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Regula Ludi

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SETTING NEW STANDARDS:

International Feminism and the League of Nations' Inquiry into the Status of Women

Regula Ludi

In 1937, the League of Nations decided to undertake an international inquiry into the status of women and nominated an expert committee to conduct the research. This was the result of interwar feminist agitation for an international equal rights treaty. The work of the experts, however, was interrupted by the beginning of the Second World War. The survey was never completed. Preliminary results nonetheless influenced the international understanding of inequalities between men's and women's status. By analyzing the epistemic premises of the inquiry and its methodological design, this article argues that the League's engagement with the status of women constituted gender as an organizing principle of the global order and recognized women's rights as a legitimate objective of international cooperation. The knowledge production on the nature of gender difference impacted the future framing of gender relations in the activity of international organizations after the Second World War.

In September 1937, the Assembly of the League of Nations adopted a resolution that commissioned a "comprehensive study, giving full information on the legal status enjoyed by women in various countries of the world."¹ To implement this decision, the Council of the League of Nations nominated an expert committee consisting of four women and three men. Feminists were excited. "We feel that the bringing of the question before the League of Nations is an important step in the history of women's emancipation," a group dominated by the militant equalitarians Alice Paul and Doris Stevens exclaimed. The International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAW) similarly expressed its satisfaction and invited its national sections to support the study by collecting data and organizing an annual "Status of Women Day." And in a rare act of unanimity with Western feminists, the Soviet diplomat Alexandra Kollontai applauded the League's decision as a "first step towards the ultimate goal in view . . . namely the recognition of the principle of equality of the sexes in the laws of all countries."²

How reasonable was the confidence these women placed in international action? As such, the League's resolution was nothing exceptional and hardly justified high expectations. During the two decades of its operation, the League had mandated countless international investigations into a wide

variety of problems.³ The decision was nevertheless remarkable. The expert committee charged with conducting the study was the first—and only—League body to be constituted on the basis of gender parity. And it was the first intergovernmental agent to concern itself with the disadvantages that women suffered worldwide.⁴ The League's inquiry rested on premises that echoed feminist assumptions about the nature of the problem—for instance, that prejudices against women were universal and could be measured scientifically in accord with uniform standards. According to Kerstin Hesselgren, a Swedish feminist and diplomat acting as the official rapporteur on the subject in the League Assembly, such a study would put the international community “in possession of an entirely objective picture” of the condition of women worldwide.⁵ And the committee's mandate implicitly recognized that gender relations were a legitimate subject of international concern, which was anything but evident considering that it challenged engrained ideas about the prerogatives of national governments, the so-called *domaine réservé* of domestic jurisdiction.

In the light of the alarming rise in international tensions during the 1930s and the League's rapid loss of authority, however, Geneva's engagement with the status of women appears to have been a minor event in international history. Unlike a parallel study by the International Labor Office, the League's investigation was never completed, as research was interrupted by the beginning of the Second World War. Consequently, it found little mention in the annals of international relations and, together with other examples of “technical” cooperation, was long overshadowed by the League's political failure. Only in recent years, as research has rediscovered international organizations as agents of global change, have historians directed their attention to the League's less spectacular activities. As an intergovernmental organization, the League not only mediated between its members' defense of their national interests and their proclaimed commitment to international cooperation, thus being involved in the redefinition of national sovereignty rights, but was also a platform for transnational activity. It embraced civil society initiatives, particularly in the vast realm of social reform and humanitarianism, and circulated the opinions of interested associations along with the official representations of governments, which allowed advocacy groups to expand and shape the international agenda and challenge national prerogatives.⁶ Women's organizations were particularly active in making use of this opportunity. In contrast to previous assumptions about the decline of feminism after the Great War, new research credits the interwar period with an unprecedented rise in international feminist activity.⁷ Resuming their transnational mobilization of the prewar years, women's organizations fervently embraced international cooperation while they also experienced a burgeoning expansion in non-Western societies in the 1930s.⁸

Against this backdrop, the League's inquiry not only constituted the recognition of women's disadvantages as an international concern; it also showed that feminism was a force shaping world order. This raises important questions about the intellectual foundations of the League's survey and its wider significance for ideas of global governance. How did interwar feminism interact with international relations? What assumptions about the significance of women's condition inspired this interaction? How did the League constitute international expertise on the status of women and how did it deal with tensions between women's universalistic ambitions and its own political constraints, including governments' reservations about the expansion of international affairs? And how did the survey relate to the international commitment to gender equality and human rights after the Second World War?

In the first part of this article, I will address the emergence of gender equality as an international concern by describing the conditions under which the issue became an item on the League of Nations' agenda in the 1930s, a period that witnessed the rise of new associations that militantly lobbied the international community to pass a treaty on equal rights. The historian Susan Zimmermann has proposed the term *legal equality feminism* to distinguish this group of activists from the more moderate mainstream of the women's movement.⁹ More than others, legal equality feminists understood international law as an instrument for global progress and placed their confidence in its ability to promote gender justice. Their faith in the transformative power of law included the expectation that the adoption of international standards would increase pressure on reluctant governments. And they considered the international collection and comparison of data critical for their cause.

In the second section, I examine the modalities and significance of global knowledge production, a set of practices that were typical for the operation of international bureaucracies. Although it failed to fulfill its core function—the preservation of world peace—the League continuously enlarged the scope of its competences, even in its darkest moments during the late 1930s. This expansion was stimulated by the rise of transnational expertise whose practitioners shared the faith in scientifically reliable data as a precondition for solving problems that stemmed from the growing complexity of the modern world and tendered their services to international organizations. According to the historian Zara Steiner, this new elite “commanded unusual respect” among the period's policymakers.¹⁰ Portrayed as “technocratic internationalism,” international expertise and knowledge production thus emerged as a genuine form of power beyond the nation state that generated social realities by the means of describing, classifying, and configuring new global facts.¹¹

As “an eminently Victorian institution,” however, the League of Nations was designed to maintain the supremacy of the Great Powers by following principles of colonial rule in its relationship with dependent territories and semi-sovereign states.¹² New international responsibilities were informed by the belief in the civilizing mission of the West, a belief that feminists and female philanthropists nourished with their own interpretations.¹³ How feminism’s entanglement in the dynamics of interwar colonialism influenced the epistemology of the League’s inquiry is the subject of the third part of this article. I focus on debates in the League’s Assembly and the work of the expert committee to show how gender discourse interacted with the League’s standards of international civilization and human progress.

