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Morefield, Jeannie

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**‘Families of Mankind’:
British Liberty, League Internationalism, and the Traffic in Women and Children**

Jeanne Morefield

Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham,
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

Abstract

The League of Nations’ long term interest in the traffic in women and children mirrored, in key ways, what I call the ‘familial internationalism’ of some of its most influential British founders. Grounded in their understanding of the British Empire as an institution uniquely able to reconcile ‘liberty and self-government’ with the denial of liberty and self-government to the colonies, this vision of internationalism recast nations as cultural ‘families of mankind’ rather than political units with a right to sovereignty. This paper thus explores first the influence of British imperial thought on League internationalism and then moves on to an analysis of the League’s Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children. In contrast to most historical investigations of the Committee, I read these archives as multivocal sites of political and cultural contestation about the status of women in relation to the national ‘family’. Ultimately, I argue, the work of the Committee resulted in an international convention that restricted women’s liberty by making it more difficult for them to travel internationally.

Key Words

League of Nations, traffic in women and children, British imperialism, familial internationalism.

Contact: Jeanne Morefield, J.Morefield@bham.ac.uk

In 1921, the traffic in women and children became the first human rights issue to be formally recognized by a Convention of the League of Nations, a recognition soon followed by the creation of the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children.¹ By 1926, the authors of the League of Nations' Information Section were describing the traffic as an issue 'eminently suited for treatment by the League'.² That same year, in a lecture before the Academy of Political Science in New York, William Snow, the General Director of the American Social Hygiene Association and Chairman of the Special Body of Experts for the Advisory Committee, explained to his audience 'that what seemed to be a very thorny subject has proven to be one of the things of which the nations of the world have said: "It isn't political; it's a thing we all want to deal with on a practical basis. We want the facts"'.³ Clearly, for many supporters of the League, the issue of trafficking was particularly useful for demonstrating what the institution was meant to do well; coordinate information regarding a thorny – but not terribly controversial or political – world problem.

What was it about the traffic in women and children that made it so 'eminently suited' for treatment by the League? I argue below that the issue's status as a non-political problem resonated particularly strongly with the vision of internationalism in widest circulation at this particular moment, a moment when most people in the world didn't actually live in nations but, rather, under increasingly contested forms of colonial governance. I call this vision, 'familial

¹ Barbara Metzger, 'Toward an International Human Rights Regime During the Inter-War Years: The League of Nations' Combat of Traffic in Women and Children', in *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire, and Transnationalism, 1880-1950*, eds. Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, (New York, NY; Palgrave, 2007), 73.

² *The League of Nations Social and Humanitarian Work* (Geneva; The League of Nations, Secretariat, The Information Section, 1926), 25-26.

³ William Snow, 'The Program of the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People', *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 12.1 (1926), 417.

internationalism'. Put forward by British thinkers such as Alfred Zimmern and Lionel Curtis – both of whom would have an outsized influence on the League's final political form – this approach to the League was grounded in a reading of the British Empire as a form of global governance uniquely able to reconcile 'liberty and self-government' with the denial of liberty and self-government to the colonies by transferring the idea of national autonomy to the cultural, social, and moral realm.⁴ Understanding nations as non-political, 'families of mankind' enabled these thinkers to imagine a League internationalism – based on the British Empire – in which the proposed Racial Equality Clause could be rejected in 1919 and Mandated territories, European empires, and sovereign nation states, could sit comfortably cheek by jowl on a global terrain in which all parties were committed equally to the cause of ensuring, 'universal peace without the universal sacrifice of liberty'.⁵

Arguing that, as a discourse, the traffic in women and children worked in tandem with the League's deeply inegalitarian vision of international cooperation does not mean that the League's interest in the issue was purely cynical or that the individual members, activists, and representatives of women's organizations who participated in the work of the Committee were ill intentioned. It means, rather, that we should treat the proceedings of the Committee as a complicated, multivocal site of political and cultural contestation rather than as an obvious

⁴ Letter from Zimmern to Hobson, The Round Table Papers, Bodleian Library, Bodl.MSS.Engl.hist.c817, 139. For more on Zimmern's influence on the League of Nations see Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants Without Swords* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2005). For accounts of Curtis influence see Debora Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1995) and Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴ Alfred Zimmern, *Nationality and Government* (New York, NY: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1918), 36.

⁵ Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, 39.

triumph for human rights. The work of the Committee over the years of its existence thus reflects *both* a flowering of transnational feminist organizing aimed at critically reappraising the problems of sex work *and* a resolutely conservative understanding of nations as moral and familial – *not* political – units. The traffic in women and children was, thus, ‘eminently suited’ for the League because, at the end of the day, it reinforced a familial internationalism that helped reconcile the League’s myriad inequalities with, in the words of one anti-trafficking activist, ‘a conviction of a humanity which transcends all differences’.⁶ In this sense, the fact that Article 22 (laying out the conditions for the Mandate System) and Article 23 (laying out the League’s concern with the traffic in women and children) should sit right next to each other in the flow of the League Covenant seems more than serendipitous. They were two halves of the same, familial coin.

In what follows, I first explore how key thinkers like Zimmern brought their understanding of an internationalism modelled on the British Empire’s ‘spirit of liberty’ to the League and discuss the way this vision depoliticized nations by familiarizing them.⁷ I move on to examine contemporary scholarship that focuses on the imperialist origins of League internationalism as well as the disconnect between this work and scholarship that focusses specifically on the League’s treatment of the traffic in women and children. The second half of the article looks first at the origin of the League’s concern with the traffic in women and children and then at the internal debates taking place within the Advisory Committee. In contrast to most historical investigations of the Committee, I read these archives not simply as evidence of either transnational feminist activism in the inter war period or the triumph of social purity crusades,

⁶‘Report of the Seventh International Congress for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, London, Tuesday, June 28th - Friday, July 1st, 1927’, 121.

