from its alleged utopian roots in pacifist and humanitarian sermons to a field more attentive to 'the realities of international politics.'<sup>51</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau called it the 'definitive' study of disarmament.<sup>52</sup> For Rayford W. Logan, the book assured Tate a 'permanent place among American historians regardless of their color.'<sup>53</sup>

Over her career, Tate became one of the most important figures in what Robert Vitalis called the 'Howard School' of IR, the main alternative to 'white man's IR' in the United States after World War II.<sup>54</sup> Yet none of the most senior figures of British IR, including Zimmern, Manning, and Headlam-Morley, understood the quality and significance of Tate's work for reasons easily surmised. Merze Tate became far more intellectually distinguished than them all, receiving numerous national and international honours and awards in her lifetime, including six honorary degrees. The initial recuperative reading of the portrait, Tate as trailblazer, embodying intellectual achievement and success, remains. But the *punctum* in the image qualifies elements of the recuperative reading, highlighting Tate's precarity. More importantly, it reconceptualises, if not severely undermines, Oxford's place in Tate's otherwise uninterrupted story of success. To the extent that the image acclaims Oxford, then the bicycle and Tate's tight grip portend both Tate's accident and Oxford's institutional and intellectual failures. Tate was a trailblazer not because she was at Oxford, but in spite of it.

### Margery Perham's (1895–1982) white, English, self-loved, cultivated self

Merze Tate was an extraordinary presence at the heart of the racist and sexist academy when Oxford intellectuals, including Zimmern, were playing a major role in the administration and justification of the British Empire. By the mid-20th century, the most influential imperial reformer

<sup>44</sup> Minutes of Board of the Faculty of Social Studies Meetings, 4 May 1934.

<sup>45</sup> Agnes Headlam-Morley to Ruth Butler, 26 April 1935. Merze Tate File, St Anne's College.

<sup>46</sup> Grace E. Hadow to Ruth Butler, 19 March 1935. Merze Tate File, St Anne's College.

<sup>47</sup> Unknown, 'Miss Tate Haunts Me', n.d. Merze Tate File, St Anne's College.

<sup>48</sup> Merze Tate, *The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), p. x.

<sup>49</sup> Tate, 'Oral', p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> Tate, *Disarmament*; Savage, 'Beyond', p. 270.

<sup>51</sup> Charles A. Timm, 'Tate, Merze, *Disarmament Illusion* (Book Review)', *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 23 (1942), p. 186.

<sup>52</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Disarmament Illusion by Merze Tate', *Russian Review*, 2:2 (1943), p. 105.

<sup>53</sup> Rayford W. Logan, 'Tate, Merze, *Disarmament Illusion*', *Journal of Negro Education*, 12:1 (1943), pp. 92–3.

<sup>54</sup> Vitalis, *White World Order*, pp. 159–65.

was Margery Perham. A decade older than Tate, Perham was a fellow at Oxford's women's college St Hugh's when Tate was at SOHS, and she received her undergraduate degree at St. Hugh's. In 1935, the year Tate graduated, Perham was appointed to Oxford's first research lectureship in Colonial Administration, funded by Rockefeller. In 1936, she published a collection of life stories, *Ten Africans*, which included an essay by Tate's friend Kofoworola Aina Moore, the first African woman to graduate from Oxford, the same year as Tate.<sup>55</sup> 'I guess they went liberal that year', Tate later remarked.<sup>56</sup>

Perham saw herself as anti-racist, even a white ally if that meant support for her gradualist project of imperial reform and limited self-government for Africans.<sup>57</sup> As the Colonial Office's 'senior University aunt',<sup>58</sup> no other figure would come close in shaping British official, public, and academic opinion in the period of decolonisation.<sup>59</sup> Given her dominant expertise on arguably the most important international event of the 20th century – decolonisation – it is astonishing that Perham is so marginal in IR's intellectual history, even in work that focuses on Britain.<sup>60</sup> But this is not unexpected given IR's belated acknowledgement of the significance of empire and decolonisation.

The black-and-white image of Margery Perham (Figure 2) is held among her vast papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford and is not in wide circulation. It appears on a fundraising website for Oxford's Nuffield College, where Perham became the first Official Fellow in 1939; the new graduate college was 'built around her'.<sup>61</sup> One can join Nuffield's 'Margery Perham Society' in exchange for pledging a legacy. The main features of the image are a full-body shot of Perham, her clothing, hair, and facial expression, the motorcycle, the road, fence, trees, and bicycle behind her. The photographer is unknown, but the image was taken in the early 1920s when Perham was in her mid-20s.

Perham appears tall and physically strong, with a Model 16H Brooklands Special Norton racing motorcycle, which she owned, designed for the well-maintained English country road. The bike is long with wide handlebars and appears low against the six-foot-tall figure leaning towards it, her entire body stretching toward the motorcycle and camera. Perham is standing, legs shoulder-width apart, wearing black riding gloves, black boots, and a very long dark winter coat with belt and thick collar that resembles a dressing gown. Perham's long arms stretch down by her side, her right hand touching the back of the motorcycle seat. Her thick head of hair is cut short, like Tate's, in the style of the 1920s independent woman. But Perham's side parted bob is messier, as is her overall appearance. She is looking straight at the camera, confident, unsmiling. There is no sign of a helmet or make-up. There is a dark-grey damage mark on the left of the photograph, parallel to another bicycle with a basket in the distance, like Tate's, this one balanced on the grass verge by the side of the flat wide road.

