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HUMANITARIAN IMPERIALISM

THE POLITICS OF ANTI-SLAVERY
ACTIVISM, 1880–1940

AMALIA RIBI FORCLAZ

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Humanitarian Imperialism

*The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism,
1880–1940*

AMALIA RIBI FORCLAZ

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Introduction

Between 1880 and 1940, slavery in Africa became a prominent issue in the relationship between European colonial powers and their African colonies. Anti-slavery organizations emerged concurrently with European expansion in Africa, as a product of the increasingly internationalized debate about 'native welfare' and the responsibilities of empire. In the late 1880s, a range of Catholic anti-slavery organizations appeared in the metropolises of continental Europe as part of the Holy See's revitalized missionary policy in Africa. Some of these new organizations, notably the French *Société Antiesclavagiste de France* (1888–1918) and the Italian *Società Antischiavista d'Italia* (1888–1938), joined efforts with the more established British Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (hereafter Anti-Slavery Society) founded in 1839 to raise political and public awareness about the persistence of domestic African slavery and ongoing slave-trading.¹

The aim of this book is to explore how these small-scale organizations, and the persons working within them, became entangled with religious and political powers, and with the diplomatic and military affairs of their times. At the heart of the story are the interactions between national anti-slavery organizations, their connections, and disagreements, as well as their relationships with governmental and non-governmental, domestic and international spheres. The history of these entanglements uncovers how anti-slavery campaigning triggered processes of competition and imitation between imperial powers, and how slavery became part of the inter-imperial circulation of a repertoire of 'idioms and imaginaries'

¹ The Anti-Slavery Society went through a few name changes. From 1839 to 1909, it was called the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. In 1909, after its fusion with the Aborigines Protection Society it became the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society. In 1947 the name was abbreviated to the Anti-Slavery Society, and in 1995 it changed to Anti-Slavery International. The organization is now known as Anti-Slavery.

of colonial rule.² The story also reveals how, between the internationalization of colonial expansion in the 1880s and the Second World War, anti-slavery activists negotiated the divide between religious beliefs and governmental interests, official authorities and popular support, national interests and international settings.

The time between 1880 and 1940 is thus treated as a coherent period characterized by the rise of transnational ideas, movements, practices, as well as empires.³ This does not mean, however, that the people campaigning against slavery constituted a monolithic block. Instead, the emphasis is on the different ideological strands, and on the continuities and discontinuities in the religious, political, and international impulses that shaped the discourse on African slavery during that period. Thus, the story focuses on how the organizations to which anti-slavery activists belonged evolved in the international context of the interwar years, and how their campaigns were shaped by the rise of totalitarian regimes. In order to examine these questions, this study draws on a number of fast-growing fields of scholarly analysis, ranging from slavery and anti-slavery to internationalism and imperialism, and to the history of international organizations and humanitarian campaigns. Although this book cannot do justice to the extensive research output of each of these fields, it hopes to link up some of the insights of this scholarship, and to shed light on the nature and the relationship between humanitarian internationalism and imperialism in the period between 1880 and 1940.

The history of anti-slavery activism has, for a long time, centred on the role of middle-class men and women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and America who, driven by religious and moral considerations, challenged their governments to abolish the slave trade and emancipate slaves worldwide. Decades of scholarship have illuminated the social and economic context of Anglo-American movements, the political and spiritual trajectories of their members, and the question whether their achievements were down to humanitarian sensibility or to the rise of capitalist interests.⁴

² Miguel Banderia Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, 'Internationalism and the Labours of the Portuguese Colonial Empire (1945–1974)', *Portuguese Studies*, 29, 2 (2013), 144.

³ On periodization, see S. Conrad and D. Sachsenmaier, 'Introduction', in Conrad and Sachsenmaier (eds), *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements* (Basingstoke, 2007), 3. Also, Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (eds), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c.1880–1950* (Basingstoke, 2007).

⁴ Modern abolitionist historiography was launched by Eric Williams, who in the 1940s contested the conventional portrayal of anti-slavery activists as 'Saints' by suggesting that slavery and the slave trade were abolished because they were no longer profitable. E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994; first publ. 1944). Williams's

In recent years, scholarship on anti-slavery activism has developed into two disconnected strands. Historians have begun to extend the temporal and geographical approaches to abolition, and to analyse the interdependent and mutually formative relationship between anti-slavery activism and imperialism in Britain.⁵ They have emphasized that the abolition of the slave trade was not a singular achievement of eighteenth-century British liberalism but involved a variety of actors who debated and formed the value system on which the British Empire was based.⁶ This research has only just begun to reveal how early anti-slavery campaigns, similar to later humanitarian efforts, were rooted in the territorial reality and moral authority of formal and informal empires, the practices of which they sometimes called into question.⁷

In parallel, the study of anti-slavery activism has experienced a revival within the flourishing field of transnational history—defined as comprising the analysis of ‘processes and relationships that transcend the borders of nation states’.⁸ In this context, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century anti-slavery campaigns have come to be seen as a landmark in the transnational history of humanitarianism, mainly due to their internationalist inclination, and their reliance on international cooperation.⁹ Political scientists and historians alike have argued that

controversial thesis subsequently came under attack from new economic research, focusing on the recovery of the Caribbean economy after the American Revolution and the continued economic efficiency of plantation slavery. A good summary of the debate can be found in Thomas Bender (ed.), *The Anti-Slavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992). As if to balance the economic paradigm, from the 1980s onwards, scholarship has focused on popular involvement in anti-slavery campaigning and the role of women, religion, and ideas. See e.g. C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds), *Anti-slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980); J. Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society, 1776–1846* (Baton Rouge, La., 1982); D. B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984); C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995).

⁵ For an overview of the literature, see the bibliography in Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford, 2002); Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006); Derek R. Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain: Africa and the Atlantic* (Athens, Oh., 2010).

⁷ On this see the recent special issue on ‘Empire and Humanitarianism’, ed. Emily Baughan and Bronwen Everill, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40, 5 (Dec. 2012), 729–896.

⁸ Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, ‘Introduction’, in Curthoys and Lake (eds), *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra, 2005), 5. Also Patricia Clavin, ‘Defining Transnationalism: Transnational Communities in European History’, *Journal of Contemporary European History*, 14, 4 (2005), 421–39.

⁹ W. C. McDaniel, ‘Abolitionism’, in A. Iriye and P. Saunier (eds), *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History: From the Mid-19th Century to the Present Day* (Basingstoke,

anti-slavery campaigners in Britain and America formed early transnational advocacy networks, defined as informal groups of actors linked across country borders and 'united by shared values, concerns, and a common discourse'.¹⁰

The concept of 'transnationalism' and the focus on 'networks' have led to a mystification of early anti-slavery movements. The attempt to separate the national from the transnational sphere has given rise to the illusion of a 'global community' growing ever closer and united by moral and cultural progress.¹¹ Early abolitionist reformers have appeared as the beacons of an emerging 'global civil society' and their organizations have been regarded as forerunners of today's human rights NGOs.¹² The representation of transnational networks as dealing with 'non-national forces and topics' and being less power-oriented than the so-called 'international arena' of inter-state relations is particularly problematic when it comes to humanitarian activities such as the struggle against slavery.¹³ As the topic of slavery illustrates, governmental and non-governmental internationalism were not always easy to distinguish and they often served national purposes.¹⁴ International debates and cooperative efforts, whether of a social, cultural, or economic nature, connected 'national communities across otherwise disconnected domestic landscapes' and were therefore ultimately part of a nationalizing process.¹⁵

2009), 6. For an attempt to connect historical and contemporary responses to slavery, see Joel Quirk's work, especially, *The Anti-Slavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking* (Philadelphia, 2011), and 'The Anti-Slavery Project: Linking the Historical and the Contemporary', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28 (2005), 565–98.

¹⁰ H. T. David, 'Transnational Advocacy in the Eighteenth Century: Transnational Activism and the Anti-Slavery Movement', *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs*, 7, 3 (2007), 368. The concept of transnational advocacy networks was first applied to anti-slavery groups by M. E. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 39–78.

¹¹ See Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 17. Also, J. Boli and G. M. Thomas (eds), *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford, Calif., 1999).

¹² Audie Klotz, 'Transnational Activism and Global Transformations: The Anti-Apartheid and Abolitionist Experiences', *European Journal of International Relations*, 8, 1 (2002), 49–76.

¹³ A. Iriye, 'Global History', in P. Finney (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in International History* (London, 2005), 320.

¹⁴ Madeleine Herren, 'Governmental Internationalism and the Beginning of a New World Order in the Late Nineteenth Century', in M. H. Geyer and J. Paulmann (eds), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (London, 2001), 121–44.

¹⁵ On the symbiotic relationship between nationalism and internationalism, see Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Internationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013), 16.

This book endeavours to illuminate this paradox by placing non-governmental anti-slavery cooperation back into its national and imperial contexts. The socio-political foundations of the transnational relationships between anti-slavery groups in different countries are viewed as key to a critical assessment of the international and national impact of anti-slavery campaigns. The examination of 'border-crossing' exchanges on slavery is combined with a discussion of the national spaces in which national organizations were grounded, and the personal worlds in which individual activists operated. The religious background and personal motivations, political partisanship and career trajectories, national and international relationships of some of the leading men and women who mobilized against African slavery reveal the complex workings of humanitarian advocacy. The resulting insights into the spiritual, social, and political backgrounds of anti-slavery advocates shed light on the inter-relationship between state and non-state actors, and on the construction of influence in the domestic and international spheres. They also illuminate the distribution of power in transnational relationships that claim to be devoid of political interest.¹⁶

This critical transnational perspective is particularly insightful when applied to late nineteenth-century neo-abolitionist groups and the campaigns they waged against slavery in Africa. Research on the latter is well-established and has yielded insights into the continuation and transformation of so-called domestic forms of slavery in Africa after the end of the transatlantic trade, and the persistence of human trafficking from North-East and East Africa to the Muslim world.¹⁷ Studies have shown how, by the end of the nineteenth century, slavery in Africa was a 'thriving institution' with political, economic, social, and religious functions.¹⁸ Although slavery was often condemned by European colonial powers, emancipation was rarely enforced.¹⁹ Even worse, European colonial powers continued to employ alternative forms

¹⁶ On the role of power when analysing transnational relationships, see P. Clavin, 'Time, Manner, Place: Writing Modern European History in Global, Transnational and International Context', *European History Quarterly*, 40, 4 (2010), 626.

¹⁷ Since the 1960s, numerous scholars including Frederick Cooper, Martin Klein, Igor Kopytoff, Paul Lovejoy, Patrick Manning, Claude Meillassoux, Suzanne Miers, Joseph Miller, and Richard Roberts have written about the problem of defining slavery in Africa, its social and political economy, the role of different actors in its abolition, its slow demise, and the flaws in the discourse on emancipation. For a detailed bibliography, see the latest edition of Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge 2012; first publ. 1983).

¹⁸ Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Lanham, Md., 2003), 33.

¹⁹ Martin Klein, *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia* (Madison, Wis., 1993), 24.

of bonded labour, including Indian indentured labour and Chinese coolie labour.²⁰

Scholars have paid comparatively little attention to forms of organized protest that emerged in the late nineteenth century against these new forms of unfree labour. Historians of abolitionism have pointed out that the 'new' anti-slavery movement was but a weak echo of previous movements and was not comparable to the 'agitators and petition-signers' of the late eighteenth century.²¹ Historians of Africa have understandably struggled to see anti-slavery campaigners as anything more than imperial busy-bodies, and some have even argued that the 'neo-abolitionist effort' was so pathetic it was 'doomed to be forgotten by history'.²² Only in the last ten years or so has a different picture emerged, as scholars have begun to describe how slavery and other forms of exploitation occupied international organizations as an increasingly complex global problem throughout the twentieth century. Pioneering studies have shed light on how Britain continued to cultivate its traditional image as an anti-slavery power, and how the League of Nations, and later the United Nations, facilitated and obstructed international cooperation and the formulation of anti-slavery agreements.²³ The ideological foundations of non-governmental British humanitarianism between the late 1880s and the First World War have also come into focus, notably the political philosophy of trusteeship imperialism, the impact of evangelical philanthropy, and the emergence of more radical proponents of human rights.²⁴

In all these studies, Britain is portrayed as the centre of humanitarian protest and political debate over European imperial labour policies. The history of how Protestant groups and especially Catholic anti-slavery organizations fared in other countries than Britain remains in the shadows.²⁵ As

²⁰ Harold Temperley (ed.), *After Slavery: Emancipation and its Discontents* (London, 2000), esp. Temperley's 'Introduction', 1–10; Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (New York, 1998).

²¹ Peter Kolchin, 'The Big Picture: A Comment on David Brion Davis's "Looking at Slavery from a Broader Perspective"', *American Historical Review*, 105, 2 (Apr. 2000), 470.

²² Frederick Cooper, 'Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa', in F. Cooper, T. C. Holt, and R. J. Scott (eds), *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 108.

²³ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*. Suzanne Miers, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues, 1890–1939', in S. Miers and Martin Klein (eds), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, Or., 1999), 16–37.

²⁴ Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884–1926* (New York and London, 2005).

²⁵ For an exception see Daniel Laqua, 'The Tensions of Internationalism: Transnational Anti-Slavery in the 1880s and 1890s', *International History Review*, 33, 4 (2011), 705–26.

this book shows, the concern for the welfare of African slaves was not a specifically British phenomenon, and late nineteenth-century anti-slavery activism constitutes a much more pervasive and extensive current than commonly thought. In order to recover the lost history of continental anti-slavery organizations, the book compares and contrasts the outlook and ambitions of British anti-slavery activists with the campaigns of other groups which defined anti-slavery protest at the time, including the Swiss, French, and particularly the Italian anti-slavery organizations. By focusing on Catholicism's catalyst function for the revival of anti-slavery activism, the book helps to further correct what Kevin Grant has defined as the 'secular bias' dominating the history of humanitarian protest in the age of imperialism.²⁶

The picture that emerges from the analysis of anti-slavery activism between 1880 and 1940 is that of a new type of faith-based humanitarian imperialism that cut across religious lines and combined the traditional Nonconformist and Protestant networks with new Catholic groups. These groups were entangled with religious and political powers, and with diplomatic and military affairs. The networks they built were characterized by an exclusively European membership. The marginalization of African participants persisted even as the dynamics of international exchanges evolved within the new international space created by the League of Nations in Geneva. Campaigners against African slavery used the strategies of earlier anti-slavery movements, notably the lobbying of governmental authorities and the creation of public awareness on slavery by collecting and collating information provided by associated missionaries, civil servants, and explorers. The resulting publicity on slavery was subject to the 'alternating imperative of concealment or propaganda'.²⁷ Depending on their political needs, colonial governments either suppressed or encouraged the circulation of evidence on slavery.²⁸ Abolitionists, on the other hand, were keen to present the information they collected in a way that would capture the attention of the European public at which it was aimed. Material on slavery thus often focused on violence and abuse, uncritically repeating an 'essentialist and synchronic' view of the institution of slavery without much regard for regional differences and

²⁶ Kevin Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29, 2 (2001), 52.

²⁷ H. Médard, 'Introduction', in H. Médard and S. Doyle (eds), *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa* (Oxford, 2007), 3.

²⁸ For the reluctance of colonial governments to abolish domestic slavery within their colonial territories, see the collection of case studies in S. Miers and R. L. Roberts (eds), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1988), particularly their 'Introduction', 1–15.

the constant changes it was undergoing.²⁹ As a consequence, anti-slavery campaigns reveal more about the people who initiated them than about the subject with which they were concerned. Like other reformist endeavours, the 'rhetorical reach' of humanitarian campaigning efforts by far exceeded any practical achievements.³⁰

Like other late nineteenth-century transnational movements with which they were often connected, such as temperance, pacifism, and feminism, anti-slavery activists elaborated common campaigning strategies across national borders.³¹ The networks they built functioned according to the usual 'mechanics of internationalism': international meetings and congresses, and the transnational exchange of information.³² Similarly to other religious and reformist groups such as the Salvation Army, the internationalist campaigning of anti-slavery organizations between 1880 and 1940 did not necessarily challenge state power.³³ Rather, these groups entertained an interdependent and mutually formative relationship with government authorities, and much of the activists' international engagement ultimately had to pass through national channels. The principles of national interest, authority, influence, and control thus consistently informed the agenda of anti-slavery advocates and the relationships between them.

As the title of this book indicates, what lies at its heart is the complex dynamic between humanitarian and imperial concerns. The recent surge of interdisciplinary interest in humanitarianism has shown that its interpretations range from 'overly romantic' to 'overly cynical', and that it has as many faces as it has specific historical contexts.³⁴ The meaning of the term 'humanitarian' can broadly be defined as 'concerned with or seeking to promote human welfare', but the particulars of the humanitarian disposition and engagement change over time, depending on the

²⁹ J.-G. Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c.1884–1914* (Oxford, 2006), 7–8.

³⁰ The phrase is borrowed from Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 2012), 18.

³¹ See e.g. Ian Tyrell, *Women's World/Women's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991); L. J. Rupp, 'Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888–1945', *American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994), 1571–1600.

³² M. H. Geyer and J. Paulmann (eds), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (London, 2001).

³³ H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The Salvation Army, British Imperialism and the "Prehistory" of NGOs (ca. 1880–1920)', in Conrad and Sachsenmaier, *Global Moments and Movements*, 31.

³⁴ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY, 2011), 7. For an overview of the interdisciplinary literature on humanitarianism see Barnett's extensive bibliography.

historical contingencies.³⁵ One of these contingencies, together with the rise of Enlightenment ideas, the impact of religious sects, and the spread of philanthropy, is the expansion of European imperialism in the late nineteenth century. The term 'Imperialism' with its widely pejorative connotations has mainly come to mean political domination, economic exploitation, and military subjugation.³⁶ Yet, when viewed in its global context, imperialism in the period between 1880 and 1940 emerges as a 'continuum' with varying aims and methods. Imperial ambitions produced both humanitarian sentiments and the 'brutal expansions' of the 1930s, and often combined goals of economic and political exploitation with philanthropic rhetoric.³⁷ The so-called 'scramble for Africa', in which French, British, Portuguese, Belgian, German, and Italian governments allegedly carved up the continent between themselves, was also accompanied by a growing concern for the welfare of colonial subjects.³⁸ Humanitarian imperialism thus became a pan-European phenomenon as international meetings articulated standardized practices of colonial rule.³⁹ Late nineteenth-century anti-slavery organizations combined traits of humanitarian pressure groups and imperial propagandistic agencies, and they continued to define Europe's 'civilizing mission' in Africa well into the twentieth century.⁴⁰ This dualism of promoting human welfare through imperial expansion persisted throughout the interwar years, when concerns about African welfare became more widely articulated within the League of Nations, while at the same time

³⁵ This is the definition given in the online version of the Oxford Dictionary, <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/humanitarian?q=humanitarian>> [accessed Jan. 2014]. Johannes Paulmann, 'Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4, 2 (2013), 215–38.

³⁶ R. Johnson, *British Imperialism* (Basingstoke, 2003), 2. Also, John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), 614.

³⁷ John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London, 2007), 22–3.

³⁸ Albert Witz and Andreas Eckert, 'The Scramble for Africa: Icon and Idiom of Modernity', in O. Pétré-Grenouilleau (ed.), *From Slave Trade to Empire: Europe and the Colonisation of Black Africa, 1780s–1880s* (London, 2004), 133–54; Suzanne Miers, 'Humanitarianism at Berlin: Myth or Reality', in S. Förster, W. J. Mommsen, and R. E. Robinson (eds), *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford, 1988), 333–45.

³⁹ F. Cooper and A. Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony', in F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 31.

⁴⁰ Juergen Osterhammel, "'The Great Work of Uplifting Mankind": Zivilisierungsmission und Moderne', in B. Barth and J. Osterhammel (eds), *Zivilisierungsmissionen: Im periale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Constance, 2005), 406.

British, French, and Italian colonial powers consolidated their control in East Africa.⁴¹

Few other examples illustrate this as poignantly as the campaign against slavery in Ethiopia (also known as Abyssinia), which forms the subplot of this book. The identification of Ethiopian slavery as a key humanitarian issue was fundamental in shaping political and popular conceptions of Africa in Europe. From the late nineteenth century onwards, British and Italian anti-slavery groups were gathering, processing, and disseminating information on slavery in North-East Africa and exerting influence on policy-makers. By sourcing and disclosing evidence on slavery and slave trafficking in those regions, European campaigners mobilized governmental authorities and their middle-class public for the anti-slavery cause. In the interwar years, Ethiopia became the focal point of international humanitarian interest and political conflict, due not least to the lobbying and popular campaigning of British and Italian activists. Slavery became a metaphor for Ethiopia's uncivilized state and for the general backwardness of its failing government.

The Ethiopian case study is particularly insightful as it allows for a multi-level analysis of the entanglements between British and Italian actors, Italian missionaries in Ethiopia, the Fascist colonial authorities, and the League of Nations' slavery commissions. The focus on Ethiopia also illuminates the continuities between the colonial expansionist dreams of the liberal and of the Fascist government in Italy, an aspect of Italy's vexed imperial history which has only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves.⁴² Last but not least, the Ethiopian case, which found its apogee in the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935/6, reveals the many ramifications as well as the full impact of humanitarian imperialism.

The war—long minimized in public memory both in Italy and abroad as the fleeting expression of an archaic and simplistic Fascist imperialism—has first and foremost been studied from a military and diplomatic angle.⁴³ Recent historiography has tried to depart from the more familiar actors,

⁴¹ J. Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, 23, n3 (1980), 657–79; Susan Pedersen, 'The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32, 4 (2006), 560–82.

⁴² Nicola Labanca, 'History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today', in R. Ben-Ghiat and M. Fuller (eds), *Italian Colonialism* (New York, 2005), 203–8.

⁴³ For an overview, see Nicola Labanca, 'Studies and Research on Fascist Colonialism, 1922–1935: Reflections on the State of the Art', in Patrizia Palumbo (ed.), *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003), 50–5. Older studies focus on the military and diplomatic history of the conflict. G. Rochat, *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia: Studi e documenti, 1932–1936* (Milan, 1971); E. M. Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER: Europe and Africa, 1932–36* (London, 1977). Also, D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman*

and open a broader perspective on the impact of the crisis on the international community.⁴⁴ This book offers an additional interpretation by revealing the role of non-governmental organizations in representing the war as a humanitarian intervention. Curiously, whereas to contemporary observers slavery was a central element in the Italo-Ethiopian controversy, historians have widely neglected the part played by humanitarian arguments in legitimizing the war. As this book shows, the significance of the anti-slavery campaign in Ethiopia for the imperial and international history of the interwar period has been underestimated. Slavery not only played a tangible role in the diplomatic build up to the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935/6; humanitarian propaganda became one of the main vehicles through which Italy attempted to sell the conflict to public opinion in Italy and abroad.

The story told in this book is a largely chronological and thematic narrative that starts with an examination of the revival of anti-slavery ideas in the late nineteenth century. The 1880s saw the emergence of transnational connections between Catholic anti-slavery associations in Italy and France, and Protestant abolitionist organizations in Britain and Switzerland. As was the case with many internationalist endeavours at the time, relations between these groups relied on the exchange of information and on regular meetings that in turn reshaped the individual societies' national aspirations. In the early twentieth century, British revelations of labour abuses in the Congo exacerbated existing ideological and spiritual differences between the various national groups, thus exposing the fragile framework on which this liberal humanitarian and essentially imperial internationalism was built.

The coming of the First World War reconfigured transnational relationships by ending the activities of the French anti-slavery society, nationalizing the focus of the Italian campaigns, and—in the British case—galvanizing the international dimension of the humanitarian campaign against African slavery. Both the Italian and British anti-slavery societies resumed their activities after the war, but initially only the British group endorsed the postwar international order of the 1920s. Chapter 2

Empire (London, 1977). For a study of the diplomatic context and prelude to the war, see G. W. Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia and the League of Nations* (Stanford, Calif., 1976); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, ii. *La Conquista dell'Impero* (Rome, 1979). For a study of Italian colonial administration of Ethiopia, see Alberto Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo Italiano in Etiopia, 1936-1940* (Milan, 1980); Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (Lawrenceville, 1997); Angelo Del Boca, *I gas di Mussolini: Il fascismo e la guerra d'Etiopia* (Rome, 1996).

⁴⁴ See the essays in the volume edited by Bruce Strang, *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact* (Farnham, 2013).

explores the multilateral space opened up by the League of Nations in Geneva and the competitive environment it provided for humanitarian pressure groups. British humanitarians played a key role in using the League as a forum to circulate information on slavery, thus pressurizing civil servants to devise an international response. The British-led campaign against slavery in Ethiopia and the exposure of the continued existence of slave-trading in the East African country served as a catalyst for the creation of a League commission on slavery in the early 1920s (not to be confused with the League's campaign against 'White Slavery' which targeted the traffic in European and Asian women and children for the purpose of prostitution). In 1926, with the drafting of the Slavery Convention, the League produced a global definition of slavery, thus advancing the potential for international action. But celebrations quickly turned into disillusionment as the League's powerlessness to impose effective measures against slavery was exposed.

British anti-slavery activists responded to the perceived decline of international cooperation in the late 1920s by launching an extensive domestic campaign for public awareness across multiple media, to which Chapter 3 is dedicated. The efforts of one of the leading abolitionists of the 1920s and 1930s, Lady Kathleen Simon, document the purposeful exploitation of lantern lectures, films, and educational radio programmes. In order to convince people of the value of Britain's continued abolitionist engagement, Simon and her peers used simplified representations of slavery that created analogies between contemporary African forms and the more familiar imagery of the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade and of American plantation slavery. This campaign to educate public opinion reached its peak in 1933/4 during the celebrations of the centenary of the Emancipation Act, which in 1833 had granted freedom to slaves in British colonies, thus revealing the powerful use of history in establishing humanitarian claims.

Around the same time, as detailed in Chapter 4, Italian views on how to curb the existence of African slavery matured, shaped by continued Catholic and colonial lobbying and by new fascist endorsement of Italian colonial expansion. With the support of the Fascist government, Catholic promoters of anti-slavery policies launched a series of so-called freedom villages in Ethiopia, thus further identifying the country as a focal point of anti-slavery action. By advertising its self-declared humanitarian engagement in Geneva, Italy gained in international visibility at a time when the Fascist regime was increasing its hold over domestic affairs. This not only challenged Britain's dominant position as a promoter of anti-slavery policies, it also prepared the ground for more decisive intervention in the Horn of Africa.

As shown in Chapter 5, the convergence of domestic and foreign policy interests in Italy, coupled with a deterioration of international relations, acted as a catalyst for the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1934/5. Italy's wide-ranging propaganda efforts on slavery reveal how, in order to overcome national and international opposition to military intervention in Ethiopia, the Italian government picked up on previous British anti-slavery publicity. Italy's political and diplomatic elite presented the Italian military invasion as the answer to a humanitarian emergency, an argument used to avoid the sanctions of the international community, and to manipulate the League's role in the international conflict.

The last chapter of the book focuses on the crisis of anti-slavery activism after 1935. The paradoxes of the Ethiopian invasion, with its many facets of violence and compassion, marked the end of an era of humanitarian imperialism. In the wake of the conflict, the perpetration of war crimes by the Italian military, notably the use of poison gas, became a subject of international controversy. The war unleashed anti-imperialist sentiments and caused a rupture in the self-perception and reception of anti-slavery campaigners in Europe. The British capital became a pivot of anti-imperialist and pro-Ethiopian relief organizations that challenged the basic tenets of imperial paternalism, thus exposing the wide-reaching discontentment amongst colonial populations. Whereas the Italian anti-slavery organization fell victim to domestic squabbles, the British organization was forced to rearticulate its campaigning strategies in the light of impending war and the looming dismantlement of the imperial order.

In its conclusion, the book explores the shifts and continuities in anti-slavery activism after the Second World War by sketching the role of British anti-slavery lobbyists in the multilateral environment of the United Nations Organization. After 1945, with the International Declaration of Human Rights, the value of international cooperation in achieving humanitarian aims was more palpable than ever. As in 1919, the Anti-Slavery Society's primary task consisted in demonstrating the continued existence of slavery in a rapidly changing world and calling for international action. There were strong echoes of the past as British anti-slavery activists tried to assert their role as custodians of anti-slavery values in the tense climate of postwar inter-state relations. As during the League's lifetime, but now within the more globalized framework of the United Nations Organization, the politics of anti-slavery remained caught between the search for universalist humanitarian values and the wariness of old and new states about allowing international interference in their affairs.

1

The Anti-Slavery Revival, 1888–1914

In the winter of 1907, a group of 400 anti-slavery campaigners—many from Italy and a few from the metropolises of Western Europe—assembled in Rome at the Papal Basilica of St Peter in the Vatican. They were participating in an anti-slavery congress organized by the Società Antischivista d'Italia, a Roman Catholic association founded in the late 1880s.¹ The congress, a three-day event, focused on the continuing existence of slavery and slave-trading in Africa, and featured a varied programme of speeches, debates, and sightseeing. A number of religious personalities, academics, and distinguished foreign speakers, notably a delegate from the British Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (hereafter Anti-Slavery Society), as well as the Secretary of the Société Anti-Esclavagiste de France, exchanged information on national anti-slavery policies and reflected on the use of media and the role of women in anti-slavery campaigning. In an emotional inauguration speech, the Italian convenor of the event, Filippo Tolli, a journalist and fervent Catholic, saluted the 'superiorly humanitarian motives' of the participants, and enthusiastically declared his commitment to wage a 'war on slavery' in Africa.²

The 1907 congress was one of many international anti-slavery meetings that took place at the turn of the twentieth century, notably in 1890 and 1900 in Paris, and in 1903 in Rome.³ These events attested to a late nineteenth-century revival of anti-slavery activism directed against the persistence of slavery on the African continent. The gatherings also reflected the

¹ Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Atti del Secondo Congresso Antischivista tenuto in Roma, 3–5 Dicembre 1907* (Rome, 1908).

² *Bollettino della Società Antischivista d'Italia* (Nov.–Dec. 1907), 5. For the sake of brevity, this publication is hereafter referred to as *Bollettino*, followed by the particular month and year.

³ Virginio Prinzivalli, 'Origine e progresso della Società Antischivista Italiana nei suoi trentuno anni d'esistenza', in Società Antischivista d'Italia, *La Società Antischivista d'Italia al convegno nazionale per il dopo guerra nelle colonie*, Rome 15–21 Jan. 1919, *Affari Esteri*, Min. Cult. Pop., Busta 309, 17.

internationalist aspirations of anti-slavery campaigners who like other socially and politically literate actors engaged in informal cooperative relations across the borders of their nation states, using the new means of transport and communication.⁴

The following analysis centres on the interactions and discrepancies between Protestant and Catholic anti-slavery societies in Britain, France, Italy, and Switzerland in the period between the late 1880s and the First World War. In the late 1880s, anti-slavery leaders in Rome, London, and Paris established regular contact through correspondence and meetings. They created an 'epistemic community' through which they shared information about slavery across national borders and articulated ideas about how to curtail the slave trade in Africa.⁵ Like many other transnational endeavours carried out by non-governmental groups, anti-slavery internationalism lacked an institutional centre and was of a 'fragile', uneven, and episodic nature.⁶ There were practical and political limitations to these transnational efforts, and activists struggled to decide on and implement joint campaigning goals. Rather than promoting an international humanitarian movement, exchanges between anti-slavery organizations often reinforced national and religious identities.

Thus, the Roman anti-slavery congress, organized by a Catholic group within an only recently unified nation state, bore specific religious and political dimensions. The programme of the congress was peppered with allusions to Roman history and Christianity. Participants were invited to visit the Roman catacombs, an archaeological site and symbol of the martyrdom of Rome's early Christians. The highlight of the congress was a pontifical audience, during which the leader of the Catholic world, Pope Pius X, conferred his blessing on each of the Italian and foreign delegates.⁷ The congress ended with a poetic speech in which Tolli quoted from Giuseppe Verdi's famous 'Va pensiero', the chorus of the Hebrew slaves in *Nabucco*, a tune generally regarded as the unofficial Italian national anthem. The 1907 congress was more than just an attempt at facilitating international cooperation. It served to showcase the host country's cultural heritage and pointed to Italy and the Holy See as new actors in a cause which was to have a lasting influence on the international perception of African affairs.

⁴ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013), 11–12.

⁵ Peter M. Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Co-ordination', *International Organization*, 46, 1 (1992), 1–35.

⁶ Daniel Laqua, 'Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations and the Problem of Order', *Journal of Global History*, 6 (2011), 225.

⁷ See undated and untitled newspaper cuttings in RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

THE EMERGENCE OF CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS

The revival of European interest in slavery in the late nineteenth century was rooted as much in the proliferation of governmental and non-governmental internationalism as in the rising wave of international imperialism in Africa.⁸ Both were the products of the consolidation of European nation states notably in Italy, Belgium, and Germany in the 1860s and 1870s, which generated a search for national cohesion and multilateral cooperation at a time of growing imperial competition.⁹ The resulting reconfiguration of national aspirations, and particularly the growth of German imperial claims, posed a threat to the fragile balance of power between European states and called for new diplomatic agreements and international laws.¹⁰

One of the many attempts at international cooperation resulting from this new type of governmental diplomacy was the so-called Berlin Africa Conference.¹¹ Called in 1884–5 by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the conference's declared aim was to negotiate conflicting interests relating to African territories, to set out the general rules of European expansion into Western and Central Africa, and to decide on the future of the Congo.¹² The discussions in Berlin centred on the transformation of the African continent through European intervention and the promises of civilization and free trade.¹³ A pivotal role in the achievement of African progress was attributed to the abolition of remaining forms of slavery, and to the enforcement of measures that would bring to an end the continuing trade in slaves within the African continent. In a bid to increase its moral authority in imperial affairs, Britain insisted on introducing an international anti-slavery agreement into the legal framework laid out in

⁸ Madeleine Herren, 'Governmental Internationalism and the Beginning of a New World Order in the Late Nineteenth Century', in M. H. Geyer and J. Paulmann (eds), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (London, 2001), 121–44.

⁹ Sluga, *Internationalism*, 19–21.

¹⁰ John Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism and the German Problem, 1865–1925* (Abingdon, 1994).

¹¹ William Roger Louis, 'The Berlin Congo Conference and the (Non-)Partition of Africa, 1884–1885', in William Roger Louis (ed.), *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization: Collected Essays* (London, 2006), 78–9.

¹² S. Förster, W. J. Mommsen, and R. E. Robinson (eds), *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference, 1884–1885, and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford, 1988), 321–31.

¹³ Albert Wirz and Andreas Eckert, 'The Scramble for Africa: Icon and Idiom of Modernity', in Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau (ed.), *From Slave Trade to Empire: Europe and the Colonisation of Black Africa, 1780s–1880s* (London, 2004), 147.

Berlin.¹⁴ As a result, the so-called Berlin Act of February 1885 stipulated that colonial powers would ensure the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery in their respective spheres of influence, thus creating international consensus on this issue. Although the humanitarian significance of the declaration was negligible, it re-established the anti-slavery argument as a political and humanitarian factor in international relations.¹⁵

The Berlin Africa Conference resulted in new forms of non-governmental lobbying on slavery and slave-trading in Africa. It gave momentum to the campaign of a non-governmental figure who was to be ideologically and financially significant for the resurgence of European anti-slavery activism: French cardinal and archbishop of Algiers, Charles Martial Allemand Lavigerie (1825–92). In the 1860s, Lavigerie, who was a committed imperialist, had sought to limit Muslim influence, and to expand Catholic missions by founding the international missionary society of the White Fathers.¹⁶ During the following two decades, Lavigerie repeatedly called for missionaries to take up armed resistance against so-called Arab slave dealers who regularly raided and damaged his missions in Tanganyika, the Upper Congo, and the French Sudan.¹⁷

Lavigerie's campaign put the Catholic Church at the forefront of anti-slavery action in Europe. In 1888, Lavigerie undertook a dramatic pilgrimage to St Peter's Square with a group of White Fathers and a few redeemed Sudanese slaves, hoping to receive substantial backing from the Vatican for what he presented as a struggle against slavery.¹⁸ At the time, the pope in office, Leo XIII, was keen to counterbalance what he perceived as a Protestant hegemony in missionary affairs. He reacted to the cardinal's public demonstration by redefining the missionary policy of the Roman Catholic Church. The pope issued the encyclical *In Plurimis*

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the Berlin Act, see Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade* (New York, 1975).

¹⁵ Suzanne Miers, 'Humanitarianism at Berlin: Myth or Reality', in Förster et al., *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*, 333–45.

¹⁶ Lavigerie's 'anti-slavery crusade' has received little critical attention. The campaign is covered in depth in F. Renault's 2-vol. book sponsored by the White Fathers, *Lavigerie, l'esclavage africain, et l'Europe. 1868–1892* (Paris, 1971). For a recent and similarly idealized vision, see Gianni La Bella, 'Leo XII and the Anti-Slavery Campaign', in Vincent Viaene (ed.), *The Papacy and the New World Order: Vatican Diplomacy, Catholic Opinion and International Politics at the Time of Leo XIII* (Brussels, 2005), 389. A more critical analysis of Lavigerie's significance for the imperial agenda of the French government is offered in J. D. O'Donnell, *Lavigerie in Tunisia: The Interplay of Imperialist and Missionary* (Athens, Ga., 1979).

¹⁷ For the African context in which Lavigerie was operating, see Roland A. Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London, 1965; first publ. 1952), 44–9, 117–19, and Denise Bouche, *Les Villages de liberté en Afrique noire française, 1887–1910* (Paris, 1968).