⁷ Alfred Zimmern, *Third British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 1.

but, rather as internally fraught discussions about the relationship between women and the national family that ultimately reinforced a deeply hierarchical understanding of familial internationalism. In particular, many Committee members' obsessive fixation with the deleterious effects of "licensed houses" suggests, I argue, an equally obsessive fixation with the threat posed to the national family by the movement of women across borders. That this fixation would contribute to the passage of a League convention in 1933 which made it more difficult for women travelling alone to cross national borders gestures toward the internally tensions of the 'spirit of liberty' that circulated within the League's British inspired internationalism.

1. The Kingdom of the Fairies: Empire, Internationalism, and Slavery into Traffic

In a 1966 chapter entitled, 'Western Values in International Relations', Martin Wight used the Hobbesian concept of the 'kingdom of the fairies' to capture the attitude of mid-century realist thinkers like E.H. Carr toward idealist (or 'utopian') supporters of the League of Nations in Britain between the wars. For Carr, he argued, the 'new kingdom of the fairies that seduces the intelligence of men is not the Roman Church but the League of Nations, which is none other than the ghost of the Pax Britannica, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof...' ⁸ One does not need to agree entirely with either Wight's characterization of Carr, nor Carr's characterization of the idealists, to see the large grain of truth in these words. For many of the most influential thinkers involved with the League of Nations movement in Britain – men who exercised direct influence over the 1919 peace process and the League of Nations Covenant and who eventually become not only some of the first professors of International Relations (IR) in the world but also helped to found Chatham House and influenced the founding of the Council on Foreign

⁸ Martin Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations', in *Diplomatic Investigations*, eds. Wight, Herbert Butterfield (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1966), 121.

Relations in America – the connection between the British Empire and the emerging form of international organization embodied in the League was obvious. In his influential 1918 pamphlet, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, South African statesman, war-time general in the British Army, and Commonwealth activist Jan Smuts argued that, in the British Empire, could be found an ‘embryo league of nations’, a ‘lesser league already existing’, and the ‘nearest approach to the League of Nations’ in the present world.⁹ For the extraordinarily influential Alfred Zimmern, understanding international organization in the future implied understanding the ‘unique position’ which the British Empire occupied in the world and ‘the unique possibilities that are in store for it in the world politics of the twentieth century’.¹⁰

For Carr, Morgenthau, and a host of other mid-century critics of international relations in the inter-war period, thinkers and activists like Zimmern, Cecil Rhodes, and Smuts were stridently committed to a ‘utopian’ vision of international organization grounded in the fantastical theory that, in Carr’s words, ‘the maintenance of British supremacy is the performance of a duty to mankind’.¹¹ What Carr failed to fully grasp, however, was the extent to which powerful liberal thinkers (including, also, Curtis, Phillip Kerr, and Gilbert Murray) weren’t merely relying on a nineteenth-century, harmony of interest oriented, notion of imperial mission to prop up their increasingly influential visions of world order after the war. Rather, these thinkers were actively transforming their theories of British imperial supremacy into an explicitly post-imperial, liberal vernacular. In the hands of Zimmern, Curtis, and Smuts, British

⁹ Jan Smuts, *The League of Nations; A Practical Suggestion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 30, 32, 29. Smuts vacillates between capitalizing and not capitalizing ‘league’ and ‘nations’.

¹⁰ Alfred Zimmern, ‘United Britain: A Study in 20th Century Imperialism’, (1905), The Alfred Zimmern Paper, Bodleian Library, Bodl. MS Zimmern 136, fol. 24.

¹¹ Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis* (London; Macmillan and Co, 1942), 97.

imperialism *became* liberal internationalism, or rather, a vision of post-imperial imperialism, ‘good for all men, white or dark’ which was universally relevant but internally variegated, a ‘vertical section of humanity in which all levels have some place’.¹² One of the ways these thinkers squared the circle between what was in actuality a deeply inegalitarian and segregated vision of the world with a universal vision of liberal, international cooperation, was to frame the relationship between peoples in familial terms. Thus, in 1915, Curtis would argue that the British Commonwealth ‘is the noblest enterprise yet conceived in the cause of liberty, for it has played a part greater than any before in joining together without binding in chains the diverse families of mankind’.¹³ That same year, Zimmern would use the exact same phrase, ‘families of mankind’, to describe the internationalism he envisioned at the heart of a future League of Nations.¹⁴ In essence, as with liberal imperialism, this language of familial internationalism cast the League in universal terms but preserved basic distinctions between white and black, colonizer and colonized, mature and developing, civilized and uncivilized. Within this vision, ‘the cause of liberty’ was furthered when the ‘families of mankind’ were bound together in a fashion that recognized their social and cultural diversity rather than their political autonomy.

For most IR realists developing their critique of League ‘utopians’ from the perspective of the Second World War, however, the problem with the inter-war thinkers wasn’t merely that they placed too much faith in a moral system of international governance modelled after a flawed conception of imperial civilization but, rather, that they had placed faith in anything other than

¹² Alfred Zimmern to John Hobson, 13 September, 1916. Bodl.MS.Engl.hist.c817, fol. 139. Lionel Curtis, from a memorandum commenting on the draft of Section Three of the Round Table’s Commonwealth project, The Lionel Curtis Paper, Bodleian Library, MS.Curtis 836, fol. 122.

¹³ Lionel Curtis, *The Commonwealth of Nations* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1918), 177.

¹⁴ Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, 36.

state interest. The intransigent insistence of the utopians, so this line of realist thought goes, on bringing their liberal fantasies about ‘public diplomacy’ and ‘collective security’ into the realm of real world, state driven, international politics inevitably led to appeasement and thus to World War Two. As Cecilia Lynch elaborates, this realist critique is deeply, internally conflicted. For many critics of the ‘crisis’ that was the inter-war period, pacifists and League activists inspired policies both actively created the conditions for appeasement and, at the same time, were completely and delusionally out of touch with how politics actually worked. They were, therefore, both all-powerful and utterly powerless. In truth, Lynch continues, what clearly bothered the realist oriented critics-of-the-period-in-retrospect was their sense that ‘proper’ norms of conduct by states, diplomats, and social agents’ had been subverted.¹⁵ Peace movement activists and League supporters, according to this line of thought, clearly misunderstood how inappropriate it was to bring the tools necessary to change political life in the domestic realm – e.g. social activism, public modes of diplomacy, legal remedies – to the hard hitting realm of the international.