The photograph was taken soon after Perham returned from her first year in Africa in 1922. Her doctor had prescribed rest to help relieve the depression caused by her brother's death on the

<sup>55</sup>Kofoworola Aina Moore, 'The story of Kofoworola Aina Moore, of the Yoruba Tribe, Nigeria, written by herself', in Margery Perham (ed.), *Ten Africans: A Collection of Life Stories* (London: Faber, 1936), pp. 323–43; Imaobong Umoren, 'Kofoworola Moore at the University of Oxford', blog of the Race and Resistance Network at Oxford, 2 October 2015, available at: <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/kofoworola-moore-at-the-university-of-oxford/>.

<sup>56</sup>Tate, 'Oral', p. 42.

<sup>57</sup>On white allyship, see Isabelle Napier, 'Recovering racial positioning in "white" women's international thought: Lady Kathleen Simon's international abolitionist crusade, 1927–1955', *Global Studies Quarterly*, 3:1 (2023), pp. 1–12.

<sup>58</sup>J. E. Lewis, "'Tropical East Ends" and the Second World War: Some contradictions in Colonial Office welfare initiatives', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 28:2 (2000), pp. 42–66 (p. 48).

<sup>59</sup>Kenneth Robinson, 'Margery Perham and the Colonial Office', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19:3 (1991), pp. 185–96 (p. 91); Wm. Roger Louis, 'Historians I have known' *Perspectives on History* (1 May 2001), available at: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2001/historians-i-have-known/>; C. Brad Faught, *Into Africa: The Imperial Life of Margery Perham* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

<sup>60</sup>Hall, *Dilemmas*. Cf. Robbie Shilliam, *Decolonizing Politics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), pp. 128–9, 135.

<sup>61</sup>Faught, *Into Africa*, p. 90; Nuffield College, 'A gift in your will', available at: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/alumni-development/support-nuffield/a-gift-in-your-will/>.



**Figure 2.** Margery Perham. Courtesy Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Somme and her misery as the only woman in the History Department at Sheffield University. She stayed in Hargeisa, British Somaliland with her sister, Ethel, a missionary, and Ethel's husband, Harry Raine, the colonial district commissioner. Perham travelled around Somaliland with her brother-in-law, admiring the work of colonial administration, becoming infatuated with Raine, but falling in love with 'Africa'. On her return to England, Perham later recalled, 'I experimented with a motor-bike until it crashed, and then with a horse, which it didn't ... I began to make friends ... But this was not enough. I wanted to *do* something about Africa.'<sup>62</sup> The crush on her sister's husband quickly ended, as did the experiment with the motorcycle. 'Africa' became Perham's vocation. 'I live on one plane – it is Africa always for me – I work, sleep, seek personal encounters, play games, enlarge my general knowledge, save my strength and money for Africa.'<sup>63</sup> For Perham, and in a *studium* reading, the motorcycle was literally a temporary stand-in for her real vocation.

The image could have recuperative power for a recovery history in IR, which has ignored Margery Perham and neglected her subjects of empire and decolonisation. This is an image of Perham at the cusp of what would become a glittering career as the most influential white thinker on the British Empire at its formal end. Seen as Britain's conscience on Africa, Perham had exceptional intellectual and moral authority in mid-century imperial circles, listened to by governments, academics, and British publics.<sup>64</sup> Despite pervasive sexism in imperial government and academe,

<sup>62</sup>Margery Perham, *African Apprenticeship: An Autobiographical Journey in Southern Africa 1929* (London: Faber, 1974), p. 26.

<sup>63</sup>Quoted in Alison Smith and Mary Bull, 'Introduction', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19:3 (1991), pp. 7–8.

<sup>64</sup>Faught, *Into Africa*.

the sheer depth and breadth of Perham's expertise and connections permitted her enormous influence in the white hierarchies of knowledge against which Tate had to struggle. Indicating her influence, Britain's National Portrait Gallery owns two drawings of Perham in chalk from 1919 and 1966, and one photograph from 1962.<sup>65</sup>

Perham's physicality in Figure 2 conveys the presence and confidence of a future *éminence grise* and thus has recuperative value in a field that has marginalised women. The image also captures how contemporaries saw the 'handsome, six-foot-tall woman'<sup>66</sup> Perham was considered 'strikingly good-looking, 'naturally' handsome, 'amply proportioned, elegant and well-dressed.'<sup>67</sup> She had a 'controlled vitality' and was a 'confident and masterful speaker', appearing 'more like an eloquent athlete than a don.'<sup>68</sup> She was 'formidable.'<sup>69</sup> In conveying Perham's willingness to her adopt what was seen as a masculine pursuit, the image could be recuperative as she transgresses norms of gender; the motorcycle can represent power and speed, signifying Perham's dominance in imperial administration, but also 'Africa' itself. During her first Africa trip, 'with a strong body', she claimed, 'I indulged in my greatest desire, that for physical achievement.'<sup>70</sup> The athleticism and physicality points to a sexualised and highly gendered reading of her search for adventure. Her biographer speaks of 'Perham's rapturous – even semi-erotic – welcoming of her new life.'<sup>71</sup>

