Wolfson and Colonialism

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Preface

We're heartened that colonialism is being discussed seriously in Oxford and well beyond. That this is partly in response to movements such as Rhodes Must Fall, which started in Cape Town, and Black Lives Matter with its epicentre in the US, is yet another testimony to the interconnectedness of our world.

Wolfson College sees itself as a proud member of the global community. It strives to be a modern and egalitarian college, and a space where people and ideas from across the world mingle and grow. In commissioning the report at hand, we appreciate that the college management is responding to longstanding calls to look into institutional pasts, to see how these inform the present. In delving into Wolfson's archives to investigate the college's links with colonialism, we could have found ourselves confronting far from uplifting aspects of our internationalism. This is indeed the case with several Oxford colleges, which have quite obviously benefited from colonialism, slavery, and the gross oppression of others.

As the 'Wolfson and colonialism' report makes clear, our archives contain no direct evidence of the college's involvement in the colonial project. This can be a moment for sitting back and congratulating ourselves. In this preface, as current members of the college, we suggest that this should not be such a moment.

Colonialism was a pernicious project that involved the capture and exploitation of lands and peoples largely, but not only, in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. Yet colonialism was, and is, much more than that. Colonialism is also a set of ideas, and effects, with multiple lives and afterlives. Colonialism emerged from deeply hierarchised and racialised notions of civilisation, and the civilising mission. Those structures continue to shape our communities. While looking into the links between Oxford, or Wolfson and the tangible projects of colonialism, we mustn't overlook how colonialism lives on amidst, and even within us.

This is manifested, for instance, in the overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Euro-American management structures of Oxford colleges, including Wolfson. The corollary to that is the lack of representation of historically marginalized groups at decision making levels across the university. Colonial hierarchies live on in who we consider worthy of our named lecture series, or the art and photographs that occupy our walls, or indeed the names on our buildings. As scholars, it may reflect in our citation practices, and the respect we accord to certain bodies of knowledge over others. Some perspectives and voices are more visible and vocal amongst us, *including in our archives*. Alongside all of this, we remain eager to 'teach' the world, and we are committed to the college 'charity' that works in Africa. Possibly unknowingly, and despite our best intentions, we may be involved in reproducing long held views of the global core and peripheries. In functioning along these divisions, rather than interrogating how they came to be, we risk absolving ourselves of structures of oppression that we inhabit.

But Wolfson, like time and space, is hardly static. As the world has changed around us, and asked questions of its givens, the college too has taken significant strides. Advancing towards a strong voice and representation for all groups, we have initiated a Black and Minority Ethnic

Society, run by students. We have set up a Diversity Working Group, chaired by our President and with membership from the student body and fellows. We have a new Diversity Policy in hiring, which is designed to ensure the presence of under-represented groups in our appointments process. While all these are steps in the right direction, as of now, they exercise a small section of the college.

Hearing the call from students for more diversity at the faculty level, for role models and relatable supervisors for all groups, it becomes evident that we also have to revise our self-understanding of Wolfson as an international community. To do so, we will need to cover many more areas that make up the college, and its mission. As an example, we believe we need to speak more about the accomplishments of Black and ethnic minority communities in Wolfson and in academia more broadly. We need to routinely 'pass the mic' to these groups, invite them to the college stage, and closely listen to their stories.

After all, 'diversity work' as the scholar Sara Ahmed puts it cannot be relegated to some 'others', or indeed to a committee or event. Likewise we shouldn't rely on committed individuals to stretch us out of our comfort zones. 'Doing' 'diversity' as a box ticking or guilt-reducing exercise allows colonialism to live and thrive amongst us, albeit in more genteel avatars.

We hope many of you will read this report, and not stop at that. We encourage you to join the conversation on Oxford and colonialism.

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Background

At the last General Meeting of the 2019–20 academic year there was discussion about how College could best respond to the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter protest movement. UK institutions in general, and Oxford colleges in particular, had already begun looking into their past, for possible links to the slave trade, etc., and there was a feeling that Wolfson should undertake some sort of audit, to see how it has dealt with issues of race and social justice.

The President discussed this with two modern historians – the archivist fellow-elect, Erica Charters, and Mark Pottle, who is familiar with the early history of College through his work on Isaiah Berlin. Since College is barely fifty years old, Erica and Mark thought it unlikely that Wolfson would have the same liability as the older colleges, in respect of slavery, for example; but they agreed wholeheartedly that the occasion warranted open-minded enquiry, the results of which might inform College debate. Since Mark – but not Erica – was able to access the College Archives, they agreed that he would undertake research, and this report shows his findings, which Erica has read and endorsed.

Method

MP sought documentary and oral evidence – the former in the College Archives, guided (remotely) by the Archivist, Liz Baird, and the latter by contacting members of College with personal experience of Wolfson's early years, namely: Henry Hardy, Dan Isaacson, Roger Just, and John Penney. MP also sought assistance from the Development Director, Huw David.