This dismissal of the inter-war period as a ‘crisis’ born of peace activism is, as Lynch and others have demonstrated, deeply gendered.¹⁶ Some of the most powerful associations to influence politics during this era – from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom to the National Women’s Institute – were run by women and much of the subsequent critique of the period has focused on the inappropriately soft (e.g. not masculine) attitude of Neville Chamberlin and the other figures associated with appeasement. This attitude, coupled

¹⁵ Cecilia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁶ See also Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 2011).

with the League's decline and the disaster of World War Two, had a dampening effect on scholarly engagement with both international politics of the inter-war era and the League of Nations itself, a trend only reversed in the mid-1990's following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Key texts such as Wilson and Long's *Thinkers of the Twenty Year's Crisis* began to re-engage the thought of scholars whose work Carr and others had castigated as hopelessly utopian while an entire body of historical research has emerged to explore the inter-war period not by fixating on the question, 'why did the League fail?' but rather, in Susan Pedersen's words, by turning to the 'more properly historical question of what it did and meant over its twenty-five year existence'.¹⁷ Scholars like Lynch, Leila Rupp, and Barbara Metzger have all looked more closely at this period from the perspective of both further understanding the League and, specifically, widening scholarly appreciation for the role women played in its creation and continued to play in its functioning as an organization.

More recently, postcolonial and anticolonial scholars critical of liberal narratives of internationalism (which hide or occlude the ongoing legacies of formal and informal imperialism) have turned to the inter-war period to explore the origins of this systemic blindness. Antony Anghie's work has most clearly articulated the way the Mandate System's 'mechanisms of exclusion' not only officially extended formal imperialism in the name of internationalism but also established means by which the formerly colonized states could be disciplined through external economic and political bodies like the World Bank and the International Monetary fund long after formal processes of decolonization had been set in motion.¹⁸ For Anghie, the Mandate

¹⁷ Susan Pederson, 'Back to the League of Nations', *The American Historical Review*, 112.4 (2007), 1092.

¹⁸ Antony Anghie, 'The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities', *Third World Quarterly* 27.5 (2006): 739–753. See also Anghie's discussion of the 'right' to free

System ‘represented the first occasion on which an international institution, not limited in any way by the sovereignty of a state, could play a direct and unimpeded role in shaping the government, political institutions, and economy of a state’.¹⁹ Similarly, scholars like Adom Getachew, Siba Grovogui, and myself have all examined the deeply imperialist assumptions at the heart of much pro-League international thought, focusing in particular on the outsized influence of Jan Smuts on the development of the League’s Mandate System and on the way Smuts and Wilson together imagined the post-war peace in terms of what Getachew (drawing on Du Bois) calls the ‘global colour line’.²⁰ Getachew is also specifically concerned with way the League not only shoe-horned Africa into a version of its pre-war, colonized self through the Mandate System but also specifically produced qualified, ‘burdened’ forms of membership for Ethiopia and Liberia, refusing to acknowledge these states as fully ready for inclusion in a liberal system of international governance.

There is a bit of a disconnect, however, between scholarship focused on the League’s work regarding the traffic in women and children during the inter-war period and scholarship focused on the legal and political extension of imperialism during the same period, a disconnect that tracks the League’s own distinction between race and gender. Notably, the racial equality clause introduced by Japan was defeated at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 given the strong opposition expressed by the United States and Australia (and the British Empire, in support of

trade and ‘open door’ economic policies in the Mandate System in *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Antony Anghie, ‘Decolonizing the Concept of ‘Good Governance’ in *Decolonizing International Relations*, ed. Branwen Gruffydd Jones (New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 124.

²⁰ Adom Getachew, *World Making After Empire* (Princeton NJ; Princeton University Press, 2019). Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (Minneapolis, MN; University of Minnesota, 1996). Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2014).

Australia). At the same time, the League Covenant clearly articulated its support for gender equality by opening up all of its positions to men and women equally in Article 7.²¹ Scholarship that deals with this uncomfortable juxtaposition tends to do so by focusing on the relationship between British feminism and imperial politics as well as the impact of women's groups on humanitarian issues in the colonies before and after World War One. Susan Pedersen refers to this mode of engagement as 'maternalism', a label she extends to the activism of 'educated and usually well-to-do women, drawing equally on their faith in women's superior moral and motherly capacities and on a long experience of single-sex philanthropic and political work' to 'represent and protect those women and children who were presumed to be less fortunate'.²² Emily Baughan's excellent work on the Save the Children Campaign in Britain during the interwar era is similarly attentive to the way these campaigns mirrored the imperialist 'hierarchies and inequalities' of a League system which proclaimed itself to be fundamentally different from the nineteenth-century world order.²³ Work by Leila Rupp and Helen McCarthy has added to this growing body of scholarship dedicated to exploring the intersection of

²¹ Covenant of the League of Nations, The Avalon Project, Documents in Law and History, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp

²² Susan Pedersen, 'The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: The Controversy over "Child Slavery" in Hong Kong, 1917–1941', *Past and Present*, 171 (2001), 165. See also, Antoinette Burton, 'The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13.4 (1990), 293-308.