The *punctum* in the image is the low frame of the motorcycle, pointing to a less recuperative reading. The frame appears low not only because Perham was tall but also because the Model 16H Norton was newly designed with the lower frame more feasible on Britain's roads. The older Model 17C had a higher frame designed for the rougher roads and tracks in the colonial empire. The 'C' in the Model 17C stood for 'Colonies'. Introduced in 1921, during Perham's first year in Africa, the 'H' in the Model 16H stood for 'Home'.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Perham's domestic adaptation of a colonial motorcycle is an image of white privilege. As a younger woman, she could 'experiment' with a motorcycle and crash it with none of the repercussions faced by Merze Tate when she crashed her bicycle in Oxford. Perham's command over the motorcycle also represents the colonial trope of the intrepid white woman in Africa embracing risk with the costume to match.<sup>73</sup> In a 1974 interview on the occasion of her retirement, Perham fashioned herself as a bold explorer recalling her 'high leather boots, the breeches, the short circular khaki skirt, the becoming double terai hat ... above all the rifle over the shoulder and the pistol under the pillow'.<sup>74</sup> Both Tate and Perham stand with objects signalling mobility, one a pushbike, the other engine-powered. Both women are in their mid-20s. Tate was working hard for the third of the four degrees she would need to enter the academic elite. Perham was already a university lecturer and, like Susan Strange, needed only one undergraduate degree to become the leading British international thinkers of their generation.

The 'strikingly' good-looking Perham, posing for the camera, was obsessed with physical appearance. According to one research assistant, Margery and her sister 'regarded it almost a calamity ... not to be good looking',<sup>75</sup> but she conceived of good looks in highly racialised terms. Perham regularly commented on physiognomy and appearance of Africans and of African

<sup>65</sup>These portraits can be viewed here: available at: <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp05664/dame-margery-freda-perham>).

<sup>66</sup>Louis, 'Historians'.

<sup>67</sup>Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War and Welfare in Kenya 1925–52* (Oxford: Currey, 2000), p. 91; Robinson, 'Margery Perham', p. 186.

<sup>68</sup>Robinson, 'Margery Perham', p. 186.

<sup>69</sup>Louis, 'Historians'.

<sup>70</sup>Quoted in Faught, *Into Africa*, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup>Faught, *Into Africa*, pp. 100, 26.

<sup>72</sup>Jon Branch, 'A Brief History of the Norton 16 H' (1 April 2020), available at: <https://silodrome.com/norton-16h-history/#:~:text=It%20was%20in%201921%20that,mot%20places%20by%20that%20time>).

<sup>73</sup>Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>74</sup>Quoted in Anthony Wood, 'How a don served her African apprenticeship', *Oxford Mail* (16 September 1974).

<sup>75</sup>Quoted in Faught, *Into Africa*, p. 173.

Americans, including at Howard University, the preeminent African American institution of higher learning where Tate became a professor.<sup>76</sup> She once referred to ‘myself, this white, English, self-loved, cultivated self’ she feared might ‘in some way be lost, overwhelmed, cut off from its base among tens of thousands of other human beings, who were not necessarily inferior, but utterly alien and uncomprehending.’<sup>77</sup> Sex and physicality were central to Perham’s racial and gender positionality, but also to her theory of colonial and anti-colonial politics. The common strand linking late colonial settler violence in South Africa, Rhodesia, and Kenya, and white mob violence in London, she argued, was white male fear of race mixture.<sup>78</sup> She likened imperialism to rape, but also read anti-colonialism as a form of racial-sexual assertion.<sup>79</sup> Anti-colonial resistance was less a product of exploitation than the need of newly university-educated African men to overcome their psycho-sexual inferiority complex.<sup>80</sup> Their ‘supreme racial compensation,’ Perham claimed, was ‘sexual intercourse’ with ‘white women.’<sup>81</sup>

The physicality on display in the image prefigures how Perham deployed gender, and ideas of sex difference, to influence the management of empire. While she continually pushed for reform, Perham celebrated British colonial paternalism and masculine virtues. Her strategy to influence the men of late empire was to pursue a balanced, tempered critique of the worst excesses of settler colonialism that neither threatened the empire’s gender order or the masculinity of its administrators.<sup>82</sup> She gently cajoled officers of state and earned their respect. Like Strange, she was sceptical of the women’s liberation movement.<sup>83</sup> Appointed to the African Women’s Education Sub-Committee because she was a woman, Perham was not very interested in women’s education, nor did she centre African women in colonial welfare policy.

Depending on her age, Perham was viewed by imperial men as their teacher, biographer, translator, therapist, or as a spinster workaholic. She devoted herself entirely to work and, according to her biographer at least, remained a ‘lifelong spinster unlucky in love.’<sup>84</sup> Her many research assistants liked to gossip about whether she was a virgin, concluding that she was. Her biographer speculates that her obsession with work – with Africa – was a substitute for heterosexual marriage and children, an expression of her sexual desire, her “feminine energy”, or ‘the redirection of a multifarious psycho-sexual drive.’<sup>85</sup> In this sexist discourse, Perham’s high-profile career, like the ‘experiment’ of the motorcycle, was a sexual displacement activity. This is how one of Perham’s male friends in the Colonial Office reduced her intellectual accomplishments. For all her achievements, she remained like ‘a housewife,’ Perham recounted, ‘eager to sweep and scrub and manage the world’. Africa was supposed to be my ‘house, my husband and my children, and ... I conscientiously wear myself out according to the ancient tradition of all serving women.’<sup>86</sup>

Perham vociferously rejected this domestic analogy. Yet like many of her male peers, Perham’s scholarship was supported by the extensive domestic and administrative labours of women. After World War II, when Perham’s sister left her philandering husband, she and Ethel lived together for the rest of their lives. Ethel managed all domestic arrangements, and Perham’s research was supported by an army of mostly female assistants, including Mary Bull, wife of Hedley Bull, but also Martin Wight, two celebrated figures in mid-to-late 20th-century British IR.

