

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ACTION

The Status of Women: A Bridge from the League of Nations to the United Nations

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The League of Nations and the UN are often considered distinct entities in scholarship. This work posits that these two entities should not be separated for study and illuminates one issue bridging the gap between these two institutions: the status of women. Work on the question of women's status in national law across league member states began in the late 1930s, and though it was suspended with the outbreak of World War II and the subsequent dissolution of the League of Nations, similar work was taken up by the UN. Beyond continuity of issues studied, in the case of one figure, Dorothy Kenyon, there was also continuity of actors. Examining the status of women can begin to close the gap between these two international organizations. It also has the benefit of adding women back into a field in which they are often forgotten or neglected: the study of international relations.

Introduction*

Historians and those in related fields have long tended to separate the League of Nations and the UN as objects of study, and this is only recently changing in a significant way (Pedersen, 2007; Mazower, 2009; Mazower, 2012). Many believe these two entities are to be studied apart, because the league failed unequivocally, and the UN still functions (Grigorescu, 2005). In fact, the UN was born out of the ashes of the League of Nations, and the league's failings provided valuable lessons for the foundation of the UN after World War II (Finch, 1945). Moreover, some "new" concepts arising from this division, such as the impact of the "Third United Nations" of nongovernmental organizations and epistemic communities (Weiss et al., 2009), are actually a rehashing of related models drawn from the league's experience and before (Pickard, 1936, particularly p. 462; Davies, 2012). Bit by bit, historians are beginning to concretely deconstruct the notion of the unsuccessful League of Nations, particularly in regard to its economic and financial section (Endres and Fleming, 2002; Clavin and Wessels, 2005), but works illustrating continuities between the two entities are largely the provenance of scholarship on specialized agencies, particularly the International Labor Organization (ILO) (Gheballi, 1989; Rodríguez-Piñero, 2006; Rodgers et al., 2009). Most new works in these areas cease discussion of the league in 1946 and begin discussion of the UN just before the 1945 San Francisco conference (Maul, 2007; Borowy, 2009; Jolly et al., 2009).

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This work breaks with the trends described above and shows one important point of continuity between the League of Nations and the UN, without having recourse to a specialized agency as a case study: examinations of the status of women. After much pressure from women's equalitarian activist groups, the league took up the questions of the legal, political, social, and economic statuses of women. A committee was founded in 1937 to examine these points across league member states. With the difficulties faced by the league during World War II, the work of this committee appeared to be disbanded, both because of the practical difficulties of conducting a cross-cultural study during wartime, as well as the more overwhelming and permanent difficulty for the largely European league to accurately conduct cross-cultural studies. The UN founded a committee whose goals were similar, which is still discussed as a phenomenon largely distinct from the league committee (Jain, 2005).¹ I propose to show that this is a mistaken view. There was continuity between the league and the UN on women's issues, not only in terms of mission but also in regard to one actor.

Dorothy Kenyon (1888–1972), an American and the sole woman member of both the league and UN bodies on the status of women, was a great advocate for the League of Nations on the issue.² With the work of the legal institutes analyzing the status of women around the world on hold due to war, Kenyon shopped the league project around to a number of internationalist institutes, hoping one would see merit in publishing the results already obtained. When the UN formed a status of women committee and did not include her on the original roster of members, it mattered little to Kenyon. She had become so involved in the cause she was willing to devote her energies to publicizing the important work, even without a seat on the body. Eventually, her perseverance was rewarded with a spot on this latter committee. Surveying Kenyon's role across these two institutions provides one simple point of entry for examining discord and continuities in the question of the status of women across these two organizations.

The selection of Kenyon as a member on the league body was indeed unexpected. International women's groups had sought to influence women's status in the league from its very foundation in 1919. Among other points, they sought equal rights regarding nationality, social and political status (Becker, 1982, pp. 163–185; C.A. Miller, 1994; Rupp, 1997; Bredbenner, 1998, pp. 195–242; Sandell, 2011), and employment (Berkovitch, 1999, pp. 86–99; Wikander, 2010; Schoeni and Natchkova, 2011). However, Kenyon was not one of these activist women present in Geneva, though the American League of Women Voters (LWV), an organization to which she belonged, was involved in international issues through the umbrella of the International Women Suffrage Alliance (IWSA). Kenyon, as an American, was an unusual choice given the United States' official absence from the league—but not so unusual when one thinks of the plethora of matters in which the U.S.—governmental and private entities alike—sustained unofficial cooperation with the league: disarmament (Eisenberg, 2013 forthcoming), philanthropic aid for league endeavors (Rietzler, 2011; Tournès, 2012), and advocacy for U.S. participation in the league (Kuehl and Dunn, 1997).