¹⁸ Bouche, *Villages de liberté*, 177.

in which he declared that the abolition of the East African slave trade and the ransom of slaves were to be the main future objectives of Catholic missionaries in Africa.¹⁹ Shortly after this appeal, international Catholic campaigning and fundraising for anti-slavery work began in earnest. Pope Leo XIII put the headquarters of Catholic missions, the Congregazione de Propaganda Fide (the agency of the propagation of the Catholic Faith, hereafter Propaganda Fide) in Rome, in charge of funding and implementing the Vatican's anti-slavery policy. Henceforth, the Catholic Church would regularly collect private donations from its followers on the feast of Epiphany, and Propaganda Fide would redistribute the money amongst missionaries for anti-slavery work.²⁰

The Holy See's new policy not only strengthened Catholic presence on the African continent; it also formalized the link between Catholics in Europe and missionaries in Africa. Thus, the Vatican instructed Lavigerie to create a range of continental Catholic anti-slavery societies to orchestrate fundraising and collect donations from the churchgoing public. In July 1888, sponsored by generous Vatican subsidies, Lavigerie set out from Algiers on a publicity tour through Europe to launch European anti-slavery societies. Significantly, his first stop was in London where he addressed a meeting of the Protestant British Anti-Slavery Society with a lecture in French on his personal experience of slavery in Africa.²¹ Lavigerie's persuasive descriptions of the scale of violence and cruelty of slave-trading and slavery on the African continent drew a passionate response. British philanthropists and the media interpreted the Cardinal's campaign in Britain as an attempt at building humanitarian connections beyond religious borders. Thus, *The Times* noted that Lavigerie's visit had 'cast down barriers between the friends of humanity', while the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society compared the Cardinal to 'a second Peter the Hermit' having 'arisen to preach a Crusade . . . in the cause of humanity, and not mere religious sentiment'.²²

This positive response to the Roman Catholic campaign was driven by a desire to frame the problem of slavery in international terms and by the necessity to reinvigorate what had become a minor public and political issue in Britain. At the time of Lavigerie's London visit, the

¹⁹ Pope Leo XIII, encyclical *In Plurimis*, as printed in C. M. A. Lavigerie, *Documents sur la fondation de l'œuvre antiesclavagiste* (Saint-Cloud, 1889), 38–41 (French translation).

²⁰ See 'Subsidies and various documents regarding the distribution of funds for anti-slavery work', Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide (hereafter PF), ns, Rubr. 55, 1891–1893, vol. 19.

²¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Nov.–Dec. 1888), 221.

²² 'Press Notices of the Crusade', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July–Aug. 1888), 110–11. *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July–Aug. 1888), 85.

British anti-slavery movement looked back on an illustrious past but its future perspectives were bleak. The only remaining anti-slavery body was the Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1839 as the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society by the Quaker Joseph Sturge with the aim to campaign for the universal extinction of slavery and the slave trade by what it defined as 'moral, religious and pacifist' means.²³ In 1888, the association counted approximately 300 members, of which a great majority belonged to prominent Quaker families. Women, many of whom came from an evangelical and Nonconformist background, formed 25 per cent of independent subscribers, but none of them were represented in the higher echelons of the association.²⁴ Overseeing the organization's public campaigning and political lobbying was the Nonconformist Secretary Charles H. Allen who in 1898 was succeeded by the Quaker Travers Buxton.²⁵ Other key figures included the leading manufacturers of chocolate and confectionaries Cadburys, Rowntree, and Fry.²⁶ It was primarily thanks to the donations of these rich Nonconformist businessmen that the Anti-Slavery Society kept afloat.

The aim of the British group was to raise awareness amongst the British public that, although slavery had been abolished in many areas, it continued to exist in Africa in varied forms. In order to do so, anti-slavery activists relied on a series of campaigning and propaganda strategies borrowed from previous abolitionist movements, notably the circulation of petitions and information leaflets, the hiring of itinerant speakers, and the organization of mass meetings.²⁷ British campaigners also used the writings of Victorian missionaries, explorers, and traders, notably David Livingstone (1813–73), whose descriptions of East African slavery had a great influence on a wide religious public.²⁸ Finally, the Anti-Slavery Society directly influenced political debates through parliamentary lobbying and through its connections with influential individuals and public figures. Thus, the organization boasted representatives, primarily

²³ 'Constitution and Objects of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1840), 1.

²⁴ 'Annual Subscriptions', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan.–Feb. 1888), 24–7.

²⁵ Charles H. Allan (1824–1904) was Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society between 1879 and 1899. In 1899 Travers Buxton (1864–1945) took over the leadership until 1909. Buxton, a lifelong campaigner against slavery and colonial labour exploitation, was the great-grandson of the famous British abolitionist Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786–1845). Buxton's cousins Charles Roden Buxton (1875–1942) and Lord Edward Noel Buxton (1869–1948) also played key roles in the British anti-slavery organization.

²⁶ 'Annual Subscriptions', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan.–Feb. 1888), 24–7.

²⁷ Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, *The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society* (London, 1931), 20–1.

²⁸ Oliver, *Missionary Factor*, 7–15.

from Liberal but also from Conservative backgrounds, in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. These MPs regularly raised questions relating to the treatment of native populations in the colonies for debate in Parliament.²⁹

Even though the Anti-Slavery Society enjoyed some political acknowledgement and could claim national and international reputation, it continuously suffered from dwindling membership and a lack of finances.³⁰ Lavigerie's campaign was thus perceived as a welcome boost for the anti-slavery cause and the British were keen to corroborate the Cardinal's descriptions of the immensity of the slavery problem in Africa.³¹ Lavigerie, on the other hand, was well aware of the historical importance of the British society, and wanted to secure its approval for what he considered an ecumenical project. In a letter to the Anti-Slavery Society, the Cardinal evoked the warm sympathy with which he had been received in London, and expressed the hope that people 'by degrees, minds, and hearts so divided in past times, might find a common cause in which they could unite for the benefit of humanity'.³² To underline his cooperative aims, Lavigerie contributed a substantial grant of money equalling nearly £2000 at the time to the Anti-Slavery Society's coffers out of the funds he had received from Propaganda Fide, thus saving the British organization from its dire financial situation.³³

Lavigerie's campaign did not limit itself to wooing British Protestants. The Cardinal also stopped in Paris, where his appeal inspired the foundation of the *Société Anti-Esclavagiste de France*, which took up its activities in 1888 with Lavigerie as Honorary President. This organization differed markedly from earlier French anti-slavery movements, including the short-lived *Société des Amis des Noirs* (1788–93), an abolitionist association founded a hundred years earlier and connected to the rise of Enlightenment values.³⁴ The new body was deeply religious, first placed under the leadership of French liberal-conservative Catholics Charles le Myre de Vilers and Germain Antonin Lefèvre-Pontalis. From 1903 onwards, the affairs of the French association were in the hands of Baron Edouard du Teil (1863–1918), a military man, philanthropist, amateur

²⁹ A summary of these debates was regularly published under the heading 'Parliamentary' in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*.

³⁰ Miers, *Britain and the Ending*, 16.

³¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1888), 85.

³² *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan.–Feb. 1889), 2.

³³ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan.–Feb. 1889), 2.

³⁴ For an exploration of this earlier movement, see M. Dorigny and B. Gainot, *La Société des Amis des Noirs: Antiesclavagisme et lobby coloniale à la fin du siècle des lumières, 1788–1792* (Paris, 1998). Also, L. C. Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802–1848* (Cambridge, 2000).

historian, and devout Catholic, involved in a number of causes including the promotion of indigenous welfare, the struggle against alcoholism in the colonies and research on sleeping sickness.³⁵

With the support of the Roman Curia, the French anti-slavery organization took on a pivotal role between the Vatican, the French clergy, and its men on the spot in the French colonies—the White Fathers and Holy Ghost missionaries. The organization directed its resources towards the manumission of slaves and their settlement in so-called ‘freedom villages’ in French West Africa.³⁶ Although, in reality, the implementation of these villages posed numerous challenges, the scheme became a central element of French anti-slavery publicity. ‘Freedom villages’ were conceived as a way to make people at home relate and respond to narratives of inflicted suffering and to ideas of civilization and development. The purpose of these villages was to establish a Christian microcosm, in which baptism, marriage, and the pursuit of agricultural activity by freed slaves was encouraged. Subscribers of the French anti-slavery newsletter, the *Bulletin de la Société Antiesclavagiste de France*, were kept informed about the progress of these settlements, and were also solicited for donations.³⁷ Despite a lack of tangible results, French Secretary Du Teil enthusiastically likened the ‘freedom villages’ sponsored by his society to ‘rare drops of water on blazing African sand’ and profusely elaborated on the long-term potential of their ‘multiplication’.³⁸

Alongside the promotion of their own missionary interests, however, the French were eager to cooperate with related organizations on an international scale. In October 1889, in spite of declaring itself an ‘exclusively national’ body, the Société Anti-Esclavagiste de France announced that

³⁵ See e.g. J. Du Teil, *Mesures accessoires contre l'alcoolisme dans les colonies* (The Hague, 1911).

³⁶ Freedom villages have received little attention in historical research. For a contemporary perspective, see J. Du Teil, *L'Antiesclavagisme en Afrique: A propos du récent congrès de Rome, 22–24 avril 1903* (Paris, 1903); J. Du Teil, *La Société Antiesclavagiste de France et ses villages de liberté en Afrique: Notice par le Baron Joseph du Teil* (Paris, 1905). A broad contextualization is offered by Oliver, *Missionary Factor*, 21–6. Bouche provides the most detailed study of French ‘freedom villages’ in Bouche, *Villages de liberté*. For a critical revisiting of the ‘freedom villages’ in the light of post-1970s scholarship on slavery and its ending in Africa, see A. F. Clark, ‘Freedom Villages in the Upper Senegal Valley, 1887–1910: A Reassessment’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 16, 3 (1995), 311–30. Clark argues that the ‘freedom villages’ did not accelerate the abolition of slavery, nor did they provide a significant alternative for slaves seeking emancipation. Rather, evidence suggests that they served as a captive labour pool to meet colonial needs. For more details on how the scheme was implemented in the interwar years, see Ch. 4.

³⁷ *Bulletin de la Société Antiesclavagiste de France* (Sept. 1902), 23. This periodical is hereafter referred to as *Bulletin*, followed by the month and year. The first *Bulletin* was published in Oct. 1888.

³⁸ Du Teil, *La Société Antiesclavagiste de France*, 13.

its aim was to build 'fraternal relations' of 'reciprocal support' with other anti-slavery societies and missionary societies in Africa.³⁹ Lavigerie who, until his death in 1892, acted as the French organization's president, had already contacted the British Anti-Slavery Society with the aim to formalize French–British relations and to secure mutual support and cooperation 'for joint action', whenever the latter might be deemed necessary.⁴⁰ In the following years, regardless of their differences in size and influence, the British and French anti-slavery societies would find a uniting concern in calling attention to African slavery as an international humanitarian and geopolitical issue.

In contrast, the interaction between the many other continental anti-slavery groups set up and financially supported by Lavigerie during his European tour proved less successful. A number of anti-slavery organizations formed in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and Spain in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference remained ephemeral. In Belgium, a major centre of internationalist movements in the late nineteenth century, Lavigerie established a Catholic Société Antiesclavagiste de Belgique, later called the Mouvement des Missions du Congo.⁴¹ In the early 1890s, under the leadership of Edouard Descamp, Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, the members of the Belgian anti-slavery society financially and morally endorsed military operations against so-called Arab slave traders near Lake Tanganyika. Participation by the Belgian organization in international activities, however, did not last beyond the 1890s.⁴² The competing Protestant anti-slavery groups and ecumenical movements, which emerged elsewhere in mainland Europe, likewise proved short-lived. In Germany, for instance, an inter-confessional anti-slavery movement led by the Protestant German theologian and colonial enthusiast Friedrich Fabri survived only for a couple of years.⁴³ The Société Anti-Esclavagiste Suisse, a loose association of Swiss evangelicals campaigning against slavery, dissolved after only

³⁹ For the constitution of the French Anti-Slavery Society, see *Bulletin* (Oct. 1889), 519–655.

⁴⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Nov.–Dec. 1888), 220.

⁴¹ Thierry Scaillet, 'Valentin Brifaut (1875–1963): Du combat antimaçonnique à la promotion du scoutisme catholique', in Guy Zelis (ed.), *Les Intellectuels catholiques en Belgique francophone aux 19e et 20e siècles* (Louvain, 2009), 50–9.

⁴² On this point, see also Daniel Laqua, 'The Tensions of Internationalism: Transnational Anti-slavery in the 1880s and 1890s', *International History Review*, 33, 4 (2011), 45–79, 707–8, 716–19. Also, Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium: Peace, Progress and Prestige* (Manchester, 2013).

⁴³ K. J. Bade, 'Antisklavereibewegung in Deutschland und Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika, 1888–1890: Bismarck und Friedrich Fabri', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 3, 1 (1977), 31–58.

two years of existence.⁴⁴ Thus, even if by the 1890s there existed a number of nominal anti-slavery societies, the major new player beside the French was an Italian organization.

THE SOCIETÀ ANTISCHIAVISTA D'ITALIA

No country offers a better example of how promoters of Catholic anti-slavery action evolved from a relatively precarious church group to a well-connected political pressure group than Italy and its Società Antischiavista d'Italia.⁴⁵ The Italian association was founded in 1888 in Palermo—a city in Italy's largely disadvantaged South—by a local member of the clerical elite named Cardinal Michelangelo Celesia.⁴⁶ It was led by two fervent Catholics: Filippo Tolli, a writer and journalist who acted as the organization's President until 1924, and the Commendatore Attilio Simonetti, a teacher, who served as its Secretary until 1925.⁴⁷ Other leading members included Catholic priest Domenico Pizzoli and the missionaries Gian Giacomo Coccolo and Giovanni Genocchi.

As was the case with the British Anti-Slavery Society, the Italian association enjoyed the patronage of members of the nobility, notably the Roman Prince Camillo Rospigliosi who presided over the organization until 1892. The group also attracted the support of prominent intellectual figures in the Italian Catholic movement, including the scholars Virginio Prinzivalli and Giulio Salvadori, as well as the journalist Filippo Crispolti. The organization's wider popular base, however, remains difficult to estimate as the Società Antischiavista made no targeted efforts to count its adherents, nor did the anti-slavery society's monthly newsletter, the *Bollettino*, list its subscribers. Records relating to Italian anti-slavery meetings convey the image of a small

⁴⁴ On the Swiss organization, see Thomas David and Janick Marina Schaufelbühl, 'Swiss Conservatives and the Struggle for the Abolition of Slavery at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Itinerario*, 34 (2010), 87–103. As examined at the end of this chapter, a more successful Protestant organization located in Geneva, the Ligue suisse pour la défense des indigènes (Swiss League for the Protection of Indigenous People) started its activities in 1908.

⁴⁵ The only existing study of this organization to date is Lorenzo Ettore, 'La società antischiavista d'Italia, 1888–1937', *Studi Storici*, 3 (2012), 693–720.

⁴⁶ *Bollettino del comitato centrale antischiavista di Palermo per la Sicilia* (July 1890), 2.

⁴⁷ For insights into their career in the anti-slavery movement, see the historical review of the society's thirtieth anniversary in *Bollettino* (June 1916), 83–93. For an obituary of Tolli, see *Bollettino* (Mar. 1924); for an obituary of Simonetti, see *Antischiavisimo* (May 1925), 7–9.

Catholic pressure group with two to three hundred adherents, who were primarily missionaries, academics, social reformers, politicians, and journalists.

The organization's small-scale operations and its alignment with clerical and social elites, however, did not impede the movement in spreading nationally and gaining adherents amongst the female population. The Italian organization quickly created a number of regional committees in Naples, Milan, and Rome, and from 1889 onwards the latter hosted the movement's headquarters. Women formed a special female committee, led by the Countess Maria Teresa Ledòchowska (1863–1922), a Polish aristocrat who had founded the missionary order of St Peter Claver, a group of sisters dedicated to service in Africa.⁴⁸ There was a general sense amongst Italian anti-slavery campaigners that philanthropy was 'a special female virtue' and that women had been 'destined by God to lessen the evils of humanity'.⁴⁹ Whereas men decided about political and administrative matters, however, women were generally relegated to generating financial support for the cause. A key figure in this respect was the Contessa Di San Marco, a writer, social reformer, and fervent Catholic, who campaigned for public donations by organizing fundraising events such as horse races and picnics.⁵⁰

The Società Antischiavista shared many traits with its French counterpart, the Société Anti-Esclavagiste. Both organizations faced similar challenges when trying to promote nationally the importance of Catholic missions in East Africa, by appealing for the redemption of African slaves through evangelization.⁵¹ Both the French and Italian organizations were set up in a time of acute rivalry and intense political and ideological conflict between Catholics and anti-clerical forces, and regularly had to endure anti-clerical attacks in the press.⁵² In France, the antagonism between church and state had become acute by the 1880s, and these tensions were particularly felt by French missionaries operating in the French Empire.⁵³ In Italy, where the church still had a profound influence on popular life, the presence of the papacy and the unresolved

⁴⁸ Ledochowska was beatified in 1930. See *Bollettino* (Oct. 1930), 14.

⁴⁹ *Bollettino* (Apr. 1889), 16.

⁵⁰ See letter SA1 to BFASS, 8 Apr. 1905, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

⁵¹ *Bollettino* (Nov.–Dec. 1899), 21

⁵² For a comparative approach to these conflicts, see Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (eds), *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003).

⁵³ J. E. Ward, 'The French Cardinals and Leo XIII's Ralliement Policy', *Church History*, 33, 1 (1964), 60–73. On the debates and clashes between French missionaries and republican administrators, see J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914* (Oxford, 2006).

issue of papal sovereignty within the young Italian nation state added to the complexity of the church–state relationship.⁵⁴

The Società Antischivista sought to mediate between the secular and spiritual authorities by attempting to carve out a new space for religious action in the public arena at a time when religious influence on society was curtailed. This was especially true for the organizations' leaders, Tolli and Simonetti, who like other social Catholics believed that the challenges of unprecedented population growth, poverty, industrialization, and modernization could be met by increasing the church's active involvement in social issues.⁵⁵ Tolli and Simonetti embraced the Vatican's cultural, social, and political aspirations and its vision of 'hands-on' Catholicism but steered clear of thornier domestic questions such as civil marriage and divorce by focusing on the geographically remote issue of slavery in Africa.

The Italian Catholics' perspective was important in shaping late nineteenth-century anti-slavery rhetoric and practice. According to Italian anti-slavery leaders, the primary aim of their organization was to 'rescue' Africans 'from the fingers of the slave traders' and to disseminate anti-slavery propaganda amongst Catholic worshippers.⁵⁶ Like the British and French organizations, the Società Antischivista derived its information on slavery from a private and informal network of missionaries, explorers, and 'anti-slavery agents' located in Africa. Their collected reports and data were circulated through a bi-monthly newsletter, the *Bollettino della Società Antischivista d'Italia*, first published on Christmas day 1888, and modelled after the example of the British *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. The *Bollettino* was distributed amongst the church-goers free of charge, but anti-slavery leaders strongly encouraged readers to send in donations. Similarly to other Catholic periodicals and missionary journals such as the *Almanacco delle famiglie cristiane* and *La nigrizia*, the *Bollettino* incited readers' interest in Catholic action in Africa through a mixture of religious rhetoric and exotic narratives. Tales of converted slave children and of missionary martyrdom reflected eighteenth-century ideas of morality and human progress, as well as modern anxieties about race, empire, and spiritual redemption.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Martin Papenheim, 'Roma o Morte: Culture Wars in Italy', in Clark and Kaiser (eds), *Culture Wars*, 202–26.

⁵⁵ Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialisation to the First World War* (London, 1991), 3.

⁵⁶ *Bollettino* (Oct.–Nov. 1894), 26.

⁵⁷ D. B. Davis, 'Slavery and "Progress"', in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), 351–66, and D. B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984).

These preoccupations also showed in the underlying anti-Islamic rhetoric of many anonymous articles published in the *Bollettino*. Islam was portrayed as an impediment to African progress, threatening to take over the African continent.⁵⁸ The villains were so-called Muslim slave traders, the *negrieri*, usually described as uncivilized, savage, and ruthless Arabs.⁵⁹ Christianity, on the other hand, was depicted as the pathway to redemption. Italian anti-slavery activists, much like their French counterparts, strongly encouraged the expansion of the Catholic Church, and more generally the spread of Christianity, even outside the boundaries of formal colonial dependencies. To promote spiritual expansion, the Società Antischivista regularly published articles in support of such organizations as the Associazione Nazionale per Soccorrere i Missionari Cattolici Italiani, founded in 1886 in Florence. There was a sense of opportunity accompanying the anti-slavery struggle, as Africa was seen as a major outlet for the promotion of Christian values.⁶⁰

Beside Catholicism, another fundamental ideological strand of Italian anti-slavery activism was a nationalist endorsement of Italian colonial expansion. Like other small patriotic and colonial pressure groups in liberal Italy, notably the Società Geografica Italiana (founded in Florence in 1867) and the Società Africana d'Italia (founded in Naples in 1882), the campaigns of the Italian anti-slavery organization were geared towards reinforcing the fragile economic, political, and social bases of the young nation state by invoking a common national colonial destiny.⁶¹ This manifested itself in a strong approval of the schemes of liberal Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, who in the late 1880s suggested settling Italy's East African colonies with surplus Italian population.⁶² Thus, when the Italian government officially acquired Eritrea in 1890, the Società Antischivista offered outspoken encouragement, for Italian development projects in that region.⁶³

⁵⁸ *Bollettino* (Jan.–Feb. 1903), 4.

⁵⁹ Anti-Islamism as a core element of abolitionism still needs to be fully investigated. For a useful discussion, see Laqua, 'Tensions of Internationalism', 716–19.

⁶⁰ Andrew Porter, 'Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire', in A. Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, iii. *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 233.

⁶¹ R. J. B. Bosworth, 'The *Touring Club Italiano* and the Nationalization of the Italian Bourgeoisie', *European History Quarterly*, 27, 3 (1997), 372. On Italian imperial popular culture in the late 19th cent., see Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa: Italy's African Wars in the Era of Nation-Building, 1870–1900* (Berne, 2009).

⁶² Mark Choate, 'From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and Back Again: The Politics of Italian Expansion, 1890–1912', *Modern Italy*, 8, 1 (2003), 66–7. For a description of the different phases of Italian colonial expansion, see Luigi Goglia and Fabio Grassi, *Il colonialismo italiano da Adua all'Impero* (Rome, 1993; first publ. 1981), 203–27.

⁶³ *Bollettino* (Jan.–Feb. 1896), 3.

In their endorsement of Crispi's plans for territorial expansion, Italian anti-slavery campaigners were confronting strong anti-colonial feelings among Italy's industrial and financial leadership and among the political left. Even if Italian liberals manifested an increasing interest in Africa in the 1880s, Italian colonialism was not only a late developer, but it also continued to suffer from the absence of an economic and financial motor. In contrast to French and British overseas administrations, the Italian Empire did not yet promise a 'high national destiny' and it remained a controversial project.⁶⁴ The small number of Italian pro-colonial lobbies had few economic arguments to rely on when promoting their plans for expansion, which were met with indifference by the majority of Italian people.⁶⁵ This was not helped by the shattering defeat of Italian troops by the Ethiopian emperor Menelik II at Adwa in March 1896, a battle with long-lasting repercussions on public and political support for African ventures.⁶⁶

Against the backdrop of this rather unpromising domestic setting, Italian anti-slavery leaders styled themselves into founders of what they called *Africanismo*, a self-declared movement to promote popular interest in African people and resources. In 1897, undeterred by the Adwa debacle, an anonymous contributor to the *Bollettino* advocated the development of a 'new African programme', which propagated the strengthening of Italian administration in Eritrea, the economic exploitation of the coastal regions of Somalia, as well as outlining a future Italian advancement into Kassala in Eastern Sudan. 'To some', the author pointed out, such ambitions 'could seem quite modest', adding that one should not judge 'the near imperceptibility of the seed of mustard' for it could eventually 'change into a large shrub'.⁶⁷ The analogy with the biblical parable of the growth of the mustard seed into a big plant suggested that, much like the anti-slavery movement, Italian colonialism, and with it Christianity and progress, could spread from tiny beginnings to considerable size. This

⁶⁴ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life under the Dictatorship, 1915–1945* (London, 2006), 370.

⁶⁵ For an analysis of the origins of Italian imperialism, see R. H. Rainero, 'An Imperialism with No Economic Basis: The Case of Italy, 1869–1939', in Pêtré-Grenouilleau, *From Slave Trade to Empire*, 85–94. For an examination of the evolution of colonial ambitions in the Italian middle class after the battle of Adwa, see Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 370–1.

⁶⁶ On Adwa, see Angelo Del Boca and Daniela Adorni, *Adua: Le ragioni di una sconfitta* (Rome, 1997). On the symbolic legacy of this battle for both Ethiopia and Italy, see A. Triulzi, 'Adwa: from Monument to Document', *Modern Italy*, 8, 1 (2003), 95–6. Also, Giuseppe Finaldi, 'Italy's Scramble for Africa from Dogali to Adowa', in J. Dickie, J. Foot, and F. M. Snowden (eds), *Disastros! Disasters in Italy since 1860: Culture, Politics, Society* (London, 2002), 82–6.

⁶⁷ *Bollettino* (Mar.–Apr. 1897), 6.

not only reflected the idea that expansion was something Italy should embrace but also that the church should move ahead of the state in colonial matters. The question, however, was how such ambitions could be successfully implemented at an international level.

BUILDING INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

From the moment of its emergence in 1888, the Italian anti-slavery society, much like the French organization, aspired to build connections beyond the territorial boundaries of the Italian state. The Italian promoters of anti-slavery action saw themselves as participants in a wider European movement, the 'movimento antischiavista in Europa'.⁶⁸ This European anti-slavery movement, although regularly evoked at anti-slavery congresses, did not actually cover much of the continent's geography. Rather, as Lavigerie's European tour illustrates, the imagined collective identity of the new movement was confined to a handful of mainly Western European countries, including Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland.⁶⁹ Even more conspicuous than the absence of major European colonial powers such as Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands was the non-appearance of Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

In the late 1880s, the only organizations to maintain regular contact were the anti-slavery societies in Italy, Britain, and France. Thanks to Lavigerie's early attempts at linking national societies, the secretaries of the Italian, French and British societies, Attilio Simonetti, Joseph Du Teil, and Travers Buxton, began a correspondence that would last until the First World War.⁷⁰ Their declared intention was to exchange information and ideas on how to curtail the continuation of slave-trading in Africa. Letters were sent back and forth between Rome, Paris, and London, and by the end of the nineteenth century these exchanges had become regular and formalized, linking the leaders of the three organizations as so-called 'Corresponding Secretaries'. This internationalism did not always sit comfortably with the domestic audience, however. The Italian rapprochement to the British movement, for instance, made the

⁶⁸ See *Bollettino* (June 1889), 7.

⁶⁹ Here I disagree with Gianni La Bella's description of 'a movement of idealism and Christian solidarity against slavery, which brought together thousands of supporters'. La Bella, 'Leo XII and the Anti-Slavery Campaign', 392.

⁷⁰ For the correspondence between the French Société Anti-Esclavagiste and the British Anti-Slavery Society, see RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S. 22, G 103. For the correspondence between the Società Antischiavista d'Italia and the British Anti-Slavery Society, see RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S. 22, G 105.

Società Antischivistica a target for heavy criticism by the Italian press, which repeatedly attacked it for its 'non-domestic' goals.⁷¹

Such accusations initially only served to strengthen the sense of international solidarity between anti-slavery leaders. Simonetti, Du Teil, and Buxton made efforts to overcome cultural and linguistic difficulties by emphasizing their common humanitarian goals rather than their political and religious differences. They used French, the international language of diplomacy and international relations, as a language of correspondence, and enclosed materials in Italian and English were painstakingly translated. These transnational connections were celebrated like family bonds and the dispatches from the Catholic organizations to the British were peppered with references to 'notre sœur aînée' while the British referred to Catholic organizations as 'notre sœur cadette'.⁷² Such phrases pointed to the central and authoritative role attributed to the British anti-slavery movement, considered as a point of reference by the new anti-slavery organizations due to its historical importance and perceived catalytic function in previous processes of abolition.

The internationalism propagated in the correspondence of French, Italian, and British anti-slavery campaigners, however, was not the expression of cosmopolitan visions of universal equality and progress. Rather, the anti-slavery rhetoric was infused with paternalism, prejudices, and the compulsion to proselytize Africans. Neither Simonetti nor Buxton or Du Teil were social revolutionaries. The values they propagated were guided by philanthropic sensibility, as well as the necessity of moral revival, the strengthening of religious beliefs, and a preoccupation with questions of race and empire. French, British, and Italian anti-slavery organizations shared some characteristic features, notably an exclusively white, middle-class membership, which completely excluded Africans as participants. Anti-slavery advocates also operated from within specific cultural and social milieux and they chose to address remote instances of suffering and exploitation with little regard for domestic labour issues and poverty. In this respect, they shared a fundamental characteristic with earlier anti-slavery movements, which some historians have criticized for their 'telescopic philanthropy'.⁷³

As during earlier British anti-slavery campaigns, Eurocentric ideas of cultural superiority and moral authority were inherent in anti-slavery thought and action.⁷⁴ With the exception of a number of missionaries, the

⁷¹ *Bollettino* (Sept. 1889), 15.

⁷² Letter Simonetti to Buxton, 9 Nov. 1907, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit Emp. S 22, G 105.

⁷³ James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London, 1996), 163.

⁷⁴ On earlier movements, see Harold Temperley, 'Anti-Slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism', in Bolt and Drescher, *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform*, 335–50; James

majority of anti-slavery activists in Britain, Italy, and France had never been to Africa. Their knowledge of African social, economic, and political institutions was sketchy, but they were drawn to African affairs by a combination of philanthropic aspirations, religious zeal, and colonial ambitions. In his writings, Du Teil, for instance, portrayed Africa as a 'Dark Continent', a familiar Victorian *topos* constructed by explorers and writers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.⁷⁵ Africa was described as a zone of 'problems', 'a theatre of events', which confronted European powers and called for intervention.⁷⁶ Similar ideas were conveyed in the letters of the Italian Secretary Simonetti who painted the African continent as a place in need of Christian charity and proselytism, and who conceived of his own activism as part of a divinely ordained plan.⁷⁷ In contrast, British anti-slavery activists relied on the much older pedigree of their organization as a pressure group in imperial politics, and imagined themselves as the protectors of a morally justified, humanitarian type of colonialism.⁷⁸ According to all three visions, Africa appeared as a backward continent that had been by-passed by civilization, while African people were depicted as the passive, nameless, and voiceless victims of merciless non-Christian traders.⁷⁹

The continued existence of slavery in Africa, and the persistence of internal and external trading flows were a *leitmotiv* in anti-slavery speeches and writings throughout the late 1890s and well into the twentieth century. The image of Africa as a continent defined by the misery and suffering of its slaves dominated international anti-slavery meetings. At the 1907 Congress in Rome, for instance, the Italian Catholic priest Monsignor Gian Giacomo Coccolo dramatically brought to the fore how men, women, and children continued to be trafficked from North-East and East Africa to the Muslim world.⁸⁰ Coccolo, who was involved with the recruitment and training of Italian missionaries for service in Africa, illustrated in his paper the pervasiveness of slavery all over the African

Walvin, 'Symbols of Moral Superiority: Slavery, Sport and the Changing World Order, 1800-1940', in James Walvin and J. A. Mangan (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1987), 242-60, esp. 243; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Oxford, 2002).

⁷⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and the Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent', *Critical Enquiry*, 12, 1 (1985), 166-203.

⁷⁶ Du Teil to Buxton, 1 Nov. 1907, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 102-9.

⁷⁷ *Bollettino* (July 1890), 2.

⁷⁸ Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism', in Porter, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iii. 198-221.

⁷⁹ The place of Africans in anti-slavery propaganda is further discussed in Ch. 3.

⁸⁰ Gian Giacomo Coccolo, 'Esiste ancora la schiavitù in Africa?', *Atti del Secondo Congresso Antischiavista tenuto in Roma, 3-5 Dicembre 1907* (Rome, 1908).

continent. Slavery, he argued, was an evil practice long abolished in Europe and the New World, but it continued to exist and to grow in Africa. This archaic and thriving institution, Coccolo maintained, was a scourge that could only be abolished with the help of collective European intervention.⁸¹

If African slavery offered anti-slavery organizations in Europe common ground for their campaigns, the geopolitical parameters of international cooperation and joint intervention were generally sketchy. French, British, and Italian anti-slavery leaders took their cue from the Brussels Conference Act of 1890, a multilateral diplomatic agreement that detailed the 'civilising mission' against African slavery already proclaimed in Berlin in 1884/5. By signing the Brussels Act, France, Italy, and Britain, together with other European colonial powers, agreed to pursue a joint and coordinated anti-slavery policy and to exchange documents and information on the trade 'to the fullest extent and with the least delay'.⁸² But there were considerable differences between the various national perspectives, which often depended on specific territorial interests. As the case of the so-called Tripolitanian campaign in North Africa illustrates, the degree to which international cooperation could be assured was indeed limited.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF ITALIAN ANTI-SLAVERY

Since the very beginning of its activities, the Società Antischivista had placed Tripolitania—a region in today's Libya then under Ottoman control but coveted by Italy for strategic and commercial reasons—at the centre of its campaigning efforts. Claiming that the North African region was a nodal point of slave trafficking, Italian anti-slavery activists had turned the collection of intelligence about this trade into their primary objective.⁸³ According to the Roman organization, African men, women, and children were trafficked by old slave routes from Wadai in the French Sudan and Darfur in

⁸¹ The recent body of work on slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia demonstrates that Coccolo's account grossly simplified the complex continuum of mutual obligations between slaves and masters. Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London, 2004). Also, James L. Watson, 'Slavery as an Institution: Open and Closed Systems', in Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980), 1–5.

⁸² For the exact wording of the Brussels Act, see 'General Act for the Repression of African Slave Trade, Brussels, 2 July 1890' (hereafter General Act), in Miers, *Britain and the Ending*, 346–63, here 346 and 347.

⁸³ *Bollettino* (Jan.–Feb. 1894), 1–3.

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⁷⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and the Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent', *Critical Enquiry*, 12, 1 (1985), 166-203.

⁷⁶ Du Teil to Buxton, 1 Nov. 1907, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 102-9.

⁷⁷ *Bollettino* (July 1890), 2.

⁷⁸ Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism', in Porter, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iii, 198-221.

⁷⁹ The place of Africans in anti-slavery propaganda is further discussed in Ch. 3.

⁸⁰ Gian Giacomo Coccolo, 'Esiste ancora la schiavitù in Africa?', *Atti del Secondo Congresso Antischiavista tenuto in Roma, 3-5 Dicembre 1907* (Rome, 1908).

continent. Slavery, he argued, was an evil practice long abolished in Europe and the New World, but it continued to exist and to grow in Africa. This archaic and thriving institution, Coccolo maintained, was a scourge that could only be abolished with the help of collective European intervention.⁸¹

If African slavery offered anti-slavery organizations in Europe common ground for their campaigns, the geopolitical parameters of international cooperation and joint intervention were generally sketchy. French, British, and Italian anti-slavery leaders took their cue from the Brussels Conference Act of 1890, a multilateral diplomatic agreement that detailed the 'civilising mission' against African slavery already proclaimed in Berlin in 1884/5. By signing the Brussels Act, France, Italy, and Britain, together with other European colonial powers, agreed to pursue a joint and coordinated anti-slavery policy and to exchange documents and information on the trade 'to the fullest extent and with the least delay'.⁸² But there were considerable differences between the various national perspectives, which often depended on specific territorial interests. As the case of the so-called Tripolitanian campaign in North Africa illustrates, the degree to which international cooperation could be assured was indeed limited.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF ITALIAN ANTI-SLAVERY

Since the very beginning of its activities, the Società Antischivista had placed Tripolitania—a region in today's Libya then under Ottoman control but coveted by Italy for strategic and commercial reasons—at the centre of its campaigning efforts. Claiming that the North African region was a nodal point of slave trafficking, Italian anti-slavery activists had turned the collection of intelligence about this trade into their primary objective.⁸³ According to the Roman organization, African men, women, and children were trafficked by old slave routes from Wadai in the French Sudan and Darfur in

⁸¹ The recent body of work on slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia demonstrates that Coccolo's account grossly simplified the complex continuum of mutual obligations between slaves and masters. Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London, 2004). Also, James L. Watson, 'Slavery as an Institution: Open and Closed Systems', in Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980), 1–5.

⁸² For the exact wording of the Brussels Act, see 'General Act for the Repression of African Slave Trade, Brussels, 2 July 1890' (hereafter General Act), in Miers, *Britain and the Ending*, 346–63, here 346 and 347.

⁸³ *Bollettino* (Jan.–Feb. 1894), 1–3.

the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan northwards through Tripoli and further into the Persian Gulf. The traffic itself was allegedly based on raids carried out by the Sanusi brotherhood, a prosperous Arab Muslim clan who dealt in slaves in exchange for arms.⁸⁴

The villain in this story was the Ottoman Empire, a country commonly regarded by European policy-makers as 'uncivilised' and 'unreformable'.⁸⁵ According to Italian reports, Ottoman authorities routinely violated the Brussels agreement, which prohibited the importation, transit, and trading of slaves, by sanctioning the re-enslavement of trafficked Africans. Italian anti-slavery activists regularly informed the Italian Foreign Office that the 'Turks' habitually converted emancipated slaves to Islam, then naturalized them as Ottoman subjects, only to sell them again as slaves in Istanbul or Asia.⁸⁶ As the Società Antischivista deplored, the manumission certificates were therefore nothing more than a licence for re-enslavement ('second esclavage').⁸⁷

Around the turn of the century, the Società Antischivista started devising its own measures against this North African traffic by setting up and subsidizing three so-called anti-slavery agencies in the port cities of Tripoli, Benghazi, and Derna. These agencies were managed by undisclosed informants called 'agenti antischivisti', who operated under the protection of the European consuls in the respective regions. Their aim was to intercept trafficked slaves and 'liberate them' by paying off the traders.⁸⁸ Tolli and his fellow campaigners used the *Bollettino* to circulate lists of allegedly liberated slaves and to draw attention to what they called their 'humanitarian work' (*opera umanitaria*).⁸⁹ They also regularly informed the Italian colonial office (a special office in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Affari Esteri) of their progress by forwarding information on the number, origin, and destination of slaves on small intercepted ships.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Simonetti to Buxton, 25 June 1909, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 283.

⁸⁵ Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914: The Emergence of a European and International Practice* (Princeton, 2012).

⁸⁶ See for the beginning of the correspondence between the Società Antischivista and the Italian Foreign Office, letter Simonetti to Agnesa, 25 Nov. 1903, ASMAE, Ministero Africa Italiana, 155/4.

⁸⁷ Simonetti to Buxton, 26 Dec. 1906, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

⁸⁸ *Bollettino* (July–Aug. 1905), 20.

⁸⁹ Letter Tolli to Pope Leo XIII in Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Atti del Primo Congresso Antischivista italiano tenuto in Roma nei giorni 22–23–24 aprile 1903* (Rome, 1903), 5.