<sup>76</sup>Margery Perham, *Africans and British Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 80; Margery Perham, *Pacific Prelude: A Journey to Samoa and Australia* (London: Owen, 1988), p. 47.

<sup>77</sup>Margery Perham, *The Colonial Reckoning* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 89.

<sup>78</sup>Perham, *Colonial Reckoning*, p. 88.

<sup>79</sup>Margery Perham, *African Outline* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 35.

<sup>80</sup>Margery Perham, *Colonial Sequence, 1949 to 1969: A Chronological Commentary upon British Colonial Policy in Africa* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 95.

<sup>81</sup>Perham, *Colonial Reckoning*, p. 38.

<sup>82</sup>Margery Perham and Lionel Curtis, *The Protectorates of South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

<sup>83</sup>Louis, ‘Historians’.

<sup>84</sup>Faught, *Into Africa*, p. 153.

<sup>85</sup>Faught, *Into Africa*, pp. 100, 26.

<sup>86</sup>Quoted in Smith and Bull, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.



For a feminist recovery project, the *studium* reading of the image focusing on Perham's physicality and the motorcycle portends Perham's stature and success. It also points to IR's failure to recognise Perham and to think deeply about empire and its legacies and is hence recuperative to those wishing to centre women's thought and the imperial origins of the field.<sup>87</sup> But the *punctum* in the image, the low frame adapted from colonial motorbikes, points more directly to Perham's racial privilege and complicity in empire. Her physicality points to racist and sexist discourses and, in turn, the familial, domestic, and hence gendered contexts of her intellectual production, themes almost entirely missing in IR's current historiography. Perham and her major subjects of empire and decolonisation are necessary to understand the conditions for the relatively belated establishment of a separate professional association for IR in Britain, two decades after the United States, a context that requires more historical investigation. By the time another respectable radical, Susan Strange, founded the British International Studies Association (BISA) in 1975, the year after Perham's retirement, Perham could already appear like a relic due to Strange's new vision for the field.

### Susan Strange (1923–88): Exceptional woman, honorary gentleman, Queen Bee

Susan Strange was not interested in race, decolonisation, or imperial nostalgia. By the 1960s, she was arguing that Britain needed to move on from empire and focus on the economic, political, and geopolitical effects of economic decline, and the relations between states and markets.<sup>88</sup> The defining global events for Perham were Black-led global uprisings against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Britain's loss of Singapore in 1942, and the rise of Mau Mau in Kenya in the 1950s. For Strange, it was Suez in 1956 because it exposed the rupture in the relationship with the United States. Britain should turn from Empire to European integration. The study of IR should be about relations between post-imperial markets and states.<sup>89</sup>

Susan Strange was easily the dominant persona in British international studies for three decades, the single most important figure in leading British IR from what she described as the stagnant 'boring' doldrums of the 1950s and 1960s to a new era in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>90</sup> Her major works are printed and reprinted in multiple editions.<sup>91</sup> There are professional prizes, student grants, and a professorship in her name, and a large secondary literature on her work.<sup>92</sup> Generations of scholars are indebted to her vision of International Political Economy (IPE) and mentorship. Partly due to these alleged 'intellectual maternal instincts'<sup>93</sup> but even more because she was an academic empire builder, Susan Strange is the only woman not written out of IR's intellectual and disciplinary histories. She is the most recognised historical woman in IR and the only one to receive close to the recognition they deserve.<sup>94</sup>

She is also the most contemporary of the figures, but the oldest and the most senior in her portrait. It can be analysed in the context of a wider recovery history because the way Strange performed her professional persona made it easier to marginalise figures such as Perham and Tate.

<sup>87</sup> Alexander E. Davis, Vineet Thakur, and Peter Vale (eds), *The Imperial Discipline* (London: Pluto, 2020).

<sup>88</sup> Susan Strange, *The Sterling Problem and the Six* (London: P.E.P., 1967).

<sup>89</sup> Susan Strange, *States and Markets* (London: Pinter, 1988).

<sup>90</sup> Susan Strange, '1995 Presidential Address ISA as a microcosm', *International Studies Quarterly*, 39:3 (1995), pp. 289–95 (p. 289).

<sup>91</sup> Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Strange, *States*; Susan Strange, *Mad Money* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin J. Cohen, *International Political Economy: An Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Randall D. Germain, *Susan Strange and the Future of Global Political Economy: Power, Control and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>93</sup> Richard Higgott and Roger Tooze, 'Professor Susan Strange (Selly)', *Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation Newsletter*, No. 2 (1998/9), p. 4, available at: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/csgnr/newsletters/nl2.pdf>.

<sup>94</sup> Patricia Owens, 'Women and the history of international thought', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:3 (2018), pp. 467–81.