In examining this continuity between the League of Nations and the UN, this study not only starts to bridge the gap between these two institutions, it also corrects the ingrained gender

1. Jain's work is the most egregious example, particularly problematic as it is part of a prominent series: the United Nations Intellectual History Project. Jain dances around the existence of the league committee: we hear of league delegates or committee members later serving on the UN committee (14), or how information on the status of women was requested and collected by the league (14, 17, 30, 60), but no actual declaration of its existence. Where it should have been mentioned—at least in passing—was after the sentence: "The UN was not the first international or intergovernmental body to deal with questions that affected the status of women." (14) Yet, it is glaringly absent—though perhaps for the best, as Jain's work is riddled with errors regarding the interwar period. She cited the Covenant of the League of Nations as dating from 1924 (14)—it was 1919—and wrote that the League of Nations was involved in the drafting of an equal rights treaty (20–21)—when in reality the equal rights treaty was a private initiative brought to the attention of the league. The league had nothing to do with the drafting process.

2. In the decade since Kate Weigand and Daniel Horowitz's call to research on Kenyon (2002) was launched, scholars have eagerly answered the call. In particular, Karen Garner (2010, p. 141ff) focused on Kenyon's role in the UN committee, Jo Butterfield recently used Kenyon as a case study in her dissertation to illustrate the argument that feminists' postwar advocacy for human rights was very much shaped by the direction of women's interwar activism (2012), and Carol Linsky is currently working on a dissertation at SUNY Binghamton entitled "American Women's Internationalism and the Work of Dorothy Kenyon, 1933–1954."

imbalance plaguing the field of the history of international relations (F. Miller, 1986, p. 171).³ Examining women's activism apart in order to reintegrate these stories into the mainstream narrative is a radical, yet necessary, project (Sluga, 2005, p. 312). It is dedicated research initiatives such as these that allow a different perspective of the history of the international system to be formed and eventually mix with more mainstream narratives, forever expanding this discipline for the better.

Women's Rights as an Issue at the League of Nations

The League of Nations, the outcome of discussions held in Paris in spring 1919 and enshrined in the Treaty of Versailles, did not have a large mandate for women's issues. This was the case despite lobbying from women's activists the world over, desirous to see pro-women planks included, particularly the women's charter drawn up by the Women's Peace Party at their conference in Zurich in May 1919 focused on economic equality (Chambers, 1991, pp. 151–157, 158–159). What was enshrined in the Treaty of Versailles was minimal on both the equality and mandate fronts. In the Covenant of the League of Nations, article 7 called for secretariat posts to be open to both men and women (but stopped short of mandating gender parity in posts). Article 23 included two conditions: part "A" called for "fair and humane conditions of labour for men, women, and children," and part "C" gave the league competence in agreements against the traffic of women and children. The constitution of the ILO, also included in the Treaty of Versailles, went further, mentioning the protection of women in its preamble. The ILO constitution was both more and less progressive than the league covenant. It was more progressive in the sense that article 389 of the ILO constitution declared when women's questions were in front of the conference, one of the two allowed advisers should be a woman. But it was less progressive because, unlike article 7 of the league covenant, article 395 stated only "a certain number of [the employees in the ILO secretariat] shall be women."

After this mitigated success at Paris, women's rights activists turned inward to set their own agenda and lobbying program. In so doing a schism between two facets of activists, the equalitarians and the protectionists, became evident. Both factions held the belief that they were agitating for the best possible status and situation for women, and in this respect, both sides may be considered "feminist." However, their belief as to what the best possible status entailed varied drastically. The equalitarians believed full political, social and economic equality for women could only come from complete legal equality—women had to be equal to men in every sense, with no special or protective regimes in place for any facet of life. Protectionists, on the other hand, saw an inherent difference between men and women—biological as well as in terms of temperament—and believed women should benefit from standards and legislation reflecting these special differences. One of the turning points in this schism was the 1926 Conference of the IWSA in Paris. An American equalitarian group, the National Women's Party (NWP), applied for membership in the IWSA, which was, at the time, in the process of changing its name to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship. The NWP application was denied on two fronts (Becker, 1982, pp. 166, 168). First, the NWP had, since 1923, supported an equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Becker, p. 19). This was a problem because of the second point. The one American entity, the LWV, a member of the IWSA at the time, was firmly protectionist. The LWV and the NWP never agreed on a common philosophy (Pfeffer, 1985, p. 462). As the IWSA was an international group, this American disagreement had international reverberations. The prominent British equalitarian Six Point Group split from this entity in protest (Becker, 1982, p. 168).

The first impact of this reverberation on the League of Nations was at The Hague Conference on the Codification of International Law, held in March and April 1930.