⁹⁰ Between January and March 1900, the Società Antischivista recorded the manumission of 75 slaves, mostly women and children, and in 1904 the number of liberated slaves rose to 104. See *Bollettino* (May–June 1901); *Bollettino* (Nov.–Dec. 1905), 8. See also the reports sent to the Italian Colonial Office between 1903 and 1907 by the

Not everybody agreed with the Società Antischiavista's approach. Their allegations were so overtly infused by strongly worded Catholicism that the Italian consul at Tripoli sceptically commented that this was nothing more than religious propaganda and that it would be much more useful if humanitarian aims were not tainted by religious preoccupations.⁹¹ Indeed, the Italian activists' emphasis on the Ottoman Empire's Islamic conversion of the victims, their insistence on the need to search ships, their survey of allegedly trafficked slaves, and the supervision of their future movements, indicated a lesser concern for humanitarian questions than for religious and territorial influence and control.

To a certain extent, French and British anti-slavery activists shared Italian preoccupations with Ottoman slave-trading. Du Teil, who held strong anti-Muslim views, criticized the Ottoman Empire for promoting rather than suppressing slavery.⁹² The British Anti-Slavery Society too argued that the 'Turks' were 'slave dealers *par excellence*'.⁹³ Incited by the Italian anti-slavery organization, the French and the British considered the possibility of a multilateral lobbying strategy. In a common resolution, the leaders of all three organizations appealed to their Foreign Offices and to the Holy See, to shed light on Ottoman contraventions of the Brussels Act in North Africa.⁹⁴ To add weight to their resolution, they signed a circular letter to the annual Brussels Arms Conference, urging the international community to take measures against the slave trade.⁹⁵ The appeal was duly acknowledged in Brussels and forwarded to the notice of the signatory governments, but with little effect.⁹⁶ Similarly, the new Ottoman government—set up in Constantinople in 1908 as a result of revolutionary uprisings against the Sultan—failed to react to allegations of slave-trading.⁹⁷ It was clear that this invocation of the treaty obligations of the Brussels Act was not sufficient to set diplomatic action into motion.

'anti-slavery agents' Giorgio Bissi and Paolo Borg Galea in ASMAE, 155/4. Also, Tolli to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 7 Mar. 1906, ASMAE, 155/4.

⁹¹ General Consul in Tripoli to Italian Foreign Office, 10 Feb. 1904, ASAME, 155/4 81905).

⁹² Du Teil, *L'Antiesclavagisme en Afrique*, 8. J. Du Teil, *Les Sociétés antiesclavagistes et l'esclavage dans l'empire ottoman* (Paris, 1913).

⁹³ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan.–Feb. 1907), 23.

⁹⁴ *Bollettino* (Dec. 1907), 26–9.

⁹⁵ 'Circular letter of the delegates of the anti-slavery congress in Rome addressed to His Excellency, the President of the Conference, which will be held in Brussels by the Representatives of the European Powers', 23 Apr. 1908. RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

⁹⁶ Copies of replies enclosed in a letter from Simonetti to Buxton, 19 Mar. 1908, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

⁹⁷ Buxton to Simonetti, 11 Nov. 1909, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D/5.

Faced with what it perceived as a violation of the international pledges made in Brussels, the Società Antischivista emphatically called on its 'sister-organizations' to renew and uphold international pressure. Although Buxton, Du Teil, and Simonetti had previously agreed to exchange and make public any intelligence of slave-trading, however, the staging of further protest proved to be politically delicate, as it challenged the common diplomatic notions of non-interference in respective spheres of interest.⁹⁸ Problems arose when an Italian anti-slavery agent in Benghazi claimed that slaves were trafficked from British territories. An uncooperative British consul angrily replied that 'such a traffic no longer existed and that the slaves in question were not treated badly'.⁹⁹ This was a classic case of the Foreign Office not wanting to confront and corroborate anti-slavery publicity, preferring to stick to the official view that it was a benign traffic and custom. As Buxton confided in his Italian pendant, he personally felt 'little doubts' as to Italian claims, and regretted that his hands were bound by the 'unfortunate' denial of the British official.¹⁰⁰

The Italian campaign against the Tripolitanian slave trade came to an abrupt end two years later when anti-slavery expectations and governmental colonial aims converged. In autumn 1911, following a large-scale nationalist campaign in the Italian press in favour of an invasion of Tripolitania, Italy embarked on a war against the Ottoman Empire in its North African provinces.¹⁰¹ The Società Antischivista, since January 1911 in close contact with the new Italian Foreign Minister Pietro Lanza di Scalea, saw this as a major step towards abolition.¹⁰² Simonetti enthused that the Italian occupation would definitely end slave-trading in the region, and he suggestively asked his British pendant whether one could 'be an anti-slavery man, and not be satisfied with the cessation of such a state of things?'¹⁰³ Without dwelling on the legal details of abolition, he praised the military invasion, arguing that it completed European control in North Africa. 'With the English in Egypt; the French in Tunis and Algeria, and now in Morocco; and the Italians in Tripoli', Simonetti rejoiced, 'the greatest blow has been dealt to the slave trade.'¹⁰⁴ In February 1912, the cover of the *Bollettino* presented its readers with a hymn to

⁹⁸ Simonetti to Buxton, 23 Dec. 1904, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

⁹⁹ Buxton to Simonetti, 29 July 1908, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/4.

¹⁰⁰ Buxton to Simonetti, 24 Aug. 1908, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/4. Simonetti to Buxton, 16 Aug. 1908, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

¹⁰¹ On the role of Italian nationalists in the acquisition of Libya, see R. S. Cunsolo, 'Libya, Italian Nationalism, and the Revolt against Giolitti', *Journal of Modern History*, 37, 2 (1965), 186–207.

¹⁰² *Bollettino* (Jan.–Feb. 1911), 6.

¹⁰³ Simonetti to Buxton, 14 Oct. 1911, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 283.

¹⁰⁴ Simonetti to Buxton, 14 Oct. 1911.

Italian anti-slavery achievements and the alleged liberation of 2,000 slaves.¹⁰⁵ There were no details on the major revolts by the local population, which the Italian military ruthlessly put down. In October 1912, Italy seized Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan from the Turks, calling the 'new' colony 'Libya'.¹⁰⁶ The Italian anti-slavery society was jubilant, undeterred by the fact that Italian control over the acquired territories was unstable and would remain largely ineffective until the late 1920s.

The campaign in Libya brought to light fundamental differences between British and Italian humanitarianism. Whereas the Società Antischivista churned out reports about Italian achievements, the leaders of the British organization remained vigilant about the development of Italian colonial rule in Libya. Buxton, who was presented with the gift of a commemorative medal for the campaign, initially applauded the cordial relations between Italian and British anti-slavery activists and declared he was happy to further collaborate 'for the advancement of the black race and the cause of justice and humanity'.¹⁰⁷ But this changed soon after the invasion, when the violent nature of Italian colonial rule was revealed.¹⁰⁸ In January 1912, rumours reached the British Society of the mistreatment and death of about 2,000 'unfortunate Arab women and children deported by the Italian government from Tripoli to certain islands in the Adriatic'.¹⁰⁹ Buxton decided to call his Italian colleague's attention to what he thought was 'needless suffering'.¹¹⁰ He wrote to Simonetti, and tried to put the case before the British ambassador.¹¹¹ The latter, however, keen to avoid a possible diplomatic conflict with Italy, silenced the matter. Likewise, Simonetti completely dismissed British concerns for Arab civilians by describing the alleged victims as 'vagabonds, beggars and almost all people of the worst sort' whose mortality was largely due to the poor condition in which they had arrived.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ *Bollettino* (Feb. 1912), 44.

¹⁰⁶ The standard scholarly account of the complicated conquest and ultimately unsuccessful colonization of Libya is still Claudio Segrè, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonisation of Libya* (Chicago, 1974).

¹⁰⁷ Buxton to Simonetti, 31 Dec. 1911, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/12.

¹⁰⁸ The violent nature of Italian colonial rule in Libya is emphasized in Eric Salerno, *Genocidio in Libia: Le atrocità nascoste dell'avventura coloniale italiana, 1911–1931* (Rome, 2005) and Nicola Labanca, 'Colonial Rule, Colonial Repression and War Crimes in the Italian Colonies', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9, 3 (2004), 300–13.

¹⁰⁹ The information came from Mrs Dryhurst, from the Society of Women in War Time and was delivered at a committee meeting of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society early in 1912. Buxton to Mr Bevinson, 18 Jan. 1912, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 284.

¹¹⁰ Buxton to Simonetti, 3 Jan. 1912, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D1/10.

¹¹¹ Buxton to British Ambassador at Rome, 3 Jan. 1912, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D1/10.

¹¹² Simonetti to Buxton, 6 Mar. 1912, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 284.

Simonetti's refusal to engage with the alarming reports to which Buxton repeatedly tried to draw his attention uncovered the limits of the Italian Secretary's claim to a humanitarian disposition. Not only was Simonetti oblivious to his own country's humanitarian abuses and to the consequences of the repressive colonial regime established in Libya, but he also reprimanded Buxton for meddling in Italy's domestic affairs. The incident was symptomatic of the more general boundaries of anti-slavery internationalism. Beyond the existing intellectual exchanges, transnational relations rarely occasioned practical cooperation, and there was a tacit understanding not to interfere in national colonial interests. At the same time, the self-ascribed humanitarianism of anti-slavery advocates was increasingly put to the test by a rising popular awareness of the scandalous treatment of African people in other parts of Africa.

RECONFIGURING HUMANITARIAN RELATIONS

A key event in the reconfiguration of humanitarian relations in the early twentieth century was the so-called Congo scandal in Central Africa, an international controversy which became synonymous with the violent excesses caused by the European demand for cheap labour in Africa, which resulted in coercive and often state-sanctioned labour regimes in European colonies.¹¹³

The history of the Congo scandal and of the protests it generated amongst evangelical Christians is relatively well known.¹¹⁴ The story usually begins with the Berlin Africa Conference in 1885, when the Congo was placed under international authority but quickly came to be controlled as the 'Congo Free State' by the Belgian King Leopold. Leopold, in accordance with the philanthropic declarations made in Berlin, claimed to develop African labour, but instead established a repressive regime through which

¹¹³ S. Miers, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues, 1890–1939', in S. Miers and M. A. Klein (eds), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, Or., 1999), 22.

¹¹⁴ Adam Hochschild has retold in detail the story of the humanitarian campaign by focusing on the radicalism of one of its leaders, Edmund Dene Morel. A. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London, 1999). See also Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884–1926* (New York, 2005) 39–78. On the innovative use of photographic evidence as a campaigning strategy, see K. Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29, 2 (2001), 27–58; D. Pavlakis, 'The Development of British Overseas Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Campaign', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 11 (2010), <<http://musc.jhu.edu>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

he appropriated all the land and created a monopoly on the exploitation of all natural resources.¹¹⁵ Private companies were granted concessions and authorized to forcefully recruit labour so that the rubber industry in the Upper Congo quickly came to rely on state-sanctioned slavery. Agents of the King and of the companies forced Africans to produce goods for export as well as to provide the administration with food, porters, and workers. Those who failed to produce were subject to military reprisals, beatings, and mutilations.¹¹⁶

Protestant missionaries living in the Congo and administrators working in the British Foreign Office knew of the abuses but it was not until the early years of the twentieth century that voices of protest began to be publicly heard. Amongst the most active mobilizers of public opinion over the Congo was the British missionary John Harris (1874–1940), the future leader of the British anti-slavery organization and moral lodestar of interwar anti-slavery campaigning.¹¹⁷ Born in 1874 in Berkshire, Harris had spent his early twenties performing evangelical social work in London while training as a Baptist missionary with a view to service in central Africa. In 1898, together with his wife Alice, he sailed for Africa to take up service with the Congo Balolo Mission, a community of Baptist missionaries who were attempting to implant Christianity in central Congo.¹¹⁸ Upon their arrival, the Harrises were confronted with what they described as the 'terror' used to drive the rubber gatherers into the forests to work, and the punishment inflicted on those who did not produce.¹¹⁹ The direct experience of the violence accompanying economic exploitation in Africa proved to be an eye-opener. Appalled by what she saw, Alice Harris famously immortalized the afflictions of mutilated Congolese workers with her camera. Back in Britain, the missionaries joined forces with the British consul Roger Casement who was investigating the Congo Free State's brutal labour practices, and the radical British journalist Edmund D. Morel who, in 1904, founded a Congo Reform Association to draw attention to the abuses.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ J. Stengers and J. Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo, 1886–1908', in Roland A. Oliver et al. (eds), *Cambridge History of Africa*, vi (Cambridge, 1985), 315–57.

¹¹⁶ Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Lanham, Md., 2003), 52–3.

¹¹⁷ On the importance of missionary involvement in the campaign, see Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire', 31.

¹¹⁸ On Harris's formative years in the Congo, see W. R. Louis, 'Sir John Harris and "Colonial Trusteeship"', *Bulletin des Séances de l'Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer*, 14 (1968), 832–56.

¹¹⁹ See the Harrises' personal reminiscences in A. Harris, 'Biography' [undated manuscript], library of Anti-Slavery International in London, 6–8.

¹²⁰ Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, 39–78.

Between 1906 and 1907, the so-called 'atrocities meetings' organized by the Congo Reform Association placed British Quakers and Nonconformists at the head of international humanitarian protest.¹²¹ Much of the campaign's popularity and financial success was due to the dramatic impact of Alice Harris's photographs, which were made accessible to the public through widely held lantern lectures. British anti-slavery activists who were closely following the campaign were eager to extend international support by getting the French and Italian anti-slavery societies to join in the protest. One of the reasons for this was the British Foreign Office's reluctance to engage in diplomatic action, which called for further pressure and led Buxton to suggest to his French and Italian partners that they 'discuss the possibility of united action'.¹²² However, to the great frustration of the Anti-Slavery Society, both the Société Anti-Esclavagiste de France and the Società Antischiavista were keen to avoid an entanglement in what could be perceived as an anti-colonial protest.¹²³ Similarly, the Belgian Anti-Slavery Society sided with Leopold II and accused the critics of the Congo of anti-Catholic propaganda, denouncing their evidence as purposely generalized and exaggerated.¹²⁴

The Congo scandal revealed a blatant lack of unity among anti-slavery campaigners. Differences over how to handle the humanitarian abuses not only created further divergences in an already fragile anti-slavery network, but also transformed the nature of anti-slavery campaigning in Britain. As Travers Buxton realized, the situation in the Congo brought to the fore that slavery could be found under the 'disguise' of other labour coercions. The new challenge, Buxton argued, was to fight 'the exploitation of natives' by the 'white man'.¹²⁵ In order to pool resources, the British Anti-Slavery Society decided to join forces with another British philanthropic group, the Aborigines Protection Society, with which it shared some of its Quaker membership. Founded in 1837, the Aborigines Protection Society was a self-proclaimed watchdog over colonial labour policies, and similarly advocated a type of 'responsible imperialism'.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire', 46–50. Also see Sharon Sliwinski, 'The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5, 3 (2006), 333–63.

¹²² Buxton to Simonetti, 2 Nov. 1907, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/1–7.

¹²³ Simonetti to Buxton, 9 Nov. 1907, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 105.

¹²⁴ Scaillet, 'Valentin Brifaut', 58.

¹²⁵ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (March–May 1909), 29.

¹²⁶ James Heartfield, *The Aborigines' Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836–1909* (London, 2011). Also, C. Swaisland, 'The Aborigines Protection Society', *Slavery and Abolition*, 21, 2 (2000), 265–81, and K. D. Nworah, 'The Aborigines Protection Society, 1889–1909: A Pressure-Group in Colonial Policy', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 5, 1 (1971), 79–91.

Both organizations had worked side by side for decades, their overlapping fields of interest sometimes giving rise to tensions.¹²⁷ In spring 1909, the two organizations merged and John Harris was elected as the combined society's Secretary, a position which he was to hold for over thirty years until his death in 1940.¹²⁸

The appointment of Harris at the head of the British anti-slavery movement was to have a lasting effect on the evolution of humanitarian campaigns in Britain. Following his election in 1909, Harris significantly increased the lobbying activities of the joint society, earning himself a name amongst the British establishment as a 'friend of the underdog'.¹²⁹ Harris developed a wide-reaching and systematic lobbying strategy, primarily based on extensive correspondence with missionary societies, liberal MPs, colonial officers, and civil servants, as well as editors of the British press.¹³⁰ Harris also continued to pursue international connections with other organizations. Thus, he established contact with the founders of a newly created Swiss League for the Protection of Indigenous People (*Ligue suisse pour la défense des indigènes*), an organization embedded in the wider tradition of late nineteenth-century Swiss evangelical philanthropy.¹³¹

The Swiss League, set up in Geneva in 1908 by two Swiss philanthropists, the Swiss-German judge and botanist Hermann Christ-Socin and René Claparède, brought a new dimension to the anti-slavery network.¹³² Until the First World War the organization, which counted approximately 500 members, campaigned for the protection of native interests in the Congo, as well as in Angola, São Tomé, and Mozambique. Based in a country without colonies but with widespread popular support for missionary activity in Africa, the Swiss League could claim neutrality thanks to the government's lack of any direct commercial and political interests in Africa. It also drew on the successes of another humanitarian body, the Red Cross, to highlight the reformist potential of campaigns waged by a small independent country. In this sense it also formed a component of Swiss nationalism that was shaped in part by a claim to an international identity.¹³³

¹²⁷ On the tensions between the two bodies, see Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, 29.

¹²⁸ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Mar.–May 1909), 29.

¹²⁹ Alice Harris, 'Biography', 22.

¹³⁰ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 64–5.

¹³¹ For earlier anti-slavery activism in Switzerland between 1860 and 1905, see J. M. Schaufelbühl, 'L'Antiesclavagisme en Suisse', in T. David, B. Etemad, and J. M. Schaufelbühl (eds), *La Suisse et l'esclavage des noirs* (Lausanne, 2005), 108–54.

¹³² René Claparède and Hermann Christ-Socin, *L'Évolution d'un état philanthropique* (Geneva, 1909).

¹³³ Herren, 'Governmental Internationalism', 132.

A key figure in the Swiss movement was Claparède, a philosopher, prolific writer, and widely travelled internationalist born in Geneva in the late nineteenth century. Like Harris, Claparède was an outspoken critic of colonial abuses and forced labour conscriptions.¹³⁴ He immediately began a productive correspondence with Harris and Buxton, who also put him in touch with Simonetti from the Italian organization.¹³⁵ While the Swiss-Italian connection remained limited to formal exchanges, relations between Claparède and the British Anti-Slavery Society flourished. The Swiss editorialized material on the exploitation of colonial labour produced by the British and circulated this information in a monthly publication titled *Bulletin du Congo*, and in the liberal Swiss daily *Le Journal de Genève*.¹³⁶ The highpoint of these cooperative efforts was a Swiss lecture tour, organized by Claparède for Alice Harris. Between February 1913 and the spring of 1914, the latter presented her Congo lecture to crowds in Geneva and Lausanne, as well as in Berne, Basel, and Zürich with great success.¹³⁷ As the Swiss League reported, Alice Harris's educational talks drew such big crowds that many people did not get a chance to enjoy her 'exciting pictures' but had 'to return home with great regrets'.¹³⁸

Only a few years had passed between the Roman congress in 1907 and Alice Harris's visit to Switzerland but the differences between the two events were remarkable. In contrast to the elitist character of the Italian meeting, with its emphasis on European leadership and Christian proselytism, Alice Harris's Swiss lectures conveyed a different message. They targeted European exploitation of African labour, which even hardened imperialists such as Lord Cromer viewed as a 'disgrace to civilised Europe' and a lasting symbol of the evil consequences of uncontrolled European greed.¹³⁹ The Congo campaign also revealed how photographs and lantern lectures could fuel the desire for public knowledge about humanitarian issues in Africa. It was ultimately a catalyst for a more secular international humanitarian

¹³⁴ René Claparède, *Le Cacao esclavagiste* (Geneva, 1909). Also, René Claparède, *L'Esclavage portugais et le Journal de Genève: Avec deux lettres des MM Travers Buxton et J. H. Harris de la société antiesclavagiste de Londres* (Geneva, 1914).

¹³⁵ For the beginning of an enthusiastic exchange of letters between the British Secretary in London and Claparède in Geneva, see their correspondence in RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/13 (fos. 118, 166, 193, 209, 253, 286, 341, 596, 628, 419, 439).

¹³⁶ See 'Bulletin du Congo de la ligue suisse pour la défense des indigènes du Congo' as published in seventeen issues in *Le Signal de Genève* from 27 Mar. 1909 to 28 Nov. 1911; and *Bulletin suisse du Congo* (Feb. 1912–Apr. 1924).

¹³⁷ For reviews of Harris's talks, see *Bulletin de la ligue suisse pour la défense des indigènes* (Apr.–June 1914), 21–5.

¹³⁸ *Bulletin de la ligue suisse pour la défense des indigènes* (Apr.–June 1914), 21.

¹³⁹ See Cromer's introduction in John H. Harris, *Dawn in Darkest Africa* (London 1914), p. xi.

sentiment towards Africans.¹⁴⁰ It also set the scene for the international anti-slavery campaigns waged by Protestant evangelical humanitarians in the early interwar years.

THE COMING OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The outbreak of the First World War on 28 July 1914 profoundly affected the activities of anti-slavery organizations in Europe. The war which initially opposed the Allies (based on the Triple Entente of Britain, France, and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary), expanded to include other countries, ultimately involving more than 70 million soldiers.¹⁴¹ The economic, political, cultural, and social effects of international hostilities were immense. The First World War disrupted global communications and the circulation of trade and finance. Nations and empires were mobilized and people and resources were called to the service of the state on an unprecedented scale.¹⁴² War also brought extensive forms of professionalized aid, which created tensions between the national and international humanitarian spheres.¹⁴³

Africa was a major and contested theatre of Allied military strategy.¹⁴⁴ British and French campaigns to capture the German colonies of Togoland and Cameroon in West Africa, and the combined war efforts of British, Indian, South African, and Belgian forces against German troops in German East Africa brought enormous social and economic dislocation. The war caused food shortages and epidemic diseases amongst African populations, leading to hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties.¹⁴⁵ Africans were mobilized as soldiers and carriers, and reacted by staging violent revolts, notably in French West Africa, or by fleeing their villages and crossing nearby borders.¹⁴⁶ The war also took its toll on missionary

¹⁴⁰ This point is made in Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire', 52–3.

¹⁴¹ Hew Strachan, *The Outbreak of the First World War: A New History* (Oxford, 2004); Robert Holland, 'The British Empire and the Great War, 1914–1918', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iv. *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 115.

¹⁴² Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford, 2005), 1–11.

¹⁴³ Heather Jones, 'International or Transnational? Humanitarian Action during the First World War', *European Review of History*, 16, 5 (2009), 697–713.

¹⁴⁴ Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁴⁵ Melvin Page, 'Introduction: Black Men in a White Men's War', in M. E. Page (ed.), *Africa and the First World War* (London, 1987), 14–16.

¹⁴⁶ David Killingray, 'The War in Africa', in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford, 2010), 115.

work in Africa. The destruction of mission stations and disruption of missionary work were particularly felt by Catholic anti-slavery organizations. French missionaries in the Congo complained about severed communications with the mainland and the drying up of financial contributions from Propaganda Fide.¹⁴⁷ Catholic missions in South Sudan and Uganda suffered human losses and material damages.¹⁴⁸

Although the general tenor amongst anti-slavery leaders was to pursue 'business as usual', abolitionist campaigners increasingly lamented the war's 'many restraints on [anti-slavery] work'.¹⁴⁹ The military conflict affected the political and public relevance of anti-slavery protest and diminished financial support for the cause. As Buxton deplored in a letter to Claparède, appeals for money were 'likely to pass unheeded unless one [could] in some way bring in a connection with the war, in which case people [were] only too ready to give'.¹⁵⁰ Anti-slavery societies were affected by warfare in Europe and Africa not only in financial terms, but also with regard to membership. Many active members were called for duty, sometimes with fatal outcomes as in the case of French Secretary Du Teil, who died on the battlefield in 1918.¹⁵¹ Due to the general depletion of the administrative personnel, and to an increasing focus on national war efforts, contact between anti-slavery organizations became irregular. In the Italian case, reporting on anti-slavery work dried up, while the French anti-slavery organization stopped publishing its newsletter altogether, and completely ceased to exist after 1918.¹⁵²

The war also added a new political dimension to the anti-slavery network, which increasingly reflected the heightened nationalist ethos of European politics, and the exacerbation of colonial rivalries between the French and British allies and their German enemy. A case in point for this was the attempt of an improvised German Anti-Slavery Society to use existing anti-slavery newsletters to disseminate propaganda material on the progressive nature of German rule in East Africa. British and Swiss anti-slavery activists rejected what they thought were clumsy propaganda efforts, and vented their anti-German feelings.¹⁵³ Gone was the sense of collective European civilization and international Christian solidarity. Instead, the wartime campaigns of national

¹⁴⁷ Van Ronsle, 8 Feb. 1915, PF, NS, Rubr. 55, vol. 559/1915.

¹⁴⁸ *Bollettino* (Dec. 1915), 51.

¹⁴⁹ Buxton to Simonetti, 14 July 1915, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/15.

¹⁵⁰ Buxton to Claparède, 9 Dec. 1914, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/15.

¹⁵¹ A. Simonetti, 'Il Barone Giuseppe du Teil', *Bollettino* (Apr.–June 1918), 25.

¹⁵² *Bollettino* (June 1916), 35.

¹⁵³ Buxton to Claparède, 14 Apr. 1915, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/15.

anti-slavery societies increasingly reflected the 'partisan climate' that also affected other humanitarian endeavours such as the efforts to assist prisoners of war.¹⁵⁴

If the war caused a cleavage between Allied and Central anti-slavery activists, the exchanges of views between representatives of allied countries gained symbolical importance beyond the concern for anti-slavery issues. This became evident when Italy joined the war in May 1915, after an initial declaration of neutrality and despite the fact that the majority of Italians were opposed to the venture.¹⁵⁵ Although Italian troops went on to fight their own war against the Austro-Hungarian army in the hope of pursuing irredentist and other territorial demands in North Africa, the British were jubilant.¹⁵⁶ As Buxton put it, the Italian intervention on the side of the Entente was 'an additional motive . . . for sympathy and co-operation' between supporters of the Italian and British anti-slavery organizations.¹⁵⁷

By the end of 1915, however, the expectations of European governments that the war would be short had shifted to the recognition that the war would be a long-drawn-out affair and the disruption of 1914 would bite deeper and become more protracted than previously thought. This further increased the anti-slavery societies' concern for national interests and domestic necessities, forcing them to redefine the parameters of philanthropy and Christian charity. The Società Antischivista reacted to the wartime economic downturn and resulting poverty amongst the Italian population by distributing bread to hundreds of impoverished Italian families.¹⁵⁸ Aid to soldiers also became a central element of anti-slavery work, and prominent figures of the Italian movement, notably the Contessa Rosa di San Marco, demonstrated support for Italy's military action by putting together a prayer book for departing troops.¹⁵⁹ In an attempt to participate in the war effort, the Italian organization also distributed *medaglie benedette* (blessed medals) amongst injured soldiers and loyal colonial troops fighting in Eritrea and Libya to boost their morale.¹⁶⁰

The activities of the Italian anti-slavery organization contrasted with the more reflective wartime attitude of British campaigners. Like many of his contemporaries, Harris regarded the First World War as a watershed

¹⁵⁴ This phrase is borrowed from Jones, 'International or Transnational?', 702.

¹⁵⁵ Antonio Gibelli, 'Italy', in Horne, *Companion to World War I*, 464–78.

¹⁵⁶ Giorgio Rochat, 'The Italian Front, 1915–1918', in Horne, *Companion to World War I*, 83.

¹⁵⁷ Buxton to Simonetti, 14 July 1915, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 19, D 1/15.

¹⁵⁸ *Bollettino* (May 1915).

¹⁵⁹ Rosa di San Marco, *Con Dio per la Patria* (Milan, 1915).

¹⁶⁰ *Bollettino* (Apr. 1916), 51.

in international and colonial relations. The war, with its devastating social and economic consequences for Europe, severely weakened Western claims to moral superiority, civilization, and progress.¹⁶¹ The war also threatened to lead to a second partition of Africa as Britain, France, and Belgium envisaged the annexation of the conquered German colonies in East, South-West, and West Africa.¹⁶² The Anti-Slavery Society, in tune with emerging popular anti-imperialist sentiments in Europe and the United States, opposed the 'recklessness' of these annexations and appealed for new international agreements to control territorial expansion in Africa.¹⁶³ The 'international engagements' entered by European governments at the Berlin and Brussels Conference in the second half of the 1880s were now described as 'out of date, inadequate, and defective'.¹⁶⁴ Instead, Harris advocated in newspaper articles, books, and pamphlets that colonial reconstruction should comprise a firm commitment to protecting 'native welfare', and that a future peace treaty would need to set new parameters for colonial governance.¹⁶⁵

In many respects, the war galvanized the British Anti-Slavery Society's conception of what a post-war settlement should look like. Harris's ideas were inspired by the writings of progressive British thinkers, notably of the social reformer Charles Roden Buxton and the internationalist Leonard Woolf, who were beginning to reflect on new forms of peace-keeping mechanisms and international government.¹⁶⁶ In January 1917, the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society, together with two regional committees for the protection of native races based in Glasgow and Edinburgh, dispatched a memorandum titled 'Native Races and Peace Terms' to Arthur J. Balfour, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.¹⁶⁷ In autumn of the same year, the Anti-Slavery Society organized a conference on the future

¹⁶¹ Michael Adas, 'Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilising Mission Ideology', *Journal of World History*, 15, 1 (2004), 41.

¹⁶² The classic study of the impact of the First World War on European colonialism in Africa is W. R. Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914–1919* (Oxford, 1967).

¹⁶³ On how new pacifist and internationalist ideas became part of mainstream political thought see Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1864–1945* (Oxford, 2007), 187.

¹⁶⁴ 'Native Races and Peace Terms', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1916), 34–6.

¹⁶⁵ John H. Harris, *Germany's Lost Colonial Empire and the Essentials of Reconstruction* (London, 1917). Other examples of Harris's impressive output of pamphlets dealing with fundamental aspects of postwar colonial order include *Native Races and Peace Terms* (London, 1916) and *Germany's Lost Colonial Empire and the Essentials of Reconstruction* (London, 1917).

¹⁶⁶ Charles Roden Buxton (ed.) *Towards a Lasting Settlement* (London, 1915). Leonard Woolf, *International Government: Two Reports* (London, 1916).

¹⁶⁷ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1917), 3.

of the German colonies at which it expressed its opposition to annexation and support for some form of international oversight.¹⁶⁸ A few months later, in January 1918, members and liberal supporters of the Anti-Slavery Society, including internationalist Alfred E. Zimmern, met to discuss how 'international control' in colonial policy could be turned into a 'workable political scheme'.¹⁶⁹ Although the opinions of the participants about the degree of international supervision differed, ranging from annual international conferences between European governments to the institution of a supranational commission to oversee colonial affairs, they all agreed that peace should bring more permanent international structures to implement the anti-slavery resolutions taken in the late nineteenth century.¹⁷⁰

This was a far cry from the idealized European anti-slavery movement envisaged by Lavigerie in the late 1880s. The war had disrupted and transformed the bonds between anti-slavery organizations by revealing not only their profound national identity, but also the fact that there existed no international mechanisms for concerted humanitarian action. And yet, even if there were obvious limitations to their humanitarian and internationalist scope, these relatively small-scale groups continued to combine various levels of interest which were crucial in shaping governmental as well as popular views of colonial policy in Africa. They also represented the few non-governmental groups who actually showed an interest in Africa throughout a war in which eyes, and for a very long-time historical attention, were trained on Europe.

In the wake of the First World War, promoters of anti-slavery activism remained at the crossroads of governmental and missionary agendas, and of humanitarian and imperial ambitions. Some anti-slavery organizations, notably the British and the Swiss, would continue to advocate international cooperation well into the interwar years, and their efforts would shape the League of Nations' work on slavery in enduring ways. Others, like the Italian anti-slavery organization would be drawn into domestic politics and the emergence of a totalitarian regime with expansionist goals. In both cases, anti-slavery societies were to remain, as they had begun, deeply entangled in the web of great power politics.

¹⁶⁸ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1917), 49.

¹⁶⁹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1918), 89.

¹⁷⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1918), 94.

2

The League of Nations and Slavery, 1919–1926

In 1919, the Secretary of the British Anti-Slavery Society, John Harris, described with characteristic colour what he believed was the beginning of a new era in the internationalization of colonial issues in Africa. The newly established League of Nations, Harris enthused, presented a 'momentous event in the history of Africa'; it 'herald[ed] a break in hoary political institutions and breath[ed] into the continent the breath of a new life'.¹ A few months earlier, the aims, scope, and design of a league to promote international cooperation and security had undergone long and trying debates at the Paris Peace Conference.² Among the many versions of postwar international order presented in Paris, British inputs had played a decisive role in shaping plans for the new organization, which, it was hoped, would act as a genuine 'guarantee of peace'.³

One of the most controversial issues faced by the architects of the postwar international order concerned the future of the seized German colonies in Africa and the Middle Eastern Ottoman provinces. British proposals, drawing on Jan Christiaan Smuts's famous 'practical suggestion', conceptualized an international regime for these territories based on the precepts of British imperial governance.⁴ Accordingly, the territories

¹ John H. Harris, *Africa: Slave or Free?* (London, 1919), 230.

² Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013), chapter 2, esp. 47–9.

³ Peter J. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914–1925* (Oxford, 2009), 107–9.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of Smuts's proposal and the 'imperial origins of international government', see Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884–1926* (New York, 2005), 135–66. Also, Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2001), 28–56; Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 2012), 21–51.

were to be governed as 'mandates', a term which evoked the values inherent in the British principle of trusteeship—the idea that British overseas administration was entrusted with a rightful authority and responsibility towards subject peoples.⁵

The Anti-Slavery Society was one of many non-governmental organizations which invested high hopes in the results of international debates in Paris. Encouraged by Wilsonian ideas of equality and self-determination, pressure groups from all over the world formed delegations, formulated demands, launched campaigns, and petitioned the national delegations in Versailles.⁶ Amongst these were the participants of a hastily organized Pan-African Congress led by African-American civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples.⁷ Like Harris, Du Bois supported the League mandate system, which he saw as the basis for improving the conditions of black peoples all over the world.⁸

When on 25 April 1919, the Allies agreed that the mandates formed a 'sacred trust to civilisation', and that the League would have oversight over the 'tutelary administration' of the 'peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world', the expectations amongst philanthropists were understandably high.⁹ As the Anti-Slavery Society professed, 'restraining retrograde measures, abuse and evil influences' in tropical territories through international control was of paramount importance to world peace and would have powerful effects on the future development of native populations.¹⁰ The Anti-Slavery Society hoped to use the League's new parameters of international accountability to relaunch its campaign against old and new forms of bonded labour on a global scale.

When the League began work in 1920, however, British anti-slavery activists were well aware of its 'geographical limitations'.¹¹ The League's

⁵ John Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, 23, 3 (1980), 657–8. On the mandates system see the later discussion in this chapter.

⁶ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007), 4.

⁷ C. G. Contee, 'Du Bois, the NAACP, and the Pan-African Congress of 1919', *Journal of Negro History* 57, 1 (1972), 13–28. For the history and evolution of the pan-African movement, see the study by activist George Padmore (ed.), *Colonial and Coloured Unity: A Programme of Action. History of the Pan-African Congress* (London, 1963; first publ. 1947).

⁸ On this see also Sluga, *Internationalism*, 52.

⁹ League of Nations, *The Mandates System: Origin—Principles—Application* (Geneva, 1945), 7.

¹⁰ 'Peace Terms and Colonial Reconstruction', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1919), 3.

¹¹ Harris, *Africa: Slave or Free?*, 230.

universal aspirations were confined by the American refusal to ratify the peace treaties and by the exclusion of Germany and the absence of the Soviet Union, who both would later join the League (in 1926 and 1934 respectively).¹² The League's main decision-making organ—the Council which roughly met four times a year—was dominated by Britain, France, and Italy, who, together with Japan, held a permanent seat. This reflected the sustained influence colonial powers would have in Geneva.¹³ The League's permanent feature was its Secretariat, a bureaucratic organ divided into administrative units which were to shape the working practices of the new organization. The League's bureaucracy was in the hands of Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond, a British diplomat and former Deputy Foreign Secretary whose appointment further accentuated the League's Western European focus.¹⁴ And although India, China, and Japan all contributed to the League's financial and administrative resources, much of the League's early work was focused on European concerns.¹⁵

Contemporary observers often described the League of Nations as an 'experiment', a term which encapsulated people's uncertainties about the organization's potential strengths and weaknesses.¹⁶ In the early 1920s, the challenges faced by the League were innumerable, ranging from the scarcity of funds to run its shoe-string operations to the enormity of problems generated by the war, including territorial conflicts, the question of disarmament, and humanitarian crises. The League was also a voluntarist organization that lacked the pretensions or even the expectation of supranational power and whose members would not tolerate an infringement of their sovereignty. Accordingly, as Zara Steiner has pointed out, the League of Nations was not designed to be 'a substitute for great-power politics' but rather a 'mechanism for conducting multinational diplomacy' whose success depended on the disposition of its member states to cooperate.¹⁷

As is well known, the League would not succeed in retaining its political credibility when confronted with international disputes and the challenges of disarmament.¹⁸ But its so-called 'non-political' work in

¹² Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History* (Oxford, 2005), 349–86, esp. 350.

¹³ Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace*, 3.

¹⁴ James Barros, *Office without Power: Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond, 1919–1933* (Oxford, 1979), 20–6.

¹⁵ Patricia Clavin, 'Europe and the League of Nations', in Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914–1945* (Oxford, 2007), 325–7.

¹⁶ W. E. Rappard, *The Geneva Experiment* (London, 1931). Also, C. W. Pipkin, 'The Machinery of Experiment at Geneva', *Political Science Quarterly*, 47, 2 (1932), 274–81.

¹⁷ Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 349.