One of the few images of Susan Strange (Figure 3) in circulation, the colour portrait is held in the archive of the London School of Economics (LSE). Like the other images, the photographer and exact date are unknown, but, unlike Tate and Perham who both organised and preserved their portraits, this image was commissioned and held by Strange's institution as part of a series of staff portraits. The image circulates on the Internet in blogs and other posts on Strange;<sup>95</sup> a black-and-white version appears in Cohen's intellectual history of IPE; and it featured in the public exhibition.<sup>96</sup> At the time, Strange was Montague Burton Professor of IR, the first woman to hold the chair at LSE, which she held between 1978 and 1988, and one of the School's most senior academics. After her retirement from LSE, she held positions at European University Institute and Warwick until her death in 1998.

The main elements of the photograph are a half-shot of Susan Strange in her early 60s, her clothing, jewellery, facial expression, and make-up, the black chair on which she sits, and the wall of books behind her. We can assume Strange is in her office as she sits in front of rows of books with titles such as *International Money*, *The City of Capital*, and *Money Lenders*, subjects in her scholarly expertise. She is wearing a smart, light-grey tailored trouser suit with a white shirt. Her grey hair is short and neat, perhaps newly styled for the portrait. She wears light red lipstick, a silver necklace and bracelet, and a gold wedding ring in full prominent focus on her left hand. Unlike Tate and Perham, Strange was married (to men) twice, first a doctor, then a journalist/farmer. She looks comfortable and relaxed, leaning slightly to the right and holding the arm rest of the chair. Strange is clearly smiling and her eyes are bright.

There is enormous recuperative power for a feminist recovery project in this portrait, even though Strange is well known. Here is someone secure in herself and their position as the most influential British IR scholar of their generation, perhaps of all time. Strange despised the hierarchical conferences of the British Co-ordinating Committee for International Studies (BCCIS) she attended from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, calling them stale and 'boring'.<sup>97</sup> Institutionally, BISA may have started as a BCCIS sub-committee, but it did not organically 'grow out' of BCCIS.<sup>98</sup> Strange's conscious intent was for BCCIS to 'quietly expire', and everything it represented as an intellectual and institutional agglomeration to 'fade out of the picture'.<sup>99</sup> Given her critique of the British IR scene, Susan Strange founded BISA as an intentional act of patricide.

All of the main elements of the image, the smile, the books, the confidence, support a recuperative reading of Susan Strange as an *exceptional, iconoclastic woman* at a time when the field was largely populated, in her mind, by mediocre men. She openly mocked what she called the male 'barons and the top brass' of mid-century British IR, men like Georg Schwarzenberger, John Burton, and Tate's examiner, Charles Manning.<sup>100</sup> In published work, she accused them of wanting to 'create in their own image a crowd of uncritical acolytes and followers, obediently parroting whatever they say or write'.<sup>101</sup> She derided the notion that IR's intellectual heritage was a genealogical line of 'fathers of international thought'.<sup>102</sup> She treated her students ideas 'just as seriously, if not more seriously, than the thought of her peers'.<sup>103</sup> For a feminist recovery project in a field

<sup>95</sup> Alison Carter, 'Professor Susan Strange 1923–1998: A tribute'. LSE blog (17 October 2017), available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/internationalrelations/2017/10/17/professor-susan-strange-1923-1998-a-tribute/>.

<sup>96</sup> Cohen, *International*, p. 46; LSE Library and WHIT Project, 'Public Exhibition'.

<sup>97</sup> Strange, '1995 Presidential', p. 289.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Barry Buzan, 'Where did BISA come from? International Relations in Britain before BISA' (3 February 2000), available at: <https://www.bisa.ac.uk/articles/where-did-we-come-international-relations-britain-bisa>.

<sup>99</sup> Strange, Letter to Department of Politics, University of Reading. BISA/8, LSE Library.

<sup>100</sup> Strange, '1995 Presidential', p. 295.

<sup>101</sup> Strange, *States*, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Kenneth W. Thompson, *Fathers of International Thought: The Legacy of Political Theory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Ronen Palan, 'Pragmatism and International Relations in the age of banker's capitalism', in Harry Bauer and Elisabetta Brighi (eds), *International Relations at LSE: A History of 75 Years* (London: Millennium, 2003), pp. 117–34 (p. 119).

<sup>103</sup> Piers Revell, 'Supplement to *States and Markets*: An investigation of the "knowledge structure" in the work of Susan Strange', LSE PhD thesis (2014), p. 6.



**Figure 3.** Susan Strange. Courtesy London School of Economics.

that has marginalised all other women, there is obvious appeal in an image of a self-assured ‘energetic, iconoclastic woman’<sup>104</sup> who showed open contempt for some of the men responsible for marginalising women from the field.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup>Brian Porter, ‘A brief history continued, 1972–2002, in Bauer and Brighi (eds), *International Relations at LSE: A History of 75 Years* (London: Millennium, 2003), pp. 29–44 (p. 37).

<sup>105</sup>On Manning’s erasure of Lucy Philip Mair, for example, see Owens, ‘Women’, p. 478.