With limited time available for archival research MP focused on a particular issue, Wolfson's response to the Anti-Apartheid Movement's campaign for an economic boycott of South Africa, *c.*1976–86. During this period College was faced with two closely related questions: whether or not to disinvest in companies with interests in South Africa, and whether or not to retain Barclays as the College bank. In undertaking this research MP looked at four sets of records: South African Investments 1976–84; General Meeting 1977–91; GPC 1978–86; and the papers of Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, President 1985–93.

Findings

Finances: the founders, and after

Wolfson was founded in 1966 with matching funds from the Ford Foundation and the Wolfson Foundation.

The Ford Foundation derived its income from the Ford Motor Company, which was founded by Henry Ford, an anti-Semite politically active in the US before the Second World War. McGeorge Bundy, who as President of the Ford Foundation, 1966–79, authorized the gift to College, was formerly a National Security Advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and much criticized as an architect of US involvement in the Vietnam War. Today, social justice is at the heart of the Ford Foundation's mission, and it supports programmes throughout Africa.

The Wolfson Foundation, established in 1955, originally derived its income from the retailer Great Universal Stores (GUS). Since its inception the Foundation has gifted in excess of £900m to more than 11,000 projects in the UK: it focuses (not exclusively) on capital infrastructure grants in the fields of science and medicine, health, education and the arts and humanities.

On the question of post-1966 donors to College, Huw David, the Development Director, confirms that there are no direct links to the slave trade, and that none of the major benefactions to Wolfson in its fifty-five year history raise ethical concerns. Today potential donors to College are vetted through a service offered by the University, to ensure that they are of good repute. Huw notes, as one example, that there is an absolute prohibition on accepting funds from tobacco interests.

During his work in the College Archives, MP discovered nothing that links College directly or indirectly to the slave trade; nor is he aware of any matter that he thought should be flagged on ethical grounds that is not already in the public domain – as is, for example, the decision to disinvite the German historian Ernst Nolte from speaking in College in 1993, which some would argue compromised College's commitment to freedom of speech. MP's general impression is confirmed by Liz Baird, who has much more extensive knowledge of the Archives.

Finances: disinvestment in South Africa

College was founded during the era of the anti-apartheid struggle, and from the late 1970s it came under pressure not to invest in companies that had interests in South Africa, Ford and GUS being among them. The initial pressure came from graduate students, but there was strong support for disinvestment among the College community as a whole, and this resulted in concrete steps being taken. The related campaign to move the College bank account from Barclays was overtaken by events, Barclays withdrawing from South Africa just as College seemed likely to move the account.

This chapter in College history offers an interesting case study in its approach to issues of race, and ethics in general, and reveals much about its character and ethos. What is striking is how seriously the two issues were taken: disinvestment and 'Boycott Barclays' consumed large amounts of committee time for a very long period, the papers on the former occupying eight box files in the Archives, more than for almost any other topic. The episode shows the workings of a functioning academic democracy: the energy and idealism of graduate students led to an Investments Working Party (IWP) being formed by the governing body; one of Wolfson's founding fellows, Derek Wyatt, was appointed chair; Wyatt and his group, which included student members, worked tirelessly to find out the facts about Wolfson's South African investments, even though these were not always willingly surrendered by the companies concerned; they presented their findings to College in an objective and balanced way, so that the community as a whole could decide on a course of action; a range of views was expressed in open debate, from outright support to outright opposition; and although passions ran high, disagreements stayed within civil bounds.

Nobody worked harder to understand the problem, and formulate a response, than Derek Wyatt, and in the eyes of one contemporary he 'emerged from the experience thoroughly radicalised'. By contrast, the President for much of the period, Sir Henry Fisher, did not. Before coming to Wolfson, Fisher had been first a High Court judge and then a merchant banker in the City of London, and he opposed disinvestment on financial and legal grounds. Without overstating the case, one may observe that there is a marked difference between Wyatt's ethical approach and Sir Henry's essentially pragmatic one. What is notable is that the President's voice did not prevail, and that he later dutifully executed a policy that he had opposed. The story of Wolfson, disinvestment, and boycott, are treated in some detail in the Appendix below.

Statutes and ethos

While numerically College has been predominantly a white male establishment, it has also long prided itself on being modern, forward-thinking, egalitarian, and inclusive. Liz Baird notes that the first of its statutes underwrites this:

> Statute I: The College 1. The members of the College shall, for the purposes of these Statutes, be the President, Fellows and Students. No distinction shall be made between members of the College, or between candidates for election or admission thereto, on grounds of sex, race, religious beliefs or political views. (18.2.1981)

Africa connections

Of our Presidents, the first, Sir Isaiah Berlin, was an immigrant to the UK, a Russian-born Jew whose family left Riga for London in 1921. His extended family in Latvia perished in what *The Times* called the 'holocaust by bullets' perpetrated there by units of the SS and local fascists in November and December 1941: Sir Isaiah did not learn of their fate until the end of the war. He was not prone to lending his name to political campaigns, but supported an Oxford University boycott of the visiting South African cricketers in 1960. And in 1969 he was one of five heads of Oxford Colleges who jointly protested publicly against any association of the University with the rugby match against the Springboks to be held at Iffley Road on 5 November: the likelihood of serious demonstrations forced the relocation of the match to Twickenham, where it was played under siege conditions. Justifying his stance on this occasion, in answer to a letter from a critic, Sir Isaiah wrote: 'If degrees of evil can be discriminated at all, racial persecution seems to me a degree worse than other forms of unjust repression.'

Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, President 1985–93, who had a distinguished career as a physician in the UK, was forced to leave his native South Africa in 1968 because of his anti-apartheid activities. He was inspired to activism there when, in 1960, the apartheid government introduced segregationist legislation that made it almost impossible for black students to gain admission to the country's so-called 'open' universities, including the University of Cape Town medical school, where Hoffenberg taught. In June 1967 he was subjected to a banning order, and in March 1968 went into exile, taking his family with him. His wife, Margaret, Lady Hoffenberg, was also active in the anti-apartheid struggle, and their decision to leave South Africa for the UK was a joint one. Fifteen years to the day after leaving South Africa Hoffenberg was elected President of the Royal College of Physicians, and two years later President of Wolfson.

Sir Tim Hitchens, President from 2018, has professional experience of Africa, having been head of the Africa Department (Equatorial) at the FCO, 2003–5, during his diplomatic career.

Wolfson has traditionally had expertise in anthropology, and one distinguished fellow, Godfrey Lienhardt, spent his career studying the Dinka and Anuak peoples of southern Sudan. Lienhardt's principal contribution to the field was his work on the way religious beliefs were practised by non-literate peoples, the subject of his important study *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (OUP, 1961). Lienhardt was revered by the Dinka, and a delegation from the London Dinka community attended the 'Cheerful Event' staged in Wolfson in 1994 to mark his death. The Dinka go in for uplifting funeral rites, and after two of the party had been amongst those giving speeches in Lienhardt's honour a space was cleared in the Hall, and the

young Dinka men went out, stripped to their shorts, put on paint, and then re-entered dancing and singing, whereupon the women rose from their seats and joined in, ululating loudly. It was a stirring scene. Lienhardt taught in Ghana in the early 1960s, and it was then that he bought art by the Nigerian artist Asiru Olatunde, which he bequeathed to College, and which is displayed there. He left the bulk of his estate to Wolfson, to support the study of Sub-Saharan Africa: grants are made in conjunction with the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology.

In 2019 the Cameroon historian and anthropologist Walter Nkwi visited College, under the auspices of the Africa Oxford Initiative. He was hosted by David Zeitlyn, who recalls that Professor Nkwi remarked on how welcoming he had found Wolfson to be.

Amref Health Africa: the College charity

The 'African Medical and Research Foundation', as Amref was originally known, was founded in 1957 by three British doctors to provide mobile medical provision for remote communities in East Africa – 'the Flying Doctors'. In the 1980s the charity moved into community health care, and today it is as well known in East Africa as Oxfam, and just as highly regarded.

Amref became the College charity in the late 1970s. Since then around £150,000 has been raised in Wolfson by fellows, students, and staff in support of Amref's work. Money has been spent on a wide variety of projects. Here are just a few examples: the SU4AM ('Stand Up For African Mothers') midwifery campaign; a youth empowerment project in Kabale, Uganda; fistula repair and trachoma treatment programmes; the purchase of WHO 'Blue Trunk' libraries; bed nets to help fight malaria.

In 2016, to mark Wolfson's 50th Anniversary, the annual Wolfson–Amref Bursary, established in 1994, was increased from £2,500 to £3,000: each year this money is used to support one or more students taking Amref's flagship Diploma in Community Health at its Nairobi HQ.

Whenever possible Amref field workers have visited College to share their experiences, and the Wolfson–Amref relationship has deepened over time, becoming especially meaningful to both parties. In November 2018 the CEO of Amref UK, Frances Longley, visited Wolfson to present the gift of two portraits celebrating African womanhood, taken by the renowned advertising photographer Dean Bradshaw: they hang in the library corridor adjacent to the Stallworthy Grove. The gift was accepted by the President, and College later purchased a full set of the prints, which now hang in the Buttery. In February 2020 the President invited the new CEO of Amref UK, Camilla Knox-Peebles, and the fundraising manager, Rebecca Miller, to a guest night dinner, where they met the Wolfson Amref student representatives, Nameerah Khan and Ryan Walker. The possibility of Amref's London staff spending a training day in College is currently being discussed.

Conclusion

This report has, of necessity, been constrained by time and space, and is therefore somewhat sketchy. But it does display a caring College that values black lives.

That is not to say that more could not have been done to demonstrate this; and more may yet be done, in particular to increase the proportion of black and ethnic minority fellows and students, both from the UK and abroad, as justice and fairness demand.

In confronting the challenges posed by BLM, Wolfson has foundations on which to build; and, in its response to the issue of South African disinvestment, a democratic example of how to proceed.