3. "There is perhaps no area of historical literature where women—other than monarchs and Mata Hari—have been less visible than in the literature of international relations" (F. Miller, 1986, p. 171).

This conference aimed to begin unifying the national laws of its member states. On the agenda for 1930 were laws governing territorial waters, state responsibility for damage suffered by foreigners within its boundaries, and questions of nationality (Stienstra, 1994, p. 68). The women activists, both equalitarian and protectionist, were keen to weigh in on issues of nationality, particularly the question of married women's nationality—should a woman marrying a foreigner be allowed to keep or change her nationality as she pleased or should she be required to take her husband's nationality for the unity of the family? The women activists managed to make themselves heard twice at the conference: once in front of the Bureau of the Conference on Codification of Law and once before the First Committee, charged with nationality issues (Stienstra, p. 70).

The countries debating at The Hague were not in agreement on how to best proceed. Brazil and Chile brought to the table an argument for full legal equality between men and women—nationality should not be changed through marriage without consent of either party. The Scandinavian countries were in favor of a woman's choice when it came to nationality, yet if foreign women married nationals of their countries, these women were automatically given citizenship, more often than not stripping them of their native citizenship due to the incompatibility of dual citizenship in many national legal systems. Switzerland, the Netherlands, Egypt, Italy, Austria, and Nicaragua all came down strongly in favor of unity of nationality—what went for the husband, went for the wife. In discussion, many delegates expressed the belief that women in international marriages should have the right to choose their own nationality—whether to keep their birth nationality or to adopt that of their husband upon marriage. And yet the resulting Hague Convention on Nationality promoted unity. It tied a woman's nationality to that of her husband, showing the delegates believed a woman's individual rights were secondary to the rights of the family. As such, it demonstrated rather decisively, according to Dorothy Kenyon, that international law could not dictate to states whether men and women were equal in terms of nationality (Kenyon, 1948, pp. 30–31). The Hague Convention on Nationality eventually came into effect in 1937 with ten signatures (Pfeffer, 1985, p. 465).

The Hague lightning rod and other efforts led the League of Nations to establish, in January 1931, a Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality (WCCN) to provide information to the league assembly on the question of independent nationality for women (Pfeffer, p. 464). Eight organizations initially composed the WCCN (LoN, 7 September 1932, p. 1). This body was quite privileged—entitled to hold its meetings in the secretariat and to have its correspondence passed directly to the assembly and council but powerless without official status (C.A. Miller, 1992, p. 197).⁴ The first meeting of the WCCN veered toward an equalitarian consensus (Stienstra, 1994, pp. 71–72), but the second meeting led to polarization, with some of the groups concluding The Hague standards on nationality were the most progressive achievable at the time (LoN, 7 September 1932, pp. 1–6). The protectionists, and eventually the league secretariat, came to believe that since the WCCN was no longer based on consensus, it had ceased to be a legitimate body (Ashby, 17 September 1932; Avenol, 27 September 1933, p. 1). The equalitarians continued to consider their role on the WCCN as active and used their membership on the body to mark their legitimacy, despite being continually rebuffed by the league regarding this point (McKinnon Wood, 6 June 1935).

The League of Nations Commission on the Status of Women

The results of The Hague Convention on Nationality and the WCCN were deeply disappointing to the NWP. They returned to regional venues—the Pan-American Union and its Inter-American Commission of Women—to build up sorely needed support. In regional venues, the NWP found success in December 1933, at the Seventh International Conference of American

4. Chapter 6 of Carol Ann Miller's doctoral thesis was published as an article in 1994, which is more widely accessible to researchers than the dissertation itself (C.A. Miller, 1994).

States in Montevideo, Uruguay. A majority of states present signed an Equal Nationality Treaty, which stated that men and women had equal rights in nationality and nationality could not be changed without either party's consent. Four states present additionally adhered to an Equal Rights Treaty, which proclaimed men and women equal throughout the jurisdiction in question (Meyer, 1999, p. 63).

The Equal Nationality Treaty was of particular interest to the League of Nations. This measure was brought to the attention of the next session of the league assembly in September 1934 by a letter signed by the delegations of fifteen member states of the league. They requested it be placed on the agenda of the First Committee (in charge of constitutional and legal questions) at the next session of the assembly, a measure indeed adopted (LoN, September 1934, p. 205).⁵ This letter in particular illustrates the lengths to which women activists went to ensure this item was placed on the agenda. Though they had tried before the Montevideo conference—by using the WCCN in the September 1931, 1932, and 1933 sessions of the league assembly—prior attempts by women activists to put questions of equal legal status for women on the league agenda failed (Doty, 28 July 1934, p. 3). This successful effort in September 1934 relied, in large part, on the goodwill the women activists procured from Maxim Litvinoff, representing a new member state, the USSR, at the annual Assembly of the League of Nations (Lutz, between September 1934–1935, p. 3; Doty, 15 October 1934, pp. 3–4).