The wedding ring on Strange's left hand is amenable to another recuperative reading as it points to her early and formative experience of working motherhood. She first got pregnant at 19, before finishing her undergraduate degree, and had two children while a journalist, and four more during her first academic job at University College London (UCL). As a twice-married mother of six children who worked for pay, Susan Strange refused the main trajectory for white middle-class mothers in the 1950s and 1960s, which was to return to work part-time, if at all.<sup>106</sup> She was highly anomalous among professional white women on insisting on returning to full-time paid work after each of her six pregnancies. For her male IR colleagues at UCL, particularly Schwarzenberger and George Keeton, the employment of married women created 'several problems in regard to the effect of the married state'.<sup>107</sup> Hence, with no legal protection for maternity leave, they bullied and harassed her until in 1964 Susan Strange resigned.<sup>108</sup>

On a recuperative reading, this could be an image of a singular woman who triumphed over adversity. In her autobiographical reflections, Strange defined herself as an outsider, as 'a woman and an ex-journalist' who came to academia relatively late who only published her first book at the age of 48.<sup>109</sup> 'I suppose I felt there was no point in being too conformist', she claimed in her International Studies Association (ISA) Presidential Address.<sup>110</sup> Strange assiduously cultivated the image of herself as an exceptional, iconoclastic woman. She seemed to smash British IR's glass ceiling and later the reputations of bullying and mediocre IR men.

What qualifies this recuperative reading? In this image, the *punctum* is even more personally subjective than the images of Perham and Tate. It is the way Strange's right hand holds the arm of the chair framed by the large bracelet, shirt sleeve, and jacket. Where Tate's left hand tightly grips the handlebar of her bicycle, suggesting the strain of her outsider status, I see Strange's right hand as capturing a different way in which she performed institutional and intellectual power, as a handsome *honorary gentleman*. Her cropped silver hair is parted to the more conventionally coded masculine left. There are no earrings, and the silver bracelet on the right wrist looks large. The wide white collar of the shirt hangs over the jacket lapels and the top two buttons are undone. In contrast to Tate and Perham, Strange's admirers rarely commented on her physical appearance. She is more likely to be described in terms of personality: iconoclastic, charismatic, but not conventionally beautiful. Only Fred Halliday's obituary referred to her 'smiling eyes'.<sup>111</sup> Susan Strange was handsome and had a deep, resonant voice.<sup>112</sup>

To see the image of Strange as both an exceptional iconoclastic woman and a handsome honorary gentleman overlaps with but is distinct from Cornelia Navari's identification of Strange's 'honourable man strategy' in the profession. According to Navari, Strange 'accepted the ideal standard of her discipline and she worked up to it', with the 'aim to be accepted as an equal or superior amongst those that she recognized as her peers'.<sup>113</sup> Strange challenged IR's gender order in the limited way that being an exceptional woman allowed, but she also remained loyal to many of the structures and standards of the field, if not individual male 'barons'. Indeed, one recuperative element of her persona – her irreverence, even patricidal contempt for what she saw as the male mediocrities of mid-century British IR – contributed to upholding some of the hierarchical structures of British IR into the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>106</sup>Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

<sup>107</sup>'Married Women: Appendix 1 A&PC 16.10.61'. UCL File No.29/1/17 Part I Folio 149b, UCL Library.

<sup>108</sup>Strange, 'I never meant', p.433. Also see the correspondence between Strange, Keeton, and Schwarzenberger in UCL archives. UCL File No.29/1/17 Part I and UCL File No.29/1/17 Part II.

<sup>109</sup>Strange, 'I never meant to be an academic', in Joseph Kruzel and James N. Rosenau (eds), *Journeys through World Politics* (New York: Lexington, 1989), pp. 429–36 (p. 429).

<sup>110</sup>Strange, '1995 Presidential', p. 295.

<sup>111</sup>Fred Halliday, 'Obituary: Susan Strange, new world orders', *The Guardian* (14 November 1998), p. 24.

<sup>112</sup>Listen to the recording of Strange, 'The limits of politics', *Government and Opposition* Leonard Shapiro Lecture, 1 June 1995, available at: {<https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:gaq423fok>}.

<sup>113</sup>Cornelia Navari, 'The IR thought of Susan Strange', *The Global Thinkers Series*, University of Oxford, 6 March 2020, available at: {<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/ir-thought-susan-strange-prof-cornelia-navari>}.



There is no evidence that Susan Strange discouraged or discriminated against people of colour, but her determination to turn Britain away from an imperial to a more global economy, contributed to the field's delayed engagement with post-colonial theory, a field with a higher proportion of racialised scholars.<sup>114</sup> Susan Strange's problem with the IR canon was not that it was all-male, let alone all-white, but that it was intellectual nonsense. BCCIS was stale not because it marginalised women, people of colour, and empire, but because it was hierarchical and outdated. Strange may have seen all this in gendered, though not racial, terms. She pronounced on the nature of women and men, finding 'most men lily-livered'.<sup>115</sup> She thought they belong 'either ... to cultures in which [they] liked women and enjoyed their company or they belonged to cultures that did not'.<sup>116</sup> BCCIS clearly had a culture that did not like women, but Strange did not explicitly call out the patriarchy of organised British IR. It took years of gender discrimination for Strange to acknowledge that there was a 'feminist case' to be made in the workplace.<sup>117</sup> She dismantled elements of British IR's patriarchal order, but not *as a patriarchal order*.