APPENDIX

DISINVESTMENT AND BOYCOTT: WOLFSON COLLEGE AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID

[nb: all indented text is direct quotation from source]

The background

After its victory in the South African general election of 1948 the National Party there introduced a policy of apartheid ('apartness'), which entailed strict racial segregation and discrimination, intended to perpetuate white minority rule. There was worldwide opposition to this policy. In the United Kingdom a boycott movement began in 1959, designed to encourage consumers not to purchase South African goods. The Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960 galvanized opposition in the UK, and the boycott coalition evolved into the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Economic sanctions remained the mainstay of its campaign: the UK was then the largest foreign investor in South Africa, while South Africa was one of the UK's largest export markets.

On 16 June 1976 thousands of people in the black township of Soweto, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, gathered to protest against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as the principal teaching language in schools. The protestors, mostly schoolchildren and students, were fired on by police, and many were killed. The events of 16 June triggered the Soweto Uprising, escalating the opposition to apartheid both inside South Africa and beyond.

Disinvestment: Wolfson leads the way?

It was against the background of the Soweto Uprising that on 2 November 1976 five Wolfson graduate students signed a joint letter to Joan Mott, chair of the College Finance Committee, calling for College to divest itself of its 'substantial shareholdings in two companies, Rio Tinto Zinc and Consolidated Goldfields [sc. Gold Fields], which […] promote their own financial interests in South Africa to the detriment of the African majority'. The five claimed to act as 'representatives of Wolfson Graduate Students', and worked under the umbrella of the National Union of Students' campaign for institutional disinvestment:

> We consider that it is morally reprehensible that the College should continue to hold these investments, and write to request that this matter be brought before the Finance Committee for consideration at their next meeting on November 10th, with a view to an open debate on the subject at the next General Meeting of the College.

Mott's reply, 10 November, has not survived, but her marginal notes on this letter – she wrote 'how does this help to end Ap.?' – do not indicate that she was in sympathy.

A matter of weeks later, on 10 January 1977, the College's investments adviser at the County Bank, R. S. Cutler, wrote to the President, Sir Henry Fisher, with the results of a review that he said were prompted by 'the recent sharp rise in the equity market'. He recommended selling a number of holdings, among them 'the two mining shares in the portfolio, Consolidated Gold Fields and RTZ, on the grounds that the relative stability of sterling has reduced the attraction of such overseas currency hedges'. Three days later the President quoted directly from this letter in a reply to the graduate students who had written to Joan Mott: he added that the Finance Committee, of which he had become chairman, taking over from Mott, had agreed to the sale.

College's shareholdings in RTZ and Consolidated Gold Fields were indeed substantial – worth £25,662 and £10,336 respectively, a total of £225,000 in 2019 terms – and somehow news of the sale reached the *Oxford Mail*, which contacted the President for comment. Despite appearances to the contrary, Sir Henry stated that the sale was a purely banking decision, made on financial grounds. The *Oxford Mail*'s reporter clearly suspected otherwise, and the story that the paper ran on 25 January was headlined 'Share sale "is a victory" ':

> Oxford anti-apartheid supporters are claiming their first victory in the battle to persuade university colleges to get rid of investments in South Africa after Wolfson College's announcement that it is selling £50,000 worth of shares in two companies in that country.
>
> "It's our first success," said Mrs Anne Mobbs, secretary of the Oxford University Anti-Apartheid Group – despite Wolfson's insistence that the decision was taken on bankers' advice.
>
> Wolfson students also put a different interpretation on the decision to sell the shares in the Rio Tinto Zinc and Consolidated Gold Fields companies. "It will be a fine boost to the anti-apartheid campaign," said Alan Bradley, a Student Union representative at Wolfson. "At no time was it openly stated by the college that it had ceded to student pressure, but we think it is not quite as simple a decision as it says," he said.

Bradley was probably right. It may be entirely coincidental that within weeks of the graduate students first raising the issue i) County Bank advised that the shares be sold, ii) the sale was completed, and iii) the President took the chair of the key Finance Committee. Another interpretation, and the one favoured here, is that the President, who, as events would reveal, was against South African disinvestment, liaised with County Bank in order to defuse a potentially awkward situation, while avoiding the appearance of College having succumbed to student pressure. What is undeniable is that pressure was brought to bear: this was the beginning of the Wolfson campaign to boycott the apartheid regime.

The Investments Working Party

Over the next year the disinvestment movement gained support worldwide – in May 1977 students at Stanford staged a well-publicized disinvestment sit-in, and that September the EEC published a Code of Conduct for Companies with Interests in South Africa. This was essentially a code of minimum acceptable employment practices: although not legally binding, it was designed to exert 'moral pressure on European companies'. In May 1978 a government White Paper urged all UK companies with South African business 'to make every effort to promote the adoption of the policies and practices recommended in the Code of Conduct to the fullest possible extent'.

The same month the GPC established an 'Investments Working Party' (IWP). It was to review the College's investments 'in companies with holdings in SA', and examine also the possibility of transferring the College account from Barclays to a bank with 'a smaller commitment in SA'. Its brief was a fact-finding one, and it would not be required to make recommendations.