¹⁸ Older studies on the League of Nations usually highlight its failure to preserve peace: e.g. Ruth B. Henig (ed.), *The League of Nations* (Edinburgh, 1973); F. S. Northedge,

the economic, social, and cultural fields expanded far beyond what the Covenant originally foresaw. Thus, in the 1920s and 1930s the League facilitated cooperation on issues ranging from economic relations and public health to the eradication of the traffic in women and children (so-called White Slavery or *traite des blanches*), the drugs trade, the plight of refugees, the rights of women.¹⁹ The League's normative efforts in these fields were due to the significant participation of non-state actors, notably British voluntary organizations and American foundations which could rely on a wealth of practical and technical expertise. They sought contact with League officials and often engaged in long-lasting exchanges. Geneva, Susan Pedersen has argued, offered the space for a type of 'humanitarian entrepreneurialism' in which 'a single crusading individual or organization could have a decisive impact'.²⁰

Harris was one of the key individuals whose views and tactics shaped the League's work, and whose organization in turn was reshaped by the existence of the League. Like a great number of contemporary feminist, pacifist, and humanitarian groups, the Anti-Slavery Society viewed the League as a 'new inter-governmental space checked by public opinion' and as a global forum for multilateral cooperation.²¹ Harris's vision of the League owed much to the liberal-internationalist programme of the British League of Nations Union—one of the most influential and largest pressure groups in postwar Britain. Like the latter, Harris foregrounded the League's potential humanitarian character by idealizing the political weight of public opinion and the exemplary role of British imperial governance.²² Thanks to Harris's determination to establish a working programme on questions of native welfare in Geneva, the Anti-Slavery

The League of Nations: Its Life and Times 1920–1946 (Leicester, 1986); Gary B. Ostrower, *The League of Nations: From 1919–1929* (New York, 1996); George G. Gill, *The League of Nations, from 1929 to 1946: International Cooperation towards Peace* (New York, 1996).

¹⁹ For a comprehensive bibliography of the rich literature in this field, see Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112, 4 (2007), 1091–1117. For an overview of recent and ongoing research projects on the League of Nations see Glenda Sluga, 'Editorial: The Transnational History of International Institutions', *Journal of Global History*, 6 (2011), 211–19. For an in-depth study of the League's facilitation of economic cooperation, see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations* (Oxford, 2013). Also, Gorman, *Emergence of International Society*, 52–108.

²⁰ Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', 1111.

²¹ Helen McCarthy, 'The Lifeblood of the League? Voluntary Associations and League of Nations Activism in Britain', in Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London, 2011), 187–8.

²² For an authoritative study of the League of Nations Union see Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–1945* (Manchester, 2011).

Society gained a position of influence, which surpassed that of other philanthropic groups with which it competed for attention. More controversially, anti-slavery lobbying was also responsible for singling out the abolition of Ethiopian slavery as one of the greatest international challenges in the interwar years.

LOBBYING THE MANDATES SECTION

In 1920, the main agenda of British anti-slavery activists was to test the League's commitment to set up humanitarian measures for the protection of indigenous people from slavery and labour exploitation, and to monitor the working of the mandates system. From a practical standpoint, this meant that the Anti-Slavery Society would have to devote a part of its time and finances to secure its position as a pressure group in Geneva, to where the League had moved from its temporary headquarters in London in autumn 1920.

The mandates system was one of the most daunting political, administrative, and humanitarian tasks with which the League of Nations found itself entrusted.²³ From an international legal perspective, the new system promised to guide previously colonized and dependent people towards self-government, and to turn the former German colonies and Ottoman provinces into sovereign and independent nation states.²⁴ In reality the scheme was caught between long-standing conceptions of colonial governance and a new framework of international accountability. The territories in question were categorized into A, B, and C mandates, supposedly reflecting the countries' varying stages of development and backwardness, and placed under the administration of colonial powers. Accordingly, between August 1919 and spring 1920, the African territories formerly governed by Germany became B mandates. Togo and Cameroon were partitioned between the British and French authorities, Rwanda and Burundi were

²³ The history of the mandates system has, in recent years, become the object of intense scrutiny. See Susan Pedersen, 'The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32, 4 (2006), 560–82. Also, Pedersen, 'Getting out of Irak in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood', *American Historical Review*, 115, 4 (2010), 975–1000. For previous interpretations, see Michael D. Callahan, *Mandates and Empire: The League of Nations and Africa, 1914–1931* (Portland, Or., 1999), and Callahan, *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929–1946* (Brighton, 2004). For a different view, Brian K. Digre, *Imperialism's New Clothes: The Repartition of Tropical Africa, 1914–1919* (New York, 1990).

²⁴ Antony Anghic, 'Colonialism and the Birth of International Institutions: Sovereignty, Economy, and the Mandates System of the League of Nations', *Journal of International Law and Politics*, 34 (2001), 513.

placed under Belgian control, and the remainder of German East Africa was administered by Britain as Tanganyika Territory.²⁵

As Susan Pedersen has argued, the primary innovation in this new system of colonial oversight was that it foresaw the existence of two bodies headquartered in Geneva: the Mandates Section and the Permanent Mandates Commission (hereafter Mandates Commission).²⁶ The Mandates Section was one of the permanent administrative units of the League Secretariat and its duty was to prepare the work of the Council and the Assembly on mandates questions, to collect data, and to correspond with the mandatory powers. The Mandates Section also acted as the secretariat of the Mandates Commission, a body which was mostly composed of former colonial officials and which functioned as an international control mechanism.²⁷ The commission was tasked with supervising the administration of the mandates by compiling questionnaires, examining the reports which each of the mandatory powers had to submit annually, and drafting a summary for the League Council. As with other League activities, although 'intended to provoke a political response', the commission's output was 'purely advisory'.²⁸

Although in the early 1920s the direct impact of the mandates system on colonial governance was difficult to predict, the language used to describe its function and the normative processes it engendered were innovative.²⁹ As Anthony Anghie has argued, the mandates system represented an attempt by the international community 'to address colonial problems in general in a systematic, coordinated, and ethical manner'.³⁰ In Britain, supporters of the League viewed the new provisions as a definitive departure from nineteenth-century colonial expansion and annexation in Africa. 'No Power in future', Gilbert Murray, Oxford Professor of Classics, Vice-President of the Anti-Slavery Society and of the League of Nations Union, wrote in his preface to one of Harris's books, 'will be able simply to annex "backward" territories by conquest and administer them just as it pleases, without reference to the rest of the world'.³¹

²⁵ On the process of repartition of the African territories, see Callahan, *Mandates and Empire*, 11–15.

²⁶ The following paragraph is based on Pedersen, 'Meaning of Mandates System', 568.

²⁷ The terms and composition of the Mandates Commission are discussed in detail in Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 60. For a study that singles out women's involvement in the Mandates Commission, see Susan Pedersen, 'Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations', *History Workshop Journal*, 66, 1 (2008), 188–207.

²⁸ The phrase is borrowed from Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, 21.

²⁹ Pedersen, 'Meaning of Mandates System', 568.

³⁰ Anghie, 'Colonialism', 549.

³¹ John H. Harris, *Slavery or 'Sacred Trust'?* (London, 1926), pp. xi–xii.

Harris's own views on the novelty and importance of the mandates system were more nuanced. The new arrangement, he suggested, encapsulated the long-standing British principle of trusteeship that defined the relationship between European colonial governments and African people as the bond between trustees and 'wards'.³² Accordingly, Harris's vision for the future of the African continent was one in which 'the League of Nations and the Protecting Powers' offered 'administrative authority' rather than encouraged self-government.³³ More importantly, Harris did not perceive the League as offering any substitution for the fundamental role of missionaries. The latter, he believed, were the key to encouraging Africans to adopt the Christian faith so that the colonies could take their place 'amongst the foremost nations of Christendom'.³⁴ Harris saw no contradiction in his support for the League of Nations as a secular and international institution and his own evangelical agenda.³⁵ Rather, he regarded the League as a 'new method' with which to apply his organization's principles and policies to solve humanitarian issues in the colonies.³⁶

It was with a firm determination to test this 'new method' that in autumn 1920 Harris travelled to Geneva for the first time. His aim was to establish contact with the various national delegations of member states attending the League of Nations' first Assembly in November 1920—a plenary meeting that was to meet once a year for about three weeks—and to lobby them on questions concerning the terms of the mandates, and particularly the question of slavery.³⁷ What was initially planned as a short visit turned into a stay of several weeks during which Harris tried to communicate his organization's values and ideas to anyone willing to listen.³⁸ As the British anti-slavery leader put it, the 'constant interviews' made for 'strenuous work', an experience which underscored the institutional openness of the new international environment in Geneva.³⁹

Harris's main concern at this point was that the Council still needed to ratify the different texts of the A, B, and C mandates, which included clauses on the political, social, and economic particulars of their administration.⁴⁰ The list of contentious issues to be agreed on, notably traffic in arms and liquor, economic equality, education, health, military clauses,

³² Harris, *Africa: Slave or Free?*, 231.

³³ Harris, *Africa: Slave or Free?*, 230.

³⁴ Harris, *Africa: Slave or Free?*, 241.

³⁵ Here I agree with Grant, *Civilised Savagery*, 137.

³⁶ Harris to Mrs Haslewood, 23 Dec. 1920, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 361.

³⁷ On Harris's early lobbying activity in Geneva, see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 72.

³⁸ 'League of Nations', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1921), 94.

³⁹ 'League of Nations', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1921), 94.

⁴⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1921), 3–6.

land rights, and last but not least slavery, was long, and the process soon faced major delays, particularly with regard to the approval of the B mandates.⁴¹ As with most of these issues, with regard to the question of slavery there existed only vague guiding principles, although its eradication was considered to be critical to the promotion of 'the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants' of the African mandates.⁴² Article 22 of the Covenant prescribed 'the prohibition of abuses such as the slave trade' in territories under B mandate in West and Central Africa. In addition, Article 23 bound League member states to 'secure fair and humane conditions of labour' for men, women, and children, not only in their own countries but in all the countries with which they had commercial and industrial relations, as well as to secure the 'just treatment' of natives under their rule.⁴³

British anti-slavery activists quickly recognized the League's general lack of data on Africa, and its hesitant view on how the new international organization should consider and treat slavery. They saw it as an opportunity to offer expertise and guidance, and to promote Britain's abolitionist credentials and humanitarian leadership. As one participant put it at the Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting in April 1921, it was the latter's responsibility to see that any agreement produced in Geneva would be in accordance with Britain's 'lofty moral traditions'.⁴⁴ Consequently, between 1920 and 1923, Harris proceeded to establish what he called a 'co-operative' effort with League staff to 'get the best out of the mandates'.⁴⁵

One of the people willing to grant Harris an interview was William Rappard, a prominent Swiss internationalist and academic who had been appointed as Director of the Mandates Section in autumn 1920.⁴⁶ Rappard, an experienced administrator and a citizen of a country without colonies, was in many ways the ideal candidate for directing these affairs. He was acutely aware of the League's inherent dualism: the conflict between the principle of national sovereignty on the one hand, and the need for

⁴¹ Pedersen, 'Meaning of Mandates System', 560–82.

⁴² League of Nations, *Mandates System*, 52–67.

⁴³ F. Knipping, H. V. Mangoldt, and V. Rittberger (eds), *The United Nations System and its Predecessors*, ii. *Statuses and Legal Acts* (Oxford, 1997), 418.

⁴⁴ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1921), 56.

⁴⁵ Harris to Rappard, 20 Dec. 1920, LoN, S 265, 1.

⁴⁶ For a study of Rappard's life, see V. Monnier, *William E. Rappard: Défenseur des libertés, serviteur de son pays et de la communauté internationale* (Geneva, 1995). On Rappard's work for the League, see Ania Peter, 'William E. Rappard and the League of Nations: A Swiss Contribution to International Organization', in Graduate Institute of International Studies (ed.), *The League of Nations in Retrospect* (Berlin, 1983), 221–43. Also Ania Peter, *William E. Rappard und der Völkerbund: Ein Schweizer Pionier der internationalen Verständigung* (Frankfurt, 1973).

an effective protection of collective security on the other.⁴⁷ Like Harris, Rappard was not anti-colonial, but had a strong sense of the obligations of colonial powers towards the 'natives'.⁴⁸ With an idealism that was characteristic of his office at the Mandates Section, Rappard hoped that 'the international obligation of altruism' embodied by the mandates system might stimulate the best colonial administrator and 'restrain the worst'.⁴⁹

Harris provided the Director of the Mandates Section with a wide range of pamphlets, articles, and memos on postwar Africa, trusteeship, and slavery. As the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society himself admitted, the wealth of material dispatched to Geneva, and based for a great part on his own writings, came close to an 'inundation'.⁵⁰ Harris's skills as a communicator and his ability to churn out memos and reports at short notice was met with appreciation.⁵¹ In his letters to Harris, Rappard confessed that his 'ignorance' on questions relating to slavery and native welfare was 'equal only to his earnest desire to dispel it', and he actively sought Harris's opinion on the drafts he was preparing for the League Council.⁵² 'I have just been working on the "B" mandates', Rappard confidentially wrote to Harris in January 1921, 'and would be most grateful to have your opinion on them'.⁵³ He even openly acknowledged to Harris that the cooperation of the Anti-Slavery Society was 'absolutely essential for the League of Nations generally, and for the welfare of the inhabitants of mandated areas in particular'.⁵⁴

In autumn 1921, Harris travelled to Geneva for the second time, carrying with him a letter in which the Anti-Slavery Society set out its views about the problem of domestic slavery and conscription in mandated territories.⁵⁵ With Rappard's help, French and English versions of the document were circulated amongst the members of the Council. The Anti-Slavery Society also managed to persuade Rappard to attend a private conference in London during which the Director of the Mandates Section met with British missionaries and philanthropists.⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Peter, 'Rappard and the League of Nations', 227. Rappard, *Geneva Experiment*, 10-35.

⁴⁸ Peter, 'Rappard and the League of Nations', 227.

⁴⁹ William E. Rappard 'The Practical Working of the Mandates System', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 4 (1925), 210.

⁵⁰ Harris to Rappard, 21 Dec. 1920, LoN, S 265, 1. For the correspondence between Harris and Rappard from Dec. 1920 to July 1923, see LoN, S 265, 1.

⁵¹ Rappard to Harris, 11 Jan. 1921, LoN, S 265, 1.

⁵² Harris to Rappard, 20 Dec. 1920, LoN, S 265, 1.

⁵³ Rappard to Harris, 2 Jan. 1921, LoN, S 265, 1.

⁵⁴ Rappard to Harris, 2 Jan. 1921, LoN, S 265, 1.

⁵⁵ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1921), 74.

⁵⁶ Rappard to Harris, 11 Nov. 1921, LoN, S 265, 1.

It is certainly to the credit of Rappard's independent thinking and his desire to make the mandates system a working mechanism that the Anti-Slavery Society was heard at a time when the question of slavery could easily have been swept under the table. In 1920–1, the League was only a small organization that was frequently overwhelmed by the problems it confronted. It was dealing with a host of major territorial disputes concerning the Saar, Danzig, and Poland, and a number of minor quarrels. The mandates system remained a relatively marginal (if controversial) item in the list of the challenges that the League was facing. Indeed, the Covenant's commitment to 'attack slavery in all its forms' was certainly not a concern debated in the Council or the League Assembly. As Harris put it, people 'who really care[d] about such questions in Geneva' were 'very limited in number'.⁵⁷ This does not mean, however, that British humanitarians were alone in lobbying for the welfare of native peoples in the Swiss city.

THE BUREAU INTERNATIONAL POUR LA DÉFENSE DES INDIGÈNES

The Anti-Slavery Society was not the only pressure group concerned with African affairs to aspire to cooperation with the League. Already before the First World War, Geneva had come into view as a home to humanitarian endeavours and evangelical philanthropy, thanks to the efforts of René Claparède, the Secretary of the Swiss League for the Protection of Indigenous People, founded in 1908.⁵⁸ In 1913, Claparède together with a group of Swiss evangelicals including Eugène Mercier-Glardon, Louis Ferrière, and Edouard Junod set up an international office for the protection of 'native races', the Bureau International pour la Défense des Indigènes (hereafter Bureau International).⁵⁹ The promoters of this new office with approximately 300 Swiss members, many of whom had supported the Swiss anti-slavery association before the war, expressed rather unrealistic internationalist aspirations. They wanted their organization to become a 'Black Cross' in analogy to the international fame and size of another Swiss humanitarian movement, the Red Cross.⁶⁰ The declared aims of the Bureau International

⁵⁷ Harris to Rappard, 6 Jan. 1921, LoN, S 265, 1.

⁵⁸ On this see Ch. 1.

⁵⁹ For an unpublished study of the Bureau International, see Manuela Höfler, *Das Internationale Büro für Eingeborenenschutz: Eine Organisation im Umfeld von Kolonialpolitik und Völkerbund* (Lizentiatsarbeit der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Zürich, 2002).

⁶⁰ R. Claparède and E. Mercier-Glardon, *Un bureau international pour la défense des indigènes* (Geneva, 1917), 6.

were to 'develop among civilised peoples the realisation of their responsibility towards others; to obtain justice for the coloured nations without distinction of country or race; to co-ordinate the efforts of national associations for the protection of native races; to establish permanent ties between them and to create new leagues'.⁶¹ In other words, Claparède's organization saw itself as an international secretariat, linking the existing anti-slavery societies in various countries and furthering the exchange of information and centralizing their campaigning efforts.

The role of acting as a transnational hub for all existing anti-slavery bodies was by no means as straightforward as the statutes of the Bureau International attempted to convey. The main problem was that many of the organizations that had operated before the war no longer existed. The Secretary of the Société Anti-Esclavagiste de France, Baron Du Teil, had died in battle in 1918 and his death had put an end to French anti-slavery activism and to the correspondence that existed prior to the war.⁶² The remaining French humanitarian organization after the First World War was the Ligue pour la Protection des Droits de l'Homme, a popular middle-class organization founded in 1898 to defend civic liberties and justice, which, however, did not manifest any international aspirations.⁶³ In the Americas, the few organizations which focused on 'native rights' showed little interest in cooperating with European anti-slavery groups. In Rome, the Catholic Società Antischivista remained loyal to the Vatican's missionary objectives with little regard for international developments in Geneva.⁶⁴ In short, although the Bureau International claimed to be in contact with as many as thirteen humanitarian organizations in 1915, these contacts hardly stretched beyond the already existing correspondence with the British.⁶⁵

In the early years of the Bureau International's existence, the relationship between the Swiss and the British anti-slavery activists was friendly and cooperative. The Swiss were in need of administrative advice and financial support to run the Bureau's small secretariat and to publish its newsletter.⁶⁶ Harris and his committee, on the other hand, were eager to

⁶¹ League of Nations, *Handbook of International Organisations* (Geneva, 1923), 75.

⁶² On this see Ch. 1.

⁶³ W. D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme 1898–1945* (Stanford, Calif., 2007).

⁶⁴ On Italian anti-slavery activism after the First World War, see Ch. 4.

⁶⁵ *Bulletin de la Ligue Suisse pour la Défense des Indigènes* (July 1914–June 1915), 16.

⁶⁶ Bureau International to Harris, 28 Mar. 1920, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471. The Bureau International's machinery at that stage did not go beyond the committee of the Swiss organization. In fact, it would only start publishing its own newsletter in 1926. See *Circulaires du Bureau International pour la Défense des Indigènes*, 1–18 (Geneva, 1926–38). Citations from this French and English newsletter are hereafter referred to as

get a firm position on the new platform in Geneva.⁶⁷ The Bureau's greatest problem was a lack of funds. Harris initially used his contacts with British humanitarian organizations, appealing to the trustees of a London philanthropic association, the Rebecca Hussey Slave Charity, for financial assistance on behalf of the Bureau International.⁶⁸ In return, and to keep the costs of British anti-slavery lobbying activities in Geneva down, Harris stayed with his 'friends', the Claparède whenever he travelled to Switzerland. As the British Secretary put it, 'the brightness and cheerfulness of [the Claparède] home, coupled with the beauty of Geneva', was 'one of the compensations of a very hard fight for subject peoples'.⁶⁹

Until 1921, it seemed that the Bureau International would act as both an international and local representative of anti-slavery interests. Rappard had even suggested that the Geneva-based pressure group should be officially represented in the Mandates Commission. Claparède's name was briefly put forward but the appointment failed because it was not submitted in time to be considered for approval by the League of Nations' Council.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the British anti-slavery leadership continued to be supportive of Swiss efforts. In June 1921 the Anti-Slavery Society even asked its Swiss analogue to attend on its behalf an international conference on the traffic in women and children hosted by Dame Rachel Crowdy, the British head of the Social Questions and Opium Traffic Sections of the League of Nations.⁷¹

Yet, only a few months later, the mutual admiration and joint efforts of these European-based evangelical humanitarians was shaken by the renewed claims of W. E. B. Du Bois. In August and September 1921, Du Bois gathered twenty-six groups of African delegates, including colonial officials, academic, and students groups in London, Brussels, and Paris for the Second Pan-African Congress. This time, the congress directly addressed the League of Nations to which it put forward three resolutions.⁷² First, the delegates of the Congress requested that the League of Nations should set up a particular administrative unit or agency to deal with 'the conditions and needs of native Negro labour, especially in Africa'.⁷³ Secondly, they

Circular of the Bureau International, followed by the number of the issue and the year of publication.

⁶⁷ For the prewar correspondence between Harris and Claparède, see Ch. 1.

⁶⁸ Harris to C. Wigan (Rebecca Hussey Slave Charity), 31 Mar. 1920, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471.

⁶⁹ Harris to Claparède, 20 Sept. 1920, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471.

⁷⁰ Rappard to Mercier-Glardon, 25 Jan. 1921, LoN, R 6.

⁷¹ Drummond to Anti-Slavery Society, 7 June 1921, LoN, R 643.

⁷² The resolutions of the Second Pan-African Congress were published by W. E. B. Du Bois as a 'Manifesto to the League of Nations', *The Crisis*, 23, 1 (1921), 12–28.

⁷³ As quoted in Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 322.

demanded that 'a man of Negro descent' be appointed as a member of the Mandates Commission. And thirdly, addressing the League's 'vast moral power of public world opinion and of a body conceived to promote Peace and Justice among men', they asked it to pay 'careful attention to the condition of civilised persons of Negro descent throughout the world'.⁷⁴

The leaders of the Bureau International and Harris differed in their appreciation of this Pan-African initiative. While the Swiss supported the resolutions of the Pan-African Congress, Harris could not conceal his personal irritation with Du Bois's activities.⁷⁵ The Pan-African Congress's endorsement of progressive self-determination for African territories went far beyond Harris's ideas of 'trusteeship'. As Harris complained to the Bureau International, Du Bois had 'complicated things badly'.⁷⁶ This reaction echoed earlier misgivings Harris had uttered when confronted with radical initiatives. A decade earlier, in 1911, the Anti-Slavery Society had refused to attend the First Universal Race Congress, a meeting held in London to discuss international race relations.⁷⁷

The disagreement over the endorsement of Du Bois's demands formed the beginning of a period of increased tension between Harris and his Swiss fellow campaigners. The Bureau International continued to harbour ambitions of becoming an international centre for organizations concerned with indigenous welfare in Geneva, and to hold periodic international conferences in the Swiss city—a plan of which the Anti-Slavery Society did not approve.⁷⁸ It became increasingly apparent that the Anti-Slavery Society was hostile towards any group which did not act as a 'sister organization' to the London headquarters. The disagreement about the Pan-African resolutions also demonstrated that the activities and concerns of the Bureau International and the Anti-Slavery Society overlapped and that the two bodies were competing for international influence. The difference between the two associations was not even clear to the League's administrative staff. Indeed, in the League's inventory of international organizations, the names of the Swiss and British organizations had been merged as 'Bureau International pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage et la Protection des Indigènes', an 'incorrect and foolish' mistake which the secretaries of both agencies found unacceptable.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Fryer, *Staying Power*, 322.

⁷⁵ Bureau International to E. Drummond, 16 Sept. 1921, LoN, R 39.

⁷⁶ Harris to Junod, 29 July 1921, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 432.

⁷⁷ For the Anti-Slavery Society's response to the Universal Race Congress in 1911, see RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 432. On the significance of the Universal Race Congress, see also Sluga, *Internationalism*, 27–30.

⁷⁸ Harris to the Bureau International, 7 Apr. 1920, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471.

⁷⁹ Harris to Claparède, 15 Mar. 1922, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471.

In July 1922, in a bid to strengthen its position, the Bureau International suggested a scheme to reorganize its machinery and to expand its international competences.⁸⁰ Concerned, Harris warned his fellow campaigners back in Britain that such a reorganization 'would doubtlessly lead on to a common policy, a common bulletin, and a *common purse*'.⁸¹ The Anti-Slavery Society declared that 'there was no intention' on its part to 'hand over its international work' to any other organization.⁸² This, of course, opened the floodgates on debate within and between the two bodies on their interests and the range of their influence, which ultimately was to put an end to effective cooperation. Interestingly, it was not the Geneva-based group which won out, a fact that can be explained by the Anti-Slavery Society's more established pedigree. Rather, events in 1922 were to strengthen the Anti-Slavery Society's impact on League affairs, while the Bureau International continued its campaign on a very reduced flame. As was to become evident, British anti-slavery activists rightly prided themselves on not needing the Swiss 'as a medium' between their society and the League of Nations to solve 'questions of an international character'.⁸³ In effect, the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society had already started their lobbying work on an issue which was to take centre stage during the interwar years: the revival of slavery in Ethiopia.

SLAVERY IN ETHIOPIA

It is revealing that the first major campaign against slavery launched in Geneva focused not on a mandate territory but on an independent country, which had been at the centre of colonial intrigues since Britain's colonization of Egypt in 1882.⁸⁴ This also offered an indication for the direction which anti-slavery activism was to take in the 1930s. On 4 January 1922, the Anti-Slavery Society sent Rappard a pamphlet that would determine the discourse on the revival of slavery in Africa throughout the interwar period. The authors of the pamphlet were Henry Darley, a British explorer and ivory poacher who had extensively travelled in

⁸⁰ E. Junod (Bureau International) to Harris, 30 July 1922, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22 G 471.

⁸¹ Harris to Roberts, 1 Aug. 1922, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22, G 471 (original emphasis).

⁸² Harris to Roberts, 1 Aug. 1922.

⁸³ Roberts to Harris, 5 Sept. 1922, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22, G. 471.

⁸⁴ This part of the chapter draws on Suzanne Miers's work on the abolition of slavery in Ethiopia, especially Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 66–86; Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in Ethiopia', *Slavery and Abolition*, 18, 3 (1997), 256–88. Also Miers, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues', 16–37.

Ethiopia, and N. A. Dyce Sharp, a specialist in tropical diseases. Under the heading *Slave Trading and Slave Owning in Abyssinia*, the authors claimed to offer a 'detailed and authoritative account . . . of present day conditions' in Ethiopia.⁸⁵ The pamphlet presented a condensed version of a series of articles by the same authors, previously brought to public notice through the *Westminster Gazette*, a small Liberal newspaper in London.

As Sir Philip Baker, personal assistant of Secretary-General Eric Drummond, commented in his accompanying letter, the pamphlet raised delicate issues and Baker warned that Ethiopia was 'a sea of troubles in which many international scoundrels hope profitably to fish'.⁸⁶ The country was rich in resources and situated at the heart of British, French, and Italian strategic and economic interests. Thus, Ethiopia was surrounded by colonial territories, notably the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in the north and west, British East Africa (later Kenya) and Uganda in the south and west, French, British, and Italian Somaliland in the east and south, and Italian Eritrea on the Red Sea Coast. But Ethiopia was also an imperial power in its own right: after its victory against Italy at the battle of Adwa in 1896, Ethiopia's ruler, Menelik II, had consolidated Ethiopia's territorial expansion—a process which had begun with his predecessor Tewodros II in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁷ Between 1889 and 1913 the Ethiopian regent successfully established control over the northern provinces and extended Ethiopia's boundaries to the west and south, absorbing large numbers of conquered peoples and establishing a relatively stable government over provincial chiefs.⁸⁸ Not least due to Menelik's expansionist policies, slavery came to play a crucial role in Ethiopia's economic and social life.⁸⁹

According to the accounts of late nineteenth-century Western travellers, slaves were one of the primary 'commodities' within the country and slavery manifested itself in various social and economic characteristics.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ H. Darley and N. A. Dyce-Sharp, *Slave Trading and Slave Owning in Abyssinia* (London, 1922), enclosed in Baker to Rappard (confidential), 4 Jan. 1922, LoN, R 60.

⁸⁶ Baker to Rappard (confidential), 4 Jan. 1922, LoN, R 60.

⁸⁷ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1955–1991* (Addis Ababa, 2001 rev. edn), 60–7. For a general introduction to Ethiopian history, see also Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Oxford, 1998) and Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002).

⁸⁸ Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, 77–90.

⁸⁹ Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in Ethiopia', 256–88.

⁹⁰ On the social and economic characteristics of slavery in Ethiopia, see Timothy Fernyhough, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade in Southern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century', in William Gervase Clarence-Smith (ed.), *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1989), 103–33; Fernyhough, 'Women, Gender History, and Slavery in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia', in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joe Miller (eds), *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World and the Medieval North Atlantic*, i (Athens, Oh., 2007), 215–36; Guluma Gumeda,

To the European observer one of its most notorious occurrences was the 'gabbar system', a serf system sanctioned by the government under Menelik's rule.⁹¹ Gabbars were liable to render service to the government—or to any soldier or government official to whom the government assigned that service in lieu of pay—for a number of days per week.⁹² Provincial chiefs aided by military forces raided slaves from local communities using them as revenue. Slaves were also held by the Ethiopian clergy as status symbols and sources of unpaid labour. Unlike the First World War, there were no effective attempts at reducing the unfree population.⁹³ Rather, the country's economic and social reliance on slave labour had also led to an increase in slave-trading in northern Ethiopia, which only declined substantially in the interwar years.⁹⁴

Already before the First World War, alarming evidence of this increase in slave-raiding and slave-trading had begun to circulate within the British Foreign Office.⁹⁵ The latter, however, preferred not to take action for fear of damaging diplomatic relations with Italy and France, and jeopardizing the possibility of securing economic concessions in Ethiopia.⁹⁶ Thus, although the British government had known of Darley's eyewitness account of slavery in Ethiopia since 1918, it had categorized it as 'unreliable' and the evidence had been suppressed until 1922, when the Anti-Slavery Society decided that it should be put before the League of Nations in the form of a pamphlet.⁹⁷ As the Anti-Slavery Society professed with some urgency, the pamphlet revealed that the situation in Ethiopia was a cause for 'serious concern and apprehension', and that this

'Subsistence, Slavery and Violence in the Lower Omo Valley, ca. 1898–1940's', *Northeast African Studies*, 12, 1 (1990), 5–19.

⁹¹ For a description of the gabbar system, see *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1943), 89.

⁹² Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 67.

⁹³ On the abolition of slavery in Ethiopia, see S. J. Coleman, 'Gradual Abolition or Immediate Abolition of Slavery? The Political, Social and Economic Quandary of Emperor Haile Selassie I', *Slavery and Abolition*, 29, 1 (2008), 65–82; James McCann, '“Children of the House”: Slavery and its Suppression in Lasta, Northern Ethiopia, 1916–1935', in Suzanne Miers and Richard Robert (eds), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1988), 332–61.

⁹⁴ On the problem of slave-trading in Ethiopia: R. Pankhurst, 'The Ethiopian Slave Trade in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Statistical Inquiry', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9, 1 (1964), 220–8; Jon R. Edwards, 'Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Economic Reorganisation of Ethiopia, 1916–1935', *African Economic History*, 11 (1982), 3–14; Timothy Fernyhough, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade in Southern Ethiopia', 103–33; Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Etiopia: Border Enclaves in History, 1897–1938', *Journal of African History*, 40, 3 (1999), 433–46.

⁹⁵ Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in Ethiopia', 256–88.

⁹⁶ Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery', 263–5.

⁹⁷ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 70.

needed to 'be addressed by the British Government . . . and the other European Governments which have territorial responsibilities in that quarter of Africa'.⁹⁸

The pamphlet's message was undiplomatically direct. It attacked the Ethiopian government for allowing slavery and the slave trade to flourish and depicted the country as 'the last great home of slavery in Africa and therefore in the World'.⁹⁹ The pamphlet conveyed images of African backwardness and savagery which echoed late nineteenth-century Victorian perceptions of the 'Dark Continent'. After some general comments on Ethiopia's state of 'barbarism' and 'unsanitary squalor', the authors centred their argument on the question of slavery and slave-trading, using harrowing images of slave caravans and slave raids.¹⁰⁰ They maintained that slavery in Ethiopia was a 'scandalous state of affairs', its extent 'almost beyond belief'. The two authors also criticized the 'hushing-up policy' and forcefully asserted that 'any visitor [could witness] in Addis Ababa the worst forms of slavery that have ever cursed the Dark Continent—slavery, open, cruel, and fiendish, unfettered by European interference and hardly discountenanced by the Foreign Offices of the European Powers'.¹⁰¹

But it was difficult to know how to address these protestations. Ethiopia was not a member of the League of Nations and therefore not bound by its Covenant. Its status as an independent African country placed it outside the terms of the Mandates Commission, which would have allowed the League to step in. Also, although Ethiopia had long been suffering from a 'serious image problem' in Europe mainly due to its corrupt administration and internal feuds, so far no European government had been prepared to officially confirm the alleged humanitarian scandal.¹⁰² It was therefore with little confidence that, in September 1922, Harris once again travelled to Geneva, hoping to lobby the League into confronting the Ethiopian issue and taking steps towards the abolition of slavery in Africa. Because he lacked an official mandate, and—as he later complained—was hampered by the Foreign Office's 'unwillingness' to place information at the disposal of the Council, he had to find a British representative willing to second his cause in the League's second Assembly of September–October 1922.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ See the Anti-Slavery Society's introductory comments in Darley and Sharp, *Slave Trading*, 2.

⁹⁹ Darley and Sharp, *Slave Trading*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Darley and Sharp, *Slave Trading*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Darley and Sharp, *Slave Trading*, 10.

¹⁰² On Ethiopia's image problem, see Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, 119.

¹⁰³ Harris to Lugard, 29 Jan. 1923, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22, G 444.

What followed was a characteristic illustration of Harris's lobbying talents, and of the League's willingness to confront delicate social questions. Upon his arrival in Geneva, Harris allegedly 'burst' into the hotel room of one of his prewar acquaintances, the British delegate from New Zealand Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, a Conservative MP and expert on imperial and socio-economic policies. Harris pleaded with the latter to motion the League Assembly to create a committee against slavery.¹⁰⁴ Steel-Maitland did as requested and on 26 September 1922 the Council adopted a general resolution in which it instructed Drummond to compile a report based on information provided by member states on slavery in their own territories. The report was to be discussed at the next meeting of the General Assembly in autumn 1923.¹⁰⁵ Drummond was taken by surprise by the sudden turn of events, and admitted he had 'never read the debates in the Assembly as regards the question of slavery'.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, few people anticipated that League attention on African slavery would evolve so rapidly and in such a manner.

One person who was quick to react to the League's call for information on slavery was Lord Lugard, an eminent colonial officer who had recently retired from an influential career as an imperial soldier and colonial administrator in tropical Africa and had been appointed as the British member of the Mandates Commission in 1922 (a post which he was to retain until 1933).¹⁰⁷ Based on his military and colonial experiences in Central and East Africa and his appointment as governor-general of Nigeria, Lugard had just published a directive on colonial government titled *Britain's Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa* in which he reflected on how colonial authorities should deal with the remaining forms of slavery in Africa.¹⁰⁸ Now in contact with the Anti-Slavery Society, Lugard was keen to emphasize that slavery in Africa was a moral and economical evil and described how its gradual abolition had occupied him as an administrative problem for most of his career.¹⁰⁹ In reality, when confronted with slavery during his time in Nigeria, Lugard had mostly tried to keep the balance between minimal abolitionist policies and minimal disruption

¹⁰⁴ John H. Harris, *Freeing the Slaves* (London, 1925), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 72–3.

¹⁰⁶ Drummond to Rappard (confidential), 2 Dec. 1922, LoN, S 1669, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Callahan, *Mandates and Empire*, 72. For details on Lugard's career, see Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, 'Lugard, Frederick John Dealtry, Baron Lugard (1858–1945)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34628>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

¹⁰⁸ Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London, 1922), 354.

¹⁰⁹ Lugard, *Dual Mandate*, 370.

of the socio-economic status quo of the colony, so that slavery declined only slowly.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, in the early 1920s Lugard took the lead in setting the League's anti-slavery machinery into motion. Prompted by the Anti-Slavery Society and encouraged by the Council's request for information on slavery, Lugard at once tried to connect to the publicity surrounding the issue created by Darley and Sharp. In November 1922, he presented a confidential report on 'Slavery in Abyssinia' to the Secretary-General, emphasizing that 'the question of Slavery in Africa ha[d] been the foremost interest of [his] work in Africa for some thirty years', and 'that he would be glad to assist the League in its investigation of this subject'.¹¹¹ Lugard's report drew heavily on the accounts provided by Darley and Sharp, and it offered a scathing critique of the Ethiopian political system and of its socio-economic problems. Lugard suggested that, in order to address the problem of slavery, the League should set up a 'fact-finding mission' and send a European observer to Ethiopia. He condescendingly described the Ethiopians as 'ignorant, turbulent and very conceited people, suspicious of, and hostile to, Europeans', and added that only 'a man of large African experience and proved ability' would know how to deal with this assignment.¹¹²

It is not inconceivable that Lugard saw himself as the best choice for this role. However, he was experienced enough to know that a British lead in this scheme would enrage the French and Italian representatives at the League, and therefore stressed the need for international cooperation in the matter.¹¹³ Although he was well aware that the structure and functions of the League itself presented no legitimate claim for international intervention in Ethiopian affairs, he nevertheless suggested a scheme for administering the country that he himself acknowledged was 'little different in principle from the B-class of mandates'.¹¹⁴ Ethiopia, according to Lugard, was to be treated like the former German territories in West and Central Africa and placed under international control. Lugard also suggested military sanctions and partial occupation of the country should the Ethiopian government resist this intervention. 'Should it unfortunately become necessary to resort to coercion in order to remove obstruction, and compel fulfilment of pledges', Lugard reasoned, 'a threat that

¹¹⁰ Jan S. Hogendorn and Paul E. Lovejoy, 'The Development and Execution of Frederick Lugard's Policies toward Slavery in Northern Nigeria', *Slavery and Abolition*, 10, 3 (1989), 1-43.

¹¹¹ Lugard to Drummond, 10 Nov. 1922, enclosed 'Memorandum on Slavery in Abyssinia', LoN, R 61. Hereafter quoted as Lugard, 'Slavery in Abyssinia'.

¹¹² Lugard, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', 7.