The committee’s conflation of gender equality with ideas of global order and modernity confronted international knowledge production with conceptual problems, as I demonstrate in the fourth section. Although framed as merely methodological, the experts’ deliberations regarding the scope of the survey and its basis of comparison relied on assumptions that in the late 1930s proved increasingly controversial and prompted national grievances about the organizing principles of international cooperation.

By considering the production of gender knowledge, my aim in this article is to shed new light on the interaction between feminism and the project of global modernity in a moment of rapid change in international relations. Understanding the epistemic premises that lay behind the origin of universal standards of equality illustrates the significance of feminist advocacy for the human rights revolution that unfolded in the 1940s and for the United Nations (UN) Charter’s commitment to international gender equality.¹⁴

“Mothers of the League of Nations”: Gendering World Order

“At a time when the League was prey to so many criticisms based mainly on failure to understand its work, was it not desirable for it to secure the support of women who were prepared to place their services at its disposal,” asked the Romanian diplomat and woman of letters Elena Văcărescu in the League’s Assembly of 1932. The poet’s imagining that women could be the League’s salvation “in the present crisis of human affairs” resonated with widespread beliefs about women’s innate pacifism that supposedly derived from motherhood.¹⁵ Echoing such ideas, the French delegate Germaine Malaterre-Sellier maintained that women all over the world were “linked together by a common sentiment—they were mothers whose sons would be sacrificed in war.”¹⁶ Many feminists thus claimed to offer an alternative model of international relations, one that substituted cooperation anchored

in maternal sentiments for (male) competition. The International Council of Women (ICW), for instance, saw itself as the "Mother of the League of Nations" by uniting "women of all types . . . classes, creeds, races."¹⁷

Linking women's diplomatic competences to their supposedly innate propensity for nurturing and caregiving seemed to validate dominant assumptions about sexual difference, but it was also a gateway for women's participation in international affairs. The demand for female representation in the League of Nations arose, as a rule, when international cooperation concerned stereotypically female issues like humanitarian problems and the welfare of children. Beginning in the 1920s, international women's organizations formed lobbying networks that supplied the League Secretariat with expertise and sought to win diplomats and international civil servants to their cause. Over the years, a pattern of collaboration developed out of such activities. The League's Advisory Committee on Trafficking in Women and Children, for instance, included, in addition to national delegates, predominately female representatives of civil society organizations. Although the latter had no vote, they exerted considerable influence on international policy by initiating research, defining concepts, and developing new methods for fighting the sex industry.¹⁸ Female delegates similarly could be found on the Fifth Committee of the Assembly, which was in charge of social and humanitarian issues and bore the nickname "la commission sentimentale" in diplomatic circles because of its fairly high proportion of women.¹⁹

By the late 1920s, however, many women were no longer willing to swallow such gendering of international politics. The British writer Nina Boyle, for instance, accused the League of perpetuating "the odious and offensive classification of women with children" through the division of labor and the language it adopted.²⁰ With the beginning of the Great Depression and the rise in global instability, feminists also felt a growing urgency to defend their previous achievements, which they saw threatened by "the whole male minded nationalist philosophy," as the Six Point Group, a British equalitarian network, complained in 1935.²¹ A resolution submitted by the Spanish delegation in 1931 asking the League to study how "feminine action and feminine feeling" could be better integrated into the work of peace provided women's organizations a favorable occasion to publicize their cause. Although playing on the traditional association of femininity with peace, the resolution was a Trojan horse that put more radical demands onto the international agenda. It invited women's organizations to submit their suggestions, an opportunity they readily seized for identifying gender hierarchies as "one of the greatest social problems of the day" and the main obstacle to women's full participation in international cooperation. Seeking guarantees for the protection of their previous accomplishments, major women's organizations demanded that the League study "the nature

and extent in the various countries" of the "legal, semi-legal or customary, political or economic" disadvantages women suffered worldwide.²²

In addition to the demand for female participation in international affairs, two conflicts propelled equality claims into the international arena. The first one originated in the controversies over labor protection and the reasons for mounting restrictions on female employment. Even before the Great Depression, feminists considered the situation of female wage earners as "the most important and difficult problem of the woman's movement."²³ Their concerns dated back to the 1920s as feminist disagreements over special protections for female workers, including the prohibition of night work advocated by the International Labor Organization (ILO), had produced a deep rift in international feminism.²⁴ The conflict escalated at the congress of the IAW in Paris in 1926 and gave rise to new transnational networks that declared war on the ILO. Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker, founded in 1929 by an elite of mostly Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian women with an academic or professional background, denounced special protection as "the pseudonym for tyranny." It adopted new universal language and proclaimed that the "aim of feminism is that a woman should enjoy the same human rights as a man in all spheres of life," including the "ordinary human right to engage in paid work" without any restrictions "by reason of sex, marriage, parenthood, or childbirth."²⁵ As the ILO remained unresponsive to such demands, equalitarians turned to the League of Nations. Although it refused to interfere with labor standards, in 1935 a resolution of the League's Assembly asked the International Labor Office to examine whether some of its regulations were detrimental to women's right to work. The ILO subsequently agreed to study the problem "from the standpoint of the equality of the sexes."²⁶

The other conflict was over the question of married women's nationality. In the spring of 1930, the Conference for the Codification of International Law convening in The Hague passed a Convention on Nationality, which addressed one of the period's most pressing problems. The Great War and the subsequent creation of new nation states had greatly inflated the significance of citizenship as an indicator of national loyalty. This often led to the loss of citizenship for minorities and other groups considered undesirable. The result was a dramatic surge in the number of stateless persons whose uncertain status generated controversy over their rights and residences. Ambiguous citizenship stemming from binational marriage and dual nationality, both of which reflected the growing mobility of people, was a related source of diplomatic complications. The codification conference was supposed to eliminate these problems by harmonizing the principles of citizenship legislation. With respect to binational marriages, it ignored feminists' desires and instead condoned the practice of the marital expatriation

of wives.²⁷ This outcome fueled women's opposition to the conference's final codification. Feminists condemned the document as a dangerous precedent because it was "founded upon the theory of the subjection of women" and denied them "the status of an adult," as the Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality, a semiofficial League body composed of representatives of the international women's movement, complained.²⁸

By using intergovernmental organizations to advance its uncompromising claims, the subsequent protest campaign adopted the strategy that activists had earlier developed in their dealings with the Pan-American Union. In 1928, a coalition of women from North and South America succeeded in wresting the first binding statement on gender equality from the International Conference of American States. The same meeting established a new agency, the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW), and elected the American Doris Stevens, a radical champion of equal rights, as its chair. Among its first actions, the IACW commissioned a survey of the legal situations of women in the Americas and drafted a treaty on women's nationality, which the International Conference of American States adopted in 1933.²⁹ Trying to capitalize on these achievements, partisans of equal rights lobbied the League to revise The Hague Convention on Nationality without success. Despite its failure, the campaign against The Hague Convention on Nationality helped to give women's rights an international dimension by illuminating the significance of national citizenship for individual rights.