The IWP was chaired by Derek Wyatt; its other members were Dr Broadbent, Dr Gear, Dr Mann, Roger Just, and David Souter, although over time there were changes of personnel. The IWP reported back to the GPC in February 1979. The bulk of its work, undertaken by Wyatt, had consisted of writing to the chairmen of companies in which College had shares, with requests for information: in particular, how far did their respective 1978 annual reports show that they

had conformed with the EEC Code? In researching this the IWP corresponded with a wide range of organizations, including the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the South African Embassy, the UK–SA Trade Association, the Department of Trade, Christian Concern for South Africa, and the universities of Aberdeen, Bath, Loughborough, and Wales.

The longest section of its February 1979 report was entitled 'Background to the concern for SA'. This was a historical overview that laid out the overwhelming moral case for disinvestment. The IWP was aware that not everyone subscribed to this approach, and that the supply of cheap, non-unionized labour in South Africa, and the absence of regulations safeguarding working conditions, meant that the country was an attractive proposition to investors: 'Studies in the US and Britain […] have consistently shown that returns on capital in South Africa are among the highest, and often the highest, in the entire world.'

The report next reviewed 'Arguments supporting various courses of action'. These included those in favour of total disinvestment, those in favour of partial investment, and those in favour of 'Ignoring the problem'; the latter mostly argued either for the separation of business from ethics, or else that disinvestment simply would not achieve its stated aims. On the separate question of the College bank it was noted that 'Barclays not only meets the Code of Conduct but goes beyond it.'

The IWP was not authorized to make recommendations, but the final section of its report, 'Comments', offered some conclusions. Although there was 'a distribution of opinion' on the IWP, all its members supported 'action by the College'. They regarded the situation in South Africa as 'highly dangerous, potentially explosive':

> Thus for both moral and pragmatic reasons there are many who would like to see Britain sever its connection with South Africa. This is easier said than done and many of the reasons why that is so are given in the section 'Arguments supporting various courses of action'. One thing is clear to us: so long as the present circumstances continue, there should be no further flow of investment funds from the United Kingdom to the Republic of South Africa. It is not simply a moral question: our country is 'locking up' vast sums of capital: and in a way which may eventually result in total loss.

Proposals for action

On 1 March 1979 the GPC considered the IWP report, which it decided 'should be made generally available to members of the College'. Anyone who had questions for the IWP, comments on the report, or recommendations for action, was advised to write to the Bursar. The following week the General Meeting passed a vote of thanks to the IWP, and by 22 to 1 asked the Governing Body to authorize it to make non-binding recommendations 'on the strength of its findings'.

The IWP subsequently made four proposals. They were designed to 'appeal to as wide a proportion of the College as possible, even though some individuals among us may favour other suggestions'. The general feeling of the IWP members can be gauged by the fact that they prefaced their proposals with a paragraph from Jonathan Derrick's *Africa's Slaves Today* which succinctly describes the appalling nature of apartheid. Directly afterwards they observe: 'That is the situation which Wolfson College, through some of its investments, is indirectly

supporting. In making our proposals for lessening the College's support of this indefensible system, we shall pay attention to specific aspects of the problem.' The IWP's four proposals were intended:

> (a) to limit action to certain cases in which either the College risks major discredit by improper commercial associations or in which the college is taking unnecessary financial risks or both. That is, any proposal to do less than we suggest would appear to us as positive political support for apartheid.
>
> (b) to ensure that any action has a good chance of desirable effects.
>
> (c) to provide clear and practical guide-lines by which decisions can be made.

Under the proposals College would not invest in companies:

> 1. which do not state that they have no plans to increase their investment in South Africa.
>
> 2. with subsidiaries that show evidence of increasing their dependence on migrant labour.
>
> 3. which employ more than 5% of their working capital in South Africa.
>
> 4. which, having had their attention drawn to ways in which they are not implementing the Code [of Conduct], fail to demonstrate in their subsequent report to the Department of Trade that they are implementing the Code fully.

If adopted, the proposals would have meant disinvesting in some highly profitable companies, notably British American Tobacco, BP, and Shell.

'A minimum standard of respectability': the GPC debate of 3 May 1979

On 3 May the GPC debated the IWP's report, the comments it had generated, and the four proposals. The minutes of the meeting state that 'There was unanimous support for the Working Party's condemnation of South African infringement of human rights.' The unity ended there.

Less than a dozen members of College appear to have submitted questions and comments on the IWP's report, and it was the President who had the most to say. He submitted four written questions (2 March) and eleven comments (13 March). These challenged the very principle and efficacy of disinvestment.

Wyatt's written response on each point was robust. The President pointed out, for example, that the College could not legally act until it had gained its charter, and could only make recommendations to its Trustees. Wyatt answered that the latter were already in the habit of delegating such detailed decisions to College. The President argued that as an educational charity the College was obliged by statute to invest its funds according to professional advice, seeking the best return, and that the 'Governing Body could not properly adopt any policy which prevented it from carrying out its obligation in this respect'.