¹¹³ Lugard, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', 7.

¹¹⁴ Lugard, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', 10.

each of the Powers would temporarily occupy a post in Abyssinian territory would have an immediate effect.¹¹⁵ Lugard did not leave much room for doubt that his abolitionist intentions and humanitarian ideals went hand in hand with a wish to increase European economic involvement in Ethiopia. 'International cooperation' on slavery, he predicted, would 'undoubtedly . . . promote the material interests of the Powers'.¹¹⁶

Drummond thanked Lugard politely for his input, stating that it would 'be of the utmost value' in preparing the report on the 'general question of slavery'. The Secretary-General also cautiously pointed out, however, that the question of how best to deal with Ethiopian slavery and slave-trading needed 'very careful consideration'.¹¹⁷ Before Drummond had the chance to formulate a more extensive reply, Lugard's report became the subject of great controversy within the League's Secretariat. The report deeply irritated Rappard, who strongly believed that the League's inquiry into slavery should be unlimited in scope and should 'geographically extend to all parts of the world'.¹¹⁸ By contrast, Italian Under-Secretary Bernardo Attolico, the Director of the League's Transit and Communications Section, was not so much concerned with the question of slavery but with what he thought was a British attempt at seeking opportunities for intervention in Ethiopia.¹¹⁹ He asked the Italian ambassador in London to 'discreetly draw the attention of the British government to the fact that Italy considered the propositions made by Lugard to the League of Nations as inopportune and unacceptable'.¹²⁰ Rappard thought the Italian reaction exaggerated, but insisted to Drummond that the dissemination of Lugard's report had to be stopped.¹²¹ The controversy came to a close when Drummond had to think better of his earlier, brief acknowledgement and instead cautioned Lugard that it would not be possible—at least not before the Assembly had obtained definitive evidence of the existence of slavery and the slave trade in Ethiopia—to carry out 'any portion of (Lugard's) scheme'. However, the Secretary-General also stated that he hoped the League might soon receive 'definite facts supported by unshakable evidence' from the Anti-Slavery Society.¹²²

The Anti-Slavery Society, which at the time extensively corresponded with Lugard on the question of Ethiopian slavery, was made aware of this and felt encouraged to continue its campaign. In March, Harris

¹¹⁵ Lugard, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', 10.

¹¹⁶ Lugard, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', 7.

¹¹⁷ Drummond to Lugard, 22 Nov. 1922, LoN, R 61.

¹¹⁸ Rappard to Drummond, 30 Dec. 1922, LoN, S 1669, 5.

¹¹⁹ Attolico to Drummond and Rappard (confidential), 2 Dec. 1922, LoN, S 1669, 5.

¹²⁰ Attolico to Drummond and Rappard, 2 Dec. 1922.

¹²¹ Rappard to Drummond (confidential), 6 Dec. 1922, LoN, S 1669, 5.

¹²² Drummond to Lugard (confidential), 28 Dec. 1922, LoN, S 1669, 5.

sent Rappard a pamphlet in which he reflected on the 'obligations' of the League 'with regard to the abolition of slavery'.¹²³ Harris made clear that the Anti-Slavery Society considered the problem of Ethiopian slavery as a test case for the League's disposition to deal with such issues and that his organization was determined to increase the pressure of his lobby and to challenge the League on its humanitarian responsibilities. A few months later, in August 1923, the Anti-Slavery Society again petitioned the Council of the League of Nations on the question of slavery in Ethiopia, this time with considerable backing from as many as forty-seven Liberal and a few Labour MPs, bishops, and Nonconformist supporters, as well as a few journalists.¹²⁴ The petition dramatically presented the fight against the 'African crime of man-stealing and man-owning' as 'one of the clearest and the most solemn of international engagements' and identified 'Slavery in Abyssinia' as the 'most serious' contemporary problem in this respect.¹²⁵ Though more elegantly phrased, the Anti-Slavery Society's suggestions on how to reform the matter closely resembled the scheme previously put forward by Lugard. Anti-slavery activists argued that, given 'the widespread nature of the evil', Ethiopia needed 'advice and assistance'—assistance that was best given in the 'form of a Mandate placed in the hands of more than one Power'. It also claimed that by placing Ethiopia under international control the League of Nations could 'confer upon Africa the greatest blessing which has yet visited the Dark Continent'.¹²⁶

Yet much to Harris's disappointment, these efforts at putting pressure on the Council and the Assembly to act on the question of slavery were cut short. Two weeks after the petition had been submitted, Rappard informed Harris that a month earlier, in July 1923, the Council had for reasons of 'economy' and concerns about alienating member states 'unfortunately' taken a resolution that prohibited the circulation amongst the Assembly of 'any statement emanating from private sources' which had not been transmitted 'by the government of the country of its authors'.¹²⁷ Rappard therefore privately suggested to Harris he should from now on

¹²³ Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, *Slavery and the Obligations of the League of Nations* (London, 1923), enclosed in Harris to Rappard, 26 Mar. 1923, LoN, R 62.

¹²⁴ Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, *Slavery and the League of Nations: The Appeal* (London, 1923), enclosed in Anti-Slavery Society to Drummond, 9 Aug. 1923, LoN, R 64 (hereafter quoted as Anti-Slavery Society, *Slavery and the League of Nations*).

¹²⁵ Anti-Slavery Society, *Slavery and the League of Nations*, 1.

¹²⁶ Anti-Slavery Society, *Slavery and the League of Nations*, 6.

¹²⁷ Rappard to Harris (confidential), 18 Aug. 1923, LoN, S 1669, 3. For the Council's decision, see League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 4, 5–8 (1923), 938.

use Foreign Office channels to circulate his society's appeals.¹²⁸ But, much to Harris's regret, the Foreign Office felt unable to present the petition and did not want to take responsibility of its contents or to lend it an 'official countenance'.¹²⁹

Around the same time, the preparations for the campaign against slavery in Ethiopia came to a sudden halt. On 12 August 1923, the head of the Ethiopian government and successor of Menelik, Ras Tafari Makonnen, who after his coronation in 1930 would be known as Emperor Haile Selassie I, applied for membership of the League of Nations. Tafari claimed that as an isolated Christian state surrounded by Muslim powers, Ethiopia depended on the collective security offered by the League.¹³⁰ Already in 1918, Ras Tafari had begun a public relations campaign to consolidate his image as a reformer and a diplomat.¹³¹ The timing of the Ethiopian application for League membership, however, had also to do with growing apprehension amongst the Ethiopian elite that a British anti-slavery campaign would ultimately threaten Ethiopian independence.¹³²

The Ethiopian request for membership gave rise to tense debates about whether the African country could legitimately claim to be a civilized nation.¹³³ The application was successful mainly thanks to support of the French government which was pursuing economic interests in Ethiopia, and had previously dismissed the slavery allegations against the African country as rumours. Although the British government believed Ethiopia was 'unfit' for membership, it reluctantly agreed to its adherence on condition that the latter provided regular reports on slavery.¹³⁴ The Anti-Slavery Society on the other hand hoped that League membership would force the Ethiopian government to comply with any international and humanitarian standards set up in Geneva.

In many ways, this evolution of the debate about Ethiopian slavery indicated a shift in the Anti-Slavery Society's ability to shape policy in Geneva. By 1924, the freedom that British philanthropists believed they enjoyed during the organization's early experimental phase, and which allowed for much more liberal interactions and information transfer, was

¹²⁸ Rappard to Harris, 18 Aug. 1923.

¹²⁹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1923), 99.

¹³⁰ On this see Jean Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations: Ethiopia as a Civilised Nation', *Journal of the History of International Law*, 8 (2006), 220.

¹³¹ Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, 119–21.

¹³² Antoinette Iadorola, 'Ethiopia's Admission into the League of Nations: An Assessment of Motives', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8 (1975), 614.

¹³³ Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', 219–23.

¹³⁴ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 79.

coming to an end. In the same year, the Anti-Slavery Society also lost its most valuable ally within the League of Nations when, in July 1924, Rappard resigned his post as Director of the Mandates Section.¹³⁵ Eager to maintain the contact and international connection with Rappard, Harris offered him the honorary position of Vice-President of the Anti-Slavery Society.¹³⁶ Rappard, who probably wanted to avoid being viewed as too close to British interests, refused the 'most flattering invitation' on the grounds that he was a foreigner and that his impending appointment as a member of the Mandates Commission, of which in 1925 he became one of the leading strategists, would make 'such a position untenable'.¹³⁷

THE SLAVERY CONVENTION

One of the results of the international controversy surrounding the question of slavery in Ethiopia was that it acted as a catalyst for the League's further work on slavery. In December 1923, in the wake of Maitland's call for the League to address the issue, the Council decided to develop as complete a picture of the existence of slavery as possible. A questionnaire was dispatched to all countries in which slavery had existed, asking them for details on measures taken to abolish it, and on the results of abolition. The replies to this enquiry, however, were unsatisfactory, and the information provided by the government was judged by the Anti-Slavery Society to be 'inadequate'.¹³⁸ As Suzanne Miers has shown, most European states answered that there had never been any slavery in their territories or that it no longer existed. With regard to slavery in colonial dependencies, British, French, Portuguese, and Belgian colonial officials only sent partial or untrue answers.¹³⁹ In spring 1924, the League Council therefore decided to take further action by appointing a temporary body as part of the Mandates Section to gather more in-depth intelligence about slavery. This corresponded to one of the Anti-Slavery Society's chief expectations, namely that the League should have a permanent body to deal with slavery similar to the one which had been formed in 1920 to combat trafficking in women and children.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Roberts to Claparède, 8 July 1924, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22, G 471.

¹³⁶ Harris to Rappard, 6 Nov. 1924, LoN, R 70.

¹³⁷ Rappard to Harris, 14 Nov. 1924, LoN, R 70.

¹³⁸ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1924), 147.

¹³⁹ For a detailed discussion of the answers to the questionnaire, in which the Council of the League of Nations asked all countries to list the measures they had taken to eradicate slavery, see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 101–2.

¹⁴⁰ Barbara Metzger, 'Towards an International Human Rights Regime during the Inter-War Years: The League of Nations' Combat of Traffic in Women and Children', in

The Council's request, however, gave rise to a new case of competition. There was already an organization in Geneva dealing with questions of labour on a global scale, the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹⁴¹ The ILO was a semi-autonomous body, which had been created as a result of the stipulations of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. It had been founded as a compromise between socialist and revolutionary forces and reformist liberal ideas and was based on unique tripartite representations by governments, labour, and employer groups. Its motto was that world peace could only be secured through social justice, and it strove to improve the living of workers, albeit without challenging capitalism as the basis on which the world economy should be ordered.¹⁴² The ILO operated through annual international labour conferences, at which member states formulated international labour standards through conventions and recommendation and elected a governing body. The latter met periodically to discuss ILO policies. Finally, like the League, it appointed a secretariat to support its activities, the International Labour Office, which was headed by the French Socialist Albert Thomas. The secretariat acted as an administrative body and a research and documentation centre.

Despite the ILO's physical proximity to the League of Nations in Geneva, the relationship between the two institutions was only loosely defined. The League Council had some influence as to the election of the ILO governing body, while the League Assembly approved the ILO's budget and provided its revenues, and the two institutions shared statistical data. Beyond that, however, the ILO was barely integrated into the League's machinery and the two institutions functioned as 'separate, often cooperating but sometimes rival agencies'.¹⁴³ Their problematic

Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (eds), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c.1880–1950* (Basingstoke, 2007), 54–79; Daniel Gorman, 'Empire Internationalism, and the Campaign against the Traffic in Women and Children in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19, 2 (2007), 186–216.

¹⁴¹ Historians have shown much interest in the International Labour Organization in recent years and they have used its rich archive to produce detailed studies on aspects of global social planning as well as transnational histories of experts and actors. For detailed bibliographies, see the edited volumes by Jasmien van Daele, Magali Rodriguez Garcia, Geert van Goethem, and Marcel van der Linden, *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labor Organization and its Impact on the World during the Twentieth Century* (Berne, 2010); Isabelle Lespinet-Moret, and Vincent Viet (eds), *L'Organisation internationale du travail: Origine, développement, avenir* (Rennes, 2011); Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds), *Globalizing Social Rights: The ILO and Beyond* (Basingstoke, 2013).

¹⁴² Sandrine Kott, 'Arbeit: Ein Transnationales Objekt? Die Frage der Zwangsarbeit im "Jahrzehnt der Menschenrechte"', in Christina Benninghaus et al. (eds), *Unterwegs in Europa: Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte* (Frankfurt, 2008), 301–21.

¹⁴³ Martin D. Dubin, 'Transgovernmental Processes in the League of Nations', *International Organization*, 37, 3 (1983), 482–3.

relationship would soon be tested by the question of what kind of people should be appointed as 'experts' on slavery.

In 1924—the debate about the creation of an international commission to tackle the problem of slavery was in full swing in the League—Harold Grimshaw (1880–1929), the British chief of section of the diplomatic division at the ILO and permanent representative of the organization on the League's Mandates Commission, put forward an unexpected suggestion. Grimshaw, a former lecturer in public administration and assistant lecturer in economic history at the London School of Economics, proposed that the inquiry on slavery should be assigned to the ILO. His argument was that 'the conditions which constitute slavery are in fact conditions of labour' and 'among the institutions of the League there is already existing one which is "competent" with regard to labour conditions, namely, the International Labour Organization'.¹⁴⁴ Grimshaw professed that leaving the question of slavery to the ILO had a range of advantages. The ILO already had staff 'more experienced in these matters than any other existing international staff', which meant less expense for the League. And more importantly, the issue of slavery would 'be removed (as far as it can be removed) from the political arena into a more technical one'.¹⁴⁵

Grimshaw, who had a particular interest in the problem of native labour, was obviously keen to move the slavery question to his own agency to strengthen its authority in this respect, because colonial labour issues hardly featured at all in the work of the ILO at the time.¹⁴⁶ They would later be partly addressed in the drafting of a Forced Labour Convention in the 1930s, a result of cooperative efforts between the Anti-Slavery Society and the ILO.¹⁴⁷ Grimshaw's argument in favour of a more technical and less political approach to slavery conducted through the agency of the ILO was not heard by the Council of the League of Nations. Rather, in 1924, the League developed its own response by establishing the first of what became three specialized technical bodies, beginning with the Temporary Slavery Commission (hereafter Temporary Commission, 1924–5).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Grimshaw to Harris, 4 Feb. 1924, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 446.

¹⁴⁵ Grimshaw to Harris, 4 Feb. 1924, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 446.

¹⁴⁶ On this see Daniel R. Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization: The International Labour Organization 1940–1970* (Basingstoke, 2012), 17–27.

¹⁴⁷ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 134–51. Also, J. P. Daughton, 'ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years', in Kott and Droux, *Globalizing Social Rights*, 85–97.

¹⁴⁸ On the two subsequent expert commissions on slavery, the Committee of Experts on Slavery (1932) and the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery set up in 1934, see Chs. 3 and 5.

In theory, the Temporary Commission—formed as a subcommission within the Mandates Section and programmed to exist for two years only—was conceived as an independent body of experts who would collect and critically assess evidence on slavery in League member countries. In reality, the commission was composed of eight members—all but Grimshaw former colonial officials—for whom independence from their own countries would prove impossible.¹⁴⁹ The inclusion on the commission of a representative from an anti-slavery organization was briefly debated and Rappard supported it as an ‘extremely useful’ suggestion.¹⁵⁰ Claparède even recommended the Vice-President of the Bureau International, the Swiss Protestant missionary and anthropologist Henri-Alexandre Junod, for the post.¹⁵¹ But internal misinformation delayed the consideration of his application by the Council and left anti-slavery organizations with no representative in the commission.

On 9 and 10 July 1924, the delegates of the Temporary Commission spent their first few sessions debating the body’s function and devising how it should conduct its investigation. Lugard who had been appointed as the British member rightly complained that the commission’s terms of office were ‘very indistinct and nebulous’.¹⁵² It was unclear, according to Lugard, whether the intention was to ‘report on the best means of suppressing slavery’, or merely to discuss ‘the results achieved by each Power and the methods it has employed’.¹⁵³ Also, if it was the commission’s task to collect information on slavery from governments and institutions throughout the world and to ‘sift and collate their evidence’, then this raised further questions about the kind of evidence the commission should accept.¹⁵⁴

Acknowledging that the League’s first inquiry into the existence of slavery had been unsatisfactory, the delegates largely agreed that it was necessary to include information from non-governmental organizations, philanthropic associations, and private persons but they were also concerned

¹⁴⁹ The Temporary Commission was chaired by the conservative colonial expert from Belgium, Albrecht Gohr; the Portuguese representative Freire d’Andrade acted as Vice Chairman. For the appointment of the commission’s members and for Lugard’s role in the process, see LoN, R 70. For more details on the individual members see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 102–6.

¹⁵⁰ Claparède to Rappard, 13 May 1924, LoN, R 64.

¹⁵¹ Claparède to Rappard, 13 May 1924. On the Junods see also, Patrick Harries, *Butterflies and Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries and Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa* (Oxford, 2007), 35–61, esp. 58–60.

¹⁵² See Minutes of the First Session of the Temporary Slavery Commission, First meeting, Geneva, 9 July 1924, Lon Archives, TSC LoN A.18.1924.vi.

¹⁵³ First meeting, Geneva, 9 July 1924.

¹⁵⁴ See Minutes of the First Session of the Temporary Slavery Commission, Fourth meeting, Geneva, 10 July 1924.

about 'wounding the legitimate susceptibilities of the Governments'.¹⁵⁵ The Temporary Commission obviously needed the intelligence, ideas, and potentially also the connection to the public that non-governmental agencies could offer, but at the same time they did not want to subvert the principle of state sovereignty. In the end the commission decided to accept information from organizations officially designated by their governments.

Given the Anti-Slavery Society's established name and international reputation, the Foreign Office had little choice but to designate it as a 'reliable' source of evidence.¹⁵⁶ But Harris was well aware that he was not very 'popular' with British civil servants in Whitehall who feared the Anti-Slavery Society's publicity on colonial labour questions and resented its attempts to pressure the British government into taking a stance against slavery in other countries. He confided to Darley, not without amusement, that he was considered a 'thundering nuisance', and that the Foreign Office probably wished for them both 'to pay a visit to Abyssinia together, and meet with some kind of accident which would put a termination to [their] activities'.¹⁵⁷

Rather than simply relying on Foreign Office channels, the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society continued to liaise with Lugard who considered himself as independent from Whitehall.¹⁵⁸ Not least due to the fact that Harris directly supplied him with information on slavery, Lugard became one of the members of the commission who showed extraordinary motivation 'to meet people and discuss questions'.¹⁵⁹ He would spend hours reading and collating data and preparing the commission's discussions.¹⁶⁰ Lugard's commitment impressed Rappard, who drily noted that 'at least, (one) of the members of the Commission intend(ed) to pull this question of slavery out of the morass in which the lack of interest evinced by the States concerned has so far left it'.¹⁶¹

Harris too was 'reasonably satisfied' with the Temporary Commission's approach, but Grimshaw was more critical of its methods and progress. He complained to Harris privately about the lack of reports and information coming in and deplored the fact that the members of the commission were acting as national representatives rather than as 'independent' international experts.¹⁶² Grimshaw particularly disapproved of the Anti-Slavery

¹⁵⁵ Fourth meeting, Geneva, 10 July 1924.

¹⁵⁶ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 108

¹⁵⁷ Harris to Darley, 4 May 1925, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22, G 447.

¹⁵⁸ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 103.

¹⁵⁹ Harris to Grimshaw, 1 June 1923, LoN, R 70.

¹⁶⁰ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 103.

¹⁶¹ Rappard to Secretary General Drummond, 26 Apr. 1924, LoN, R 70.

¹⁶² Grimshaw to Harris, 9 Feb. 1925.

Society's tactic of supplying 'its delegate', Lugard, and not the commission as a whole, with information concerning slavery.¹⁶³ Such criticism met with little understanding from the Anti-Slavery Society's London headquarters, which saw no contradiction between furthering British leadership within an international commission when promoting the solution of an international problem.¹⁶⁴

Much to Harris's satisfaction, Lugard took the lead in the Temporary Commission's second session, which was devoted to establishing an agreed international definition of slavery. In May 1925, the Anti-Slavery Society addressed a memorandum to the commission in which it underlined 'the necessity of defining . . . what practices may be said to-day to amount to modern slavery' and suggested the adoption of an international convention.¹⁶⁵ In the autumn of the same year, Lugard, together with the Temporary Commission, elaborated a draft for a Slavery Convention in which he argued that slave traders on the high seas should be treated as pirates, liable to search and seizure anywhere; that countries that allowed slave-trading should be expelled from the League; and slaving should be punished with the death penalty.¹⁶⁶ The draft also listed various forms of slave ownership, including forms of coercive and trafficked labour such as domestic slavery, debt bondage, and sham adoptions. The draft also proposed to end forced labour—a common and increasingly publicized problem in European colonies. Lugard succeeded in getting a revised, weaker version of the draft supported by the British diplomat, peace campaigner, and League architect Lord Robert Cecil who presented it to the Sixth Commission of the League Assembly.¹⁶⁷

In response, the Assembly appointed a draft committee consisting of British, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Dutch delegates who were given the responsibility of formulating a convention that would supplement all previous international agreements on slavery and slave-trading, including the Brussels Act. During long and animated meetings that brought to light important differences of opinion, the delegates to the draft committee reviewed the British proposal. The French delegates objected to the slave trade being treated as piracy; the Portuguese delegate did not want

¹⁶³ Grimshaw to Harris, 9 Feb. 1925.

¹⁶⁴ Harris to Grimshaw, 12 Feb. 1925, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 446.

¹⁶⁵ Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, *The Abolition of Slavery: Appeal to the League of Nations* (London, 1925), 4.

¹⁶⁶ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1925), 99–103. For insights into the drafting history of the 1926 Convention, see also Jean Allain, *The Slavery Conventions: The Travaux Préparatoires of the 1926 League of Nations Convention and the 1956 United Nations Convention* (Leiden, 2008), 31–166. Also, Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 121–33.

¹⁶⁷ Miers, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues', 28.

to include the treatment of forced labour.¹⁶⁸ With regard to slavery, the various related forms of labour exploitation mentioned in the original draft were substituted by a vague formulation that slavery was defined as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised'.¹⁶⁹

In 1925 the draft convention was circulated amongst the member states of the League to give them time to study it. Although Ethiopia had previously made a declaration in support of the British document, it offered no further comments on the proposed agreement.¹⁷⁰ In 1926, final negotiations over the slavery convention took place in a subcommittee of the League Assembly. France and Italy objected to the clause about piracy and the slavery and forced labour clauses were not strengthened. Rather, the treatment of the question of forced labour was deferred and handed to the ILO. (This led to the formulation of a Forced Labour Convention in 1930, which bound signatories to suppress forced and compulsory labour but—significantly—still allowed its use for a transitional period and for public purposes.¹⁷¹) Slavery was not immediately banned but the final wording of the convention simply stated that it should be progressively abolished and that each signatory would 'take the necessary steps' in the 'territories placed under its sovereignty' to prevent slave-trading and to bring about the complete abolition of slavery 'in all its forms'.¹⁷² But the agreement neither identified these 'forms', nor did it establish a time frame in which abolition should take place. With regard to applying the newly defined standards, the Convention merely expected the signatories to render one another 'every assistance with the object of securing the abolition of slavery and the slave trade', without giving any specifications about the transfer and exchange of information and the practicalities of the 'assistance' in question.¹⁷³ Last but not least, the new treaty did not foresee the creation of any organization or structure to deal with the implementation of its articles or to monitor its effects on the ground.

¹⁶⁸ The animated debates about the particulars of the Convention are covered in Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 123.

¹⁶⁹ For the full text of the Slavery Convention, see Knipping et al., *United Nations System*, 906–19.

¹⁷⁰ Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', 232.

¹⁷¹ Daniel R. Maul, 'The International Labour Organisation and the Struggle Against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present', *Labour History*, 48, 4 (2007), 477–500, 480. This is not the place to discuss the wide-reaching debates which led to the Forced Labour Convention. For an analysis of its importance, see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 134–52.

¹⁷² Knipping et al., *United Nations System*, 908.

¹⁷³ Knipping et al., *United Nations System*, 910.

The protocol was opened for signature at Geneva on 25 September 1926. A month later, the Secretariat of the League of Nations notified the Anti-Slavery Society that the Convention presented a record of early ratifications, a fact which was encouraging but could also be taken to indicate that the convention lacked bite.¹⁷⁴ Despite the considerable amendments to the original proposal, British anti-slavery activists viewed the agreement as a major step forward in articulating a multilateral response to a humanitarian issue. The Anti-Slavery Society proceeded to organize a series of celebrations, regardless of a widespread domestic labour crisis at home that put issues between labour, industry, and government at the forefront of British politics and which culminated in a General Strike in the same year. Indeed, the achievements in Geneva were seen as a distraction from nationalist strife. Harris invited Steel-Maitland to attend a celebratory luncheon 'as a relief' from the strains of domestic labour disputes.¹⁷⁵

For the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society, their influence in propelling the issue of slavery onto the international stage was a source of great personal and national pride. Activists and supporters involved in the 'great work' including John St. Leo Strachey, the editor of the *Spectator*, and Lord Cecil were asked to give speeches and attend celebratory lunches in London.¹⁷⁶ Harris enthused that the 'mental vision' with which he had begun lobbying work in Geneva had become reality.¹⁷⁷ He also insisted that Cecil should provide the League with a document acknowledging Britain's anti-slavery efforts, on the grounds that it had 'really done an enormous amount of work in clearing up slavery conditions'.¹⁷⁸ As Harris put it: a document testifying to this 'would make extraordinarily good reading for the Assembly, and should enormously enhance British prestige in this respect'.¹⁷⁹

The focus on national prestige and achievement rather than on international cooperation efforts was symptomatic of deepening nationalist tendencies and raising ideological tensions, which revealed themselves in border disputes in Eastern and Central Europe, conflict in the Balkans, and the rise of Fascism in Italy.¹⁸⁰ The point was brought home, too, in

¹⁷⁴ H. Gilchrist (League of Nations Secretariat) to Harris, 15 Oct. 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 448.

¹⁷⁵ Anti-Slavery Society to Arthur Steel-Maitland, 12 Oct. 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 448.

¹⁷⁶ Harris to Strachey, 26 May 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 448. See also J. St. Leo Strachey, 'Slavery and the League of Nations, Speech delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society', 29 June 1926. RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S. 25, K 30.

¹⁷⁷ Harris to Lord Cecil, 18 Feb. 1927, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 448.

¹⁷⁸ Harris to Cecil, 18 Feb. 1927. ¹⁷⁹ Harris to Cecil, 18 Feb. 1927.

¹⁸⁰ Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 394–501.

the difficulties faced by the Bureau International, which now was little more than a one-man show run by Claparède. The year of the Slavery Convention formed the low point of the Swiss organization's presence in Geneva. Following Claparède's resignation in 1926 and his subsequent death, the Bureau International's dissolution became imminent.¹⁸¹ Overwhelmed by personnel and financial problems, the organization informed its followers that it had been 'more concerned with the moral influence of [its] work in the world than with mere financial considerations'.¹⁸² The leaders of the Swiss movement ironically pondered whether they should ask the League of Nations for 'several square yards of ground in its garden' where they might 'dig a grave [to] bury [their] archives'.¹⁸³ But just before its disintegration, the Bureau International was saved by a private donation, the source of which remains unclear. Although the organization continued to campaign well into the 1930s, and never abandoned faith in the impact of its work, it was rather pessimistic about the League's potential to implement the recently established international humanitarian standards. The Swiss organization gloomily predicted that, having adopted the Slavery Convention, the ratifying countries 'regarded (their) task as finished'.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, it would take a few years for the League to take up the issue of slavery again, at which point the balance of power within the League would be different but the question of slavery in Ethiopia would still hold centre stage.

¹⁸¹ Harris to Junod, 22 Dec. 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S22, G 471.

¹⁸² *Circular of the Bureau International*, 3, 2.

¹⁸³ *Circular of the Bureau International*, 3 (Geneva, undated, probably 1927), 1.

¹⁸⁴ *Circular of the Bureau International*, 3, 3.

3

Popular Anti-Slavery Campaigns in Britain, 1927–1933

By the late 1920s the optimism with which British humanitarians had greeted the creation of the League of Nations in its early days had given way to disillusionment. In 1928, the British anti-slavery leader John Harris took stock of the League's progress against slavery, deploring the fact that it had been 'slow' since the ratification of the Slavery Convention two years earlier. He criticized the fact that some member states with a notorious slavery problem, notably Abyssinia, had not yet ratified the Convention.¹ He also vented his feelings about how lobbying work in the Swiss city had become 'arduous' and 'difficult', adding that the Anti-Slavery Society was 'entirely dissatisfied' that the Assembly had made no progress in setting up a permanent body to supervise the implementation of the Convention. The 'time, energy and money' invested by his organization into lobbying work in Geneva, Harris concluded, could hardly be justified by the results obtained.²

The Secretary of the British Anti-Slavery Society was not alone in observing a shift in the League's openness to private initiatives. As Rappard candidly admitted when reviewing the League's progress three years later, by the late 1920s, Geneva had become 'one of the strategic points on the world's chessboard'. Foreign offices all over Europe, Rappard argued, now acted as the 'jealous guardians' of national policy and national sovereignty, and were therefore 'less tolerant of private opinions and of individual wishes, hopes, and fears'.³ The perceived erosion of the League's internationalist spirit and the fact that Geneva offered

¹ John H. Harris, *Draft Report on Work Done at the League of Nations Assembly in Geneva in 1928*, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 451, 4.

² Harris, *Draft Report*, 4.

³ William E. Rappard, *The Geneva Experiment* (Oxford, 1931), 58. On the crisis of publicity, see also Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–1945* (Manchester, 2011), 22–3.

a less hospitable environment to private information and expertise had consequences for how the Anti-Slavery Society redefined its campaigning strategies. The obvious antidote was to increase publicity on slavery and to refocus the campaign on the creation of public awareness without, however, abandoning coverage of League affairs.

The analysis that follows examines the domestic campaign against slavery launched in Britain between c.1926 and 1934, and the measures taken by the Anti-Slavery Society to increase its popular base and gain public support. Until the mid-1920s, much of the Anti-Slavery Society's manpower and finances were invested into lobbying and exerting influence in the British Parliament as well as the League of Nations Assembly. This strategy changed under the influence of Lady Kathleen Simon (1863–1955), who joined the organization's committee in 1927 and became one of the architects of a re-energized popular movement against slavery in Britain. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Simon set new trends in anti-slavery campaigning by issuing simplified emotional appeals to the public, and by combining old and new populist techniques across multiple media, including lantern lectures, cinema, pageantry, and the radio. Simon's engagement in educating the British public about slavery reached its high point in the celebrations of the Centenary of Emancipation in 1933/4 which saw an intensification of anti-slavery events, and meetings all over Britain. This growth of anti-slavery publicity, however, also reflected an awareness amongst anti-slavery leaders of the need to counter the lack of both popular support and a climate of political indifference at a time when native labour issues were only marginally covered by mainstream politics.

In the late 1920s, despite Britain's historical reputation as a custodian of abolitionism, the remaining existence of slavery in Africa was not an issue that attracted much public or political attention in Britain. In the imperial politics of the 1920s, strategic and economic interests took precedent over concerns about native welfare and African slavery.⁴ Neither the rising Labour Party nor the dominant Conservatives were actively addressing the issue of colonial reform, although Labour arguably tried to 'push colonial policy onto a more overtly humanitarian track'.⁵ In 1924, the Anti-Slavery Society had experienced a rare moment of increased political authority when Ramsay MacDonald's first, short-lived minority Labour

⁴ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964* (Basingstoke, 2002; first publ. 1975).

⁵ Susan Pedersen, 'The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: The Controversy over "Child Slavery" in Hong Kong, 1917–1941', *Past and Present*, 171 (May 2001), 166.

government—in power for nine months between January and November 1924—appointed a commission to enquire into certain questions affecting natives in the British East African dependencies. The commission included people whom the Anti-Slavery Society termed ‘friends of the natives’ such as John H. Harris, Charles Roden Buxton, and Edmund Dene Morel. But as early as April 1925, precipitated in part by the change of government and to the Anti-Slavery Society’s great disappointment, the Conservative Colonial Secretary Leo S. Amery (1924–9) suspended the meetings.⁶

In fact, throughout the interwar years the relationship between the Anti-Slavery Society and the British government remained strained.⁷ The Foreign Office resented the philanthropic organization for throwing unwelcome light on colonial labour practices, and for forcing the British government to take positions with regard to labour exploitation in other countries. As the controversy over slavery in Ethiopia in the early 1920s shows, British governments of whatever political hue disliked potentially explosive publicity on slavery issues and resented anti-slavery activists for stirring up political controversy.⁸ Imperial administrators were not keen on upsetting other colonial powers with charges of labour exploitation, or even worse appearing as exploiters.⁹ The Colonial Office therefore watched with trepidation as the Anti-Slavery Society uncovered a growing range of labour issues over an extensive geographical area, ranging from the abolition of chattel slavery in Ethiopia and Nepal to questions relating to forced labour in Kenya, the poor living conditions of the native population in Portuguese East and West Africa, the compulsory recruitment of juvenile labour in Southern Rhodesia.¹⁰

Traditionally, the creation of public awareness through pressure group campaigning was an essential motor of anti-slavery action and publicity. What characterized the successful abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the degree to which it mobilized public opinion. Historians agree that, between the 1780s and 1830s, public protest against slavery in Britain progressed into one of the most popular movements ever, mainly thanks to the political petitioning and campaigning activities of an extensive network of local anti-slavery

⁶ ‘Annual Report’, *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1925), 33–4.

⁷ On this, see Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Lanham, Md., 2003), 63.

⁸ See Ch. 2.

⁹ Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein, ‘Introduction’, in Miers and Klein (eds), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, Or., 1999), 1–15.

¹⁰ ‘Annual Report’, *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1927), 38–40. And ‘Annual Report’, *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1928), 34–9.

committees.¹¹ Abolitionists circulated material inspiring public outrage about slavery in an increasingly literate British society, thus building the public's political vocabulary.¹² The movement declined after reaching its peak with the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833.¹³ A hundred years later, the Anti-Slavery Society struggled to tie its modern campaign to the influential popular and political legacy of its forerunner.

In many respects the 1920s offered a very different context for pressure-group campaigning than the late eighteenth century. Anti-slavery activists attempted to galvanize the British public and the political elite at a time when newly founded organizations proclaimed inclusive, pluralist participation and could draw on a diverse middle-class mass membership.¹⁴ The achievement of universal suffrage in 1918 transformed Britain into a 'mass democracy' and had resulted in the emergence of a great number of voluntary associations and pressure groups. Many of these associations were connected to the rise of Labour and focused on popular domestic concerns.¹⁵ The Anti-Slavery Society faced the difficulty of conveying its importance in a context where issues ranging from the organization of rural housewives to the assistance of ex-servicemen had become targets for pressure group campaigning.

It was not the lack of endorsement from influential patrons that was the problem. Like other charitable organizations, the Anti-Slavery Society could count on the support of wealthy aristocratic and liberal politicians, notably Earl Beauchamp, Lord Daryngton, Lord Gainford, and Viscountess Gladstone. The anti-slavery leadership also drew on the services of distinguished civil servants Lord Olivier and Sir Montagu de Pomeroy Webb. Last but not least, the philanthropic association could claim the powerful patronage of leaders of the Anglican Church including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Durham.

¹¹ James Walvin, 'The Rise of British Popular Sentiment for Abolition, 1787–1832', in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), 150, 155; Seymour Drescher, 'Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade', *Past and Present*, 143 (May 1994), 136–66; David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780–1860* (London, 1991); Roger Anstey, 'The Pattern of British Abolitionism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in Bolt and Drescher, *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform*, 19–42. Also, Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

¹² James Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society, 1776–1846* (Baton Rouge, La., 1982), 58. Also, John R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995).

¹³ Howard Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery: 1833–1970* (London, 1972).

¹⁴ Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *Historical Journal*, 50, 4 (2007), 891–912.

¹⁵ McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations', 893–4.

When it came to popular membership, however, the organization's elitist profile had its disadvantages. The Anti-Slavery Society could hardly claim to be a popular grassroots movement: its draw on the middle class was weak, even less so on the working class. Between 1920 and 1928, the Society's membership had doubled from approximately 400 to 800 subscribers.¹⁶ These, however, were meagre numbers compared to the 400,000 people the League of Nations Union managed to recruit in Britain during the same period.¹⁷ While the latter successfully campaigned for the League of Nations' ideals of international peace and collective security, the Anti-Slavery Society struggled to expand its popular base.

Thus, although the organization was not socially exclusive, it mainly attracted an elite membership. Besides those adherents who belonged to renowned Quaker families, the organization drew a select group of humanitarian activists and internationalist thinkers to its meetings. This, for instance, included Save the Children founder Eglantyne Jebb; the Chairman of the League of Nations Union Gilbert Murray; the internationalist writer Leonard Woolf; the Professor of International Relations Alfred E. Zimmern; and the Secretary of the International Missionary Council J. H. Oldham, whose commitment to promote cooperation between missionaries and colonial administrators in Africa went back to the First World War.¹⁸ As before the First World War, the Anti-Slavery Society ran on a tight budget of small individual donations and occasional legacies. The general decline of financial gifts meant that by 1926 the organization faced a considerable deficit.¹⁹ In the spring 1927, anti-slavery leaders started a campaign to gain new subscribers and to secure their organization's survival.

KATHLEEN SIMON AND THE EDUCATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

One person who played a pivotal role in popularizing the Anti-Slavery Society's new domestic campaign was Kathleen Simon. Born in 1863 as Kathleen Harvey into an Irish middle-class family, Simon had trained as a nurse in Ireland before migrating to London where she worked as a midwife in some of the capital's poorest boroughs.²⁰ In 1917, Simon married

¹⁶ 'Subscriptions and Donations', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1928), 41–51.

¹⁷ McCarthy, *British People*, 4.

¹⁸ See cover of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1926).

¹⁹ See, for instance, 'Subscriptions and Donations', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1926), 38–47, and *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1927), 41.