In 1934, legal equality feminists spearheaded by Doris Stevens and Alice Paul convinced Latin American states to submit a draft of an equal rights treaty. The wording of the proposal carefully concealed the revolutionary character of the demand: "In consideration of the fact that the League of Nations is an international organization designed to defend human rights," the introduction reads, it ought to "take cognizance of the present widespread and alarming encroachments upon the rights and liberties of women."³⁰ The idea of an equal rights treaty dated back to the mid-1920s. The draft submitted to the League Assembly, which Alice Paul had authored, was initially designed to break the deadlock in the US Congress over the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1929, the British Six Point Group was the first to use that text to lobby Assembly delegates in Geneva. In the following years, Equal Rights International, a transnational campaign network formed in 1930, pushed for the League to study "how far international action might assist application of the principle of equality of the sexes in the internal legislation" of member states.³¹

The proposal immediately stirred debate. "Every time one meets members of women's organizations this question is brought up," averred one activist who was worried about the demand's potential to challenge labor legislation in favor of working mothers.³² For such reasons, the League's

staff was not inclined to be rushed “into feminist action.” Hugh McKinnon Wood of the Secretariat’s Legal Section demurred that it was “hardly possible to think of a more unsuitable subject for discussion by the Assembly than the status of women as a whole.” Such debate would not only touch on issues of domestic jurisdiction; it would also antagonize the ILO by raising “in a violently controversial manner the question of industrial protection of women.”³³

Debate in the Assembly was scheduled for September 1935. By the time it opened, however, the Abyssinian crisis had overshadowed all other international affairs, and equal rights advocates hesitated to push their case too aggressively. In the end, they settled for a resolution that invited governments and women’s organizations to provide the League with information and suggestions for further action.³⁴ The debate nevertheless uncovered obstacles that any subsequent move to internationalize women’s rights would have to overcome. For example, most states were unwilling to give up their exclusive authority over the regulation of gender relations, although they were not as categorical in their opposition as the Swiss government, which declared the status of women to be “part of the traditional and historic heritage of every people.”³⁵ On September 30, 1937, after considering the statements of governments and women’s organizations, the Assembly concluded that additional information was required before any further steps could be taken. It decided to appoint an expert committee to prepare a survey but explicitly excluded the two most controversial subjects—namely, labor standards and women’s nationality.

Constituting International Expertise

On first examination, equal rights advocates appeared to have suffered a defeat. The League’s decision to commission an investigation as the precondition of future action reflected most governments’ desire to postpone if not “bury the equality question,” as Alice Paul surmised.³⁶ At the same time, however, it acknowledged that women’s rights were an international concern. Moreover, equal rights advocates were certain about the future benefits of the planned international investigation, which they expected to corroborate their claims about the universal discrimination against women and justify further action. For example, Open Door International was confident that a League inquiry would deliver “facts which cannot be questioned” and anticipated that “a clear and unprejudiced statement” of women’s “low position in almost all countries cannot be without practical effect.”³⁷ The League Secretariat, however, was not altogether happy with its new task of compiling the proposed survey. Considering how jealously governments guarded their sovereignty rights by denouncing even the collection of data

as illegitimate interference in their domestic affairs, Hugh McKinnon Wood, head of the League's Legal Section, complained that "unfortunately, we have to deal with an inquiry whose object is not scientific but political, i.e., to give the maximum satisfaction to the women's organizations." He thus recommended phrasing controversial decisions as if they were "taken on technical grounds, tinged as little as possible with any particular view."³⁸

The conflicts involved in international knowledge production became evident in the League's selection of experts for the commission. By handpicking members who would both reassure wary governments and meet feminist expectations, the Secretariat sought to prevent both diplomatic complications and public protests. At the same time, its decisions predetermined the design of the investigation and revealed unspoken assumptions about its objectives. Appointing more women than men, for instance, signaled the Secretariat's recognition of women's special expertise on the subject of the inquiry. To avoid alienating the feminist movement, it rejected experts from countries that were adamant in their opposition to an international convention.³⁹ But it also ignored important suggestions of the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organizations, a feminist lobbying network that verified its claim to global gender expertise by submitting a comprehensive list of candidates from all over the world, including female scholars and professionals from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.⁴⁰ Without explanation, however, the Secretariat limited its choices to people of Western origin and gave precedence to candidates who had the approval of their home countries, or at least would not give any offense to the Great Powers.

The League, for example, respected the sensitivities of the French, who "wished to be represented by a woman in order to destroy any feeling that they are anti-feminist." But instead of considering Maria Vérone, a distinguished attorney and well-known feminist endorsed by the Liaison Committee, it appointed the young, inexperienced lawyer Suzanne Bastid, who, as the wife of a former French minister, had the approval of her government.⁴¹ Following established practice, the Secretariat also wanted to have an American on board. Although not a League member, the United States frequently participated in the League's technical work by supplying expertise and sponsoring investigations through its powerful foundations, actions which both provided the League with essential resources and allowed the American government to influence international politics.⁴² By considering an expert from the United States, the Secretariat also acknowledged the strength of the American women's movement and hoped to preempt attacks from its militant equalitarian wing. The obvious candidate was Alice Paul, given her experience as the former director of the IACW's survey on women's nationality. Having a reputation as the "most irresistible lobbyist

of the extreme feminist movement," however, Paul's appointment seemed unacceptable to governments as well as women's organizations critical of her uncompromising militancy. The Secretariat finally settled on a compromise candidate, the New York judge Dorothy Kenyon, who had the endorsement of the Liaison Committee.⁴³

The remaining appointments caused no debate. The League generally adopted official suggestions, some of which had the approval of the Liaison Committee. The other women selected were Anka Godjevac, a Yugoslav lawyer, and Kerstin Hesselgren, an industrial inspector and member of the League's Swedish delegation. The male experts finally chosen were Joseph de Ruelle, a top official of the Belgian Foreign Ministry; Paul Sebestyén, a top official of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry; and Harold C. Gutteridge, a professor of comparative law at Cambridge University who became the committee's chairperson. Most of those chosen had close ties to the political establishment of their home countries, and Gutteridge, de Ruelle, and Bastid represented important colonial powers.