September 1935 marked a turning point for the league. The league assembly passed a resolution drawing the attention of its member states to the existence of the Montevideo Nationality Convention⁶ and to the fact it was open for accession by all states. The league was indeed impressed that via this instrument some American States members of the league had fulfilled recommendation no. 6 of the Hague Convention, which requested that equality of the sexes be taken into account when formulating or revising nationality laws. Nevertheless, the league still hoped that countries intending to ratify the Hague Convention on Nationality of 1930 would do so soon, ostensibly in order to speed its coming into force. Such a dual promotion—of an instrument already in force (the Montevideo Equal Nationality Convention) and of one still pending (The Hague Convention of 1930) effectively meant, for the time being, the Montevideo clauses had supplanted the Hague formulation as official league policy (LoN, 24 September 1935, p. 2). While certainly a victory on paper for equalitarian feminists, the broader question of women's equality (beyond the sole facet of nationality) remained outstanding. Discussion of the Montevideo Equal Rights Treaty, also on the agenda at the watershed September 1935 league assembly session (Trigg, 1995, p. 63), prompted some tentative attempts to explore the question of women's legal status in national law. A resolution called on the secretary-general to request league member states to submit observations on “the political and civil status of women,” to be discussed by a future session of the league assembly. Also requested were observations on the role of women in national labor legislation, with a view to evaluating their economic status, left to examination by the ILO (LoN, September 1935, pp. 234–235).

The 1935 appeal for information, and the subsequent questionnaire circulated to states on the status of women in national law, resulted in the question of the status of women being placed, once again, on the agenda of the assembly, this time for September 1937. In discussion, the rapporteur for the question of the status of women in the first committee of the league presented a summary of the replies received from governments, showing very different policies toward women among league member states (Appendix 1). To build on the information received and to contextualize and understand it, the first committee proposed the assembly undertake a comprehensive scientific study of the status of women in national law and that it be carried out by a mixed committee of men and women, in consultation

5. Letter dated 21 September 1934 and signed by the delegations of Argentina, Chile, China, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Latvia, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Siam, Turkey, U.S.S.R., and Yugoslavia.

6. A shortened form referring to the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1933).

with several legal institutes (Kenyon, 12 September 1945, p. 2).⁷ The assembly agreed (LoN, September 1937, p. 204) and charged the council with selecting the committee (LoN, October 1937, p. 259). The September 1937 Assembly of the League allotted a budget of 25,000 CHF (LNC, January 1938, p. 1–Point 5), earmarked as such: 20,000 CHF for the expenses incurred during two expert meetings (one to draw up a program of work and one to finalize the report of work), and 5,000 CHF reserved should the legal institutes assigned by the league to help with this task be unable to cover the costs through their own reserves (Lutz or Paul, 15 December 1937).

The council wasted no time, selecting three men and four women for the League of Nations Committee to Study the Legal Status of Women (LNC), after reviewing names suggested by women’s international organizations (Appendix 2). The American member, Dorothy Kenyon, was not favored by the equalitarian groups, who had lobbied hard to place the question of women’s full legal equality on the league agenda but enjoyed the support of the protectionists (Stienstra, 1994, p. 76). The equalitarians were represented by the Yugoslav Anna Godjevac. Still, Kenyon’s inclusion on this body at all was extremely unusual, because the protectionist viewpoint was essentially promulgated by the LWV alone—no other national delegations were keen to support it (Trigg, 1995, pp. 63–64).⁸ Kenyon was a better fit than an equalitarian radical like Alice Paul of the NWP, because despite all of her judicial accomplishments, she was perceived as less threatening. As one profile phrased it, “[u]nlike most feminists, Judge Kenyon is feminine” (“Profane Profiles,” November 1940). The selection of Kenyon was also unusual because, like most Americans, she was not chiefly occupied with international activities. As a lawyer in New York, previously partnered with Dorothy Straus in the firm of Straus and Kenyon—colloquially known as “the two Dorothys”—state and local activities predominantly held her attention (Adams Kenyon, n.d. a, p. 94; “Association of the Bar of the City of NY,” 1972, p. 57). Yet she had an international background. Admitted to the bar in 1917, her first position was with Walter Lippmann’s committee gathering economic data for the Paris Peace Conference. In 1919, the Kingdom of Siam was her first private legal client, requesting a brief on territoriality and the opium trade (Limberg, ca. 1939, pp. 1–2).