²⁰ In the 1952 edn of *Who's Who*, Simon said of herself: 'Worked as a nurse among the London poor; devoted to the cause of freedom everywhere; to Ireland, to Zionism, to

the widowed lawyer and liberal politician Sir John Simon (1873–1954), who would later become Foreign Minister in Ramsay MacDonald's Coalition National government in 1931. In 1928, Kathleen Simon joined the Anti-Slavery Society and thanks to her relentless campaigning efforts quickly came to be seen as 'the champion of slaves all over the world'.²¹

Simon stood out in the male-dominated narrow group of late 1920s anti-slavery leaders and Quaker philanthropists. The society's affairs continued to be run by its energetic leader, John Harris. Long-time activist Charles Roden Buxton acted as vice-chairman of the organization until 1942,²² and Travers Buxton continued to serve as honorary secretary and editor of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* until 1945.²³ Simon's cultural and religious background set her apart from these middle- and upper-class Nonconformist men in their sixties who had been members of the Society for well over two decades. As a self-declared humanist, Simon adhered to a philosophy that promoted the value of human agency as opposed to the powers of a supernatural deity. Unlike the Harrises, Simon felt no evangelical or missionary calling. Nor did she easily fit into the long line of historically established philanthropic families like the Buxtons. Rather, as a former colonial subject, she identified with the Irish nationalist cause, and called for peace in Ireland, an engagement which put her at odds with Conservative forces in the British government.

It was Simon's marriage to John Simon (after which she became known as Lady Simon and in 1940, after her husband's elevation to the peerage, as Viscountess Simon) that gave her the necessary social credentials and political connections to take on a leading role in the Anti-Slavery Society.²⁴ The Simons not only shared an interest in anti-slavery (John Simon became Vice-President of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1928), but their relationship was one of shared liberal sympathies, mutual support, and intellectual exchange. John Simon endorsed his wife's anti-slavery campaign by encouraging her to use his connections to high-ranking civil servants in Whitehall to promote her cause. Early in 1928, for instance,

assisting backward and oppressed peoples' (p. 224). Also, Sybil Oldfield, 'Simon, Dame Kathleen Rochard, Viscountess Simon (1863/4–1955)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66994>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

²¹ Newspaper cutting, [untitled], 12 Apr. 1930. RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 8.

²² Obituary in *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1943), 89.

²³ Obituary in *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1945), 41–2. Also, Ch. 1.

²⁴ For an authoritative account of John Simon's career, see D. J. Dutton, 'Simon, John Allsebrook, first Viscount Simon (1873–1954)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, May 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36098>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

he arranged for an interview between his wife and the Conservative Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Godfrey Locker Lampson, whom he assured that Mrs Simon was a 'most practical woman' who would 'not meander or waste [his] time'.²⁵ Over the next few years, Kathleen Simon adopted the lobbying strategies of fellow campaigner John Harris and developed her own influential network. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, she corresponded with many of the contemporary political authorities in foreign and colonial affairs, including Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, Frederick Lugard, the Governor-General of Sudan Sir John Maffey, and colonial administrator Sir George Maxwell to name but a few.

Despite Kathleen Simon's evident desire to fit in with the British establishment, she quickly earned herself a reputation, especially in wealthy Conservative circles, as an 'overzealous', uncompromising, and sometimes outright problematic woman.²⁶ Many international officials experienced Simon's passionate commitment to the cause of abolition as she scrutinized their government's anti-slavery record and offered undiplomatic comment. When accompanying her husband to diplomatic receptions, Simon did not stick to small talk but questioned high-ranking diplomatic officials on the occurrence of slavery in their home countries. At an encounter with the entourage of the Ameer Feisal of the Hedjaz and Nejd, for instance she 'did not mince matters' but confronted those she called the 'big pots' by asking about the working conditions of pearl fishers in Southern Arabia.²⁷

It is difficult to pin down what triggered this long commitment to anti-slavery, a cause to which Simon remained faithful until her death in the 1950s. Her obituarist in *The Times* speculated that it was her Irish upbringing and 'that love of liberty and hatred of servitude' which she inherited from her Irish parents that inspired her activity.²⁸ When asked about the source of her engagement against slavery, Simon herself, however, did not make much of her Irish background. Instead she told journalists that her abolitionist beliefs originated from witnessing racial discrimination in the USA during a trip to Tennessee, and that an encounter with a marginalized African-American girl named Amanda

²⁵ John Simon to G. Locker-Lampson (FO), 11 Jan. 1928, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 1.

²⁶ Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, 2009), 105.

²⁷ K. Simon to Harris, 11 May 1932, reporting on a reception of the Ameer Feisal of the Hedjaz and Nejd, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 1.

²⁸ 'The Dowager Lady Simon. Champion of Slaves', *The Times*, 21 Apr. 1955.

had provoked her humanitarian 'conversion'.²⁹ American race relations were a persistent theme in Simon's writings and she collected information on racist crimes and corresponded with the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching.³⁰ Simon's interest in and knowledge of America's slaving history informed her views on contemporary slavery and on the social, economic, and political challenges faced by the African continent. 'America', Simon professed, 'is paying a hundredfold penalty in political, racial and economic embarrassment, for the crime of bringing into her cotton fields over 5,000,000 of slaves stolen from their peaceful homes in the African continent'.³¹ By analogy, Simon believed, Africa would be denied 'political peace' and 'economic prosperity' as long as it practised 'the madness and folly of holding . . . chattel slaves'.³²

Simon's involvement with charitable work for Africa was by no means extraordinary. Women's metropolitan-based activism on anti-slavery and on imperial issues had a tradition in Britain that went back to the late eighteenth century.³³ Female middle-class campaigning had been a crucial element of success in both early anti-slavery and foreign missionary movements.³⁴ This interest in philanthropic causes and social reform also shaped women's relationship with public life and politics over the centuries, and it helped women to gradually acquire more direct influence on political networks. Thus, missionaries like Alice Harris took an active part in drawing attention to labour exploitation in King Leopold's Congo, and in turning the humanitarian crisis into a political issue and ultimately into a successful humanitarian campaign.³⁵

Simon's contribution to anti-slavery activism in the interwar years also took place against the background of emerging anti-imperial and anti-racist campaigning both in Britain and on a global scale.³⁶ In the 1920s, transnational organizations based in the US such as Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (1914–30) and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (founded

²⁹ Newspaper cutting dated '1931' with the title 'Lady Simon's conversion', RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 10, 135.

³⁰ For a detailed account of Simon's role in transatlantic racial campaigning and politics, see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 103–45.

³¹ Kathleen Simon, *Slavery* (London, 1929), 266.

³² Simon, *Slavery*, 266.

³³ Clare Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790–1930s', in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (eds), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (New York, 2006), 230.

³⁴ On this see Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992).

³⁵ Kevin Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29, 2 (2001), 27–58. On Alice Harris, see also Ch. 1.

³⁶ Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home', 246.

in 1909) turned race relations and colonial exploitation into central issues of imperial politics and international relations. With the growth of an African presence in Britain after the First World War, the number of educated and radical middle-class women who championed political and humanitarian causes grew steadily.³⁷ Socialist writers like Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain embraced the ideas of the Fabian Society, a leading left-wing political think tank, on reforming British imperialism and promoting social justice. Politicians, notably the Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson, also regularly raised questions on Africa in the House of Commons.³⁸

Simon's attitude towards these younger and more radical interwar reformers and political activists was ambivalent. Unlike them, Simon was not a colonial critic, nor were her reformist views meant to challenge the British establishment. Rather, as she later insisted when accused of supporting the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, hers was a purely 'humanitarian' and 'non-political' involvement.³⁹ Simon's assertion that she did not 'meddle in such intricate affairs as politics' was a common one in the interwar years.⁴⁰ Being apolitical was—as research on voluntary associations in interwar Britain has shown—'the established modus operandi of the politics of pressure after the war'.⁴¹ In the eyes of anti-slavery leaders, having no declared political allegiance was essential to the construction of a truly 'public' opinion, which they regarded as a powerful tool to achieve political change.

Simon believed that 'public opinion', if properly stimulated and educated, was the key to increasing humanitarian sensibility in the world. 'Public opinion', Simon maintained with characteristic intensity, was 'at once the weakest and the strongest weapon in the cause of human progress: weak when dormant, but invincible when once roused to the pitch of zealous indignation'.⁴² This idea of empowering public opinion reflected a common strategy used by pressure groups to legitimize a

³⁷ The role of women in interwar humanitarian activism is emphasized by Clare Midgley, 'Introduction. Gender and Imperialism: Mapping the Connections', in Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998), 1–20. See also Barbara Bush, 'Britain's Conscience on Africa: White Women, Race and Imperial Politics in Interwar Britain', in Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism*, 200–23; Pedersen, 'Maternalist Moment', 161–202; Antoinette Burton, 'Some Trajectories of "Feminism" and "Imperialism"', *Gender and History*, 10, 3 (1998), 558–68.

³⁸ Bush, 'Britain's Conscience on Africa', 206.

³⁹ Simon to Storr, 22 Dec. 1938, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 1. Also, Ch. 6.

⁴⁰ Simon to Rocke, 1 Nov. 1936, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S. 25, K 1.

⁴¹ McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations', 893.

⁴² Simon, *Slavery*, 260.

political or reformist cause in the interwar years.⁴³ From the late eighteenth century onwards, politicians and reformers had professed that an informed and mobilized public opinion would be able to exert pressure on government and influence foreign affairs. As Helen McCarthy has shown in detail, after the First World War, organizations like the League of Nations Union used the claim 'that one spoke for the people' as a 'fast-track route to legitimacy'.⁴⁴

The other side of this argument was that it was the organization's primary duty to mobilize public opinion through the production of so-called 'publicity'. Publicity had been a central element of anti-slavery campaigning back in the eighteenth century and it continued to be regarded as the principal means of raising awareness in the 1920s. By the late 1920s, the techniques used by the Anti-Slavery Society to spread the word about slavery embraced the dramatic visual effects of lantern lectures and the wider outreach of new technologies of film projections and radio broadcasts. As will become clear during later discussions of Fascist anti-slavery campaigning, such publicity was not always easily distinguished from the political aims and pejorative connotations of 'propaganda'.⁴⁵ In both cases the resulting communications were accompanied by a specific rhetoric and imagery of slavery, although the spread of this message to the masses provided unforeseen challenges to the movement.

OLD AND NEW CAMPAIGNING TECHNIQUES

In the 1920s, British anti-slavery campaigning was a combination of old and new strategies deployed by abolitionists to draw attention to the continued existence of slavery in the world. Techniques of social agitation and mobilization elaborated a hundred years earlier, including mass gatherings, the lobbying of influential politicians, and the circulation of anti-slavery literature amongst the British public were still at the centre of anti-slavery protest.⁴⁶ But the Anti-Slavery Society increasingly adapted these strategies to incorporate the new media and technical advances of the 1920s. Similarly to the popular and cultural strategies deployed in the interwar years to make British imperialism part of popular entertainment, anti-slavery propaganda tried to appeal to a wider public by using

⁴³ McCarthy, *British People*, 15.

⁴⁴ McCarthy, *British People*, 15.

⁴⁵ On the elision between publicity and propaganda, see McCarthy, *British People*, 22-3.

⁴⁶ Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery*, 3.

visual modes of representation including lantern lectures, movies, and plays, as well as means of mass communication like the radio.⁴⁷

In the second half of the 1920s, the public lantern lecture, a sequence of projected photographic plates used by missionaries since the late nineteenth century, was arguably still the most common form of anti-slavery campaigning, and Simon became one of its most enthusiastic promoters. In contrast with anti-slavery pamphlets, for instance, lantern lectures offered the advantage of direct communication with the public and the added emotional impact of images. As had already become clear during the campaigns against 'atrocities' in the Congo, the use of these images was less a matter of demonstrating evidence of humanitarian crimes than a way to evoke a psychological response by arousing the audience's indignation and sense of outrage.⁴⁸

For the purposes of public campaigning, the Anti-Slavery Society drew on a repertoire of customized presentations, individually tailored for specific topics and audiences. Simon often used a 'general lecture on slavery' geared to capture the public's sense of responsibility, and to generate feelings of empathy. The sequence of slides was skilfully organized to convey Britain's essential role in the history of abolition and the contemporary challenges it was facing.⁴⁹ Portraits and quotes from famous emancipators, including Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce, and Thomas Clarkson, alternated with maps and figures illustrating where slavery still existed. The lecture jumped from one continent to another, drawing the public's attention to slave raids in Liberia, domestic slavery in Ethiopia, and the practice of buying and selling slave girls in China that were known as *mui tsai*.

If lantern lectures continued to be used as a successful means to mobilize popular support well into the 1930s, the Anti-Slavery Society also experimented with new technologies, the most innovative of which was the cinema. In January 1928, the Anti-Slavery Society hired the London Pavilion, a movie theatre in London's West End, to show the

⁴⁷ John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984). Also, MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), esp. his 'Introduction', 1–16, and MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iv. *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 212–31; J. A. Mangan (ed.), *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1990), 96–109. Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*.

⁴⁸ Sharon Sliwinski, 'The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5, 3 (2006), 342.

⁴⁹ The original glass negatives, lantern slides, and printing blocks are kept in RHO, ASP (Anti-Slavery Picture Collection), Mss. Brit. Emp. 6. The script for the lantern lecture can be found in RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 21/4.

newly released silent black and white movie *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As the Anti-Slavery Society claimed in its *Reporter*, humanitarian campaigning 'in connection with the Cinema' was 'an entirely new form of publicity'.⁵⁰ By drawing on the 'wonderful slavery movie', the Anti-Slavery Society was trying to make its 'work better known to the general public'.⁵¹ In fact, the use of the cinema as a means to increase public awareness was not completely new; it had been exploited for imperial propaganda before. Imperial companies such as Cadbury had recognized the educational and propagandistic value of film before the First World War, using it as a form of commercial advertising.⁵² In the interwar years, the cinema became a popular source of escapism, and steadily growing audiences were treated to patriotic subjects such as royal and military themes alongside more liberal and ethical visions of the Empire and of the African colonies.⁵³

The Anti-Slavery Society's utilization of a motion picture to document the social consequences of slavery reflected the organization's awareness of the need to campaign across multiple media. It was also an attempt to reach out to the public by way of entertainment rather than moral lecturing. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a high-budget two-hour silent movie produced in 1927 by Universal Studios. It was—at the time—the latest of about ten film productions based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's influential 1852 abolitionist novel. The dominating theme of the screenplay was still the exploitation and violence of the racialized system of slavery in the Southern States of America, although the movie departed from the novel in some respects.⁵⁴ The movie was also one of the very first Hollywood productions to show a cast of white and black actors working together.⁵⁵ Advertisements in the *New York Herald Tribune* publicized the movie as 'the greatest human drama ever written transformed into such

⁵⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1928), 39.

⁵¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1928), 39.

⁵² MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 68–95. Also Martin Stollery, *Alternative Empires: European Modernist Cinemas and the Culture of Imperialism* (Exeter, 2000), 438; Stollery and Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow, 2005), 88–95.

⁵³ Rosaleen Smyth, 'The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927–1939, with Special Reference to East and Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, 20, 3 (1979), 438; Stollery, *Alternative Empires*, esp. the two chapters on the 'British Documentary Film Movement's Enlightened Imperialism' and 'the Receptions of Empire in 1930s British Film Culture', 140–202.

⁵⁴ See 'Uncle Tom's Cabin on Film', *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture: a Multimedia Archive*, University of Virginia, <<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/films/fhp.html>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

⁵⁵ Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1956* (Oxford, 1993), 48.

tremendous entertainment as only the miracle of modern motion pictures makes possible'.⁵⁶

The Anti-Slavery Society, however, did not intend the projection of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be pure entertainment. Rather, anti-slavery leaders carefully framed the visual experience as an educational event by asking Kathleen Simon and Lord Henry Bentinck to deliver a speech on contemporary slavery to the audience during the interval.⁵⁷ Simon tried to connect to the movie's emotional impact by drawing analogies between American plantation slavery and its modern occurrence in countries like Ethiopia. The slaves of Ethiopia—in Simon's words—were the 'Uncle Toms of the Old World', anguished and oppressed.⁵⁸ With pathos that was characteristic of her other public interventions, Simon urged people 'to take part in helping to release those still in bondage and remove the dark shadow of slavery from the earth'.⁵⁹ To add weight to this appeal, she was accompanied on stage by James B. Lowe, the African-American actor who played Tom in the film and whose father had worked as a slave on a Southern plantation.⁶⁰ Lowe's presence and his personal background, of which the British people were made aware through the press, not only added to Simon's anti-slavery message. Lowe's successful career as an actor also symbolized what people who were freed from slavery could achieve.

The event attracted considerable media attention, and the Anti-Slavery Society was praised for its efforts in international and national liberal newspapers including the Boston-based *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Westminster Gazette*. Less sympathetic words, however, came from a reviewer in *The Times* who took issue with the exaggerated pathos and sentimentality of the film, noting that the director had 'let sentiment run riot' and that the film 'rarely breathe(d) conviction at all'.⁶¹ Although anti-slavery activists claimed that the use of Beecher Stowe's familiar anti-slavery representations 'had led to a good deal of interest' from the public, the results in terms of membership numbers were slight. Following the projections, the organization recorded

⁵⁶ *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 Nov. 1927, <<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/films/1927/mv27adshp.html>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

⁵⁷ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1928), 39.

⁵⁸ Newspaper cutting, *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Jan. 1928. RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 8, 96.

⁵⁹ For the media coverage of this event, see the collection of newspaper cuttings in RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 8, 57.

⁶⁰ Newspaper cutting, *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 Jan. 1928, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 8, 58.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 14 Dec. 1927. For reviews of this event, see *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 Jan. 1928, *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Jan. 1928, and *Westminster Gazette*, 20 Mar. 1928.

about a hundred new members.⁶² By comparison, between 1925 and 1928, the League of Nations Union had increased its membership from 255,469 to 362,160, making it the most popular voluntary organization of the interwar years.⁶³

Undeterred by the relatively modest response, Simon and her fellow campaigners sought to spread the anti-slavery message by organizing regular public anti-slavery lectures, local gatherings, and protest meetings all over the country. In staging these events, the Anti-Slavery Society could rely on the support of the regional committees of the League of Nations Union, as well as on leading political and administrative sympathizers, and on some representatives of the church.⁶⁴ Thus, in March 1928, the humanitarian campaigners organized an 'anti-slavery demonstration' in London, featuring addresses by Viscount Cecil, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the Simons. Two months later, a Slavery Protest meeting was held in Hull with support from the local clergy and public speeches delivered by John Harris and Kathleen Simon. Leaflets were distributed in the streets of Hull and a moving exhibition of slave chains and whips drew large crowds into the town hall.⁶⁵ These events resulted in a brief increase of donations but had otherwise limited effects on the organization's low membership rates.

The modest progress achieved in 1928 spurred the Anti-Slavery Society into further action. In 1929 alone, local anti-slavery meetings were convened at East Grinstead, Streatham, Kettering, Woodford, Manchester, Altrincham, Guildford, Bingley, Stoke Newington, Watford, Tunbridge Wells, Thornton Heath, and Ealing. In October of the same year, Kathleen Simon and John Harris made an extended tour through Scotland. As a result of these campaigning efforts, the Anti-Slavery Society noticed a relative increase in the demand for literature and for public speakers. Despite the economic depression, the following year of 1930 was recorded as a time of 'vigorous activity', 'fresh openings', 'increased publicity', and 'encouraging growth'.⁶⁶ John Harris and Kathleen Simon chaired meetings all over the country, in cities such as Liverpool, Edinburgh, Leeds, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Oxford.⁶⁷ In 1931, the Anti-Slavery Society conveyed its abolitionist message at around sixty public events, and Simon was the speaker at thirty of them.⁶⁸

⁶² *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1928), 39.

⁶³ McCarthy, *British People*, 4.

⁶⁴ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1931), 58.

⁶⁵ 'Hull', picture dated 1 June 1928, LoN 6B, slavery, R 2351, 4301/3053.

⁶⁶ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1930), 52.

⁶⁷ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1930), 58.

⁶⁸ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1932), 43.

The public turnout at these events, however, was relatively small, and in most cases Simon was preaching to the converted. Audiences usually comprised twenty to thirty people, who mostly belonged to groups that were sympathetic to the Anti-Slavery Society, including religious congregations, charities, and civic associations.⁶⁹ In order to broaden its popular base, the Anti-Slavery Society, similarly to other interwar pressure groups, attempted to reach out to all social classes and increasingly set out on an educational mission into British classrooms, targeting secondary school pupils and university students.⁷⁰ This was an activity Simon found particularly satisfying and she singled out her visit to schoolchildren at Farnborough Secondary School as 'a new and enjoyable experience'.⁷¹ After a lecture given to a crowded hall of mothers in the Docklands, she marvelled at her audience's considerable response, noting somewhat condescendingly that, 'although from a financial point of view these women cannot help, it educates them and makes them sympathetic and interested in the suffering and misfortunes of others'.⁷²

But this inclusive strategy—the idea that every child, man, and woman in Britain should know about slavery—was accompanied by a paternalistic vision of society. Thus, Simon clearly favoured what she thought were politically disinterested and uneducated audiences, preferably of women and children. These, she noticed, were easily impressed by her emotional appeals and poignant visual material. Simon was not receptive to intellectual scrutiny or criticism, and preferred audiences who would not dare to question her simplified emotional appeals. Unsurprisingly, therefore, she declared herself rather unhappy with the response she received at Cambridge University, where students proved 'a difficult audience to speak to as flippancy was evident but partly as a defence against emotion'.⁷³

If anti-slavery leaders targeted an ever-widening audience of schoolchildren and working-class mothers, this attitude contrasted with a rather selective approach as to who should be regarded as legitimate speakers at anti-slavery events. Significantly, throughout all anti-slavery lectures, rallies, and meetings, one crucial voice remained silent: the voice of the slaves. As opposed to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when prominent African abolitionist writers such as Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cugoana, and, later, Frederick Douglass actively participated

⁶⁹ For Simon's notebooks see Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 4.

⁷⁰ The League of Nations Union, for instance, pursued a similar educational mission. McCarthy, *British People*, 109–17.

⁷¹ Hand-written note, 20 Mar. 1931, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 4.

⁷² Hand-written note, 28 Apr. 1931, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 4.

⁷³ Hand-written note, 25 Feb. 1931, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 4.

in the abolitionist movement, anti-slavery activists in the interwar years did not seek representation from people of African descent. Rather the Anti-Slavery Society's self-declared *raison d'être* was defined by its supposed 'duty' to appeal to the public on behalf of silenced and helpless victims.

Thus, while Harris and Simon bustled from one meeting to the next, often complaining about the toll the intense campaigning was taking on their health, they rarely envisaged giving slaves a public voice. One exception was Masha Katish, a Sudanese Dinka slave, allegedly 'the last slave to be freed by General Gordon'—the former Governor-General of the Sudan and a popular hero who died in an attempt to suppress the Mahdist revolt against Khartoum in 1885. Katish was occasionally allowed to present his life story on stage as a living evidence of the horrors of slavery. But although Katish brought 'a human note into a meeting', the Society deliberately avoided using him as a public speaker because he did not know 'anything of the modern problem'.⁷⁴ As Harris remarked, Katish's 'real weakness' was that he did 'not appear to have understood the question [of slavery]', and therefore was 'only suited to a particular type of audience'. 'Certainly', Harris concluded, 'he must not go where there are critics until he has got up his case very much better'.⁷⁵

In contrast with Katish's unrefined and personal narrative, Simon claimed to offer an authoritative portrayal of modern-day slavery which she based on her own research and writing. In 1929, under the title *Slavery*, Simon published a 'comprehensive and up-to-date account of the survival of chattel slavery in the world'.⁷⁶ As John Simon put it in his foreword, the object of his wife's book was 'to substitute for historical complacency a stimulus to fresh action'.⁷⁷ Simon's 'popular' book soon became the standard work on slavery, circulated and discussed among the political and diplomatic elites.⁷⁸ *Slavery* received favourable reviews in newspapers across the political spectrum, notably in the *Manchester Guardian* which commended the book's 'impressive array of fact and argument', while the *Daily Mail* remarked that there could 'not be a better instance to show how efficacious can be a strong expression of popular feeling, even though far distant from the scene of action'.⁷⁹ Other

⁷⁴ R. Long (Northern Friend's Peace Board) to Harris, 22 Mar. 1930, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 451.

⁷⁵ Harris to Long, 15 Apr. 1930, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 451.

⁷⁶ Simon, *Slavery*. ⁷⁷ Simon, *Slavery*, p. ix.

⁷⁸ For a sample of responses to Simon's book, see RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 451.

⁷⁹ 'Lady Simon's Great Book *Slavery*: What the Press Says', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1930), 161.

reviewers praised the book's combination of factual style and emotional narrative. *The Christian World*, for example, remarked that 'in a sense it is a cry from a woman's heart. Yet nothing hysterical is written here. Deeply though she feels, Lady Simon writes with restraint, marshalling her facts with deadly effect and weighing the evidence with logical precision.'⁸⁰

Simon's account, however, did not aspire to be a scholarly reflection on slavery. The book was based primarily on her own private collection of newspaper cuttings and personal communications, and it contained little reference to scholarly texts.⁸¹ Without offering any statistical evidence Simon claimed that there were 4,000,000–6,000,000 slaves in the world, people treated as 'saleable property' that, in Simon's words, could 'never possess the right either to act as they like, or to control the movements of their own intimate relationships'.⁸² The study focused on 'traditional' systems of chattel slavery in Ethiopia, Arabia, Liberia, China, Burma, and Nepal. Whilst Simon emphasized how British administration worked to eradicate slavery under its jurisdiction, for instance in the Sudan ('the Land of Refuge'), other regions were described as unchanging social, economic, and political entities in which ancient forms of slavery persisted.⁸³ Simon eloquently countered her critics' objections that these forms of slavery constituted a 'social custom' with descriptions of the mental and physical agony of slaves and the horrors of the slave trade, which, according to Simon constituted a 'social crime'.⁸⁴

Undoubtedly the strongest words of condemnation were for Ethiopia.⁸⁵ 'Whatever slavery is in other parts of the earth, in Abyssinia it exists in every one of its varied forms', Simon told her readers. She described the plight of household slaves held by Christian priests and Ethiopian rulers, and evoked images of suffering gangs 'yoked and chained together, and driven by the crack of the whip through the country or to the coast ports for sale as human merchandise'.⁸⁶ As evidence, Simon listed controversial documents including Darley and Sharp's articles, and, more significantly, Lord Lugard's confidential and unpublished report, which he had sent to the Mandates Section in the early 1920s only for it to be banned from circulation.⁸⁷ Simon thus reiterated the allegations already made against the Ethiopian government by the Anti-Slavery Society in the early 1920s.

Simon's simplified views, her use of hyperbolic language and sweeping generalization, however, came under fire from various corners. Mr Sorenson,

⁸⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1930), 161.

⁸¹ Lady Simon, notebooks, 1927–8, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp., S 25, K 6.

⁸² Simon, *Slavery*, 1. ⁸³ Simon, *Slavery*, 194.

⁸⁴ Simon, *Slavery*, 263.

⁸⁵ See chapter 'The Slaves of Abyssinia', in Simon, *Slavery*, 8–40.

⁸⁶ Simon, *Slavery*, 8. ⁸⁷ Simon, *Slavery*, 14–17.

the man in charge of the work of the Seventh Day Adventists in Addis Ababa, condemned her dramatic description and sensationalist portrayal of slavery in Ethiopia. 'Lady Simon, whoever she is', Sorenson reportedly snapped, 'has to a marvellous degree succeeded in displaying her own ignorance of present-day conditions in Ethiopia.'⁸⁸ Simon was also criticized for her careless use of evidence and for disseminating inaccurate figures. George Montandon, a Swiss ethnographer who had researched slavery in Ethiopia on behalf of the Ligue Suisse pour la Défense des Indigènes in 1923, commented after reading Simon's book 'that people trained to do scientific work [would] not be able to control [her] statements'.⁸⁹ Despite such judgements, Simon's attitude remained pragmatic. As she remarked in a letter to Harris, 'I am rather criticised for some details in the book. [Reviewers] emphasise the fact that in such cases as Arabia and Abyssinia the number of slaves can be a mere guess. That does not interest me very much, if there were only ten slaves in a country, we should set them free.'⁹⁰

The most articulate challenge to Simon's representation of slavery came from the British journalist and women's rights activist Nina Boyle (1865–1943). Boyle campaigned on behalf of a broad range of organizations concerned with the welfare of women and children in developing countries. Before the First World War she had been a militant of the feminist Women's Freedom League, and during the 1920s, she took up work in the Save the Children Fund.⁹¹ She also wrote a range of pamphlets on female slavery and repeatedly challenged the Anti-Slavery Society to take up the cause of female slaves and to tackle forced marriage and dowry payments which she claimed exploited African women.⁹² In short, Boyle pursued the type of maternalist discourse common amongst a large number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century female reformers and imperial feminists who focused on how British reformers could improve the condition of women and children.⁹³

⁸⁸ Sorenson quoted in Dexter to Harris, 6 Oct. 1930, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 453.

⁸⁹ Montandon to Simon, 2 Aug. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 455. For more details on Montandon's involvement in the campaign against slavery in Ethiopia, see Ch. 5.

⁹⁰ Simon to Harris, 15 July 1930, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 452.

⁹¹ Marc Brodie, 'Boyle, Constance, Antonina (1865–1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37212>> [accessed Jan. 2014].

⁹² Nina Boyle, *Notes on Slavery*, 27 Sept. 1929, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 456.

⁹³ See Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, 'Introduction', in Chaudhuri and Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992), 1–15; Barbara Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865–1915', in Chaudhuri and Strobel,

Boyle's relations with the male leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society became particularly tense in the late 1920s and early 1930s when the former harshly criticized the charity's work in connection with the League of Nations. Boyle argued with regard to the work of the Temporary Slavery Commission that 'at no single [anti-slavery] meeting' had there been 'any allusion to the forms of Slavery that affect women only'.⁹⁴ As a result, Boyle claimed, with regard to the protection of women from trafficking and forced marriage, the Slavery Convention contained 'loopholes provided by deliberate arrangement'.⁹⁵ British activists, according to Boyle, were not campaigning 'against Slavery as Slavery': their protest was 'not strictly humanitarian . . . [but] in its inception and its action a political and economic campaign aimed at those form of Slavery which supply cheap and unpaid labour'.⁹⁶

Harris and Lugard angrily dismissed Boyle as a 'troublesome female' and a 'political woman'.⁹⁷ To avoid having to cooperate with her, the Society claimed it was being 'careful not to trench upon the work of other Committees' such as the League of Nations' Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children.⁹⁸ Although Simon thought that Boyle's targeting of domestic slavery in Africa was 'worth thinking over',⁹⁹ she did not pursue the point in her speeches and writing. Unlike, for instance, Lady Gladstone whose pacifist pleas on behalf of the League of Nations Union targeted women's motherly instincts, Simon made no dedicated appeal to women, although the latter formed a substantial part of her audience.¹⁰⁰ Whether this was an attempt at distancing herself from her feminist and pacifist peers, or whether the strategic sidestepping of gender issues was simply a way of avoiding the disruption of a delicate gender and power balance within the Anti-Slavery Society is impossible to say.

What is clear, however, is that Simon adopted the methods and language of her male fellow campaigners, and a discourse which was underpinned by British middle-class definitions of freedom, 'based around the promotion of male waged labour and female domesticity'.¹⁰¹ When anti-slavery

Western Women, 119–36; Antoinette Burton, 'White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865–1915', in Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women*, 137–57. On strengths and weaknesses of the maternalist paradigm, see Lynn Y. Weiner (ed.), 'International Trends: Maternalism as a Paradigm', *Journal of Women's History*, 5, 2 (1993), 95–131.

⁹⁴ Nina Boyle, *What is Slavery? An Appeal to Women* (Croydon, c.1932), 3.

⁹⁵ Boyle, *What is Slavery?*, 3. ⁹⁶ Boyle, *What is Slavery?*, 3.

⁹⁷ Harris to Lugard (confidential), 15 Dec. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 456.

⁹⁸ Harris to Simon, 15 July 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 455.

⁹⁹ Simon to Harris, 2 Sept. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S. 22, G 455.

¹⁰⁰ On Lady Gladstone see McCarthy, *British People*, 182.

¹⁰¹ Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home', 235.

leaders such as Harris and Simon spoke of slaves, they conveyed a picture of trafficked and cruelly exploited men who were estranged from their land, as opposed to free peasants and wage workers enjoying their full productive capabilities. Although Simon embraced the cause of the Chinese *mui tsai*, she rarely made the welfare of women and children her central argument.¹⁰² Neither did she, unlike other reformers at the time, raise the issue of women's citizenship, education, health, and employment more generally.¹⁰³ Rather, Simon deliberately chose to evoke popular, and often inaccurate, images familiar to the readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of chattel slaves, chains, fetters and whips, of violence and deprivation. These stereotypical representations distorted the social and economic characteristics of the African slave systems she claimed to attack, and in which a great number—if not the majority—of slaves were women. Simon completely omitted talking about women who were imported or locally born, valued for their productive and reproductive power, living and working as agricultural labourers and domestic slaves, sexually vulnerable and with slim prospects of freedom or social mobility.¹⁰⁴

What also characterized Simon's rhetoric was her effort to paint a grim picture of slavery in 'backward' Africa, and her determination to add new value to Britain's imperial mission. Like the great majority of interwar abolitionists, Simon subscribed to William E. H. Lecky's famous remark that the British anti-slavery crusade was 'among the three or four perfectly virtuous pages comprised in the history of nations'.¹⁰⁵ From this conviction it followed that, as an imperial nation, Britain held certain responsibilities towards colonial people and towards the international community in general. Like other members of the Anti-Slavery Committee, Simon was a firm believer in the liberal idea of a progressive and enlightened imperial order, and rarely questioned the efficacy of British colonial administration. The belief in 'Britain's lead against slavery'—a lead whose objective was 'to convert the World to the British view on slavery'—was a fundamental aspect of Simon's campaigning.¹⁰⁶ 'The new international efforts' made by Britain in Geneva were thus seen as the logical continuation of

¹⁰² Simon, *Slavery*, 69–114. Pedersen, 'Maternalist Moment', 161–202.

¹⁰³ Fiona Paisly, 'Australian Feminists and Indigenous Rights in the International Context, 1920s and 1930s', *Feminist Review*, 50 (1998), 66–84.

¹⁰⁴ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds), *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World and the Medieval North Atlantic*, i (Athens, Oh., 2007), p. xv; Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein, 'Women's Importance in African Slave Systems', in Robertson and Klein (eds), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1983), 1–25.

¹⁰⁵ William E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (London, 1886, 7th edn), 153, as quoted in Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Kathleen Simon, *Britain's Lead Against Slavery* (London, 1930), 7.

the work of British emancipators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁷ The protection of those who were unable to protect themselves was, in Simon's words, the modern 'challenge to civilisation'.¹⁰⁸ Such statements also implied a belief in Britain's humanitarian superiority and authority, an appeal which became particularly persistent in 1933/4 during the campaign to celebrate the centenary of the emancipation of slaves in British colonies.

THE CENTENARY OF EMANCIPATION

The year 1933 offered a perfect moment for promoting the nation's contemporary abolitionist credentials: the centenary of the Act for the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire in 1833 was an opportunity to reflect on the importance of abolitionism for Britain's national identity, and to call again for mass support and national leadership in the contemporary struggle against slavery. As one of the foremost slave-trading nations, Britain had also been one of the first countries to legally abolish the slave trade in 1807, and to free its slaves in 1834. Interestingly, in 1907, the Anti-Slavery Society had completely ignored the 100th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, and the date was not mentioned once during the 1907 congress in Rome. But a quarter of a century later, there was an unprecedented eagerness amongst activists to mark the centenary of emancipation and to exploit it for their contemporary campaign.¹⁰⁹

The centenary of 1933 provided the focus of two anniversaries which were treated as one big event: the passing of the Emancipation Act coincided with the death of William Wilberforce (1759–1833), the man whose lobbying efforts had brought about the parliamentary legislation against slavery and who famously died a month before the legislation was passed.¹¹⁰ The purpose of commemorating these events a century later was to remind British people of their honourable past and to instil in them a sense of patriotic duty, humanitarian vocation, and international prestige. As historian John Oldfield rightly observes, British abolitionist commemorations were based on the idea that '[e]mancipation marked Britain out'. It was Britain's abolitionist credentials, and not her past as one of the most powerful slave-trading nations, which defined the country's national

¹⁰⁷ Simon, *Slavery*, 241–59.

¹⁰⁸ Simon, *Slavery*, 260–7.

¹⁰⁹ John Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, Ritual and Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester, 2007), 1.

¹¹⁰ On the political contingencies that accompanied Wilberforce's achievements, see Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

and imperial identity, and cemented ideas of a 'traditional humanitarian interventionism'.¹¹¹

The double centenary was, first and foremost, an occasion to set the historical record straight, and to give British people a sense of their great national past. In preparation for the centenary celebrations, the Anti-Slavery Society's London headquarters concentrated on producing and circulating anti-slavery literature with the aim of mobilizing the public and raising awareness for the contemporary campaign. Harris set out to write a celebratory popular history of the British anti-slavery movement, ignoring his editor's remark that 'there were already a crop of books in preparation' and that the market for a 'slavery book' might be somewhat saturated.¹¹² Harris's historical overview, *A Century of Emancipation*, was published in 1933. In the same year, another member of the Anti-Slavery Society, the Oxford Beit Professor of Colonial History, Reginald Coupland, published a similar, more scholarly account, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*.¹¹³ Both authors focused on the accomplishments of a small group of British 'saints' including William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, who, in an age of moral progress, had become the principal agents of the abolitionist process.¹¹⁴ Harris and Coupland described how Britain led the anti-slavery movement, starting from the late eighteenth century, marked by the emergence of mass anti-slavery movements organized on the basis of a national network. Both authors depicted the response of successive British governments to parliamentary and public pressure as the anti-slavery 'crusade', a metaphor also frequently used in the interwar years to denote the League of Nations' 'new crusade', again under British leadership.¹¹⁵ Both accounts offered an idealized version of history, which conveniently omitted much of Britain's own slaving past.

Like these books, much of the anti-slavery material produced for the centenary centred on William Wilberforce as a model of morality, reminiscent of 'an age and country fertile in great and good men'.¹¹⁶ In an attempt to reach out to the broader public, the Anti-Slavery Society created leaflets featuring a photograph of a life-sized wax figure of the great man with the caption: 'Still 5,000,000 slaves in the World. What

¹¹¹ Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 1.

¹¹² Hodder and Stoughton to Harris, 22 Aug. 1932, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 409.

¹¹³ John Harris, *A Century of Emancipation* (London, 1933); Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* (London, 1933).