The League's prudence in selecting committee members bespoke the authority it attributed to experts in classifying the world and governing its symbolic order. The example shows that the constitution of international expertise was a decisive step in what the historian Susan Pedersen has conceived as internationalization, that is "the process by which certain political issues and functions are displaced from the national or imperial, and into the international, realm" and rested on the belief that the collection of data was an endeavor that would enable and determine future action.⁴⁴ The predominance of appointees with a semiofficial standing, testifying to the League's consideration of national interests of important powers, indicates the politically sensitive nature of the issue. And the Secretariat's preference for legal scholars—all of the experts except for Hesselgren were lawyers with degrees from European or American universities—indicates a legalistic understanding of the social order and the corresponding assumption that the law was the appropriate standard for gauging gender disparities.

The experts' similar cultural backgrounds and academic training facilitated agreement among them and guaranteed a high degree of consensus during the three sessions of the committee in April 1938, January 1939, and July 1939.⁴⁵ Outsourcing research to specialized research institutions, the experts dealt mainly with such conceptual matters as designing the study's structure, defining its terminology, determining its methodology, and delineating its scope. By and large, they followed the guidelines laid down in the Assembly debates of 1935 and 1937, which had set important parameters for the scope of the study by gearing discussion towards equality as an international standard.

Shifting Standards: The Significance of Gender Equality

The debates in the League Assembly in 1935 and 1937 testified to feminists' success in linking the condition of women to the tenets of hegemonic internationalism. In pushing for their cause, equal rights advocates elaborated on the transnational repercussions of gender inequalities. The British writer Vera Brittain, for instance, stressed that international relations were "adversely affected both by the unequal status of men and women in all countries and the unequal treatment of women by one country as compared with another." To illustrate her claim, she cited inconsistent citizenship provisions and discrepancies in the conditions of labor as frequent sources of diplomatic complications.⁴⁶ The persuasive power of this reasoning depended on recent changes in international imagination that had been fostered by the League's production of knowledge. By initiating inquiries into almost every conceivable aspect of modern life, the League had not only raised awareness of the world's interconnectedness, but, by illuminating potential sources of conflict inhering in many issues, it had also revealed the significance of these issues for collective security, the main aim and justification of international organization.⁴⁷

By identifying women's lower status as an obstacle to human progress and the welfare of future generations, feminists inscribed their cause into the dominant discourse of global modernity. Sex equality, accordingly, had wide relevance "for the whole of humanity," as Anna Westergaard, a member of the Danish delegation and an activist for Open Door International, had declared during the Assembly debate in 1935. Referring to the Enlightenment's axiomatic connection between the status of women and a society's stage of civilization, Westergaard asserted, "Progress of a country depended to a great extent on its willingness to free itself from prejudices regarding the status of women and to loosen the shackles which, in so many States, still bound women so that they were unable to make their full contribution to the future development of the world."⁴⁸ In 1935, the Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality similarly stated in the observations addressed to the League, "Countries which are held to be most civilized and progressive are those countries where some measure of equality has been given [to women]." Societies denying women adequate opportunities, on the contrary, not only squandered their human potential but, worse, obstructed the welfare of all of humanity.⁴⁹

Subsequent debates in the League's Assembly testified to the resonance of these arguments by reflecting a shift in the parameters of the international discourse on gender away from women's vulnerability, their correlative need for protection, and their frequent association with minors—for example, in labor protection and humanitarian issues—to questions of agency and

the full development of women's human capacities on a par with men's. "One felt very strongly at Geneva that few nations were prepared to oppose 'equality,'" concluded one member of Equal Rights International with satisfaction.⁵⁰ The list of nations demonstrating support for the feminist cause was indeed striking and included young states like Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and China, most of which owed the recognition of their sovereignty to the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations. The Bulgarian delegate, for instance, proclaimed that in his country, the "idea of equality of the sexes was gaining ground daily" and referred to "marked progress of recent years in the matter of public law."⁵¹ Mocking the West for missing out on the developments of the rest of the world, the Chinese delegate not only appropriated the dominant discourse of the West's cultural superiority but, by inverting it, used it against its originators: "The fact of the complete legal equality that Chinese women now enjoyed came as a surprise to the Western world; but it was no less surprising to modern China that so many countries in Europe and America granted their women little or no legal rights."⁵² Hardly any of the vociferous defenders of sex equality represented countries with outstanding records of improving women's status. But in their desire to appear modern, the symbolic value that they attached to gender equality revealed the centrality of the condition of women to ideas of progress in a world that was organized around cultural distinctions and in which the failure to fulfill the standards of Western civilization easily undermined the political autonomy of young nations.⁵³

The new symbolic significance of the status of women, however, created growing embarrassment for governments not ready to endorse gender equality. One delegate complained about the tendency "to divide the states into two categories—the so-called progressive states and the others, the latter being regarded more or less as culprits."⁵⁴ With the lack of women's suffrage becoming an international anomaly, particularly in Western democracies, countries refusing to enfranchise their female citizens, like France and Switzerland, came under increasing pressure to justify their position, and their reasoning unintendedly confirmed the new standard. The Swiss delegate, for instance, explained that his "government was not at all hostile, as some might imagine, to the so-called emancipation of women. . . . In any case, foreign opinion would be committing a great mistake in lavishing pity on the women of Switzerland. They were much happier than was imagined in certain quarters."⁵⁵

Without making a binding commitment, the international community recognized sex equality as a universal goal, a self-evident standard, which by the mid-1930s no longer required justification. The claims of feminists, who sensed "a growing process of evolution" geared "towards complete emancipation of women," as the Swedish delegate Kerstin Hesselgren ob-

served in a League report, went unchallenged.⁵⁶ In this way, the Assembly's debates in the late 1930s had set the epistemic parameters for the planned investigation. But a consistent methodology for examining inequalities between men and women from an international perspective did not exist yet. Developing such a methodology required a basic understanding of the causes of prejudices against women, which necessarily involved questions about social power relations—questions, however, that the experts preferred to avoid. Rather, by narrowing the scope of what had been called in the Assembly's debates "the whole status of women" and assuming that legal distinctions were the main cause of social inequalities between the sexes, a majority of the experts came to equate women's status with their legal position. This allowed them to confine the study to "the present state of legislation" and, at the same time, prevent the committee from "stray[ing] into the fields of philosophy, morals or sociology" that "a social inquiry into women's claims as a whole" would inevitably entail, as the Belgian expert warned.⁵⁷ In other words, a methodology restricted by legal formalism would help the experts exclude knotty questions about the origins of the imbalance in power between men and women. The militant equalitarians' insistence on the law as an instrument of change ironically provided the committee with a justification, at least implicitly, for a narrow approach and facilitated the experts' choice of sources. To identify the legal status of women, researchers could rely on legal codes, court decisions, and other official documents. That this choice automatically excluded societies with oral legal practices and a lack of official records had the additional benefit of appeasing experts from colonial powers, including Suzanne Bastid and Joseph de Ruelle, who feared that the use of information from unofficial sources and reports of private associations would cast "a slur on the governments of countries with colonies."⁵⁸