The LNC met three times throughout 1938 and 1939 to discuss how to conduct the study and manage intermediate results. Several voluntary organizations with an interest in the status of women were included in these consultations, meaning non-league entities were now officially part of the decision-making process (LoN, January 1939, pp. 42–43). First, the committee compiled a list of questions for study under the headings of public, private, and criminal law (LNC, 12 April 1938).⁹ This work was then transferred to the legal institutes, who quickly discovered problems interpreting non-Western law (LoN, January 1939, pp. 42–43). The delay in finding an institute capable of dealing with such legal traditions caused the ultimate deadline for the LNC’s results to be pushed to 1941 (LoN, July 1939, pp. 296–297), at which point the work of the league had effectively been suspended for several months due to the European war.

World War II and the Foundation of the UN

A newspaper recorded Dorothy Kenyon’s palpable excitement about being appointed to the LNC: “Imagine being able to do something for women in China and Japan and Germany

7. The International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (Rome), the International Institute of Public Law, and the International Bureau for the Unification of Criminal Law (both in Paris) undertook the bulk of the work. Questions of Mohammedan and Hindu law were split between specialists in France and India after the fact when difficulties in interpreting these “foreign” laws were discovered (Kenyon, 12 September 1945, p. 2).

8. Paula Pfeffer offered a hypothesis as to why a protectionist was appointed rather than an equalitarian feminist. At the Eighth International Conference of American States in Lima, Peru, 9–27 December 1938, equalitarians Alice Paul and Doris Stevens faced competition from the U.S. State Department-backed protectionist League of Women Voters (LWV) to represent the U.S. in the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Pan-American Union (IACW). While the IACW did not take kindly to the agitation sparked by the LWV, the U.S. State Department maintained that representation on the IACW was appointed on a national basis, meaning its decision to have the LWV represent the U.S. in the IACW would stand (Pfeffer, 1985, p. 466; also, Trigg, 1995, pp. 64–65). From 1938, protectionists represented the U.S. in one of the most prominent women’s international organizations.

9. A sampling of the points to be covered: in public law, franchise and entitlement payments (e.g., pensions); in private law, right to enter into contracts and rights as a parent; and in criminal law, prostitution and the ability of women to participate in police work.

and Italy. It's staggering—it's simply colossal" (*Tribune*, 20 January 1938). Serving on the committee was not only an opportunity to help others but also an opportunity for American self-reflection.

Americans are likely to be full of confidence about the legal status of their women, but this confidence may not be wholly justified after [the LNC] studies are completed. Comparatively speaking, we lead the world; but when we stand in comparison with other countries we will get a true perspective of the whole question. It will be a good thing for us to see ourselves through the eyes of an objective, fact-finding commission (Petersen, 15 May 1938).

The many advantages made Kenyon keen to continue the committee's work however she could, despite no scheduled meetings due to the war. In mid-1940, Kenyon offered her New York office as a safe repository for the LNC documents (Kenyon, 28 June 1940), and, at the end of the year, it was agreed she would receive a complete set of documents in both English and French (Unknown, 31 December 1940), which she eventually received in mid-1941 (Habicht, 20 May 1941).

During the war years, in New York and working at her solo law practice, Kenyon did not forget the work begun in Geneva. She was keen to have LNC's work published during wartime. However, the difficulties were many. All of the legal institutes were located in war theaters, and the league was quite diminished in Geneva, so fact-checking, translation, and publication could not be undertaken in Europe (Kenyon, 16 July 1943). As a solution, Kenyon sought an American publisher, and her first stop was the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP). Though the CEIP professed that the status of women was not of importance at the moment, Kenyon begged to differ, citing it essential for the shape of the postwar period. The CEIP held its ground and chose not to fund the project (Kenyon, 16 July 1943; Kenyon, 24 July 1943; Finch, 30 July 1943; Unknown, 31 July 1943; Kenyon, 1 August 1943). After the CEIP failure, Kenyon tried such popular publishers as *Harper's Magazine* and *Funk and Wagnalls* to no avail (Kenyon, 6 August 1943).

Designs for a postwar order were drawn up at a number of conferences: Dumbarton Oaks, Yalta, and finally the San Francisco Conference, generally recognized as the founding point of the UN. At San Francisco, women took part in discussions—unlike at Paris some twenty-six years earlier—and their input became part of the UN Charter completed on 25 June 1945, which entered into force four months later. Though a separate commission on the status of women was not enshrined in the charter, women activists found hope in the newly created Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in the human rights clauses, which called for freedom on the basis of sex (Galey, 1995a, pp. 6–8). The Commission on Human Rights (CHR), created under the aegis of the ECOSOC, met for the first time on 18 February 1946, and on the same day, a UN Sub-Commission on the Status of Women (UNSC) was approved and placed under its tutelage. Nine countries were selected to appoint experts to the body; as the U.S. was not among the nine named, there was no opening for such representation at the time (Galey, 1995b, p. 13).