¹¹⁴ On Clarkson and Wilberforce's role as key figures of the early abolitionist movements, see Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 33–55. Also, Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, 45–62.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. foreword by Sir John Simon, in Simon, *Slavery*, p. x.

¹¹⁶ Copy of the epitaph on the memorial to William Wilberforce, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 21/1.

would he say if he could speak?' The implicit message was, of course, that Harris, Simon, and their fellow campaigners were direct heirs to that nineteenth-century abolitionist hero, and that the contemporary battle against slavery was as morally relevant as it had been a hundred years earlier. The press helped to cement this claim to a moral legacy by referring to Lady Simon as the 'twentieth-century edition of William Wilberforce'.¹¹⁷ Simon, in turn, used the same analogy to launch 'an intensive anti-slavery campaign' which, she claimed, was a direct continuation of Wilberforce's work for emancipation. She advertised it with well-designed leaflets, picturing African slaves begging to be set free. People were solicited to give what they had to 'finish the work Wilberforce began'.¹¹⁸

The aims of the Anti-Slavery Society were not only to offer a public history lesson but also, as it somewhat unrealistically declared, to gain around 10,000 new members who would bring in an estimated £20,000.¹¹⁹ One of the most elaborate creations in this respect was a monumental Centenary Pageant Play, which offered a narrative account of the history of the British anti-slavery movement. The play had been commissioned with the aim 'to bring before the public the history of slavery and the work which remains to be done in releasing the five millions who are still enslaved'.¹²⁰ The use of pageantry was common amongst British internationalists and imperialists in the interwar years. The League of Nations Union often involved schoolchildren and adults in performing dramatic pieces at garden parties or other public events. The aim was to convey symbolic and educational messages to the broader public while offering them 'the escapist pleasures of theatrical role-play and opportunities for the more creatively inclined to demonstrate their artistic flair'.¹²¹ Accordingly, the Centenary Pageant Play, which consisted of eight scenes and required about forty actors, had been specially devised to enable local church groups, schools, and social institutes to hire the script and the set of fifty costumes.¹²² To make staging and performance as easy as possible,

¹¹⁷ Newspaper cutting, untitled, undated [approximately 1933], RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 28/3.

¹¹⁸ 'The Intensive Anti-Slavery Campaign', undated leaflet [approximately 1933], RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 30.

¹¹⁹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1933), 65.

¹²⁰ Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, *'Slavery': A Centenary Pageant Play* (London, 1933) (hereafter *Centenary Pageant Play*). For a review of the play, which was produced by Gerald A. Tomkinson, see untitled newspaper cutting, 13 Mar. 1933, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 21/4. On the pageant, see also Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 93–5.

¹²¹ Helen McCarthy, 'The League of Nations, Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain, c.1919–56', *Historical Workshop Journal*, 70, 1 (2010), 113.

¹²² *Centenary Pageant Play*, 3.

the play required only minimal scenery and properties, and potential performers were asked to bear in mind 'that simplicity and sincerity will go a great deal further towards impressing an audience than any amount of tinsel decorations'. The play also foresaw an optional opening chorus of slaves singing 'negro spirituals', which, as the authors asserted, were 'not essential' but would 'add greatly to the beauty of the Play'.¹²³ The choice of music again reflected the explicit link made by interwar anti-slavery campaigners between American plantation slavery and the so-called 'contemporary' forms of unfree labour in Africa.

Much like Simon's lantern lectures, the centenary play offered a dramatic narrative constructed of visualized episodes in the history of British abolitionism. Two allegorical figures personifying 'Liberty' and 'Public Opinion' led the audience through the play and framed each scene with their moral commentary. As the play unfolded, 'Public Opinion' was gradually made aware of the 'hideous' and 'evil' history of slavery and slave-trading.¹²⁴ The first scene began with a slave auction in Rome; the next one showed an encounter between Queen Elizabeth I and her slave trader, Admiral John Hawkins. Then followed a portrayal of the Somerset's case in Westminster Hall in 1772—a court case that freed the slave James Somerset who had fled after being brought to England from Boston by his master, thus creating a precedent for the abolition of slavery in England.¹²⁵ Next, an abolitionist meeting was staged involving famous emancipators and British leaders involved in the abolition of the slave trade such as William Wilberforce, William Pitt, and Lord Grenville. The first part of the play ended with the dramatization of the 'last illness of Wilberforce in 1833'—a scene in which Wilberforce, on his deathbed, was made aware of the successful passing of the Emancipation Act.¹²⁶

But the play was not simply an enactment of abolitionist history. Its aim was to raise awareness of the contemporary campaign against slavery, the anti-slavery efforts undertaken by the League of Nations' Mandates Commission, and the role of Britain in the international community. During a ten-minute interval, Lady Simon addressed the audience with an appeal to rekindle the popular protest against slavery. The second part of the play presented a dramatic crescendo from the emancipation of American slaves in the 1860s to the rendering of slavery in Arabia in the 1930s. In a tragic scene, a young slave girl committed suicide after being separated from her lover in the slave market of Mecca. In response, the

¹²³ *Centenary Pageant Play*, 3–4.

¹²⁴ *Centenary Pageant Play*, 20–1.

¹²⁵ Steven M. Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial that Led to the End of Human Slavery* (London, 2006).

¹²⁶ *Centenary Pageant Play*, 20–1.

character of Public Opinion issued an emotional appeal, which echoed the cherished principle of British humanitarian leadership and intervention: 'The slaves must be freed; what can we do? The slaves are in other lands, not in our Empire. We must demand their freedom, and if need be fight for it.'¹²⁷

The play ended by shining a spotlight on those states which had only recently abolished slavery, including Nepal, Burma, Sierra Leone, and Tanganyika. One of the last countries to appear on stage was the personification of 'Abyssinia' followed by two slaves in chains. Abyssinia was presented as a victim of internal struggles between the government and local chiefs who would 'die rather than give up their slaves'. In reference to contemporary international politics, the audience was told how the Ethiopian emperor had 'vowed' to abolish slavery but that it was a 'hard' and 'uphill' task which could only be accomplished with the aid of 'the great League of Nations'. This statement was followed by cheers and one of the slaves was to 'drop his chains', while the other retained them, kneeling down and 'looking depressed'.¹²⁸ The final tableau offered a passionate plea for people to 'speak about [slavery] in season and out of season. The people of Britain must know. The people of the World must know.'¹²⁹

To what extent this appeal and the play itself helped the Anti-Slavery Society gain new supporters is difficult to measure. Reviewers rightly warned potential audiences that the play was not to be thought of as 'frivolous entertainment'. To those 'who do not know the real meaning of the word slave', the critics observed, the play could be 'rather a jolt'.¹³⁰ This somewhat discouraging statement seems to have reflected the play's moderate success. Judging from the booking dates for the costumes, the play proved relatively popular amongst high school children but less so amongst financially solvent and politically literate adults.¹³¹ Between October 1933 and January 1934, the play was staged approximately fourteen times, much less frequently than the Anti-Slavery Society's lantern lectures, which were held approximately every second day.¹³²

In another attempt to target the British public's emotions and intellect, the Anti-Slavery Society deployed a further tool in its repertoire: the so-called 'wireless'. The radio was undoubtedly one of the most far-reaching innovations in communication in the interwar years, a period

¹²⁷ *Centenary Pageant Play*, 28.

¹²⁸ *Centenary Pageant Play*, 29.

¹²⁹ *Centenary Pageant Play*, 30.

¹³⁰ Untitled newspaper cutting, 13 Mar. 1933, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 21/4.

¹³¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1933), 104.

¹³² See 'Pageant Bookings', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (special centenary number, July 1933), 107.

during which the newly founded BBC aimed to convey the notion of a united and beneficent Empire to the British public by broadcasting programmes on British history and exploration, and by celebrating the lives of heroic figures.¹³³ In December 1932—the BBC had just launched an Empire Service targeted at white people across the colonies and dominions—Harris suggested the BBC broadcast a series of nine lunchtime talks on ‘Slavery, 1833–1933’.¹³⁴ The series began in late April 1933 with Harris’s lecture on ‘The Crime of Slavery’, and was followed by a piece on ‘Britain’s Efforts to Abolish the Slave Trade’ by Charles Kingsley Webster, Professor of International History at the London School of Economics, and by Coupland’s talk on ‘The Emancipation of the Slaves’. The series programme also anticipated that an unnamed ‘negro’ would comment on the results of abolition in the West Indies and in America, and that Margery Perham (1895–1982)—a writer on African affairs and university teacher—would discuss the result of abolition in West Africa.¹³⁵

The impact of the series on the public, as we shall see later, remained relatively small. However, the radio programme generated quite a storm within anti-slavery ranks. Remarkably, Harris did not suggest Lady Simon to BBC producers as a potential speaker. There is not enough evidence to assess whether Harris’s slip should be taken as a reflection of his feelings about the role of women in the Anti-Slavery Society. John Simon certainly thought that this was ‘a deliberate attempt’ by the Anti-Slavery leader ‘to put forward his own name’.¹³⁶ Perhaps it also reflected Harris’s desire to distance himself from Simon’s husband, whose weak and equivocal foreign policy, notably with regard to the Italian and German dictatorships, was increasingly facing criticism from the press, the public, and the political establishment.¹³⁷ In any case, these petty controversies reveal much about the individual activists’ personal ambitions to distinguish themselves during the celebrations of the centenary of emancipation. There was certainly a feeling, amongst veteran members of the Anti-Slavery Society, notably Buxton and Harris, that Lady Simon’s relatively recent involvement in anti-slavery activism did not justify her taking a leading role in the centenary commemorations. Thus, the seating order at a highly

¹³³ John MacKenzie, ‘“In Touch with the Infinite”: The BBC and the Empire, 1923–1953’, in MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, 165–91; Emma Robertson, ‘“I Get a Real Kick Out of Big Ben”: BBC Versions of Britishness on the Empire and General Overseas Service, 1932–1948’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28, 4 (2008), 459–73.

¹³⁴ BBC to Harris, 16 Feb. 1933, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp, S 22, G 410.

¹³⁵ On Perham, see also Ch. 6.

¹³⁶ John Simon to Harris, 9 Mar. 1933, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 410.

¹³⁷ On the anti-Simon campaign waged in British newspapers from late 1933 onwards, see David Dutton, *Simon: A Political Biography of Sir John Simon* (London, 1992), 180–1.

publicized centenary luncheon gave rise to further antagonism between Lady Simon and her peers, as did the appointment of keynote speakers at official meetings with the royal family.¹³⁸

Notwithstanding these internal squabbles, the centenary commemorations reached a peak in the summer of 1933 with local centenary committees throughout England making use of the society's publicity material and its lantern lectures. Thus, purposely created regional anti-slavery committees organized public gatherings in Durham, Bath, Tunbridge Wells, Birmingham, Bristol, and Brighton. Although church authorities had been reluctant at first to participate in the commemorations, St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey held special sermons.¹³⁹ More commemorative events were scheduled in Salisbury, Liverpool, Oxford, Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast, and Manchester to name but a few.¹⁴⁰ The people who were actively involved in leading the celebrations were a close-knit circle. Most of the meetings—sometimes more than three in a week—were chaired and addressed by Lady Simon, John Harris, or his wife Alice. In Hull, Wilberforce's birthplace, the celebrations were more extensive.¹⁴¹ Patrons of the Anti-Slavery Society, notably Lord Cecil, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, and descendants of the Wilberforce family led the civic celebrations, including a procession to the statue of Wilberforce. The latter's birthplace, Wilberforce House, marked the centenary with a special exhibition of slave relics and a life-sized wax statue of Wilberforce donated by Madame Tussaud's.¹⁴² Along the line of the projection of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, these exhibitions were conceived as popular entertainment with an educational message that treated African slaves as objects and not as agents of abolitionism.

Celebrations for the Wilberforce centenary and particularly the anniversary of the Emancipation Act were not confined to Britain but extended to the British colonies. Many of the Caribbean islands marked the anniversary of Wilberforce's death with special church services, concerts, and public spectacles.¹⁴³ On the African continent, sermons to commemorate the centenary were held in Sierra Leone and in Johannesburg.¹⁴⁴ These

¹³⁸ Buxton to Harris, 12 May 1934, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 411.

¹³⁹ Harris to Revd W. Paton, 20 Dec. 1932, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 412.

¹⁴⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (special centenary number, July 1933), 95–7. See also 'Forthcoming Meetings', 106–7.

¹⁴¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1933), 95.

¹⁴² For successful regional British activities including the museum exhibition in Hull, see Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 118–19.

¹⁴³ Barry W. Higman, 'Remembering Slavery: The Rise, Decline and Revival of Emancipation Day in the English-Speaking Caribbean', *Slavery and Abolition*, 17 (1996), 90–205.

¹⁴⁴ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 122.

celebrations reinforced the narrative of British leadership in bringing about the slaves' emancipation. As has been argued, they constituted an 'imperial chorus . . . designed to pay tribute to, and to some extent, recover Britain's tradition of humanitarian interventionism'.¹⁴⁵ The Anti-Slavery Society's attempt to export its celebrations to Geneva, however, was much less successful. International observers were not impressed with the nationalist and imperialist character of British anti-slavery commemorations. While the Anti-Slavery Society would have liked to see an official tribute to British anti-slavery achievements from the members of the League of Nations, the Bureau International warned Harris that the tribute's perceived 'political character' would 'somewhat complicate' matters.¹⁴⁶

These international setbacks aside, nonetheless, in its annual report for 1933, the Anti-Slavery Society looked back on what it considered a 'red-letter year' in its history.¹⁴⁷ Two of the society's leaders had been publicly honoured for their anti-slavery engagements. Harris was knighted 'for the prominent part which he ha[d] taken for many years at Geneva in the international effort for the suppression of the slave trade and slavery in all its forms'.¹⁴⁸ Simon was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 1933.¹⁴⁹ With regard to the reception of these celebrations, however, there was a gap between the Anti-Slavery Society's publicity efforts and the public interest they generated. The forty meetings, centenary services, pageant shows, and lectures which the Anti-Slavery Society organized between July and November 1933 quickly created a feeling of saturation.¹⁵⁰ Already by 1934, the BBC refused to broadcast any further slavery documentaries, claiming that the issue did not appeal to a wider audience.¹⁵¹ The response of the public, it can be inferred from this, was largely one of disinterest. In this respect, the intensification of anti-slavery campaigns in the early 1930s did not compel people to sign up to the Anti-Slavery Society or to donate to the cause. Those who did received Simon's full attention. 'It is so refreshing to meet people who really *care* about things in this busy world', she wrote to a supporter, 'and I assure you that I appreciate it more than I can tell you'.¹⁵² Similarly, when an unemployed young man named Norman Adam donated the

¹⁴⁵ Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 158.

¹⁴⁶ F. O. Hefty to Harris, 28 Aug. 1933, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471.

¹⁴⁷ 'Annual Report', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1934), 39.

¹⁴⁸ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1934), 40. ¹⁴⁹ *The Times*, 21 Apr. 1955.

¹⁵⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (special centenary number, July 1933), 60-1.

¹⁵¹ BBC to Harris, 30 Apr. 1934, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 411.

¹⁵² Simon to Massey, 2 Dec. 1930, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 1 (original emphasis).

comparatively large sum of £2 after hearing one of Simon's broadcast speeches, he was rewarded with a copy of Simon's book *Slavery*.¹⁵³ The personal dedication with which Simon responded to her supporters only served to illustrate the Anti-Slavery Society's comparatively small-scale outreach into British society.

A MARGINAL ISSUE

The massive deployment of lantern lectures, pageant plays, and radio broadcasts used during the centenary celebrations marked a visible peak in the Anti-Slavery Society's activities in the 1920s and 1930s. It was less clear, however, how far this deployment of multiple media succeeded in stirring public debate about modern slavery and about Britain's role and responsibility as an anti-slavery power, particularly in view of the growing concerns surrounding Britain's depressed economic and foreign policies. Did anti-slavery campaigns—as some scholars have maintained with regard to popular imperial culture in general—'infuse' the lives of average Britons?¹⁵⁴ Or did the British public remain ignorant and indifferent to them?¹⁵⁵

The trickle-down effect of anti-slavery campaigning and abolitionist commemorations on the national conscience is, of course, difficult to assess, as it remains unclear how the message mediated by the Anti-Slavery Society was received.¹⁵⁶ If we take membership numbers and financial success as an indicator, however, it seems that the impressive campaigning efforts of the late 1920s and early 1930s had relative little impact on broadening the organization's elite profile and membership. Between 1928 and 1934, the Anti-Slavery Society recorded the adherence of a few hundred new members.¹⁵⁷ This relative increase fell far short of the ambitious target the Anti-Slavery Society had set itself. In fact, because of growing expenses and the 'increased burden' of additional meetings and lantern lectures, the society continued to struggle financially to meet its moderate annual expenditure of about £1,700, which was used to pay for

¹⁵³ Adam to Simon, 26 May 1933, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 1.

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, 'Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire', in Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. xix.

¹⁵⁶ As Andrew Thompson has pointed out, this is true for much of Britain's imperial propaganda. Andrew Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c.1880–1932* (New York, 2000), 176.

¹⁵⁷ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1932), 43.

secretaries, rent, and output of literature.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, between 1933 and 1934, the Anti-Slavery Society's financial situation became more precarious than it had ever been before. In July 1933, the bishop of Durham addressed a broadcast sermon on slavery to the British people, in which he compared the 'meagre support' received by the Anti-Slavery Society to the large sums contributed to other charitable organizations.¹⁵⁹ In January 1934, Harris reflected on how difficult it had become to finance the society, due to a further decrease in the average amount of donations.¹⁶⁰

Historians of the centenary commemorations have noted that financial failure does not mean that the celebrations were not a success. Rather, it has been argued that, because of the economic depression and insecurity, young people especially were drawn to the comforting and 'reassuring' representation of Britain's heroic past.¹⁶¹ However, there is little evidence that the identification with a heroic past translated into public engagement for the contemporary cause. The South African historian, colonial critic, expert on African affairs, and member of the Anti-Slavery Society, William M. Macmillan observed in 1933 that 'the battle of today seems for the humanitarian now disillusioned about his own civilisation to lack the inspiration and the sublime confidence of his predecessors centuries ago'.¹⁶² Macmillan noted that the Anti-Slavery Society's belief in trusteeship imperialism as a remedy against slavery made 'the story just a little complacent'. 'It is fatal to give any kind of countenance to the belief, incredibly widespread in responsible British circles', he wrote, 'that all is well if only the map of Africa be painted British-red.'¹⁶³

Macmillan's vision of Britain's civilizational decline clashed with the Anti-Slavery Society's virtuous self-image. Yet his judgement echoed a widespread intellectual discourse of national crisis, economic disaster, and social anxiety.¹⁶⁴ The economic crisis of the early 1930s with its pressing national political and social concerns arguably left little space for more remote instances of suffering. Whereas in the nineteenth century the issue of chattel slavery had generated much public protest, political

¹⁵⁸ 'Annual Report', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1933), 34.

¹⁵⁹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1933), 98.

¹⁶⁰ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1934), 78.

¹⁶¹ Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom*, 99.

¹⁶² W. M. Macmillan, 'African Slavery and After', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 5 (Aug. 1933), 163. On Macmillan see also J. E. Flint, 'Macmillan as a Critic of Empire. The Impact of a Historian on Colonial Policy', in H. Macmillan and S. Marks (eds), *Africa and Empire: W. M. Macmillan, Historian and Social Critic* (Aldershot, 1989), 212–31. For his critique of the Abyssinian crisis, see Ch. 6 of the present book.

¹⁶³ W. M. Macmillan, 'African Slavery and After', 163.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919–1939* (London, 2009), 50–92.

debate, and legal action, by the 1930s, despite the publicity and the development of international institutions, it seemed to lack the potential to trigger civic action. Thus a reading of Lady Simon's correspondence suggests that, by 1934, she was increasingly frustrated by the lack of public support. Suffering from poor health and chronic fatigue, Simon was in fact rather pessimistic about the future survival of the anti-slavery movement. In a letter to a young woman who had been in the audience of one of her speeches, Simon wrote: 'As regards awakening public opinion to the persistence of slavery in the world, . . . I am afraid people are getting too sophisticated to care for it. . . . I fear we shall have passed away before this crime is obliterated from the world's record.'¹⁶⁵ Little did she know that her work would gain renewed attention from an unexpected but most enthusiastic audience in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact, a few months after Simon's dispirited comments, a resurgent political and diplomatic interest in slavery in Ethiopia was to propel the issue once again onto the international stage and turn it into a subject of Fascist propaganda.

¹⁶⁵ Simon to Margoliouth, 17 Oct. 1934, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 1.

4

Italian Anti-Slavery, Colonialism, Catholicism, and Fascism, 1919–1933

In November 1918, as the First World War drew to a close, the Società Antischivistica appealed in its newsletter to its members to thank God in prayer for the war's 'glorious outcome' and for Italy's 'triumph'.¹ In the months preceding the armistice, Italian anti-slavery activists revelled in patriotic feelings and religious fervour. The leadership of the Roman anti-slavery organization celebrated the nation's contribution to allied victory as an 'act of divine providence' and professed with great buoyancy that the 'Italian nation was reborn to new life'.² Italian anti-slavery leaders also declared that the army's bloody sacrifice on the battlefield needed to be matched by a renewed nationwide moral and civilian engagement. Now that the threat from the enemy had ceased, they insisted, 'all efforts had to be concentrated again on the will of God' and on strengthening national unity and progress.³

There was little correspondence between these nationalist statements and the contemporary liberal vision of a new international order expressed by American President Woodrow Wilson in Paris in his Fourteen Points a few months earlier. Rather, the Italian declarations echoed older *Risorgimento* and Futurist ideas on national regeneration through war and sacrifice and promoted a vision of a reinforced national identity and a spiritual mission. Indeed, in contrast to many religious pressure groups, the Società Antischivistica did not emerge from the First World War with revived internationalist feelings. Nor did the Italian organization join the ecumenical movement, which, in the immediate aftermaths of the war, looked to the League of Nations as 'an essentially Christian means

¹ *Bollettino della Società Antischivistica d'Italia* (Nov. 1918), 8.

² *Bollettino* (July–Aug. 1918), 11.

³ 'On the Peace Path', *Bollettino* (Sept.–Oct. 1918), 2–3.

of attaining international justice and peace'.⁴ Unlike British anti-slavery leaders who were prompted by the traumatic experience of war to embrace internationalist currents, anti-slavery activists in Italy did not perceive the conflict as a challenge to their long-held religious and colonial aspirations. On the contrary, as this chapter reveals, the Società Antischiavista's colonial ambitions were re-energized by the war and its primary agenda in the interwar years focused on building a nexus between missionary and governmental interests.

One of the revelations of the currently flourishing scholarship on Italian colonialism has been the continuity from the liberal era, which comprised the period between Italian unification in 1861 and the First World War, to the two decades of Fascist rule in the interwar years.⁵ As one historian has put it, the shift from liberal to Fascist imperialism was one 'of degree, and not of fundamental attitude'.⁶ The evolution of Italian anti-slavery activism in the 1920s and early 1930s confirms this view. This chapter focuses on the domestic context in which the Italian anti-slavery society operated and draws specific attention to the relationship between the Italian anti-slavery lobby, the Vatican, and the Fascist regime. The analysis centres on how Italian anti-slavery activists integrated the changing political landscape within their own country. The chapter also discusses the emergence and intensification of mass propaganda for empire, and examines how the Italian anti-slavery organization acted as a conduit for the Fascist regime's civilizing mission while maintaining its strong links to the Vatican.

In January 1919, a delegation of twelve anti-slavery campaigners presented its vision of an Italian colonial empire at a national colonial congress in Rome organized by the Istituto Coloniale, a body founded in 1906 by Italian geographers and pro-colonial lobbyists.⁷ That same month, representatives of the great powers were meeting in Paris for the inaugural session of the Paris Peace Conference. While the Paris Peace Conference went on to agree to create a League of Nations and the establishment of an

⁴ See chapter on 'Christianity, Religion and the League', in Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–1945* (Manchester, 2011), 81.

⁵ Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa: Italy's African Wars in the Era of Nation-Building, 1870–1900* (Berne, 2009); Patrizia Palumbo (ed.), *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003); Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (eds), *Italian Colonialism* (New York, 2005).

⁶ Mia Fuller, 'Italy's Colonial Futures: Colonial Inertia and Postcolonial Capital in Asmara', *California Italian Studies*, 2, 1 (2011), 3.

⁷ *Bollettino* (Jan.–Feb. 1919). On the Istituto Coloniale, see R. J. B. Bosworth, 'The Opening of the Victor Emmanuel Monument', *Italian Quarterly*, 16 (1975), 78–87.

international regime of mandates, anti-slavery activists in Rome proposed imperialist and revisionist ideas on why East Africa needed European rule and potentially Italian colonial oversight. Filippo Tolli, who had presided over the Italian organization since 1888, argued that the African continent continued to produce 'enormous masses of populations incapable of any ordered labour that would conform to the principles of Italian civilization'. Slavery in Africa, he maintained, could only be eradicated by combining the moral and educational benefits of Italian missionary activities with successful colonial expansion. Tolli rallied his fellow campaigners with the following words: 'From the beaches, deserts and forests of Africa comes one repeated cry that goes straight to our heart: *Italy, Italy and we respond with one motto: ROMA-AMOR*.'⁸ This appeal not only expressed the self-importance with which Italian anti-slavery activists campaigned against African slavery: it also put Rome at the centre of the abolitionist movement, thus picking up on older ideas about the centrality of imperial and papal Rome for Italian nationalism and expansionism.⁹

The colonial congress in Rome forms part of what Giuseppe Maria Finaldi has described as the Italian 'culture of colonialism', a phenomenon which developed in Italy in the late nineteenth century and shaped the identity of the newly formed Italian nation state.¹⁰ The organization of a pro-colonial congress only months after the end of the First World War also reflected the way in which liberal Italian expansionist ambitions for East Africa had grown during the war. With the acquisition of Libya, conquered in 1912 as a potential settlement colony, the Italian government had decided to create a Ministry of Colonies (later renamed the Ministry of Italian Africa in 1937).¹¹ This formal institutionalization of colonial bureaucracy brought fresh impetus to Italian expansionism and during the First World War the Italian colonial minister pushed for an enlargement of Italy's African Empire to be part of the peace settlement.¹² At the secret Treaty of London of April 1915, the Allies promised Italy territorial concessions in Europe, the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and Africa. But during the first months of meetings at the Paris Peace Conference, it became clear that the Allied powers would not satisfy

⁸ Società antischiavista d'Italia, *La società antischiavista d'Italia al convegno nazionale per il dopo guerra nelle colonie*, 15–21 Jan. 1919, Min. Cul. Pop, 309, 24.

⁹ On this, see Fabrizio de Donno and Neelam Srivastava (eds), special issue: 'Colonial and Postcolonial Italy', *Interventions*, 8, 3 (2006), 376.

¹⁰ Finaldi, *Italian National Identity*, 45.

¹¹ Mark Choate, 'From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and Back Again: The Politics of Italian Expansion, 1890–1912', *Modern Italy*, 8, 1 (2003), 71–2.

¹² R. L. Hess, 'Italy and Africa: Colonial Ambitions in the First World War', *Journal of African History*, 4, 1 (1963), 105–26.

Italian wishes, given tabled plans for a League of Nations mandates system in which Italy would not play a supervisory role. The Società Antischiavista's endorsement of the colonial congress was, therefore, also indicative of the disappointment felt by Italian activists with regard to the insufficient territorial compensation received by Italy for its war efforts.

In late April 1919, the Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando walked out of the Paris Peace Conference because Italian territorial demands were not recognized by the Allies.¹³ Italy felt betrayed and Italian policy-makers and the public viewed the nascent League of Nations and the mandates system with suspicion. But Italy was weakened both socially and economically by the war, and dependent on international peace and stability, and the Italian government, albeit reluctantly, committed to the League of Nations and to its principle of collective security. As one of the Allied and victorious powers, Italy occupied a permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations, together with Britain, France, and Japan. During the following two decades, Italy's relationship with the League was to be one of convenience rather than conviction. The country's involvement in the League's political, economic, and social activities was to remain uneven—and would eventually, after various crises, lead to Italy's withdrawal from the League in December 1937.¹⁴

If in 1919, Italian anti-slavery activists took an active interest in their country's territorial expansion, this does not mean that foreign and colonial politics were their primary preoccupation. The Italian anti-slavery society essentially remained a Catholic interest group, spiritually and ideologically devoted to the Holy See. In the aftermath of the First World War, the principal authority to whom anti-slavery activists looked for guidance was Pope Benedict XV. After his election in September 1914, Benedict engaged in diplomatic efforts to secure peace and humanitarian aid during the First World War. For the remainder of his short pontificate, however, which only lasted until 1922, he otherwise undertook only marginal doctrinal and institutional reforms.¹⁵ In the immediate

¹³ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History* (Oxford, 2005), 18.

¹⁴ There has been little in-depth research on Italy's relationship with and influence in the League of Nations. Exceptions are the Italian studies by Italo Garzia, *L'Italia e le origini della Società delle Nazioni* (Rome, 1995), and Enrica Costa Bona and Luciano Tosi, *L'Italia e la sicurezza collettiva: Dalla Società delle Nazioni alle Nazioni Unite* (Perugia, 2007). See also Enrica Costa Bona, *L'Italia e la Società delle Nazioni* (Padua, 2004) and L. Tosi (ed.), *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali: Diplomazia multilaterale nel Novecento* (Padua, 1999). This relatively small body of work contrasts with a large number of Italian studies on the League published in the 1920s and 1930s. For an extensive bibliography, see Costa Bona and Tosi, *L'Italia e la sicurezza collettiva*, 333–43.

¹⁵ John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London, 1999), 71–8.

postwar years, Benedict propagated mostly conservative social and cultural values, with an aim of strengthening the Catholic Church's authority by expanding and revitalizing the Vatican's missionary outreach. The Vatican's postwar policy thus remained in line with the missionary strategies decreed by Leo XIII in the late nineteenth century, that had remained unchanged during the pontificate of his successor Pius X. Like his predecessors, Benedict XV drew on the ideas of Cardinal Lavigerie, who postulated anti-slavery policy as a means of Catholic proselytism and settlement in Africa.¹⁶ Reflecting the Pope's conservative outlook, the Holy See remained untouched by interwar ecumenical initiatives, and demonstrated a desire to 'insulate worshippers from rival religious influences'.¹⁷ Throughout the 1920s, the Vatican observed the League of Nations with a feeling of antagonism, an attitude shared by the Italian anti-slavery society.¹⁸

In a country which was typically described as '99 per cent Catholic', religion remained the central impulse of anti-slavery lobbying in the interwar years.¹⁹ As before the war, the Italian anti-slavery movement was a top-heavy organization with a strong presence of clergymen. Middle-class Catholics such as Attilio Simonetti and Filippo Tolli had been at the forefront of the movement since the late nineteenth century, and the anti-slavery organization boasted the patronage of a range of illustrious supporters from the Catholic hierarchy. The Società Antischivista shared affinities and members with other Catholic charities in Italy, such as the Società Promotrice Buone Opere, as well as with scientific institutes and pro-colonial lobbies, including the Società Geografica Italiana and the Istituto Coloniale.²⁰ As before the war, the organization was more interested in fostering its ties with religious and political elites than in gaining a popular base.

The Catholic doctrine continued to provide the main inspiration for Italian anti-slavery leaders who believed in the spiritual power and moral authority of the Catholic Church and regarded Catholic proselytism as instrumental to native progress and welfare in the African colonies.²¹ As before the war, the Società Antischivista drew on Catholic symbolism

¹⁶ Pollard, *Unknown Pope*, 201–94. For details on Pope Leo's 1890 anti-slavery encyclical, see Ch. 1.

¹⁷ McCarthy, *British People*, 90.

¹⁸ Pollard, *Unknown Pope*, 146.

¹⁹ This number is given by John F. Pollard, 'Fascism and Catholicism', in R. J. B. Bosworth (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford, 2009), 166–84.

²⁰ Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischivista nazionale, Roma 21–22–23 Aprile 1921: Relazione e Documenti* (Rome, 1921), ASMAE, Min. Cul. Pop., 309, 30–2.

²¹ See Ch. 1.

and iconography to underline its religious origin, and it remained strongly connected to Propaganda Fide. Throughout the interwar years, the cover of the *Bollettino* featured a representation of Christ holding a white and an African slave by the hand.²² The image was that of the Trinitarians, the Order of the Most Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives (*Ordo Sanctissimae Trinitatis Redemptionis Captivorum*). The Società Antischiavista's identification with the Trinitarians' ministry of charity and redemption and its use of the religious imagery reflects the organization's ultimate goals, namely the spiritual salvation and physical rescue of African slaves.

In September 1919, the prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Van Rossum, appealed to Catholic missionaries to revive Lavigerie's late nineteenth-century anti-slavery 'crusade' and to pursue the fundraising work for anti-slavery projects undertaken by the Holy See in the two decades preceding the First World War. In a circular letter to the Catholic churches, Van Rossum postulated that, since the liberation of slaves remained the missions' central task, Propaganda Fide was to keep up collecting donations and distributing funds for this purpose.²³ As in the late nineteenth century, part of the money was attributed to the Società Antischiavista for anti-slavery propaganda and domestic campaigns. In return, Italian anti-slavery activists pledged to publicize missionary accomplishments in the colonies and to promote missionary action as a 'suitable system of colonisation'.²⁴

When seeking to unite missionary and colonial interests, anti-slavery activists had to confront widespread political and public scepticism. The leaders of the Italian movement often deplored the 'indifference' and 'ignorance' of governmental circles with regard to missionary action against slavery in the colonies. The scarcity of records on slavery kept in the archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that slavery was treated as a marginal issue by colonial governors.²⁵ In the early twentieth century, Italian authorities regarded slavery as an 'indigenous' institution, and only a mild form of exploitation and a phenomenon against which it was neither possible nor necessary to take policy measures. In Eritrea, colonial governors were cautious not to interfere

²² *Bollettino* (Dec. 1919), 23.

²³ Circular letter on the anti-slavery collections to be made on the day of Epiphany, 'Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide, De Stipe colligenda pro nigris in Africa', Rome, 29 Sept. 1919. PF, rubr. 55, ns, 1919, vol. 624, 534.

²⁴ Società antischiavista d'Italia, *La società antischiavista d'Italia al convegno nazionale per il dopo guerra nelle colonie*, 15–21 Jan. 1919, Min. Cul. Pop, 309, 3.

²⁵ See Archivio Storico Diplomatico, *Inventario dell'archivio storico del Ministero Africa Italiana*, li. 1857–1939 (Rome, 1975).

with what they considered 'local customs', for fear of generating social unrest.²⁶ In Somalia, the authorities did not combat slavery systematically, as their power was limited.²⁷

If Italy's colonial ministry was slow to adopt the campaign against slavery as its civilizing mission, the challenge was even greater with regard to the Italian public. By the 1920s, Italian colonialism was still widely perceived as relatively unsuccessful and unrealized. Italy had gained its colonies in Eritrea, Libya, and Somalia during the liberal era and, as Ruth Ben-Ghiat has argued, imperial conquest had been 'central to many liberal-era visions of Italianness'.²⁸ But plans to settle Italian emigrants to control agricultural resources in Eritrea and Somalia had not been realized, and the majority of Italians living in Africa were civil servants and members of the military.²⁹ Things were not looking better in Libya which, in the wake of Italy's occupation in 1912, continued to be a source of armed resistance and military conflict that would only be resolved in 1932.³⁰ Thus, more than two decades after the disastrous attempt to conquer Ethiopia in Adwa in 1896, popular enthusiasm for colonial expansion remained weak, and Italian businesses were reluctant to invest in the colonies.³¹

It was this political and public ambivalence towards colonial expansion that the Società Antischivistica hoped to change by advocating the combination of religious and civilizing goals to achieve economic profit. In June 1920, Tolli wrote to the Ministry of Colonies to promote the benefits of a combined colonial and missionary enterprise and to ask for financial and political support for the activities of his organization. The letter included a lengthy report detailing the history of the Italian anti-slavery

²⁶ See Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Vicenza, 2005), 83–6.

²⁷ This phrase is taken from Francesca Declich, 'Dynamics of Intermingling: Gender and Slavery in Somalia at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *Northeast African Studies*, 10, 3 (2003), 45. Also, L. V. Cassanelli, 'The Ending of Slavery in Italian Somalia: Liberty and the Control of Labor 1890–1935', in S. Miers and R. L. Roberts (eds), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1988), 308–31.

²⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Modernity is Just Over There: Colonialism and Italian National Identity', *Interventions*, 8, 3 (2006), 382.

²⁹ On the failure of liberal Italian colonial settlements, see Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact* (Uppsala, 1987). Also, Claudio G. Segrè, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonisation of Libya* (Chicago, 1974), 3–19; G. C. Novati, 'Italy in the Triangle of the Horn: Too many Corners for a Half Power', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32, 3 (1994), 369–71.

³⁰ Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, 4 vols. (Rome, 1976–85). Also, G. Rochat, *Guerre Italiane in Libia e in Etiopia: Studi militari, 1921–1939* (Padua, 1991).

³¹ H. R. Rainero, 'An Imperialism with no Economic Basis: The Case of Italy, 1869–1939', in O. Pétré-Grenouilleau (ed.), *From Slave Trade to Empire: Europe and the Colonisation of Black Africa, 1780s–1880s* (London, 2004), 85–94.

movement, its campaigns in connection with missionary establishments in Libya, Somalia, and Eritrea, and its future goals. As Tolli professed, the objective of his society was to instruct and elevate indigenous people in Africa. The development of the 'natives' (*indigeni*) in the colonies, the Italian anti-slavery leader argued, was a prerequisite for their compliance with the 'superior expectations' of Italian civilization and the latter's 'central reliance on work'.³² Underpinning Tolli's notion of colonial development was the idea that only 'free labour' as opposed to slave labour would enable the full exploitation of both human and natural colonial resources. Thus, the successful growth of Italy's colonial production and wealth, Tolli maintained, was in direct relation to the quantity and quality of indigenous population labouring in the fields and mines. It was therefore in the Italian government's interest to support the Catholic missions in their anti-slavery efforts.³³

With his lengthy report to the Ministry of Colonies, Tolli expressed the hope that the government would engage in a closer collaboration with the anti-slavery lobby and thus indirectly acknowledge the importance of missionary work in East Africa, a step that came to pass in 1923, when Giovanni Salvadei, vice-director of the Ministry of Colonies, joined the Società Antischivista's organizational Committee. In order to further promote its vision of African slavery as a central issue that could be tackled by expanding Italian colonial activity, the Società Antischivista organized an anti-slavery congress in Rome in April 1921. With the Pope's approval, Italian anti-slavery leaders invited representatives from both religious and secular Italian institutions to attend the event. This resulted in the formal affiliation to the congress of a great number of members of religious orders, congregations, and of the Catholic hierarchy, including the archbishops of major metropolitan and colonial archdioceses in Naples, Palermo, and Pisa, as well as Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia.³⁴ The congress also brought together delegates from scientific and academic Italian institutes, notably from the Istituto Coloniale, the Società Geografica Italiana, the Istituto Geografico, or the Neapolitan Società Africana d'Italia, as well as journalists working for the Catholic press including *Civiltà Cattolica* and the *Osservatore Romano*, both semi-official voices of the Holy See.³⁵ Tolli also wrote to the Ministry of Colonies,

³² Tolli to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 19 June 1920, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 115, 11.