Far from being a purely academic matter, the committee's decisions about methodology had practical implications. If gender inequalities were basically a matter of legislation, then the elimination of legal distinctions between men and women would be the adequate remedy, as legal equality feminism maintained. At the same time, they recognized that such an understanding of equality would measure the condition of women by rules that were modeled on the experiences of men and that "a law which *prima facie* affects both sexes equally" could "in reality [be] of a nature to operate adversely to women."⁵⁹ They moreover acknowledged that an empirical study of the legal status of women would challenge the conventional classifications of jurisprudence by stressing interdependencies and, consequently, bring into question the distinction between civil and public law. The guarantee of equal citizenship, for instance, was "illusory" for a married woman as long as civil law required her to obtain her husband's

consent before entering public office, an intermediary report explained.⁶⁰ Narrowing the definition of women's status to their legal status may have simplified matters at first by excluding questions of power and economic distribution, but, in the long run, looking at the law through the lens of gender exposed legal discrepancies and sensitized the experts to ambiguities and inconsistencies in supposedly rational legal systems.

The Limits of Comparison: Contested Fault Lines of Global Order

The committee's mandate did not specify the scope of the study. The interpretation of the Assembly's phrase "women in the various countries of the world" was theoretically up to the discretion of the experts. In reality, however, it was hardly conceivable that the Great Powers would accede to the truly global survey that international women's organizations desired. Reasons for their reluctance were not hard to find. The Catholic St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, for example, aired its concern over the "human rights" of African women by insinuating that colonial governments dishonored their own commitments to civilization with their failure to ban practices that were particularly harmful to women's "human dignity," including polygamy, bride price, and marriage practices leading to women's bondage.⁶¹ Critical reports about the condition of colonial women entrenched the Great Powers in their fierce determination to shield their colonial administrations from international scrutiny.

To avoid suffering any similar embarrassment as a result of the League's investigation, the British delegate William E. Beckett preferred to establish "one broad distinction . . . , namely, between (a) European systems of political and legal organization . . . ; (b) other systems of political and social organization, including systems under which civil status was governed by religious rather than by civil law, and including also the social organization of the native populations in continents other than Europe," as he explained in the Assembly's debate in 1937. Beckett's view suited the South African government, which, fearing foreign interference with its policy of racial segregation, proffered a biological theory of racism to support its view on the fundamental incomparability of European and African societies. It claimed that Africans were "a distinct race differing psychologically from Europeans, having a different glandular system, with different instincts and racial complexes" that would "make any social or legal study so entirely at variance, as to afford practically no basis of comparison."⁶²

With the exception of Kerstin Hesselgren and Dorothy Kenyon, who defended the universal approach, the experts were ready to give precedence to countries with European legal systems while postponing (but in reality shelving) the examination of non-European societies. As Gutteridge

explained, almost repeating Beckett's wording, a "world-wide survey of the status of women falls naturally and inevitably into two separate and independent parts: viz, (a) the laws of the European countries and kindred systems elsewhere; (b) the laws and customs of those countries which are not under the regime of Western civilization. . . . The gulf between them is so great that any attempt to compare them and to include them in the same synthesis can be of little or no value."⁶³ Although the committee's mandate did not instruct it to conduct a comparative study of European legal systems, the claim that "it was impossible to compare elements which by definition were not comparable" appeared to justify excluding "the laws and customs of Oriental and other races which do not conform to the standards of European civilization."⁶⁴

That claim seemed obvious to the experts for two substantial reasons. First, the committee's casual use of such binary oppositions as "backward peoples" and "advanced countries," "primitive races" and "civilized states," and "savage races" and "what was commonly known as the Western world" entrenched the notion that there was a fundamental difference between well-organized societies with genuine legal systems and populations that had mere "tribal customs." Second, its narrow sense of the term *status* excluded, by definition, societies in which the position of women was not circumscribed by formal laws. Legal notions employed in questionnaires that the League circulated, including the distinction between public, private, and criminal law, further entrenched the notion of a fundamental difference.⁶⁵ Practical considerations also favored giving the study a culturally limited scope since attempting a worldwide survey would delay the final report indefinitely, as Gutteridge warned, and prevent women's organizations from making use of its findings.⁶⁶

None of the experts approved openly racist arguments, like those the South Africans put forward. But in assuming that civilized and non-civilized cultures were incommensurable, the majority was convinced that systems for organizing gender relations differed in the most fundamental way. This implied a rejection of the feminist theory that the subjection of women was a universal phenomenon with similar origins everywhere and that worldwide variations in the status of women were merely due to an asynchrony in the evolution of different societies toward human perfection. In its protest against the exclusion of non-European societies, the Liaison Committee argued that "women's rights, which were the subject of such keen controversy in England a generation ago," were "now being tackled in non-European countries." Consequently, a truly international inquiry presented "an excellent opportunity to facilitate the study and perhaps the solution of some of the thorniest problems affecting women" worldwide.⁶⁷

In fact, what was originally held to be the clear-cut distinction between comparable systems and the rest of the world gradually started to blur as feminist complaints converged with those originating from anticolonial quarters. Serious grievances coming from individual governments as well as international women's organizations showed that the experts' classification disgruntled a growing number of League members, particularly Asians. As "you probably know," Margery Corbett Ashby, president of the IAW and a strong advocate of a truly global inquiry, reminded Gutteridge in June 1938, many Indians were "apt to think that Europe looms too large in international efforts." She noted that it would make a bad impression if "once more a division appears to be drawn between the East and the West" and that the Indians would not believe that their country had been excluded for purely methodological reasons and not because of "considerations of race or prestige."⁶⁸