One reason is indicated by Strange's prominent wedding ring. In the early 1960s, Strange became entangled in the post-war gender order that permitted white, married, middle-class mothers to return to work, but not full-time, and certainly not if it inconvenienced male colleagues. She rejected that compromise but not its ideological premise that managing family and career was the private preserve of mothers and domestic assistants. Strange could survive in academe because, she told her employer, she had a 'good nanny at home'.<sup>118</sup> In 1995, her advice to junior women was not to change sexist professional cultures, but to not delay having babies; 'the earlier, the easier'.<sup>119</sup> Despite her experience of discrimination, Strange did not challenge the wider academic culture that punished mothers. 'She made no special claims for women and no special claims for being one', writes Navari, 'except that she had produced six children while inventing the central theoretical pillars of IPE'.<sup>120</sup> Strange described the concept of 'liberated woman' as 'woolly and self-defined'.<sup>121</sup> Overcoming sexism was a matter of will and personality. After all, with hard work, character, and career 'lucky breaks', a working mother of six could transform a discipline.<sup>122</sup>

The image of Susan Strange as handsome honorary gentleman conveys her successful professional and intellectual institution-building strategy and has been read as a kind of feminism.<sup>123</sup> The point is not to hold Strange to standards of a different time. However, less recuperatively, much of Strange's fame and influence also came from performing non-feminism, explicitly defining herself in opposition to the feminist IR of *her day*. In widely reported remarks during her ISA Presidential Address, Strange is variously said to have told IR feminists to stop 'carping',<sup>124</sup> 'whinging',<sup>125</sup> 'complaining',<sup>126</sup> or 'whining'<sup>127</sup> and get on with it. The 'it' was either 'their work',<sup>128</sup> empirical 'research

<sup>114</sup>Others found Strange's work relevant to 'developing countries'. See Anna Leander, 'Dependency today – finance, firms, mafias and the state: A review of Susan Strange's work from a developing country perspective', *Third World Quarterly*, 22:1 (2001), pp. 115–28.

<sup>115</sup>Margot Light, 'Studying and working in the IR Department at LSE in the 1970s and 1980s' (28 November 2019), available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/internationalrelations/2019/11/28/studying-and-working-in-ir-at-lse-in-the-1970s-and-1980s/>; Strange, 'I never meant', p. 428.

<sup>116</sup>Gautam Sen, 'Obituary: Professor Susan Strange', *The Independent* (9 December 1998), p. 6.

<sup>117</sup>Strange, 'I never meant', p. 433.

<sup>118</sup>Strange to Schwarzenberger, 28 December 1959. UCL File No.29/1/17 Part I, UCL Library.

<sup>119</sup>Strange, '1995 Presidential', p. 295.

<sup>120</sup>Navari, 'IR thought'.

<sup>121</sup>Strange, 'Wake up, Krasner! The world has changed', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1:2 (1994), pp. 209–19 (p. 215).

<sup>122</sup>Strange, 'I never meant', p. 433.

<sup>123</sup>Sen, 'Obituary', p. 6.

<sup>124</sup>Sen, 'Obituary', p. 6.

<sup>125</sup>Navari, 'The IR thought of Susan Strange'.

<sup>126</sup>Louis W. Pauly, 'The spirit of Susan Strange (1923–1998)'; in Richard Ned Lebow, Peer Schouten, and Hidemi Suganami (eds), *The Return of the Theorists* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 302–12 (p. 302).

<sup>127</sup>Higgott and Tooze, 'Professor Susan', p. 6.

<sup>128</sup>Pauly, 'The spirit', p. 303.



demonstrating that attention to women and gender will tell us something important<sup>129</sup> or have 'babies sooner rather than later'.<sup>130</sup> As one department colleague recalled, Strange 'thought feminism was tiresome ... She was SUPERWOMAN ... It was left to lesser women to identify with women students and colleagues, and to represent them in the department and in the School'.<sup>131</sup>

The wedding ring, and her handsome and confident persona accord with Susan Strange's self-presentation as sexually free and comfortable talking about heterosexual sex. She rejected the discourse of women's liberation but did not entirely disavow all aspects of the radical sexual politics of her age. Her short autobiography recounts her undergraduate days during the London blitz when the 'fact that most of the boys would be drafted ... and some would never come back sharpened our appetites for life and love'.<sup>132</sup> She did not seek her father's approval for her first marriage, likely a shotgun wedding. She tried to persuade the conflict studies scholar John Burton of the wrongs of rationalist approaches by asking whether 'he had ever quarrelled with his wife or his mother-in-law!'<sup>133</sup> 'No need for political correctness around me', one admirer has her posthumously announce.<sup>134</sup> One can imagine Susan Strange in her grey trouser suit making mother-in-law jokes at BISA or the ISA, 'holding forth, pint in hand, in the bar', the pint in that right hand.<sup>135</sup>

The image of Susan Strange is simultaneously one of exceptional woman, handsome honorary gentleman, but also Queen Bee. In her survey of the female subject positions allowable in the early 90s legal academy, Margaret Thornton identified the figures of beautiful body, adoring acolyte, mother confessor, dutiful daughter, and Queen Bee. Susan Strange was read and positioned as all of them except beautiful body.<sup>136</sup> In autobiographical writing, she implied repeatedly that senior IR men wanted her to be their dutiful daughter, reproducing their knowledge. She resisted and spent much of her later career denouncing and ridiculing them. To some extent, Strange performed 'institutional caring and housekeeping roles'<sup>137</sup> and was also obviously mother confessor, nurturer, and intellectual midwife. She was devoted to her students, men and women, acting as mentor to several generations, building her own empire. But as Queen Bee, she criticised feminists in the profession and was thus 'co-opted to promote some of the dominant norms of masculinity' in IR.<sup>138</sup>