²³ Emily Baughan, 'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!' Empire, Internationalism, and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-War Britain', *Historical Research*, 86.231 (2013), 119. Daniel Gorman argues that women involved in these various maternalist projects were attracted to such causes because they allowed them a level of autonomy unavailable within 'the strictly masculine power structures of domestic politics'. For instance, he points out, a woman (Rachel Crowdy) could serve as the head of the Opium and Social Questions Section of the League 'a full decade before a woman held a cabinet position in the British Government'. Daniel Gorman, 'Empire, Internationalism, and the Campaign against the Traffic in Women and Children in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19.2 (2008), 216.

imperialist and internationalist attitudes in early twentieth century feminist and peace movements in Britain.²⁴

Scholars interested specifically in the relationship between historical women's movements and the League's Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, however, have been less interested in the imperial dimension and are often moved to fill in the historical gaps left by masculinist interpretations of this historical period by focusing their work on successful examples of transnational women's organizing that helped bring about the League's long term interest in the issue. Katarina Leppanen, for instance, argues that the International Council of Women and the International Women's Suffrage Alliance were able to influence on the drafting of the Covenant precisely because these drafters knew how dependent they were on the force of public opinion within member states and they counted on the League support whipped by 'strong female participation in the peace movement'.²⁵ For Leppanen, the fact that an anti-trafficking clause appeared in the League covenant demonstrates the visibility of women at the 1919 peace conference. Barbara Metzger's important work on the League and human rights similarly links the League's interest in the traffic to feminist activism and reads the League's 1921 Convention on the Traffic in Women and Children and the 1933 Convention on the Suppression of Traffic in Women of Full Age as 'milestones widening the scope of international law' and examples of the first international conventions 'dealing with human rights issues'.²⁶ Jessica Riley is similarly interested in the way feminists 'latched onto the issue of sex

²⁴ Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of An International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*.

²⁵ Katarina Leppanen, 'International Reorganization and the Traffic in Women', *Lychnos: Annual of the Swedish History of Social Science*, (2006), 116.

²⁶ Metzger, 'Toward an International Human Rights Regime during the Inter-War Years', 74.

trafficking to raise questions about women's civil rights and citizenship' and argues that the 'spirit of Geneva' briefly opened the door to feminist influence – and then shut it again in the 1930's with the rise of nationalism in the League.²⁷

As illuminating and instructive as these scholarly accounts of women's international organizing and the League are, however, they tend to largely elide questions of race and empire. Tellingly, Leppanen, Metzger and Rupp are rather subdued in their discussion of the shift in phrasing (which occurred in 1921) from the term 'white slavery' to the traffic in women and children. Both authors trace the historical evolution of British, American, and French feminist anti-prostitution politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, movements that were inspired by the work of Josephine Butler and the British Association for Moral and Social Hygiene. Both examine how the international activism of these movements led to the convening of the International Congress for the Suppression of White Slavery in London in 1899 and the passage of the 1904 and 1910 International Conventions for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic, both signed by roughly twenty countries. Neither Leppanen nor Metzger, however, give us a clear picture of *why*, in the context of the League's creation, the issue was rephrased as the traffic in women and children. Leppanen states that this shift in terminology 'is interesting because it marks a number of changes in the understanding of the world – questions of race and ethnicity, sexuality, and internationalized world politics, crystallized in the abandonment of 'slavery' for 'trafficking'.²⁸ She goes on to say that the move represents 'an increasing awareness and willingness to reframe the issue of traffic in women in a global context', to turn

²⁷ Jessica P. Riley, 'Claims To Protection: The Rise and Fall of Feminist Abolitionism in the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919–1936', *Journal of Women's History*, 22.4 (2010), 92.

²⁸ Leppanen, 'International Reorganization and the Traffic in Women', 524.

‘from the national to the international and from feminism to humanism’, but she gives us absolutely no information about the debates which led to this change nor any theorizing about the discursive rationale or power politics that informed the shift.²⁹ Rupp’s work on women’s international movements quite rightly refers to these movements long-term obsession with European women in colonial brothels as a ‘feminist Orientalist worldview’ but she tells us nothing about the decision to change the name from ‘white slavery’ to the ‘traffic in women and children’ other than to note that ‘both the ICW and the IWSA critiqued the use of the term ‘white slavery’ as a misnomer that obscured the sexual abuse of women of colour.’³⁰ Finally, Metzger is even less enlightening, relying on the passive voice to convey the evolution of the term during a six day Conference on the Traffic in Women and Children at Geneva. ‘To make its scope universal and less Euro-centric’, she argues, ‘the term ‘white slavery’ was dropped from the title’.³¹

At the end of the day, scholars of feminist history largely fail to connect the stories they tell about the League’s interest in the traffic in women and children to the particular vision of League internationalism, grounded in the British Empire’s ‘spirit of liberty’ and developed by its most ardent and influential British founders. Likewise, scholars of the League’s connections to imperialism and to the ‘global colour line’ that undergirded its central claims to universality are largely uninterested in the way gender circulated in League discourse to buttress this mode of inegalitarian internationalism by reinforcing a familial – rather than political – notion of nationhood. In what follows, I explore this intersection by tracing the way members of the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children fused the language of .

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 151.

³¹ Metzger, ‘Toward an International Human Rights Regime’, 58.

2'.Eminently Fitted for Treatment by the League'.

While intellectual histories of the League have traditionally painted the Covenant as a product of diplomats and experts alone, feminist scholarship since the 1990's has revealed that there is also much in the document reflecting the presence in Geneva of a variety of voluntary organizations lobbying in support of various humanitarian efforts, many of them led by women and concerned specifically women's issues. Chief among these early feminist and humanitarian causes was the movement to suppress the international traffic in prostitutes or again, as it was more commonly known up to that point, 'white slavery'. The term 'white slavery' emerged out of the nineteenth-century movements – spearheaded by Josephine Butler in Britain – to end government regulation of prostitution more generally and reflected reformers' attempts to tie the issue to the abolitionist movement – to equate prostitution with slavery. While historians of both women's movements and international norms regimes have argued that the 'perceived internationalization of prostitution' outpaced the reality, the issue generated considerable attention and organization which, by 1919, had already resulted in several European congresses and the signing of major international conventions.³²

The coalition of anti-trafficking groups present at Geneva mirrored the various political and ideological allegiances associated with the strange admixture of liberal feminism and moral purity discourse that characterized the issue. Feminist 'abolitionists' such as those associated with the International Council of Women (ICW) opposed state regulation on the assumption that all prostitution was the result of economic slavery and the sexual exploitation of women while members of the American National Vigilance Association, the British Association of Moral and

³²See for instance Ethan Nadelman, 'Global Prohibition Regimes; the Evolution of Norms in International Society'' *International Organization*, 44.4, (1990), 514.