Corbett Ashby's concerns reflected recent developments in transnational feminism. With the growing significance of the women's movement in non-Western countries and its frequent alliance with anticolonial efforts, the historian Marie Sandell argues in her recent book, women from Asia and the Middle East began to question the hegemony of Western feminism.⁶⁹ At the same time, Corbett Ashby addressed a sensitive issue of international cooperation. With one country after another resigning from the League, the staff of the Secretariat was increasingly nervous about the attitudes of their remaining sponsors. They realized that the Indian authorities attached great value to participating in the survey and understood their country's omission as its exclusion from the so-called civilized nations, which was a setback for their national ambitions.⁷⁰ For reasons of political expediency, the committee invited India to carry out a separate survey on the status of women on the subcontinent. This exceptional concession had wider implications. Should not such a *de facto* expansion include other non-Western League members, too, like Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Siam? But once the basic distinction between the West and the rest collapsed, how could the omission of protectorates, mandates, and colonies from the survey be justified? Yet so many inclusions would require an entirely different methodology from relying on Western legal systems as the standard. The alternative—case studies published as separate volumes—was not more appealing. It would either give each case undue prominence or, again, put the non-Western countries in the upsetting position of being mere appendices. Overwhelmed by these dilemmas, the experts finally decided to drop the "so-called criterion of 'civilization'" and replace it with the "more satisfactory test . . . of expediency," whatever that meant.⁷¹

The difficulties raised by India's insistence on its inclusion exposed contradictions in a world order undergoing rapid transformation. The fiction of formal state equality and the ambitions of colonies to obtain full sovereignty clashed with global power relations that seemed increasingly unstable. Beset by these thorny problems, the League's attitude toward its study on the status of women mirrored its feelings of insecurity. By the summer of 1939, one year into the work, the neat classification the committee had started off with was in shambles, and the draft reports, whose first versions had failed to meet the experts' standards, were still unsatisfactory.

So far, the inquiry into the status of women looked more like a futile experiment in international standardization. Did this imply that women's organizations had failed to convince the international community that the inequalities of women required a global solution? Some of the experts' earlier choices—for instance, their plan to exclude large parts of humanity from the investigation—suggest this conclusion. The change of mind that the Indians had prompted, however, seemed to favor a global approach, albeit one that still privileged the standard of formal legalism modeled on Western societies. While Margery Corbett Ashby may have made skillful use of India's national sensitivities, it was not the feminist theory of the universal nature and causes of gender discrimination that had swayed the committee. Instead, the committee had simply acceded to new global realities. Yet the eagerness of the Indians to be included in the survey confirmed the dominant association of women's rights with global modernity. This connection indicated that international discourse should be organized around a universalized concept of gender relations, which, in turn, validated liberal and individualistic claims about the global nature of the problem.

Some weeks after the experts had held their third meeting in July 1939, the German attack on Poland extinguished the last glimmer of hope for international cooperation. A gloomy Harold Gutteridge wondered whether "our survey will ever see the light in view of the present cataclysm."⁷² His worries were justified. At the end of 1940, the committee ran out of funding, and the inquiry came to a halt. For women's organizations, too, priorities were changing. At its last prewar congress in July 1939, the IAW repeated its call for a global study that could serve as the basis of an international equal rights convention. At the same time, it framed its concerns about the looming collapse of international order in the new language of universal rights. Underlining that respect for human dignity was "of active value as an element in the preservation of peace," it demanded the international protection of "human values and individual liberty . . . without regard to sex, race or religion."⁷³

In placing their emphasis on human rights, feminists anticipated the postwar significance of the individual in international law, a significance for

which legal equality feminism, with its emphasis on the universal nature of personal autonomy, had been instrumental in preparing the ground. In March 1941, a draft resolution of international women's organizations demanded that a postwar settlement be built on "the inviolable right of the individual to life and bodily integrity, the right to worship and to earn, to contract, to possess and use property . . . irrespective of sex, race, creed or class." This was just a few months before the Atlantic Charter set off an international avalanche of human rights demands.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Given the speed of international events in those years, the significance of the League of Nations' inquiry into the status of women might appear ephemeral and purely episodic. Yet it impacted conceptions of gender relations and framed debate for decades to come. In the first place, it constituted an acknowledgment that the status of women was an international problem. By engaging women's claim to equality, the League set a new standard that had wider implications in international politics. At its conference in Washington, DC, in 1944, the ILO placed new emphasis on issues of gender equality, for instance, by recognizing women's right to paid work and equal pay. Second, the epistemic premises of the inquiry—including a notion of formal equality that gauged the status of women by their legal position by taking the male standard for the norm—influenced the United Nations' early efforts to promote the advancement of women and make core demands of interwar feminism, including married women's nationality and political rights, the subject of international codification. Continuity also found linguistic expression in the name of the new UN agency dealing with women's rights, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). These connections between the UN and the League's work on the status of women ties in with research highlighting the role of individual actors, like Dorothy Kenyon who continued her work as an expert in the CSW.⁷⁵ In the long run, the inquiry framed international adoption of feminist demands and aided their insertion into the architecture of the new world order. Despite its lack of tangible results, the interwar lobbying of a small and well-connected feminist elite established gender equality as an organizing principle of global order, a principle of "vision and division," in the words of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, that configures the political field and structures power relations.⁷⁶

This, third and finally, points to the symbolic power of international expertise and knowledge production. Although the League had few means to impose its will on the international community, it produced an authoritative and dominant language in which to talk about gender rela-

tions among many other issues of international concern. By identifying distinctions between the legal statuses of men and women, the League's inquiry established that inequality was the result of social institutions, not nature; by harmonizing definitions and terminology, the expert committee organized international discourse around basic assumptions, like the legal origins of the invidious distinctions in status between the genders and an ideal of gender justice modeled on the development of women's rights in the Western world; and by collecting and collating information, the League confirmed the existence of gender hierarchies as a social fact. The League's engagement with gender equality was instrumental in integrating women's equality with a universalized notion of global progress. Differences in the status of men and women thenceforth carried a negative connotation, or at least required justification. Gauged by the standard of equality as the international norm, they were associated with backwardness.

Commissioning an international survey, by itself, set new standards of international justice and communicated a vision of a legitimate order whose concepts the League promulgated through its questionnaires and the reports it distributed among member states. International data collection, furthermore, offered incentives for governments to adjust their administrative practices by adopting the League's classifications for domestic use, as happened, for instance, in the United States.⁷⁷ In the absence of international codification, such newly adjusted practices contributed to harmonizing national definitions and interpretations of social problems and the ensuing responses. This, however, was not a linear process. The promulgation of international standards also provoked resistance and thereby entrenched differences, as exemplified by the opposition South Africa offered to any efforts at international comparison.