Wyatt countered:

> This surely cannot lay on them in every case an obligation to maximise return over a given period, regardless of possible discredit, damage to reputation, or longer-term risk. A minimum standard of respectability is an important factor in institutional investment. It should perhaps be made more clear that most of the companies which we are discussing have thus far failed to comply with a clear request from Her

> Majesty's Government, namely, to meet certain standards of employment or explain why they cannot.

The President's long final comment betrayed his frustration. It begins:

> If the purpose of 'disinvestment' is merely to express moral indignation at apartheid and its consequences, without actually doing any good to anyone, then one must ask whether it is right to hamper and distort the investment policies of a charitable institution in order to satisfy the moral feelings of individuals. There are other ways in which indignation can be expressed.

Wyatt replied 'There are several rather separate arguments in this paragraph […]. In summary, we would hope that the College can find some form of action which will be effective and practical, rather than a mere gesture.' He might also have pointed out that the purpose of the EEC's non-binding Code of Conduct, which HMG urged should be adopted 'to the fullest possible extent', was precisely to exert moral pressure.

If the questions/comments put by the President betrayed scepticism, those of Dr Kay exhibited a degree of outright hostility. He argued that 'it was a mistake' for the IWP to have accepted a brief that focused on South Africa since it 'prevents the members of the College from taking a balanced view of discriminatory practices in general', e.g. in other countries in Africa, and also in the USSR. Kay argued further that it was 'obvious that the major source of opposition to South Africa exclusively comes from left wing political groups'. Wyatt responded that to polarize the issue politically in this way 'does a gross injustice to all those people of many different political persuasions who, whether for moral, religious or ethical reasons abhor the system of apartheid'.

Kay also noted that the IWP report had referred to 'houses without electricity or running water as though this were a serious deficiency peculiar to the housing of Blacks in South Africa', when in fact 'the vast majority of the world's population lacks these amenities which are peculiar to western-style, wealthy, energy-wasteful societies and are not necessary for a happy and healthy life'. And he concluded by wondering why the IWP portrayed 'the partial lack of modern amenities in black African housing as evidence for deliberate deprivation by the white community when the present standard achieved there is superior to the vast majority of housing in Africa and throughout most of the world'. Wyatt answered that the stark difference in the average housing conditions of whites and blacks in South Africa was evidence of racial discrimination. The IWP sought to show not just the inequalities, but 'the reasons for the inequalities that exist'.

The debate at the GPC meeting of 3 May built on these written submissions. The President frankly admitted that he 'would be reluctant to carry some of the Working Party's recommendations' to the Trustees: in particular, College 'owed its existence' to the Wolfson Foundation, which had recently advanced a loan to deal with building repairs, and Sir Henry felt that 'It would be ungrateful and impolitic to tell Great Universal Stores how to behave in South Africa and would certainly offend a Trustee and Honorary Fellow who had done so much for the College' (i.e. Sir Leonard Wolfson, later Lord Wolfson).

The majority on the committee supported his scepticism, and in a series of votes the IWP's four proposals were watered down. It was decided, for example, that companies that did not conform to the EEC Code should be allowed more time before their shares were sold. The

approach of the Church Commissioners to this same question was held up as 'a reasonable compromise, and for the College to follow their example could not be regarded as risking moral censure'.

The debate at the General Meeting, 9 May 1979

Forty-six members of College attended the General Meeting of Wednesday 9 May 1979, at which the IWP's report and proposals were 'debated at some length'. The Bursar reported on the discussion at the GPC, but where financial, legal and practical considerations had there been uppermost, the General Meeting was clearly more concerned with the moral and ethical issues involved. It was observed by one speaker that half those who had submitted written comments felt that 'the Working Party had underemphasized many of the worst aspects of the present situation in South Africa'. Disarmingly, Wyatt agreed: 'the report did tend to underestimate the deplorable consequence of apartheid'.

After the critical scrutiny to which the IWP's four proposals had been subjected at the GPC, Wyatt now offered a revised wording, which made them more straightforward and effective:

1. We propose that the College does not invest in companies that are known to be expanding their interests in South Africa.
2. We propose that the College does not invest in companies that are known to be increasing their dependence on migrant labour.
3. We propose that the College does not invest in companies that are known to employ more than 5% of their net capital in South Africa.
4. We propose that the College does not invest in companies which, having had their attention drawn to ways in which they are not implementing the Code [of Conduct], fail to demonstrate in their second subsequent report to the Department of Trade that they are implementing the Code fully.

Wyatt explained that the proposals 'had a strong pragmatic content and a strong moral content; they were both modest and moderate and the Working Party could see no reason why they should not be implemented'.

This brought matters to a head. The GM was faced with the choice of endorsing these proposals, or the diluted version adopted by the GPC. The President, seconded by the Bursar, proposed the latter course, which was defeated by 33 votes to 6. Wyatt, seconded by Mr Trainor, proposed the former, which was agreed by 36 votes to 2. A third proposal, that College should not invest in companies that refused to submit the necessary information when asked, was agreed by 39 to 1.