Social Hygiene, and their European counterparts also maintained that state regulation encouraged men to use prostitutes and thus threatened the moral health of the nation.³³ All of these groups argued against what they saw as the moral double standard whereby women suffered the full societal condemnation for prostitution and the vast majority of them were against state regulation of prostitution as a violation of women's human dignity. Their combined efforts resulted in the 1921 International Conference on the Traffic in Women and Children held in Geneva and the subsequent creation of the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children³⁴.

Comprised of twelve national representatives appointed by the Assembly, plus non-voting delegates from America and Germany and Assessors appointed by various voluntary organizations such as the *Association Catholique Internationale des Euvres de Protection de la Jeune Fille*, and the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, members of the Committee remained resolutely abolitionist in perspective throughout the period of its greatest activity during the 1920's and early 1930's. The Committee also represented the first historical instance in which a human rights issue served as the focal point for the active and ongoing collaboration of state representatives and voluntary organizations (what we would now call NGO's) through the auspices of an international organization.

Again, while it isn't entirely clear how and why the various groups associated with writing Article 23 of the Covenant came to the decision to change 'white slavery' to traffic in women and children – and while, according to historians like Donna Guy, the change did little to alter the Committee's racist assumptions about non-Europeans – the change in terminology was

³³ For more on women's movement's associated with the League, see Patricia Ward D'Itri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement, 1848-1948* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

³⁴ Metzger, 'Toward an International Human Rights Regime', 60.

both sudden and total.³⁵ The Information Section, for instance, summarily excised ‘white slavery’ from their own historical narratives of both the League’s involvement with the traffic and the movement more broadly. It is unclear whether, when they insisted that the ‘white slave traffic’ be ‘replaced in the texts of international documents by the words ‘traffic in women and children’,’ participants of the 1921 Conference on the Traffic in Women and Children meant that the term be erased from history entirely.³⁶ But the Information Section took the directive literally to mean changing the names of all previous conferences so that – within League archives – the 1899 ‘Convention for the Suppression of the White Slavery’ became the ‘Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children’, as did the 1904 and 1910 conventions. The authors of the Information Section Reports clearly felt the need to stress that the League’s efforts reflected universal (as opposed to imperial or racial) norms and that these norms had always been thus.³⁷

The League’s public relations and educational sections made full use of the traffic in women and children to demonstrate and legitimate the League’s developing international ‘machinery’. Thus, authors of the 1926 Information Section pamphlet on the League’s Social and Humanitarian Work argued repeatedly that the illegal ‘traffic in women and children’ was a problem the ‘solution of which the new machinery provided by the establishment of the League of Nations is properly applied’.³⁸ Central to their insistent declaration that the traffic in women

³⁵ See, in particular, Donna Guy’s chapter on Argentina and the League of Nations in, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

³⁶ ‘Conference Recommendation to the Council, 1921’, *Resolutions Adopted by the Assembly, the Council, and the Traffic in Women and Children Committee, 1920-1929* (Series of the League of Nations Publications, IV Social, 1929), 3.

³⁷ *The League of Nations Social and Humanitarian Work* (Information Section, Geneva, 1926), 25-26.

³⁸ *The League of Nations Social and Humanitarian Work*, 24.

and children fit the new international institution to the bill was its dual nature as both an international and national problem. As the authors of the pamphlet maintained, the trafficking of prostitutes ‘directly concerns Governments’ and so, to combat the traffic, ‘it is necessary that the trafficker be subject to punishment, the exercise of which is a function of the State’.³⁹ And yet, while punishment remained the purview of states, individual states alone were not equipped to deal with the fact that the ‘trafficker buys his wares in one country, and sells them in another, often transporting them through a third country or more’. The League’s new institutional machinery (focused in particular on information gathering, publicity, and the generation of international consensus in the Assembly) was uniquely able, according to these authors, to unite the ‘scattered efforts’ of anti-prostitution, voluntary organizations ‘in an international plan of action’, while simultaneously ‘invoking the aid of Governments’.⁴⁰ The ‘traffic’ was a ‘problem eminently fitted for treatment by the League’ and the Information Section took full advantage of this fit to flesh out their international vision of a world ‘determined to make effective use of the new organization’.

At the same time, it is clear from reading these documents that other kinds of ‘traffic’ (namely the traffic in opium and other illegal drugs) did not express the institutional purpose of the League nearly as well as ‘traffic in women and children’. Indeed, Surveys put out by the Information Section on the League’s Social and Humanitarian Work in 1924, 1926, and 1929, each treat the opium traffic with a tone of detached disdain, focusing on the ‘duties’ of the League connected with the execution of the Opium Convention. The prose is terse and descriptive, and the authors make no attempt treat the issue as ‘eminently fitted’ to the League’s

³⁹ *The League of Nations Social and Humanitarian Work*, 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 25.

institutions as they believed the ‘traffic in women and children’ to be. In one particularly stark example of this descriptive bias, Dame Rachel Crowdy, head of the Opium and Social Questions Section of the League, spent no more than two paragraphs on the opium traffic in her 1927 speech, ‘The Humanitarian Efforts of the League of Nations’, dedicating the other seventeen pages to the traffic in women and children.⁴¹ The preference for ‘women and children’ makes considerable sense if we think about the traffic as a reflection of the larger ideological vision constantly being worked out by League activists during the 1920’s. Central to this vision was the idea that the League represented a universal turn toward international cooperation. The opium traffic, while clearly enough of a problem to concern the League, was not considered a universal problem. The traffic itself was transnational but the traffickers and users of opium were portrayed in both League documents and the popular media as criminals, the denizens of smoke-filled rooms in the exotic capitals of Asia and the Middle East.

By contrast, the authors of the Information Section, members of the Advisory Committee, and Assembly members alike often treated the subjects of the traffic in prostitutes as unwitting victims who could be anyone’s mothers, daughters, or sisters. Thus, despite the fact that their own surveys revealed that ‘sixty to seventy percent’ of the women caught up in the traffic were already prostitutes in their countries of origin, many Committee members continued to insist that in the ‘majority of cases’ a victim of the traffic was ‘not fully aware of the disaster to which she is being led’.⁴² All women and children traveling alone were potential victims and thus, the Committee argued, the issue appealed to all member nations equally, particularly after the

⁴¹ Rachel Crowdy, ‘The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations’, *Journal of the Royal Institution of International Affairs*, 6.3 (1927), 153-169.