Many of Strange's admirers praised her seeming ability to 'puncture the pretensions' of feminist theory,<sup>139</sup> that she was 'a scourge of some of the more pretentious exercises in international theorising'.<sup>140</sup> *Strange* should be judged by the standards of a different time. But her persona as 'Queen Bee' became an alibi for critiques of emerging post-positivist theory in the 1990s, including feminism and post-colonialism. These were among the approaches that helped to open the door to more women and/or racialised scholars and more innovative research methods, including visual analysis. Strange's vision of a new British IR was more exciting and successful than BCCIS's. But her project for a post-imperial IR contributed to further marginalising empire and race for another two decades, the subjects in which Tate and Perham excelled. For a feminist recovery project, the *studium* reading of Strange's portrait focuses on her stature, confidence, and exceptional achievements. But my *punctum* reading suggests some of the ways that Strange's gender performance

<sup>129</sup> Craig N. Murphy, 'Seeing women, recognizing gender, recasting International Relations', *International Organization*, 50:3 (1996), pp. 513–38 (p. 532).

<sup>130</sup> Higgott and Tooze, 'Professor Susan', p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Light, 'Studying and working'; for a literal depiction of Strange as superwoman, see Nat Dyer, 'Susan Strange as superwoman', Twitter (6 September 2021), available at: <https://twitter.com/natjdyer/status/1435943046051418113>.

<sup>132</sup> Strange, 'I never meant', p. 430.

<sup>133</sup> Strange, 'I never meant', p. 433.

<sup>134</sup> Pauly, 'The spirit', p. 307.

<sup>135</sup> Halliday, 'Obituary', p. 24.

<sup>136</sup> Margaret Thornton, 'Discord in the legal academy: The case of the feminist scholar', *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 1 (1994), pp. 53–71.

<sup>137</sup> Thornton, 'Discord', p. 59.

<sup>138</sup> Thornton, 'Discord', p. 60.

<sup>139</sup> Chris Brown, 'Susan Strange', *Review of International Studies*, 25:3 (1999), pp.531–35 (p. 534).

<sup>140</sup> 'Professor Susan Strange', *The Times* (24 November 1998).

both enabled and limited her institutional and intellectual work of transforming IR and is thus less recuperative, though no less interesting, for a feminist recovery project.

## Conclusion

Photographic images are everywhere, but they are understudied in IR's intellectual and disciplinary history. This includes new recovery works that display portraits of women thinkers. Moving beyond the analysis of written texts alone, and recuperative representation, this article has begun to remedy the neglect of images in the study of IR's history and introduce a new thematic to visual studies in IR. Analysing portraits of international thinkers can deepen historical recovery work, including but not limited to attention to thinkers as embodied subjects and themes that enable new critiques of IR's intellectual and disciplinary history. Portraits force us to attend to the appearance and bodies of thinkers, not just their bodies of thought, helping us to better understand how intellectual subjects fashion themselves as thinkers, as sexual, gendered, and racialised subjects. Going beyond recuperative representation also allows us to see the images differently, raising questions about the relation between the image and the viewer, our personal investments in images, and the uses to which images are put for critical historical purposes.

Recovery history is one of the most intellectually and methodologically exciting approaches to historical IR. It is more reflexive than conventional intellectual history, with the potential to introduce not just new thinkers and different themes and to read well-known thinkers in new ways, but also different methodologies, including visual analysis. Recovery history is also necessarily critical and political, offering new insights into historical thinkers, their reception, and thus IR's past and present. Susan Strange's admittance to the IR canon as the *only* historical woman, for example, further contributed to the marginalisation of women in IR's intellectual history, making new recovery histories even more urgent. In other words, the IR that Susan Strange helped to build could recognise her as the exceptional woman but also delayed IR's reckoning with the intellectual legacy of figures such as Tate, Perham, and so many others. We might think of these figures as part of a counter-archive to the image of Susan Strange.

If all history is contemporary history, then the image of Tate is particularly resonant given the belated and still partial attempts to address the legacies of empire, race, and misogyny. In the wake of the Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter movements, and informed by Barbara Savage's careful scholarship, Merze Tate was claimed by Oxford's Faculty of History when it 'symbolically' named a seminar room in her honour. In the room hangs a portrait of Tate and a plaque describing some of her many achievements. Fittingly, the portrait is not Tate as a young scholar with her bicycle, but of a mature Tate in her mid-70s. In 2020, the Faculty of History also inaugurated the Barbara Savage Prize for a thesis in Black History, and All Souls College, in the background of Tate's image, removed the slaver's name from its library. Against the new tide, Oxford IR has thus far not honoured Tate.

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**Patricia Owens** is Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford and Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford. She is author of *Erased: A History of International Thought Without Men* (Princeton, 2025). Her monograph, *Economy of Force* (Cambridge) won BISA's Susan Strange Prize for the Best Book in International Studies in 2016. She was Principal Investigator of the multi-award winning Leverhulme Research Project on Women and the History of International Thought.