When gauged by interwar feminist ambitions, the League's inquiry into the status of women was unsatisfactory and in many respects a disappointment. Yet, despite its inconsistencies and incompleteness, this typical example of international knowledge production did make a difference. It changed the terms of international political discourse about gender relations. And it validated some of the assumptions that informed the statements of feminists quoted in the introduction of this article by tying the claim of gender equality to notions of global order.

NOTES

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¹"A.54.1937.V. Status of Women. Report Submitted by the First Committee to the Assembly," 25 September 1937, 3, League of Nations Archive, Geneva, Switzerland (hereafter LNA).

²"Communication from Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality," 3 April 1938, box R3756, 19254/13900, LNA; D. v. V., "Status of Women Day," *The International Women Suffrage News* 32 (May 1938): 58; and for Kollontai, see *Official Journal of the League of Nations (OJ): Special Supplement* 170 (1937): 27.

³Examples in Daniel Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴The only precedent was limited to the Americas, see Ann Towns, "The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women's Suffrage, 1920–1945," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42, no. 4 (2010): 779–807.

⁵"A.54.1937.V. Status of Women," 3.

⁶For pioneering work, see Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013); and Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On historiographical trends, see Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–117.

⁷Karen Offen, *European Feminisms 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 344. See also the pioneer research by Carol Miller, "'Geneva—the Key to Equality': Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 219–45; and Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁸Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: Identity and Sisterhood between the World Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

⁹Susan Zimmermann, "Liaison Committees of International Women's Organizations and the Changing Landscape of Women's Internationalism, 1920s to 1945," *Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present* (2012), https://search.alexanderstreet.com/preview/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C2476959?ssotoken=anonymous.

¹⁰Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 612.

¹¹Patricia Clavin, "Introduction: Conceptualising Internationalism between the World Wars," in Laqua, *Internationalism Reconfigured*, 1–15. On interwar experts, see Sandrine Kott, "Une communauté épistémique du social? Experts de l'OIT et internationalisation des politiques sociales dans l'entre-deux-guerres," *Genèses*

71 (June 2008): 26–46; and Katharina Rietzler, “Experts for Peace: Structures and Motivations of Philanthropic Internationalism in the Interwar Years,” in Laqua, *Internationalism Reconfigured*, 45–65.

¹²Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Place: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.

¹³Susan Pedersen, “Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations,” *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (2008): 188–207; and Keith David Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1315–39.

¹⁴See Jean H. Quataert, “The Gendering of Human Rights in the International Systems of Law in the Twentieth Century,” *Essays on Global and Comparative History*, ed. American Historical Association (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 2006).

¹⁵*OJ: Special Supplement* 109 (1932): 27.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷“Eighth Quinquennial Meeting of the International Council of Women, 1930,” 3, 2, Brochures: file 4, box 66, LNA. See also Carol Miller, “Lobbying the League: Women’s International Organizations and the League of Nations” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1992), 25. On feminist pacifism, see Jo Vellacott, “Feminism as if All People Mattered: Working to Remove the Causes of War 1919–1929,” *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 375–94.

¹⁸See Edith Siegenthaler, “Das Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children des Völkerbunds. Internationale Problemwahrnehmung und Wissensproduktion zu Frauen- und Kinderhandel in der Zwischenkriegszeit” (PhD diss., University of Bern, 2014); and Magaly Rodríguez García, “La Société des Nations face à la traite des femmes et au travail sexuel à l’échelle mondiale,” *Le Mouvement Social* 241, no. 4 (2012): 109–29.

¹⁹Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 215.

²⁰Nina Boyle to Rachel Crowley, 16 March 1929, box R3018, 7086/7086, LNA.

²¹“Annual Report of the Six Point Group November 1934–November 1935,” 7, 5SPG/B/1–5, box FL525, Women’s Library, London, United Kingdom (hereafter WL).

²²“A.10.1932. Collaboration of Women in the Organisation of Peace. Report by the Secretary-General,” 25 August 1932, 10, 1–2, LNA.

²³International Alliance of Women (IAW), *Report of the Eleventh Congress 1929* (London: IAW, 1929), 192.

²⁴See Eliane Gubin, “Pour le droit de travail: entre protection et égalité,” in *Le siècle des féminismes*, ed. Eliane Gubin, Catherine Jaques, Florence Rochefort, Brigitte Studer, Françoise Thébaud, and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Paris: Les Éditions de l’Atelier, 2004), 163–78.

²⁵Open Door International, "Manifesto and Charter adopted at Berlin 1929," box R3019, LNA.

²⁶Marguerite Thibert, *The Law and Women's Work: A Contribution to the Study of the Status of Women* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1939), vii. See also Offen, *European Feminisms*, 358.

²⁷See Candice Lewis Bredbenner, *A Nationality of Her Own: Women, Marriage, and the Law of Citizenship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 196–246.

²⁸"V. Legal 1932. Proposals of the Committee of Representatives of Women's International Organizations," 6 July 1931, 8, LNA. The issue was controversial among women's organizations, too, with some pleading for strict equality and others preferring a right of choice for wives. See also Paula F. Pfeffer, "'A Whisper in the Assembly of Nations': United States' Participation in the International Movement for Women's Rights from the League of Nations to the United Nations," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 5 (1985): 459–71; and Ellen Carol DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," in *Globalizing Feminisms*, ed. Karen Offen (London: Routledge, 2010).

²⁹Towns, "The Inter-American Commission of Women," 792. See also Beatrice McKenzie, "The Power of International Positioning: The National Woman's Party, International Law, and Diplomacy, 1928–34," *Gender & History* 23, no. 1 (2011): 130–46.

³⁰"A.8.1935.V. Status of Women. Proposal of Certain Delegations for Examination by the Assembly of the Status of Women as a Whole," 15 May 1935, LNA.

³¹"Minutes of the Meeting of the Equal Rights International Council," 8 September 1931, 5 ERI, box FL330, WL. See also "Summary Sent to Kathleen Innes on October 28, 1930," box FL331, WL; and Vera Brittain, "Geneva—the Key to Equality," [1929], box FL331, WL.

³²C. Beresford Fox, World Young Women's Christian Association, to Ethel Luxmoore, 4 February 1935, 7MCA/C/08, Papers of Margery I. Corbett Ashby, WL. On the following, see also Miller, "'Geneva—the Key to Equality.'"

³³Hugh McKinnon Wood, memo, 3 July 1935, box R3755, 18611/13900, LNA; McKinnon Wood to Harold B. Butler, director of the International Labour Organization, 5 September 1935, box R3756, 19723/13900, LNA; and McKinnon Wood, memo, 5 August 1935, box R3755, 18611/13900, LNA.