The difficulties of implementation

The GM votes of 9 May 1979 on the issue of South African disinvestment were both symbolic and unequivocal. In a sense, that was the easy part. More difficult was the effective implementation of the proposals that had been adopted. The question was considered by the GPC on 18 October. The committee accepted that companies that were perceived not to be implementing the EEC Code would have to be warned about their future conduct, but the majority felt that, 'before making an allegation of non-compliance', the GPC should review for itself the evidence gathered by the IWP.

This might seem a reasonable request, but the way that it was broached by the President upset several members of the committee. On 20 October the Domestic Bursar, Cecilia Dick, supported by four others, wrote to Sir Henry 'to express our perplexity and concern at the way the South African investment issue has been handled':

> We feel we should warn you that the view that many members of the College, rightly or wrongly, already hold, that you have tried to postpone action on the question, will be much strengthened by the line you took at the GPC on Thursday. Surely the right time to have raised questions about the evidence on which the Working Party evaluated the record of companies in implementing the EEC Code of Conduct was when the Working Party reported? Surely also the Working Party should have been asked to explain its grounds of evaluation if you had reason to question them? It is most unfortunate that our discussion took place without all the relevant information, and that the Chairman of the Working Party was not consulted before the meeting, and also not asked to attend the meeting.

This complaint seems to have had some effect. A follow-up meeting of the GPC was arranged for 24 October, and Wyatt was invited to attend. The President also suggested, in a note before the meeting, that he and Wyatt should work together in drafting the necessary letters. At the meeting it was agreed that the GPC would review the letters before they were dispatched, but nothing was said about reviewing the evidence itself, and the President now no longer insisted on first consulting the Trustees. Instead, he proposed to inform them at the earliest opportunity of what was being done. In March of the following year he wrote to Lord Wolfson himself, pointing out those areas where it seemed that GUS had not fully complied with the code.

At the end of 1982 the IWP reported on progress, and was able to point to 'a very marked improved in conformity with the [EEC] Code, which was ascribed, at least in part, to the effect of the letters previously sent to the chairmen of companies by the College, pointing out ways in which the companies were not conforming with the Code'. The labour involved had been substantial, however, and Wyatt understandably stood down as chair of the IWP. It is significant that he was succeeded by the President, a sign perhaps that the controversy over disinvestment was effectively over. The argument had been won by the IWP once its view was endorsed by the General Meeting: what remained was to apply the agreed policy, and the President did not shirk from this. In 1984 Sir Henry wrote again to GUS about conformity to the Code:

> The College is, of course, well aware that it owes its existence to the generosity of the Wolfson Foundation. […] I am sure you will agree that the College should not allow its recognition of the debt which it owes to the Wolfson Foundation to prevent its directing to Great Universal Stores the same enquiries which it has put to the other companies in its portfolio.

Both he and Wyatt, though, recognised that GUS and Ford were special cases: they could be pressed on conformity, but, even if they failed to make progress, it was unlikely that their shares would be sold. And it is unclear, without further research, whether and when shares in Shell and BP were sold.

The 'Boycott Barclays' campaign

Running parallel to the NUS's campaign for South African disinvestment was its call to 'Boycott Barclays'. The NUS estimated that in 1969 around half of all UK students banked with Barclays: ten years later that figure had dropped to around a quarter.

The campaign against Barclays affected Wolfson because it was the College bank, and as the debate over disinvestment subsided, the debate over Barclays came to the fore. It must have had special resonance for Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, who succeeded Sir Henry Fisher as President in 1985. At one of his first General Meetings, on 27 November 1985, he faced a call from Alex George, a philosophy JRF, to revisit the question of the College bank.

The issue had first been raised as early as November 1976, when the manager of the Carfax branch of Barclays, R. J. King, had written pre-emptively to the acting bursar, Allen Maunder, noting that 'this Bank's interests in South Africa have been the subject of public discussion and, in some circles, criticism'. To counter this he sent Maunder fact sheets describing the benign nature of Barclays' employment practices in South Africa. A decade later Barclays had sharpened its act: College was sent a slickly produced publicity booklet emblazoned with the slogan 'THE *ANTI*-APARTHEID BANK'. It ended with the emphatic assertion that:

> Barclays National Bank acts as a force for justice in South Africa, helping to break down discrimination and to push back the barriers of apartheid.

This was an Orwellian inversion of reality. In February 1986 Judith Grindle, of Christian Concern for Southern Africa, answered a request from the President for information on Barclays. Grindle noted that the bank paid its non-white staff above the rates recommended by the EEC Code, but that focusing on the bank's employment practices missed the point:

> Barclays' presence in South Africa significantly supports the present regime and status quo. In 1984 £32,500,000 was paid to the South African government in taxes. South African law obliges the bank to invest 30% of its assets in government bonds and securities. According to the latest figures available to me, this amounted to approximately £500,000,000.

Barclays also operated twenty-six branches in Namibia, even though South Africa's occupation of that country was deemed illegal by international law and the UN. Moreover, as with all major companies in South Africa, the bank was expected to participate in activities 'relating to the security of major institutions in times of civil strife. These activities, which are usually secret, are controlled and coordinated by the government.'