Despite this setback, Kenyon was steadfast in her support of an international legal commission on the status of women, most remarkable because she had no direct role to play on this body. Kenyon continued to spread the word about the work of this forgotten commission, pleading its necessity to relevant parties, and in so doing delicately made the case for her own participation (*Smith College Spectator*, February 1946, pp. 6–7). She courted the members of the UNSC by inviting them to a luncheon at the prominent New York women's Cosmopolitan Club in April 1946, around the time of this body's first official meeting (Adams Kenyon, n.d. b, pp. 114–115). In parallel, U.S. protectionists lobbied their government to secure Kenyon's appointment (Laville, 2008, pp. 40–41).

The UNSC sat for its first session in April and May 1946, almost concurrently with the second session of the ECOSOC. Both bodies met in New York: ECOSOC at Lake Success, where the UN had established temporary headquarters, and the UNSC at Hunter College. After

conferring with her commission counterparts, UNSC President Bodil Begtrup of Denmark was permitted, exceptionally, to address the ECOSOC (Stienstra, 1994, p. 83). There she presented the work completed to date by the UNSC. A review of the LNC's work had judged it insufficient and limited: the LNC had focused on the *content* of laws; the UNSC hoped to focus on the *application* of legislation regarding women in practice (UNDPI, 1996, p. 111).¹⁰ In order to focus on the application of laws, the UNSC hoped to create a secretariat office headed by a woman, complete the LNC's work and finish the worldwide survey on laws pertaining to women, agitate for equal access to education, and host a women's conference under the aegis of the UN (Galey, 1995b, p. 13). Begtrup also requested the UNSC be promoted to a full commission, specifically as a reward for women's service during World War II (Stienstra, 1994, p. 83).¹¹ With the help of some behind-the-scenes opinion-swaying by equalitarian militants like Alice Paul (Stienstra, p. 84), the ECOSOC promoted the UNSC to full commission status—the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNC)—on 21 June 1946, by Resolution 2/11 (Galey, 1995b, p. 14).¹²

Elevation to a full commission opened the way for new membership. This new, broader commission proved different in composition than the LNC. Instead of a European contingent with one American, it was inching toward an international composition, with members from every continent except Africa (Adams Kenyon, n.d. b, p. 116).¹³ Kenyon was appointed the U.S. member of the UNC by President Harry Truman in a recess appointment on 7 November 1946. She was to serve for a period of three years (Adams Kenyon, n.d. b, p. 115). Her nomination was approved by the ECOSOC on 10 December 1946 (Byrnes, 6 January 1947).¹⁴

The first meeting of the UNC took place in February 1947, at which time its role as the “watchdog of women's interests” was set (Kenyon, 1947, p. 43). As Begtrup had mentioned before ECOSOC the previous year, the UNC sought to trump the work of the LNC by examining not only the legal status of women but the effects stemming from that status in national law (Kenyon, 1947, p. 41). The UNC adopted the program of work prepared by the UNSC, and added the step of reporting directly on women's issues to the ECOSOC, as well as preparing recommendations to be submitted to the ECOSOC for adoption (Kenyon, 1947, p. 39; Galey, 1995b, p. 14). For this reason, in terms of concrete action, the UNC aimed larger than any of its precursors.

Kenyon was indefatigable in her advocacy. Before the first meeting in January 1947, she hosted a tea for American women involved in women's causes and internationalist organizations to drum up interest in the UNC (“Organizations represented,” 28 January 1947). In February, during the meeting, she lined up editors of the most prominent women's magazines in the U.S.—*Good Housekeeping*, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Colliers*, and others—to interview the delegates, in order to spread the message and work of the UNC to women all over her native country (“List of magazine editors,” 20 February 1947; Kenyon, n.d. b). This trend of informal courtship—through teas, luncheons, and meet and greet events—continued throughout her term on the UNC (Kenyon, n.d. a).

The first question for the UNC was political equality. As Kenyon wrote, “Democracy cannot be said to exist in a country which disenfranchises more than 50 percent of its people” (Kenyon, 1946?). It was not a trivial question, but one that persisted despite women's increasing participation in economic life during wartime: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

10. UN ref. no. E/PV.4, 28 May 1946.

11. Note that the argument used by Begtrup is not unlike one of the arguments used to justify the foundation of the ILO in 1919—that it was a gift to the workers who had sacrificed themselves during World War I.