³⁴"Proceedings of the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations," 9 September 1935, Women and Social Movements, International, <https://alexanderstreet.com/products/women-and-social-movements-international>. <http://www.ub.unibe.ch>

³⁵Author's translation. Le Chef de la Division des Affaires étrangères to la Division de la Police du Département fédéral de Justice et Police, 6 April 1935, E2001 D 1000/1554, box 15, Swiss Federal Archives, Bern, Switzerland.

³⁶Committee for the Study of the Legal Status of Women (hereafter CSLSW), P.V. 12 (1) "Minutes of the Twelfth Meeting," meeting with representatives of women's organizations, 9 April 1938, 16, box R3771, 33443/31757, LNA.

³⁷*Open Door: Organ of the Open Door International* 21 (December 1937), 5 ODI/F/14, box FL 471, WL.

³⁸McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 30 October and 6 December 1938, box R3772, 33633/31757, LNA.

³⁹McKinnon Wood, memo, 25 November 1937, box R3771, 31757/31757, LNA.

⁴⁰Mrs. Percy Bigland and Elsie M. Zimmern, Liaison Committee, to Joseph Avenol, secretary-general of the League of Nations, 26 November 1937, box R3771, 31757/31757, LNA.

⁴¹McKinnon Wood, memo, 25 November 1937, box R3771, 31757/31757, LNA.

⁴²On American experts in the League's financial and economic committees, see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37. See also Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

⁴³See the correspondence in box R3771, 31757/31757, LNA, esp. the memos by McKinnon Wood and Arthur Sweetser, 5 January 1938.

⁴⁴Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

⁴⁵For the proceedings, see box R 3771, 33443/31757 (first session, April 1938), LNA; and box R 3772, 36576/31757 (second session, January 1939; and summaries of the third session, July 1939), LNA.

⁴⁶Vera Brittain, "A Memorandum Showing the Connection between the Status of Women and the Relations between Countries," ERI 5, box FL 334, WL.

⁴⁷On the redefinition of collective security through the expansion of financial and economic expertise in the 1930s, see Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*.

⁴⁸*OJ: Special Supplement* 139 (1935): 27. See also Jane Rendall, "The Progress of 'Civilization': Women, Gender, and Enlightened Perspectives on Civil Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Civil Society and Gender Justice: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Sonya Michel, and Gunilla Budde (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 59–78, 64.

⁴⁹"A.19.1935.V. Nationality and Status of Women," 28, LNA.

⁵⁰Helen Archdale [?] to Mrs. Harvey Wiley, National Woman's Party, 8 December 1930, 5 ERI, box FL331, WL.

⁵¹For the Bulgarian delegate, Nicolas Balbanoff, see *OJ: Special Supplement* 170 (1937): 36.

⁵²For the Chinese delegate, Hilda Yen Chen, see *OJ: Special Supplement* 139 (1935), 34.

⁵³See Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵⁴*OJ: Special Supplement* 139 (1935): 19.

⁵⁵For the Swiss delegate, Camille Gorgé, see *OJ: Special Supplement* 170 (1937): 26.

⁵⁶“A.54.1937.V. Status of Women. Report Submitted by the First Committee to the Assembly,” 25 September 1937, 3, LNA.

⁵⁷For the Belgian expert, de Ruelle, see CSLSW, P.V.1, 4 April 1938, 3, LNA; and CSLSW, P.V.2, 4 April 1938, 3, LNA.

⁵⁸For Bastid, see CSLSW, P.V.2, 4 April 1938, 14 LNA; and for de Ruelle, see CSLSW, P.V.2, 4 April 1938, 16, LNA.

⁵⁹“Scheme of Work,” 12 April 1938, box R3771, 33305/31757 C.S.F./13, LNA.

⁶⁰“Survey by the Institute of Public Law. Second Edition,” (translation), 1 July 1939, box R3769, 30999/30999, C.S.F./30, LNA.

⁶¹“A.14.1937. Status of Women. Communications Received from Governments and Women’s International Organisations since September 1936,” 8 August 1937, 56–63, LNA.

⁶²For Beckett, see *OJ: Special Supplement* 170 (1937): 18; and H. T. Andrew, representative of the Union of South Africa, to McKinnon Wood, 5 December 1938, box R3772, 33633/32757, LNA.

⁶³“Memorandum by the Chairman on the Scope of the Enquiry,” 19 December 1938, C.S.F./20, LNA.

⁶⁴For Sebestyen, see CSLSW, P.V.2, 4 April 1938, 18, LNA; and CSLSW, P.V.8, 7 April 1938, 2, LNA. Also “Memorandum by the Chairman,” 19 December 1938, C.S.F./20, LNA.

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⁶⁶M. Corbett Ashby, “Status of Women at Geneva. Meeting of the Committee of Experts. Proceedings of the Liaison Committee,” n.d., Women and Social Movements, International, <https://alexanderstreet.com/products/women-and-social-movements-international>.

⁶⁷“Communication from the Liaison Committee of Women’s International Organizations,” 9 November 1938, C.S.F./14, LNA; and “Second Communication from the Liaison Committee of Women’s International Organizations,” 30 November 1938, C.S.F./14(a), LNA.

⁶⁸Corbett Ashby to Gutteridge, 1 June 1938, box R3772, 33633/31757, LNA.

⁶⁹Sandell, *Rise of Women’s Transnational Activism*, 81–95.

⁷⁰McKinnon Wood, memo, 10 November 1938, box R3773 36161/36152, LNA.

⁷¹CSLSW, "Résumé 1," 19 July 1939, C.S.F.34/, LNA; and CSLSW, "Decisions of 19 July 1939," C.S.F.34/, LNA. See also correspondence and internal memos, spring 1939, box R3773, 36161/36152, LNA.

⁷²Gutteridge to McKinnon Wood, 18 September 1939, box R3772, 33633/31757, LNA.

⁷³IAW, *Report of the Thirteenth Congress 1939* (London: IAW, 1939), 18, 9.

⁷⁴"Proceedings of the Liaison Committee," 6 March 1941, Women and Social Movements, International, <https://alexanderstreet.com/products/women-and-social-movements-international>.

⁷⁵See Jaci Eisenberg, "The Status of Women: A Bridge from the League of Nations to the United Nations," *Journal of International Organizations Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 9–24.

⁷⁶Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

⁷⁷US Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, "Press Release," May 1938, box R3769, 30993/38289, LNA.