When considering the Barclays question in 1979, while serving on the IWP, Dr Michael Argyle had opined that while it could not be argued that Barclays was 'operating a racist policy', it gave 'powerful support in South Africa to a racist government'. In a detailed letter to the President, in May 1986, Alex George made essentially the same point, observing that there were alternative banks, notably the Co-operative Bank, which had a policy of not lending to South Africa. At the next GM, on 11 June, George was able to report that the President – who was not at the meeting – 'had asked the Bursar to compile a report on the possibilities of alternative banks'. Somewhat embarrassingly, the Bursar corrected him, noting that he had been asked to report on 'the disadvantages to the College of moving from Barclays'.

This perhaps reveals the President's thinking. When the Bursar duly reported, in October, he made the disadvantages of moving the account abundantly clear. College then used a branch of Barclays at the junction of Banbury Road and North Parade, within walking distance of

College. In an era when virtually all transactions had to be conducted in the branch, this proximity mattered, as did the personal relationships with individual bank staff that developed over time. Moreover, the College accounts staff were likely to resent the change, since it would make their work much more difficult.

The backdrop to this issue was rising levels of political violence across South Africa, and on 12 June 1986, four days before the tenth anniversary of the Soweto Uprising, the government there declared a state of emergency. By October of that year six Oxford colleges (Balliol, Corpus, Exeter, Magdalen, New, and Wadham) had moved their accounts from Barclays, prompting Alex George to ask of Sir Raymond 'what makes Wolfson's position relatively different?' He requested that the President make a statement on Barclays at the next General Meeting, on 22 October.

In the President's absence from this meeting it was left to the Bursar to explain that he and Sir Raymond were due soon to speak to the local director of Barclays to discuss the situation. He noted that only around 6 per cent of the College's total assets were kept at Barclays, but the feeling of the General Meeting was strongly that College should cease its association with the bank: when this was put to a vote it was carried by 29 to 4, with 11 abstentions.

More could be expected on Barclays at the next General Meeting, 26 November, but two days before, on 24 November, events took a dramatic and unexpected turn. According to a front-page story in *The Times*, Barclays, 'a frequent target of anti-apartheid campaigners', intended to pull out of South Africa. When the subject was next raised at the GM the President advised that College 'should accept Barclays' statement at face value, and continue to bank with them'. This was agreed, subject to the rider that if Barclays had not withdrawn within six months, or at most a year, 'further action would be considered'.

It transpired that Barclays had indeed turned its back on South Africa, a bombshell that inflicted serious damage on the economy there. External and internal boycotts were already exacting a heavy toll, and the role played by academic institutions in this cannot be discounted. By 1985 disinvestment in Barclays by US educational institutions had accelerated, more than 60 colleges and universities withdrawing around $350m. Wolfson's individual contribution may have been negligible in financial terms, but in the context of a coordinated movement it mattered.

The South African regime limped on, but was clearly failing. In 1989 F. W. de Klerk became Prime Minister, and on 2 February 1990 he announced the unbanning of the ANC, and other proscribed anti-apartheid organizations. On 11 February Nelson Mandela was released from prison, after more than twenty-seven years in captivity. He prepared to guide South Africa on the last leg of what he called 'a long walk to freedom'.

Epilogue

More research would be needed to uncover all the details of this story, and some of the assumptions and conclusions presented here might need to be altered. What is evident, though, is that through the industry of a voluntary working party, and the debates and votes of the General Meeting, Wolfson joined the broad anti-apartheid and boycott movement. It disinvested from any company with more than a 5 per cent share of its business in South Africa, or which failed to show genuine intent to conform to the EEC Code, and it was on the verge of

withdrawing its account from Barclays. Financial arguments were deployed, but moral considerations were the determining factor.

Virtually all research undertakings involve some degree of personal discovery, and in the eyes of his contemporaries this was true of Derek Wyatt, the long-time chair of the IWP. Roger Just, a student member of the IWP, observed Wyatt at close quarters, and he developed a profound admiration for the industry and integrity with which Wyatt approached his voluntary task. Roger Just later reflected on those days, and his comments on Wyatt are worth quoting in full, since they reflect the character of College itself:

> At the outset Derek made it fairly clear to us that he was not himself enthusiastic about disinvestment, but in a methodical manner he set about contacting all the companies in which the College had investments to determine whether or not they were involved in South Africa. I believe most said they were not, and I think a number of the more radical students were inclined to think that what we were about to witness was going to be a whitewash. It was not. Derek discovered that the information he was seeking was not as straightforward as he had at first thought, the problem being that companies in turn have holdings in other companies. Derek would be told by a company that it had no business in South Africa, only to discover that it owned a considerable part of another business that did indeed operate in South Africa. Despite a barrage of obfuscation, Derek doggedly pursued these companies, and his verbal reports back to the committee betrayed more and more frustration and anger. I remember him saying to us, with a sort of innocent outrage: 'They lied to me. These people lied to me!' As I have said, Derek started his enquiries with little apparent enthusiasm for the prospect of disinvestment. By the end he was an angry man, and what transformed him was simply his own commitment to the truth.