⁴² *Minutes of the Traffic in Women and Children Committee: Eleventh Session*, April 4th to 9th, 1932, Amendments to the Conventions of 1910 and 1921: Elimination of Age Limit, 2. See Crowdy on percentages in ‘The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations’, 58.

exorcism of ‘white slavery’ as a defining theme. On a more instrumental level, League authors were well aware that sex sells and that the issue of the traffic in particular could provide them with a way to attract the kind of sustained public attention that the League required in order to justify its institutional existence. As Crowdy eagerly admitted to her audience, the ‘Report of the Experts on the extent of the traffic in women and children... has, I am told, established a League record for sales. It was made available to the public only a few weeks ago, yet already five thousand copies have been issued and another edition is being prepared’.⁴³ The ‘traffic in women and children’ was thus an issue ready-made to appeal to a broad audience because it was both universally recognizable and simultaneously titillating.

In sum, on the surface, what made the ‘traffic in women and children’ truly the perfect educational issue for both legitimating the League as an institution and elaborating the vision of international governance at its core was its appeal as a universal, humanitarian issue. And yet, when we look closely at the actual policy debates in the Committee and the eventual agreements signed by the Assembly, we see that expressions of universalism were also combined with a deep anxiety about women’s relationship to the nation and the national home, an anxiety reflected in the Committee’s and Assembly’s long term fixation with the existence of ‘licensed houses’ and the spectre of women traveling alone.

Again, Leppanen and Metzger tend to view the actions of the Advisory Committee as largely a feminist success story particularly insofar, they argue, as the Committee was able to shift fixed narratives about prostitution. For Leppanen, the League and the Committee ‘took a non-moralizing stand on the issue of prostitution and trafficking’. Throughout the committee reports and investigations, she argues’, the procurers and traffickers, if anyone, are considered

⁴³ Crowdy, ‘The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations’, 156.

criminal or immoral, not the women'.⁴⁴ For Metzger, the Committee's extensive reports on the traffic demonstrated that 'the image of the prostitute had changed'. 'No longer', she argues, 'was 'moral degradation' seen as the root cause of prostitution but the economic hardships and lack of economic opportunities'.⁴⁵ Jessica Riley argues in a somewhat different vein that feminists embedded within the Committee were able to put forward a vision that stressed equal standards of morality between the sexes until the Committee was taken over by more nationalist and conservative interests in the 1930's.⁴⁶ And yet, I argue that a closer investigation of the Committee meetings themselves reveals that a sizable majority of Committee members (both representatives from the League and from the voluntary associations) tended to treat prostitution as a *moral* threat rather than a violation of women's economic and political rights and that they did so successfully from the time of its inception.

With Crowdy leading the League's Opium and Social Questions Section, the representative of the British Empire (S.W. Harris) chairing the Committee itself, and the name of Josephine Butler being evoked, fairly regularly, by members of the Committee for almost the entirety of its existence, British moral and social purity crusaders had an outsized influence on the Committee proceedings from the very beginning.⁴⁷ In addition (and somewhat ironically given the U.S. Senate's rejection of League membership in 1919), American moral and social purity organizations also made their presence felt in the Committee. Indeed, the first official

⁴⁴ Leppanen, 'International Reorganization and the Traffic in Women', 528.

⁴⁵ Metzger, 'Towards an International Human Rights Regime', 69.

⁴⁶ Riley, 'Claims to Protection', 90.

⁴⁷ For more on Butler's influence on the League see, Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, 'The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women', *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 10 (2012), 97–128. A discussion of Harris' involvement with the Committee is explored in Stephanie Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

enquiry into the status of the traffic in member states commissioned by the Advisory Committee in 1921 was funded entirely by a \$75,000 grant from the American Social Hygiene Bureau and the Chairman of the Bureau (William Snow) served as President of the panel of experts appointed to carry out the study.⁴⁸ From a perusal of years of Committee minutes, it is apparent that a majority of Committee members and assessors believed the solution to the problem of the traffic lay in both the moral ‘rehabilitation of fallen women’ and in stricter scrutiny of women’s international travel.⁴⁹ Perhaps most significantly, the Committee chose to focus the majority of its criticism over the years on the existence of state ‘licensed houses’ throughout the world and particularly within member states.

In 1921, a divided Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly take up the issue of legal brothels resulting in the 1922 Assembly resolution:

‘...in view of the fact that the system of State regulation which exists in certain countries is thought in many quarters to encourage the traffic in women, the Advisory Committee should be asked by the Council to consider whether, pending the abolition of the system, it could be agreed that no foreign woman should be employed or carry on her profession as a prostitute in any licensed houses..’.⁵⁰

On its face, the Committee and Assembly's concern with ‘licensing’ reflects the very real problem of trying to codify international law given the post-war expansion of the circle of states now committed to sustained diplomatic and legal engagement. Legally, the prosecution of traffickers – or *souteneurs* as they were referred to by the Committee – fell within the jurisdiction of individual states. The stopgap measure above focused on the presence of *foreign* prostitutes in the brothels of regulatory nations.

⁴⁸ *League of Nations Social and Humanitarian Work*, 1926, 32.

⁴⁹ Comments of the Italian representative, Marquis de Calboli, ‘Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, Minutes of the First Session Held at Geneva from June 28th to July 1st 1922’, 17.

⁵⁰ Resolution Adopted by the Assembly, Sept. 25, 1922, *Resolutions Adopted by the Assembly*, 3.