12. American protectionists were opposed to the establishment of the UNC, whereas American equalitarians were not. Once the UNSC and, later, the UNC became realities, protectionists co-opted the system and supported Kenyon's nomination to the UNC. Separately, equalitarians supported the idea of a UNC and the elevation of the UNSC to the UNC (Stienstra, 1994, p. 84; Laville, 2008, pp. 35, 41).

13. For a listing of the first iteration of the UNC, see Appendix 3.

14. N.B. Kenyon's post was not renewed. She was replaced, later in the Truman administration, by Olive Remington Goodman, a Democratic stalwart (Adams Kenyon, n.d. b, p. 126).

adopted in 1948, was only amended in its English version from “men” to “human beings” after pressure from the UNC—and even then one instance of “man” remained in the preamble (Jain, 2005, pp. 19–20). The UNC worked for several years on the issue of women’s political equality, preparing a draft Convention on the Political Rights of Women, submitted upward to the ECOSOC and then approved by the UN General Assembly (GA) in 1952 (coming into force in 1954), which gave women the right to vote, to hold public office, and to be public functionaries on equal terms with men (Galey, 1995b, p. 16). Other major accomplishments predominantly attributable to the UNC were a new Convention on the Nationality of Married Women—supplanting the Montevideo (1933) and The Hague (1930, in force in 1937) Conventions—passed by the GA in 1957 (coming into force in 1958), and a Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, adopted by the GA in 1962 (coming into force in 1964) (Galey, 1995b, pp. 19–20). Several other questions pertaining to women were examined by various UN specialized agencies and received the support of the UNC (Galey, 1995b, pp. 17–19).

Conclusions

The UNC was certainly a success. It represented great progress from interwar efforts. Compared to the league, the UN’s universal membership provided a greater audience to survey and from which to draw information and support. In contrast to the LNC, the UNC had an expanded mandate and the ear of an interested body (specialized ECOSOC instead of the all-inclusive league assembly). As an analytical, rather than solely information-gathering body, the UNC became the first international, truly intergovernmental “watchdog of women’s interests.”

Nevertheless, the relative success of the UNC does not diminish the contribution of the league to bringing women’s rights to fruition. On the contrary, it is one further step in the long narrative of women’s activism for legal equality, which had begun before the league and continued inside, outside, and beyond the league. It is not a question of only the league or only the UN being an appropriate lens through which to view the issue. Equality for women is an issue that cuts transversally through numerous countries and institutions over a long time span, and to view it any other way is only to understand the tip of the iceberg. In this manner, positing any discussion of women’s equality at the UN as the beginning of “a sixty-year quest for equality and justice” is to ignore the efforts of women activists as well as institutional efforts in the interwar period and before.¹⁵ This focus on successes to the exclusion of the complex processes that led to success is a reductionist version of history: the failures, discarded ideas, and fragile stepping stones all contributed to the accomplishments of the UNC.

The UNC does not mark the end of the story. The UNC organized an International Women’s Year in 1975, marked by a first, important, agenda-setting, intergovernmental and international conference on women’s issues held in Mexico City. This was the very goal stated by the UNSC in 1946 coming to fruition almost thirty years later. The momentum continued through the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) (Allan et al., 1995, p. 29). Here an uptick in engagement occurred. Beyond the LNC’s examination of content of national laws on the status of women and the UNC’s more intensive survey of their application, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was passed by the GA in 1979. The CEDAW went one step beyond the league and UN committees, enshrining anti-discriminatory measures as international law and provided for oversight of women’s status in signatory countries, which comprised almost all UN member states, as the mechanism by which nondiscrimination would be ensured. It is the chief instrument in force today advocating equality for women in all aspects of life (with exemption for maternity regulation).¹⁶ The second UN Decade for Women conference, held in Copenhagen in 1980,

15. The quotation is the subtitle of the Jain book in the UN Intellectual History Project series.

16. For a retrospective on the CEDAW, see Schöpp-Schilling and Flinterman, 2007. Note: the CEDAW has been only signed by the U.S., not ratified. In comparison, the BRICS have all signed and ratified the convention.

provided the push for the third step in this international progression for women's rights. It was the perfect opportunity for many UN member states to ratify the CEDAW, helping the convention to attain the minimum number of ratifications required to enter into force in 1981 (Fraser, 1995, p. 77). Though the discourse had changed from "equality" to "discrimination" over the course of the twentieth century, the impetus and fight behind it were the same.