However, debates within the Committee and the Assembly reveal that the delegates' concern with 'licensed houses' went beyond the legal difficulties involved in the employment of foreign prostitutes. Rather, they also reflect a deeper discomfort on the part of many members with the movement of women internationally. Just at the very moment when League activists, scholars, and authors of its public and educational documents were making the case for international cooperation between sovereign states, the Committee and members of the Assembly were insisting that states, like families, continued to exercise sovereign, paternal authority over their women and children. The obsessive concern of the Assembly and the Committee with licensed houses, I argue, suggests a continuing anxiety on the part of League members with the status of the 'home' in national life, what Deniz Kandiyoti, Nira Yuval Davis, and other scholars concerned with the relationship between gender and nationalism refer to as the 'inner sanctum' of modern nationhood; the private, familial sphere which becomes, for nationalists, the 'symbolic repository of group identity'.⁵¹

The minutes of the Advisory Committee's proceedings and the questions posed by the extensive, international survey of the traffic conducted by the Special Body of Experts in 1927, suggests that Committee members were deeply intrigued by the details of licensed brothels, commissioning experts to calculate the number of women they employed and the average number of 'clients' the women saw each night. What appeared to disturb them most, however, was the way these houses mimicked family life and lured women away from their countries of

⁵¹ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Identity and Its Discontents', *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams, Laura Chrisman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 382. See also Nira Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State* (London; Macmillan and Co., 1989).

origin by promises of what one ‘technical expert’ referred to as ‘fictitious marriages’.⁵² The accounts of this phenomenon tend to fall into two narrative types; those that describe true families and those concerned with false or corrupted families. In the true family narrative, a young girl is initially separated from her relatives (often while traveling alone to meet them), narrowly avoids becoming the victim of traffickers through the intervention of conscientious individuals, and in the end, is reunited with her family. In an excellent example of such a story, one Committee delegate reported to the Committee in 1927 that she had recently heard of five young girls traveling alone from Beirut to Brazil, who, during the journey, had become ‘the objects of the attentions of two suspicious individuals’. A nun who happened to be on the same ship ‘became alarmed’ by these attentions and was able to provide protection for the girls for the rest of the journey.⁵³ At the moral resolution of this story, the girls were once again reunited with their father.

By contrast, the false family story centres on the figure of the wily *souteneur* who manages to lure young girls into his clutches by either passing himself off as their father or ‘marrying’ them. In one example of this kind of narrative, the Special Body of Experts reported to the Committee the story of a Czechoslovakian trafficker who reportedly convinced four young women to run away to Argentina with him by ‘proposing marriage to each of the four girls, although he was already married’.⁵⁴ The moral resolution of this type of story inevitably occurred when the *souteneur* was captured and exposed for the polygamous fraud that he was.

⁵² ‘Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People, Traffic in Women and Children Committee, *Minutes of the Seventh Session*’, Geneva (1928), 42.

⁵³ ‘Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People, Traffic in Women and Children Committee, *Minutes of the Sixth Session*’, Geneva (1927), 43.

⁵⁴ ‘Report of the Special Body of Experts on the Traffic in Women and Children’, Geneva (1927), 28.

Committee members often described brothels in the inverse language of the home. Thus, they argued, licensed houses were ‘dens’ of degradation and ‘sinks of iniquity’.⁵⁵ They chilled at the idea that what was ‘moral on one side of the street must be regarded as immoral on the other side’.⁵⁶ They were also concerned not just with the fact that these houses were providing a space for extra-marital sex but ‘perverted practices’, as well. ‘The licensed houses’, argued one Committee member, were ‘centres of depravity. Despite their regulation, all kinds of perverse and horrible practices were carried on. More particularly, sadistic practices were extremely common’.⁵⁷ Likewise, licensed houses were also believed to promote other vices such as alcoholism. ‘In each house or crib’, noted the Special Body of Experts in 1927, ‘the prostitutes offer intoxicating liquor for sale at prices slightly higher than elsewhere’.⁵⁸

Despite the fact that subjects of the traffic in prostitutes were largely considered victims by the Committee, the women in these licensed houses were also the recipients of both some Committee members’ greatest wrath and their most focused ‘rehabilitative’ efforts. ‘The women’, declared the Special Body of Experts in 1927 upon examination of one particular house, ‘are the most depraved that can be imagined’.⁵⁹ One French delegate referred to them as sexually rapacious, ‘undesirable parasites’.⁶⁰ Another Committee member argued that a prostitute on the street could ‘perhaps have seen two or three clients. In the licensed house she saw at least twenty’.⁶¹ And yet, while the Committee felt that many of these prostitutes were

⁵⁵ ‘Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People, Traffic in Women and Children Committee, *Minutes of the Third Session*’, Geneva (1924), 5.

⁵⁶ *Minutes of the Sixth Session*, 31, 33,

⁵⁷ Report of the Special Body of Experts, 29.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 14.

⁶⁰ *Minutes of the Sixth Session*, (1927), 35

⁶¹ ‘Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People, Traffic in Women and Children Committee’, *Minutes of the Ninth Session* (1930), 57.

too ‘hardened’ for salvation, they also argued that some women in these houses, particularly the young girls, cried out to be ‘reclaimed and re-educated’.⁶² The secret to this reclamation process, they surmised, was not to imprison prostitutes but instead, to reincorporate them into true, moral homes. Committee member Ghénia Avril De Sainte Croix (also known as the ‘Josephine Butler of France’) from the International Women’s Organizations, understood rehabilitation in these domestic terms, arguing in 1929:

‘The question was not that of the punishment of offenders but of their education and of affording them favourable conditions for their moral development in a humane atmosphere different from that of a prison; namely in a school or a home where they could be morally helped and rehabilitated. They must be placed in a good environment and, if possible honest families must be found to house them’.⁶³

Hence, as with women and girls traveling alone, the Committee's response to the threat or reality of women's ‘degradation’ lay in the re-institution of the family.

Ultimately, by mimicking the home, licensed houses threatened both the institution of the family and the morality of the nation. As ambiguous ‘sinks of iniquity and perversion’, Committee members argued, licensed houses had a ‘demoralising influence on their own surroundings by the mere fact of their existence’ which led to sexual excess.⁶⁴ They believed that this ‘excessive’ sexuality could, at any moment, overflow its banks and flood the moral landscape. Like viruses in an otherwise healthy body, licensed houses would spread moral disease throughout any nation that tolerated their existence.

In the end, their fixation with the sexual immorality of licensed houses helps explain the Committee’s seeming inability to address economic issues despite the presence of individual members and Assessors who routinely raised the issue of women's low wages as the key

⁶²*Minutes of the Ninth Session* (1930), 57.

⁶³*Minutes of the Eighth Session* (1929), 43.

⁶⁴*Minutes of the Sixth Session*, (1927), 31.

underlying causes of prostitution. In contrast to Barbara Metzger's assertion that the 1927 *Report to the Committee* 'unmistakably identified economic deprivation as the crucial factor driving prostitution' and that this view was widely shared by the Committee, I argue that a close examination of the Minutes of the meetings reveal otherwise.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1920's and 30's, suggestions from Committee members regarding women's wages were typically either ignored or silenced by the majority of other members and/or representatives from external League organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO). In 1928, for example, Baroness De Montenach from *the Association Catholique Internationale des Euvres de Protection de la Jeune Fille* submitted a proposal to the Committee stating that the Special Body of Experts were 'unanimously of the opinion that the inadequacy of wages paid to women constitutes an important factor in prostitution and in the traffic in women', and urged the Committee to study the issue. The proposal was rejected after the Chairman of the Committee and representative from the British Empire, S.W. Harris, argued that 'it laid too much emphasis on the connection between wages and prostitution'.⁶⁶ According to Harris, other voting delegates, and ILO representatives, as an organization officially committed to 'social' problems, economic matters were necessarily 'outside their terms of reference'.⁶⁷

At the same time, the claim by some Committee members that prostitution was a 'social' problem and therefore impervious to economic analysis was largely disingenuous in light of the other committees categorized as 'social' by the League that were actively engaged in economic research. In 1928, for instance, The Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of

⁶⁵ Metzger, 'Towards an International Human Rights Regime', 69.

⁶⁶ *Minutes from the Sixth Session*, 37. In this case, the Committee at first chose to simply ignore the proposal and then, when it was reintroduced at another session, refer it to the ILO.

⁶⁷ *Minutes of the Sixth Session*, 17.

Children and Young People (of which the Advisory Committee was officially a sub-section) commissioned the ILO to engage in a lengthy study of the 'Family Allowance System' in various European nations and determine its effects on the 'wellbeing of children'.⁶⁸ Likewise, the ILO was asked to make periodic reports to the Committee itself, and at such times, often stressed 'the importance of social insurance, which had a direct influence on the family' as an issue that united both organizations.⁶⁹ Thus, it seems that the Committee considered the economic health of the family an acceptable, social and humanitarian line of inquiry but continued to view prostitution as a 'social' issue and the economic status of women employed outside of the family as a concern beyond their influence.

The Committee's emphatic concern with the morally impure character of the licensed house was also often coupled with an equally emphatic fear for the 'moral danger' faced by women who crossed the borders of both the family and the national family when they travelled abroad seeking employment. To remedy the situation, they urged port authorities to post signs warning women of the hazards they might face during their journeys, urged states to withhold passports from women whose employment opportunities abroad looked suspect, and suggested that shipping lines employ 'matrons' to look after unaccompanied women and girls.⁷⁰ Often, they argued, these women and children ended up traveling alone due to the 'separation of families as a result of emigration'. Thus, over the years, members of the Committee and the Special Body of Experts lobbied heavily for 'the necessity of avoiding if possible a separation of

⁶⁸ *The Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People: Report by the International Labour Office on Family Allowances in Relation to the Physical and Moral Well-being of Children* (Geneva: Series of the League of Nations Publications, Social, 1928), 1.

⁶⁹ 'Advisor Committee on the Traffic in Women and Protection of Children, *Minutes of the Fourth Session*', Geneva (1925), 18.

⁷⁰ *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 27.

families under the emigration laws'.⁷¹ Eventually, the majority on the Committee convinced the Assembly to pass the International Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women of Full Age in 1933, a document that criminalized the trafficking of women even to and from countries where prostitution was legal. Moreover, it required signatories to increase their supervision of women traveling abroad without families. As early as 1924, dissenting members of the Committee recognized the implicit danger this posed for women traveling abroad alone. In the words of Uruguayan delegate Dr. Paulina Luisi, 'such provisions might lead to results which were opposed to the interests of women or to that protection which it was the object of the Convention to afford'.⁷² Such provisions also made it more difficult for women like Luisi to travel to Geneva from Uruguay precisely at the moment when the League of Nations was insisting that 'all positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women'.⁷³

3. Conclusion

The League's relationship to the traffic in women and children during the interwar period reflected the complexities and anxieties of a nascent and deeply hierarchical internationalism forged through the familial logic of British imperialism. A 'social' issue 'eminently fitted for treatment by the League', the traffic in women and children provided League advocates with a perfect example of the League's unique 'machinery' at work, particularly the ability of that machinery to balance international and national interests while channelling the scattered efforts of voluntary organizations into a coherent plan. In practice, however, the archival records of the

⁷¹*Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 43.

⁷²*Minutes of the Third Session* (1924), 27.

⁷³ The Covenant of the League of Nations,
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art7

Advisory Committee's proceedings suggest that its members tended to focus on issues – such as the problem of 'licensed houses' – which reflected the symbolic conflation of the family and the nation through which interwar internationalists squared the circle between a universalism and imperialism, liberty and hierarchy. The Committee often moralized the issue of prostitution and, despite the efforts of a persistent group of members and Assessors who tried to bring the issue of women's low wages to the table, they insisted on treating it as a social, rather than. This tendency to focus on the moral and the social – to burrow into the perversity of licensed houses and the horror of fictitious marriages – ultimately impacted those policy and legal issues upon which the Committee chose to focus. For instance, the passage of the 1933 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age – the Committee's signature legal achievement over the course of its existence – ultimately worked against the gender equality proclamations of the League by making it more difficult for women to travel internationally. Thus, in many ways, the discursive impulse of the Committee served to bind women – both rhetorically and legally – to the national family. It thus worked alongside and in tandem with the internationalist vision of some of the League's most influential British founders, a vision striving to reconcile hierarchy and extant imperialism with 'a conviction of a humanity which transcends all differences'.

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