Focusing on Dorothy Kenyon as a bridge between the League of Nations and the UN is one micro-level way to understand the question of the legal status of women, which has the benefit of allowing many relevant, complex points surrounding this question to be raised. Kenyon represented one side of a fraught battle between protectionists and equalitarians, one that is often reduced in UN-only scholarship to reflect a march toward the triumph of the equalitarian viewpoint. In the LNC, she was an outsider by nationality, the lone non-European on the committee. This particularity was quite valuable during World War II. When she attempted to keep the work of the league committee alive, her nationality afforded a privileged situation away from hostilities, though in the end, none of her efforts came to immediate fruition. Though not a member of the first UN iteration of the legal status of women committee, she was appointed when the membership was expanded (UNSC versus UNC). This change highlights the differences in Euro-centric membership of the league and the global community forming the UN, as well as the connective role of certain individuals like Dorothy Kenyon in spanning these two institutions.¹⁷ By unearthing these important, yet largely heretofore unexamined connections, a more complete story of women's involvement and influence in the UN and international relations can be written.

APPENDIX 1

Excerpt of Resolution taken during the September 1937 League Assembly:

"STATUS OF WOMEN"

The rapporteur for this question to the First Committee made a general survey of the present position of women under the law of different countries. This was based on information supplied by Governments and associations in respect of thirty-eight countries, including twenty-four in Europe, four in Asia, two in Africa, seven in American and Australia. It revealed that:

- (1) Equality of right to their own nationality is allowed to women by ten countries and refused by twenty;
- (2) the right to vote in parliamentary elections and eligibility for election to parliament on an equal footing is enjoyed by women in twenty-four countries and refused in fourteen (nine in Europe);
- (3) an equal right to vote and eligibility in local government on an equal footing is accorded to women in twenty-nine countries, and refused in seven (four in Europe);
- (4) the equal right for married women to choose their domicile is given only in four countries and refused in twenty-four;
- (5) in seven countries married women have an equal right to the guardianship of their children; in twenty they are refused it;
- (6) fourteen countries seem to give a woman, married or unmarried, the right to engage in every kind of work, while restrictions of different kinds are imposed in sixteen countries;
- (7) equality of rights as regards property, income and earnings is given in twenty-four countries and refused in ten.
- (8) The rapporteur was impressed by the process of evolution, many countries reporting recent or contemplated changes in their legislation.

—LoN, September 1937, p. 204

17. Appendix 3 shows that women of all continents, save Africa, were included in the first full UNC, compared to representation from only two continents in the LNC (Appendix 2).

APPENDIX 2**Members of the League of Nations Committee to Study the Legal Status of Women**

Madame Paul Bastid (French)

Professor in the Faculty of Law of the University of Lyons

Mr. de Ruelle (Belgian)

Legal Adviser to the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration

Madame Anka Godjevac (Yugoslav)

Doctor of Law, Technical Adviser of the Yugoslav Delegation at the Codification Conference (1930)

Mr. H.C. Gutteridge (UK)

Professor of Comparative Law at the University of Cambridge

Mademoiselle Kerstin Hesselgren (Swedish)

Member of the Second Chamber of the Riksdag, rapporteur on the status of women to the First Committee of the Assembly (1938)

Mr. Paul Sebestyen (Hungarian)

Counsellor of Division, Head of the Treaties Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [sic]

Miss Dorothy Kenyon (American)

Doctor of Law, Member of the New York Bar and Legal Adviser to a number of national organizations

—LoN, January 1938, p. 22

APPENDIX 3**Members of the First United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, June 1946**

Jessie Mary Grey Street (Australia)

Campaigner for equality of women, equal pay, the status of Aborigines, and world peace; Secretary of the National Council for Women in 1920

Evdokia Uralova (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic)

A history teacher and a senior executive in the Ministry of Education Way Sung New (People's Republic of China)

Graciela Morales F. de Echeverria (Costa Rica)

An executive in Costa Rica's Social Security Office

Bodil Begtrup (Denmark)

Chief film censor for Denmark

Marie Helene Lefauchaux (France)

Vice President of the Assemblée de l'Union Française; led the French Resistance to the occupation of Paris in the 1940s

Sara Basterrechea Ramirez (Guatemala)

An organic chemist and the sole woman member of the faculty of the University of San Carlos

Shareefah Hamid Ali (India)

Organized the All India Women's Conference in the 1920s and represented Indian women in many international gatherings

Amalia C. de Castillo Ledon (Mexico)

A playwright and active participant in women's and social work

Alice Kandalf Cosma (Syria)

An educator and writer who organized the Arab Women's National League in Syria

Mihri Pektas (Turkey)

University professor and former member of parliament

Elizavieta Alekseevna Popova (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)

Lawyer and trade unionist

Mary Sutherland (United Kingdom)

Leader in trade union activity and the chief woman officer of the Labour Party

Dorothy Kenyon (United States)

Former judge of the New York Municipal Court; active as a lawyer in civic and women's organizations

Isabel de Urdaneta (Venezuela)

Teacher and diplomat active in the work of the Pan-American Union

—Jain, 2005, pp. 15–16

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