³³ Tolli to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 19 June 1920, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 115, 11–12.

³⁴ 'Adesioni al congresso', in Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischivista nazionale*, 13–30.

³⁵ 'Elenco delle adesioni', in Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischivista nazionale*, 30–2.

encouraging it to dispatch a delegation to the congress in order to add to its official nature.³⁶ The government responded favourably by sending representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Colonies.

The Roman congress of 1921 promoted an image of Italian anti-slavery activism that suggested it was an influential historical and contemporary movement. Contributors stressed the importance of Catholic anti-slavery and missionary activities both for Africa and for their own country's national, historical, and cultural identity.³⁷ The writer and editor of the *Bollettino*, Virginio Prinzivalli, painted a glorious picture of ancient Rome as the avant-garde of anti-slavery activism. Egilberto Martire, long-standing member of the Società Antischiavista and delegate of the Italian Populist Party in the Italian parliament, rejoiced that the decline of anti-clericalism in Italy had favoured the public expression of faith.³⁸ Count Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, President of the influential Catholic lay organization Azione Cattolica (founded in 1905), gave a speech on the measures to promote missionary activism. Missionaries reported on the spiritual pursuits of various orders, including the Capuchins in Eritrea, the Trinitarians in Somalia, and the White Fathers in Uganda. The Italian anti-slavery society even launched a competition for the compilation of a missionary guidebook, intended to provide missionaries with practical information on questions of hygiene and education, as well as agricultural and commercial issues.³⁹

With its strong focus on the continuity and growth of Italian missionary action in Africa, the anti-slavery congress not only reflected the organizers' belief in Italy's spiritual domination through Catholicism, but it also outlined the geopolitical contours of future missionary and colonial aims. Unlike the British Anti-Slavery Society, which spoke out against a wide range of issues concerning native labour and indigenous protection all over the globe, the Italian anti-slavery movement continued to focus exclusively on slavery in the Horn of Africa that was also the focus of Italian geopolitical interest. In so doing it provided a bridge between the liberal past and the future project of a Fascist empire in which anti-slavery ideology and propaganda would play an increasing role.

³⁶ Tolli to Ministry of Colonies, 16 Apr. 1921, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 115.

³⁷ 'Programma', in Società Antischiavista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischiavista nazionale*, 34–6.

³⁸ Egilberto Martire, 'Gli ideali della società antischiavista', in Società Antischiavista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischiavista nazionale*, 82–8.

³⁹ 'Concorso per la guida pratica dei Missionari', in Società Antischiavista d'Italia, *Terzo congresso antischiavista nazionale*, 211.

THE ASCENT OF FASCISM

In 1922, anti-slavery aspirations for an Italian civilizing mission were to gain further governmental support with the rise of Fascism under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, the new man of Italian postwar politics and key strategist of Italy's interwar Fascist government.⁴⁰ Fascism was officially founded in February 1919 as a radical patriotic alternative to the Italian Socialist Party.⁴¹ It was a movement profoundly shaped by the First World War and by social and political upheaval in Italy. Fascist ideology comprised an eclectic combination of various political and philosophical currents and it was strongly influenced by existing populist and ultranationalist ideologies, which were opposed to Marxism and liberalism.⁴² Between 1919 and 1922, Fascism spread in the Italian countryside through violent and military-style Fascist squads (*squadristi*) who organized so-called 'punitive expeditions' against which the authorities and the liberal government failed to act.⁴³ This violent, anti-clerical, and anti-capitalist extra-parliamentary movement turned into a rapidly growing regime which gained particular support amongst the lower middle classes and amongst Italian industrial elites and was tolerated by the political establishment which feared the rise of socialism.⁴⁴

In autumn 1922, Mussolini's 'March on Rome' and his theatrical seizure of power placed him at the head of a coalition which lasted until 1924, and formed the first step in the Duce's ascension.⁴⁵ Mussolini not only became Italy's Prime Minister, a post he would hold for two decades until 1943. He also controlled the main zones of national governance by simultaneously acting as Minister of the Interior (a position

⁴⁰ For an authoritative account of Mussolini's rise to power, see R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London, 2010; first publ. 2002).

⁴¹ The origins and development of Fascism in Italy have been an area of huge scrutiny and controversy. I rely here on Glenda Sluga, 'The Aftermath of the War', in Bosworth, *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 70–87. For a general introduction to Italian Fascism, see A. J. De Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Development* (Lincoln, Neb., and London, 2000; first publ. 1982). Also, Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York, 2004) and R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Dictatorship, 1915–1945* (London, 2005).

⁴² Kevin Passmore, 'The Ideological Origins of Fascism before 1914', in Bosworth, *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 11.

⁴³ Mimmo Franzinelli, 'Squadristi', in Bosworth, *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 91–108. On the terror of the early years, see Paul Corner, 'Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?', *Journal of Modern History*, 74, 2 (2002), 331. Also Sluga, 'Aftermath', 73.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Dunnage, *Twentieth Century Italy: A Social History* (London, 2002), 63–8.

⁴⁵ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 41.

he would retain until 1943 except for two years between 1924 and 1926), and as Minister of Foreign Affairs (a post he would hold until 1929 and again from 1932 onwards). This accumulation of offices and functions, together with the reliance on a tight network of trusted friends, became a trademark of Mussolini's regime.⁴⁶

To gain widespread acceptance, the new Fascist government made certain that it integrated the dominant interest groups in Italy, secured the support of the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele, and paid particular attention to the Catholic constituency.⁴⁷ All this explains why the Società Antischiavista followed the changes in government without much concern. The leaders of the Italian anti-slavery movement never commented on Mussolini's early anti-clericalism nor did they express concern about the violent raids of Fascist squads against Socialist and Catholic agrarian organizations.⁴⁸ Rather, like many Italians in the early 1920s, the anti-slavery lobby saw the new regime as 'a new model of modernity that promised to unify and regenerate the nation'.⁴⁹ This impression was strengthened as Mussolini made 'tangible efforts' to satisfy Catholic expectations: he reintroduced religious education in state schools and crucifixes in public buildings, and augmented the salaries of priests, which gave him the support of the Pope.⁵⁰ Building on the increasingly solid relationship between the Vatican and the regime, in July 1923, the Società Antischiavista began a correspondence with the Fascist leader and gained Mussolini's support for its anti-slavery project in East Africa.⁵¹

In April 1924, Mussolini won the Italian general elections, which confirmed his position as Prime Minister and formed the beginning of the progressive centralization of a Fascist dictatorship that remained relatively dependent on existing interest groups.⁵² The National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF), founded in November 1921, became the main political party and one of the principal vehicles of social control.⁵³ Remaining liberals in the Italian bureaucracy and civil service were replaced by a new guard of Fascist administrators. These

⁴⁶ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, 146.

⁴⁷ See Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, 86–7. Also, Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 187.

⁴⁸ On Mussolini's early anti-clericalism and the initially antagonistic relationship between early Fascism and the Vatican, see Pollard, 'Fascism and Catholicism', 169–70.

⁴⁹ Ben-Ghiat, 'Modernity is Just Over There', 382.

⁵⁰ Pollard, 'Fascism and Catholicism', 170.

⁵¹ Correspondence between the Società Antischiavista and Mussolini began in 1923. ASMAE, Min. Cul. Pop., 309.

⁵² R. J. B. Bosworth, 'Dictators Strong or Weak? The Model of Benito Mussolini', in Bosworth, *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 268–9.

⁵³ Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 191–4; Corner, 'Italian Fascism', 337–8.

included Dino Grandi, a perceptive diplomat who was to play a key role in shaping Fascism's international image.⁵⁴

The beginning of a new political era coincided with a reconfiguration of the leadership of the Società Antischiavista brought about by the death of its two leading figures. In May 1924, the President of the Italian anti-slavery organization, Filippo Tolli passed away in Rome at the age of 81. A few months later, in January 1925, Tolli's demise was followed by that of Secretary Attilio Simonetti. The loss of Tolli and Simonetti brought significant change for the Società Antischiavista. It signalled the end of the founding generation of Italian anti-slavery activists, who, born in the mid-nineteenth century, experienced Italian unification, and pursued Catholic action in the face of general anti-clericalism for almost four decades.⁵⁵ Both Tolli and Simonetti had retained a strong Catholic identity when confronted with Mussolini's rise to power. Guided by their aim of increasing Catholic influence on political, social, and colonial issues, the two men willingly went along with governmental changes, but they were not active Fascists. They were replaced by a group of activists who, as we shall see, were more directly supportive of the regime and eager to participate in its colonial projects.

After Tolli's death in 1924, Don Francesco Massimo, a member of the Italian royal family with close ties to the Catholic hierarchy, was elected President of the Società Antischiavista. A year later, the executive committee reorganized around a group of existing members with strong colonial connections, bringing an intensification and ideological shift to anti-slavery propaganda. Aldo Blessich, a professor of geography and member of the Società Geografica Italiana, an instrumental body in the promotion of 'colonial science' and of Italian colonialism in North Africa, was appointed as the Secretary and official spokesman of the Società Antischiavista.⁵⁶ He was closely assisted by Giovanni Salvadei, the future vice-director of the Italian Ministry of Colonies. Pietro Cancani, a lawyer, journalist, and keen supporter of Italian colonial expansion, became one of the main contributors to the anti-slavery newsletter.⁵⁷ These changes in the organization's leadership

⁵⁴ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 51.

⁵⁵ For insights into their career in the anti-slavery movement, see the historical review of the society's thirtieth anniversary in *Bollettino* (June 1916), 83–93. For an obituary of Tolli, see *Bollettino* (Mar. 1924). For an obituary of Simonetti, see *Antischiavismo* (formerly *Bollettino*, May 1925), 7–9.

⁵⁶ David Atkinson, 'Geographical Knowledge and Scientific Survey in the Construction of Italian Libya', *Modern Italy*, 8, 1 (2003), 9–29.

⁵⁷ For A. Blessich and P. Cancani, see T. Rovito, *Letterati e giornalisti italiani contemporanei: Dizionario bio-bibliografico*, I (Naples, 1922), 166–97 and 67–71 respectively. For

were accompanied by a subtle but indicative modification of the title of the anti-slavery newsletter: in May 1925, the *Bollettino* was renamed *Antischiasmismo* ('Anti-Slavery Activism') and the movement announced that its agenda would be the 'Civilizing of Coloured Races'.⁵⁸

The now explicit focus of the Italian anti-slavery lobby on promoting Italy's civilizing mission found its expression in a new national congress organized in Rome in December 1926.⁵⁹ On the surface, this event closely resembled previous Roman anti-slavery events. As in 1921, the congress was officially endorsed by the Pope and it featured numerous representatives of the Catholic hierarchy.⁶⁰ But there was no mistaking the growing colonial aspirations of anti-slavery campaigners, and their ambition to cooperate with the Fascist government: out of the congress's four specialist commissions, one focused on the history of anti-slavery activism, one on missionary action in the Italian territories, and two commissions dealt with 'contemporary colonization' and 'colonial commerce'.⁶¹ The convenors of the congress nominated a list of 'honorary members' which included Emilio de Bono (governor of Tripolitania), Count Cesare Maria de Vecchi (governor of Somalia), Jacopo Gasparini (governor of Eritrea), and finally Attilio Teruzzi (governor of Cyrenaica).⁶² The organizers also sent telegrams to the Italian Ministry of Colonies and to Mussolini, expressing their 'endless gratitude' for the government's 'tireless civilizing work'.⁶³ A reviewer of the congress enthusiastically noted that 'Italy does not hide her will to rise to Power, for it is in the nature of the strong to possess and honour such a will. However, she wants that Power to be united with a generous vision of highest spiritual good which she professes and bestows'.⁶⁴ On a practical level, this 'generous vision' found its expression in the development of Italian freedom villages, to which this chapter now turns.

biographical details on Giovanni Salvadei, see the obituary in *Antischiasmismo* (Oct.–Dec. 1937), 178–80.

⁵⁸ See the new series titled *Antischiasmismo: Monitore dell'incivilimento delle razze di colore*, starting in May 1925.

⁵⁹ Società Antischiasmista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso nazionale della Società Antischiasmista d'Italia* (Rome, 1926).

⁶⁰ 'Documento pontificio al presidente generale della Società Antischiasmista d'Italia per il IV congresso antischiasmista', written by Cardinal Gasparri and published in Società Antischiasmista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 15.

⁶¹ Società Antischiasmista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 60–1.

⁶² 'Comitato d'onore', in Società Antischiasmista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 25.

⁶³ Telegram, Presidente Francesco Massimo to S. E. Benito Mussolini, Presidente Consiglio, 1 Dec. 1926, in Società Antischiasmista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 61.

⁶⁴ *Antischiasmismo*, Jan. 1927, 5.

FREEDOM VILLAGES IN ETHIOPIA

In the mid-1920s, the Società Antischivista's ideological bridging of religious and colonial interests found a means of practical implementation in the so-called 'freedom villages' (*villaggi di libertà*)—manufactured settlements of freed slaves living and working under missionary control in East Africa. The scheme of freedom villages, which combined missionary ideals and future Italian colonial aims, was neither new nor innovative, and its effectiveness had long been a matter of controversy amongst humanitarian organizations and amongst historians. Freedom villages were a prominent feature of late nineteenth-century Catholic missionary expansion but their usefulness as measures for the emancipation of slaves remained contested in liberal and evangelical circles.⁶⁵ A historical precedent could be found in the Société Antiesclavagiste de France and its late nineteenth-century policy of ransoming slaves—a policy which, by the turn of the century, had evolved into the creation of so-called *villages de liberté* in French West Africa.⁶⁶ The French scheme had quickly been abandoned because of high flight and mortality rates amongst the liberated slaves, as well as general socio-economic changes on the ground.

The French experience, of which the Società Antischivista knew through its correspondence with the late anti-slavery leader Joseph Du Teil, did not deter the Italian organization from making freedom villages its priority. The supporters of Italian anti-slavery action had first evoked the establishment of freedom villages during the First World War, presenting such settlements as an innovative way to come to terms with the war's devastating effects on missionary stations. At the time, the Società Antischivista suggested that anti-slavery organizations including the French and the British societies should create so-called 'peace villages' (*villaggi della Pace*) to mark a new beginning of missionary work.⁶⁷ However, the tepid enthusiasm shown by the French and British societies and the lack of governmental subsidies had made it impossible to implement the Italian idea.

After the war, the scheme of freedom villages was popularized again as a potentially civilizing Italian enterprise. At the Roman anti-slavery congress in April 1921, the Vice-Secretary of the Società Antischivista, Augusto Grossi-Gondi, portrayed freedom villages as a 'humanitarian endeavour' that offered a safe haven for African slaves who were persecuted

⁶⁵ For a review of the literature on freedom villages, see Ch. 1.

⁶⁶ J. Du Teil, *La Société Antiesclavagiste de France et ses villages de liberté en Afrique: Notice par le Baron Joseph du Teil* (Paris, 1905). For more details on the French scheme, see Ch. 1.

⁶⁷ *Bollettino* (Feb. 1916), 37–8.

by 'perfidious slavers'.⁶⁸ The vision Italian anti-slavery activists had for the villages was heavily tinged with missionary ambitions, anti-Islamic ideology, and racial superiority. Like Du Teil in the late nineteenth century, Italian anti-slavery leaders professed that the villages would act as Christian microcosms, in which baptism, marriage, and the agricultural activity of freed slaves could be encouraged. The idea was to populate the villages with young Africans—derogatorily called 'little blackamoors' (*morettini*), a racialized term derived from the missionaries' romanticized view of the childlike nature of the African population. Anti-slavery activists planned to use the donations from domestic anti-slavery campaigns to help local missionaries ransom these African slave children, and then convert them to Christianity.⁶⁹ Following their 'rescue', the freed slaves were to be educated in agrarian and religious matters. As in the French case, the missionaries' long-term aim was to encourage and arrange marriages between freed slaves living in the community, and to settle the newly formed couples in compounds within the boundaries of the mission station. The final objective was the formation of free, productive, Catholic families, metaphorically described as 'oases of Christianity'.⁷⁰ Anti-slavery activists were convinced that their scheme would provide an 'extremely efficient' means for the 'penetration of the Gospel in . . . unfortunate territories'. The villages would also create useful pools of cheap labour from which Italian missions and colonial authorities might benefit.⁷¹

It did not take the Società Antischivista long to find the ideal place for the implementation of freedom villages: since the beginning of the British media campaign on slavery in Ethiopia in 1922, Italian anti-slavery activists had been alert to the international debate on slavery in that part of North-East Africa.⁷² It was hardly a coincidence that in the same year British anti-slavery activists raised alarm at the alleged increase of Ethiopian slave raids, reports on the pervasiveness of slavery under Ras Tafari's rule began to appear in the Italian newsletter.⁷³ In June 1923, two months before Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations, the Società Antischivista appointed a small subcommittee to study slavery

⁶⁸ A. Grossi-Gondi, 'I villaggi di libertà', in Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo Congresso Antischivista Nazionale*, 10.

⁶⁹ Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo Congresso Antischivista Nazionale*, 4.

⁷⁰ Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo Congresso Antischivista Nazionale*, 6.

⁷¹ Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Terzo Congresso Antischivista Nazionale*, 8.

⁷² See Ch. 2.

⁷³ For the Italian reception of British reports on Abyssinian slavery, see *Bollettino* (July–Aug. 1922), 13. Also, 'The British Alarm', *Bollettino* (Mar.–Apr. 1923), 11–15, and 'Slavery in Abyssinia', *Bollettino* (Sept.–Oct. 1923), 9–15.

in the independent and sovereign African state.⁷⁴ One month later, in July 1923, Italian anti-slavery activists wrote to Mussolini, suggesting for the first time that he should promote the establishment of Italian freedom villages in Ethiopia.⁷⁵ Mussolini, whose vision of Fascist modernity increasingly relied on the idea of Italy's imperial expansion, showed considerable interest in the scheme.⁷⁶ He congratulated the Società Antischivista on its 'noble initiative' and sent 20,000 lire (roughly equivalent to £5,000 sterling at the time) in support, a sum corresponding to the estimated cost of running a village.⁷⁷ For reasons that remain unclear, however, a further two years would pass before the first villages were realized.

In March 1925, the Società Antischivista wrote to the Fascist Minister of Colonies, Pietro Lanza di Scalea, outlining its plans for four freedom villages on Ethiopian territory.⁷⁸ It suggested assigning the administration of these settlements to the Consolata Mission founded in Turin in 1901. The Consolata had been authorized by Propaganda Fide to begin missionary work in Kaffa in south-western Ethiopia in 1913, with the primary purpose of evangelizing and educating non-Christian peoples.⁷⁹ The idea of putting the Consolata in charge of Italian freedom villages received a positive response from the Italian government, and, in August 1925, the Italian Ministry of Colonies decreed an annual sum to support the undertaking.⁸⁰

This official validation by the Fascist government reflected the extent to which the political and constitutional evolution of Italy in the early 1920s had consolidated previous expansionist aims. As would become clear during the following years, freedom villages fitted the Fascist vision of Italian expansion in East Africa. Although Mussolini's preoccupation with the need to increase natural resources to sustain demographic growth had not yet matured into military plans, Ethiopia's situation between the Italian colonies of Somalia and Eritrea certainly made it strategically attractive for acquisition.⁸¹ Not surprisingly, however, these Italian plans for freedom villages were decidedly

⁷⁴ Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 227–35.

⁷⁵ Società Antischivista to Mussolini, 2 July 1923, ASMAE, Min. Cul. Pop., 309.

⁷⁶ On how imperial thinking 'was built into Fascist ideology', see Ben-Ghiat, 'Modernity is Just Over There', 382.

⁷⁷ Mussolini to Società Antischivista, 7 July 1923, ASMAE, Min. Cul. Pop., 309.

⁷⁸ Società Antischivista to Lanza di Scalea, Italian Ministry of Colonies, 14 Mar. 1925, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 115.

⁷⁹ For an overview of the Consolata Mission's activities in East Africa, see A. Sbacchi, 'The Archives of the Consolata Mission and the Formation of the Italian Empire, 1913–1943', *History in Africa*, 25 (1998), 319–40. Also, Lucia Ceci, 'Chiesa e questione coloniale: Guerra e missione nell'impresa d'Etiopia', *Italia Contemporanea*, 233 (2003), 617–33.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Colonies to Società Antischivista, 10 Aug. 1925, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 115.

⁸¹ On Mussolini's obsession with demographic growth, see Bruce Strang, "'Places in the African Sun': Social Darwinism, Demographics and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia',

out of step with the progressive internationalist mood in Geneva. In July 1925, the League of Nations' Slavery Commission during its second meeting officially condemned the practice of establishing freedom villages.⁸² A few months later, perhaps in response to that indirect international criticism, the Società Antischivista proudly announced the inauguration of its first freedom village in Maji, a territory in Southern Ethiopia where slave raids were particularly devastating and slavery was endemic.⁸³ The village was not named after saints or private donors, but rather after the man described as the most fervent supporter of the initiative, Benito Mussolini.⁸⁴ This was not only an early sign of the Duce's personality cult. It also showed how the regime strove to control and benefit from Catholic missionary activity in East Africa whilst Italian anti-slavery activists sought to assert the moral support of the church and the state in relation to Italian colonial expansion.

The Consolata mission became a key actor in bridging the gaps between metropolitan interests and the realities of the East African local context. Following the suggestion of the Società Antischivista, Consolata missionary Gaudenzio Barlassina, who since 1913 had acted as the apostolic prefect of Kaffa, was put in charge of administering the village in Ethiopia.⁸⁵ Before the First World War, Barlassina had travelled *incognito* in Ethiopia and had gradually succeeded in gaining the friendship of the Ethiopian regent Ras Tafari. In 1920, Barlassina's mission had been granted permission by the Ethiopian government to settle in central Ethiopia. From then on, the Consolata's commercial, scientific, educational, and medical activities intensified, gaining general acceptance amongst the population and governmental authorities.⁸⁶ Notwithstanding Barlassina's privileged relationship with the Ethiopian government, when asked to report regularly to the Italian Ministry of Colonies and to the Società Antischivista on the developments of freedom villages, he showed no concern that his religious mission would be instrumentalized for the promotion of Italian interests. His attitude would later change when faced with the military invasion of October 1935 with which he refused to cooperate.⁸⁷

in Bruce Strang (ed.), *Collision of Empire: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact* (Farnham, 2013), 11–31.

⁸² See League of Nations, *Report of the Temporary Slavery Commission* (Geneva, 1925), paragraph 94, 112–16.

⁸³ On the situation in the mid-1920s, see Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Lanham, Md., 2003), 174.

⁸⁴ See 'Foundation of the First Freedom Village "Benito Mussolini"', *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1925), 185–6.

⁸⁵ Società Antischivista to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 29 Mar. 1925, 180/37, 115.

⁸⁶ Sbacchi, 'Archives of the Consolata Mission', 324.

⁸⁷ On Barlassina's relation with the Ethiopian government, see Ceci, 'Chiesa e questione coloniale', 617–18.

In spring 1926, Barlassina sent his first report to the Società Antischivista describing the progress of the Ethiopian freedom village of Maji, in which twenty-one slaves had already settled.⁸⁸ According to Barlassina, the slaves had been ransomed at various prices, had received modest clothing, and were employed at the local mission station. As Barlassina outlined, the Consolata missionaries intended to 'educate, civilize and improve' former slaves, turn them into wage labourers, and make them 'owners of themselves' by giving them a sense of responsibility. As a result of this civilizing mission, so the missionaries hoped, former slaves would be in a position to contribute financially to their own liberation, and to pay for some of the costs the mission incurred for running the village.⁸⁹

To foster donations from members of the anti-slavery organization, Barlassina compiled reports accompanied by evocative photographic material that was supposed to illustrate the development of the humanitarian enterprise.⁹⁰ One photograph claimed to show an Ethiopian mother and her child whom the missionaries had rescued from slavery twice before settling them into the freedom village of Benito Mussolini.⁹¹ Barlassina also sent heart-rending appeals from Ethiopia in which he encouraged members of the Italian anti-slavery society to donate parcels of clothes, medicines, and cooking utensils to support the project.⁹² The Società Antischivista, in turn, organized the collection and shipping of these items to Ethiopia. Significantly, the organization added Italian flags to the list of useful donations, reasoning that it would be advantageous to mark Italy's humanitarian work as a worldwide example.⁹³ It is difficult to establish how Italian people reacted to these appeals, but it appears that the sums donated to the Consolata through the Società Antischivista and Propaganda Fide were used to fund three additional villages in the south-western part of the country.⁹⁴

In order to counter possible suspicions from the side of the Ethiopian government with regard to Italy's mounting influence in Ethiopia, the Società Antischivista stressed that its anti-slavery campaign was implemented in cooperation with local authorities. In January 1926, Italian anti-slavery leaders coopted Ras Tafari as an honorary member of their organization, without, however, asking his permission to do so.⁹⁵ They

⁸⁸ *La Consolata: Periodico Missionario Mensile* (May 1926), 5 (hereafter *La Consolata*).

⁸⁹ *La Consolata* (May 1926), 5.

⁹⁰ Barlassina's report for 1925 was published in *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1925), 185–7.

⁹¹ *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1925), 186.

⁹² *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1925), 187.

⁹³ *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1925), 188.

⁹⁴ *La Consolata* (May 1926), 5.

⁹⁵ The Società Antischivista informed the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs about this honorary election in a letter dated 2 Jan. 1926. ASMAE, MAI, 180/38 B, 120.

awarded the Ethiopian regent an anti-slavery diploma on the basis of a series of emancipation edicts he had issued in response to international pressure after Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations in 1923.⁹⁶ These new laws, published by Ras Tafari in 1924 imposed heavy penalties, including the death penalty, for the trade in slaves, and they envisaged the emancipation of some slaves through slave courts, but they did not abolish slavery per se.⁹⁷ The impact of these decrees, which arguably were designed not to offend Ethiopia's slave-holding elites, remained rather opaque. Far from marking an important step away from slavery, the new laws probably contributed to driving the slave trade underground.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Consolata missionaries published photographic evidence of public hangings of slave traders and generally emphasized Ras Tafari's willingness to cooperate with missionary aims.⁹⁹

This positive publicity reflected the missionaries' wish to strengthen their position in Ethiopia. Publicity was also a strategy used to detract from the fact that the villages were not yielding the expected results. The absence of reliable data on the socio-economic progress of the *villaggi di libertà* and the lack of tangible evidence of manumitted slaves suggest that the settlements were much more ephemeral than initial reports would indicate.¹⁰⁰ In 1927, Barlassina admitted in a letter to a fellow missionary in Rome that the concept of 'freedom village' was problematic and likely to be abandoned. The liberation of the slaves, Barlassina argued, was simple: it was achieved by buying the 'victims' into freedom. Paradoxically, however, the continuation of a slave-master relationship was the only legal means to enforce the stay of freed slaves on the mission station and to prevent anybody else from 're-enslaving' them. So, buying the slaves meant possessing them and, as a result, the slaves' freedom remained elusive. Barlassina deplored that, because the Ethiopian government did not

⁹⁶ See pictures of the anti-slavery diplomas sent to 'Her Majesty the Princess Zauditu' and 'Ras Teferi [sic] Makonnen', in *Antischiasmismo* (Nov. 1927), 17–18.

⁹⁷ See 'Règlement pour la liberté des esclaves et pour leurs conditions de vie', Addis-Abeba, le 22 de Megabit 1916, de l'an de grâce (31 March 1924), LoN archives, R 64.

⁹⁸ Jon R. Edwards, 'Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Economic Reorganisation of Ethiopia, 1916–1935', *African Economic History*, 11 (1982), 7–8. On the ineffectiveness of Tafari's emancipation edicts, see also Ch. 5. On Tafari's rationale for gradual abolition, see S. J. Coleman, 'Gradual Abolition or Immediate Abolition of Slavery? The Political, Social and Economic Quandary of Emperor Haile Selassie I', *Slavery and Abolition*, 29, 1 (2008), 71–4.

⁹⁹ *La Consolata* (Oct. 1926), 157–8.

¹⁰⁰ In general, evidence on the philanthropic work of the mission among the slaves in the *villaggi di libertà* is hard to come by. Despite several searches with the archivist of the Consolata Mission, Padre Tomei, in Rome, only fragments of such reports could be found.

foresee any legal protection for freed slaves, Italian freedom villages could not successfully achieve their aims in Ethiopia.¹⁰¹ Barlassina's doubts were well founded and after an initial peak, missionary interest in running freedom villages, and in confronting the issue of slavery more generally, declined. In fact, in the late 1920s, the attention of Consolata missionaries shifted to scientific pursuits, and to providing free medical aid for the poor.¹⁰²

Yet, even if the viability of the freedom villages was questionable in the longer term, in the short term the scheme lent itself well to the metropolitan campaigning efforts of the Italian anti-slavery society. In its newsletter, the Società Antischiavista advertised Barlassina's villages under the colourful title 'Spartacan mission' (*Missione Spartaca*), after the famous leader of a slave revolt in the Roman Empire.¹⁰³ A range of photographs was publicized to illustrate 'the marvellous work undertaken by Italian missionaries in the struggle against slavery'.¹⁰⁴ One, for instance, showed a very young African slave boy allegedly liberated and settled in the *Villaggio Mussolini*.¹⁰⁵ The African child was dressed up as a Fascist youth (*balilla*), raising his arm for the Fascist salute.¹⁰⁶ The purpose of the picture was to convince subscribers of the success of Italian anti-slavery measures and of the importance of Italy's civilizing mission for African development. The next challenge was to impose this idea on the rest of the world.

TOWARDS A 'FASCISTISATION' OF ITALIAN ANTI-SLAVERY

In the late 1920s, the Società Antischiavista progressively aligned itself with the opportunistic and improvised policies of the Fascist regime, and its declared attempts to establish a 'system of totalitarian control'.¹⁰⁷ From 1927 onwards, the mechanisms of repression used by the Fascist government to control Italian opinion grew along with an increasing regulation of information, both of which accounted for the absence of open protest against the

¹⁰¹ Barlassina to unnamed fellow missionary, undated [approximately 1927], in MC, IV-4, Barlassina Papers.

¹⁰² Sbacchi, 'Archives of the Consolata Mission', 326.

¹⁰³ See 'The Scheme of Freedom Villages as Reviewed by the Italian Press', *Antischiavismo* (Apr. 1927), 81–3, 81.

¹⁰⁴ *Antischiavismo* (Apr. 1927), 83.

¹⁰⁵ See the photograph (undated and no author mentioned) with the caption 'piccolo balilla del villaggio Mussolini', *Antischiavismo* (Apr. 1927), 83.

¹⁰⁶ *Antischiavismo* (Apr. 1927), 83.

¹⁰⁷ On the use of the term by the regime, see Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 215.

regime.¹⁰⁸ The government issued a new set of laws which extended its power to dissolve political and cultural associations and to persecute and confine non-Fascists for 'political crimes'.¹⁰⁹

The extent to which this 'fascistisation' impacted the Italian people is difficult to assess and, like the more general question of public support for Fascism, it remains a subject of controversy among historians.¹¹⁰ While older histories have privileged the vision of a totalitarian regime relying on mass consensus, more recent studies have argued that Fascist ideology was 'a fragile influence' and that Fascism was 'a system which could readily enough be evaded'.¹¹¹ What is clear, however, is that greater state control and the enforcement of censorship on newspapers, radio broadcasts, films, and foreign publications, also meant that these media increasingly became instruments of Fascist propaganda. The emergence of political and cultural mass propaganda in the 1920s, a phenomenon which was not limited to Fascist regimes but extended to the liberal democracies of Europe, was one of the new features of Italian life in the late 1920s, even if its efficacy essentially remains 'unverifiable'.¹¹²

A central aspect of this new Fascist propaganda was the promotion of Italy's role as a great power and as an international actor with a 'colonial destiny', a concept which had been redefined and prioritized by Mussolini's regime after 1926.¹¹³ Connected to this was the need to control and improve

¹⁰⁸ For a synthetic account of the regime's repression, terror, and police control, see Corner, 'Italian Fascism', 333–4.

¹⁰⁹ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 56–7.

¹¹⁰ The term 'fascistisation' is used by Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, 193. See also Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 215–48.

¹¹¹ For older interpretations of the totalitarian character of the regime and its ability to create consensus, see Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, i. *Gli anni del consenso, 1929–1936* (Turin, 1974). For an in-depth study of Fascist control over Italian public opinion, see P. V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: Fascismo e mass media* (Bari, 1975), and also Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime 1929–1943* (Bari, 2000). For new research questioning the degree to which the dictatorship affected Italian people's daily lives, see R. J. B. Bosworth, 'Everyday Mussolinism: Friends, Family, Locality and Violence in Fascist Italy', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 1 (2005), 27. Also, Patrizia Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani: Una storia sociale* (Milan, 2008) and Kate Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–1940* (Basingstoke, 2012).

¹¹² On the methodological and empirical challenges of studying propaganda activities see Susan L. Carruthers, 'Propaganda, Communications, and Public Opinion', in P. Finney (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in International History* (London and New York, 2005), 207. On the evolution of Fascist propaganda in the 1920s, see Gianpasquale Santomassimo, 'Propaganda', in Victoria de Grazia and Sergio Luzzato (eds), *Dizionario del Fascismo*, ii (Turin, 2003), 433–7, esp. 435.

¹¹³ This point is made in Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna, 2002), 153. Other historians, however, such as Bosworth for instance, have insisted on the numerous continuities between liberal and fascist colonialism. For a useful overview, see Nicola Labanca, 'Studies and Research on Fascist Colonialism, 1922–1935: Reflections on the State of the Art', in Palumbo, *Place in the Sun*, 37–61.

the Fascist regime's image both within Italy and abroad, an image which by the mid-1920s was characterized by a series of foreign policy coups including the escalation of a dispute with Greece over the Greek–Albanian border, the bombardment and annexation of Corfu in August 1923, followed by the annexation of Fiume from Yugoslavia in February 1924 and the establishment of an informal protectorate over Albania in 1925–6.¹¹⁴ This was ample proof of Mussolini's desire to gain a position among the big powers by securing control of the Adriatic and the Balkan coast, and by establishing hegemony over the Mediterranean.¹¹⁵ But these aggressive nationalist and expansionist tendencies needed to be counterbalanced by the manufacture of a rhetoric of Italian heroism and of the country's spiritual, political, and cultural aptitude to take its place amongst the great powers of Europe.

The propagation of Italy's civilizing mission abroad was an aim the Società Antischiavista had pursued since the late nineteenth century, and in the second half of the 1920s this objective was infused with new vigour. In a resolution taken at the Roman congress of 1926, Italian anti-slavery leaders affirmed that, in the future, 'special attention [would be] given to propaganda activities'.¹¹⁶ Propaganda, which in this case meant both the control and manufacture of information, was to be 'quickly and efficiently organized' whenever an occasion presented itself. There was no doubt that this meant placing Italian anti-slavery publicity at the service of the regime's political needs.

To achieve wider publicity the Società Antischiavista suggested promoting Italian anti-slavery policy at an international level by organizing meetings and inviting international guests.¹¹⁷ This was a direct continuation of the Società's prewar activities, but it also mirrored the increased tendency of the Fascist government from the late 1920s onwards to promote its own brand of 'internationalism' on various levels, by creating new international institutes and associations and organizing congresses on topics ranging from agriculture to international law.¹¹⁸ After 1926, the

¹¹⁴ The debate on the aims and characteristics of Fascist foreign policy has created a large body of literature. For a historiography of the conflicting interpretations of Fascist foreign policy, see S. C. Azzi, 'The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy', *Historical Journal*, 36, 1 (1993), 187–203. For a diplomatic history of Italian foreign policy, see H. J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918–1940* (Westport, Conn., 1997).

¹¹⁵ Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, 167–93. For a study of Mussolini's vision of a new Mediterranean order, see Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War* (New York, 2006), 164–5.

¹¹⁶ Società Antischiavista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 337.

¹¹⁷ Società Antischiavista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 337.

¹¹⁸ On Fascist internationalism, see Madeleine Herren and Sacha Zala, *Netzwerk Aussenpolitik: Internationale Kongresse und Organisationen als Instrumente der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik, 1914–1950* (Zurich, 2002), 151–65.

Bollettino featured a slow but steady increase of contributions praising the regime's policies for a national as well as international audience. This new type of political propaganda was accompanied by a radicalization of the tone. This did not go unnoticed amongst international humanitarians. It prompted the Bureau International (which had continued its work despite its disastrous financial and administrative situation) to note that the Italian organization had 'changed in character'.¹¹⁹

The increased international aspirations of the Fascist regime also had consequences for Italy's relationship with the League of Nations—a relationship which radically changed after 1926. Having consolidated his dictatorial regime, from the mid-1920s onwards Mussolini, who had previously dismissed the League's role in international affairs, embarked on an opportunistic course to use League membership to promote Italian interests.¹²⁰ This also had implications for the Società Antischivista, which increasingly engaged in covering the hitherto marginalized League affairs. Until the mid-1920s, Italian anti-slavery activists had shown little interest in the work of the League of Nations' Mandates Section on slavery, unless it was to counter what they perceived as the dominant British position in Geneva. Italian activists objected to the idea of international interference and accountability reflected in the mandates system, and they argued that the League of Nations 'weakened the providential colonial order'.¹²¹ In line with governmental attitudes, the Società Antischivista had also made it clear that it disapproved of the meetings of the League's Temporary Slavery Commission (1924–5), a commission in which Italy was represented by Commandant Giovanni Roncagli, the Secretary-General of the Italian Geographical Society.¹²² In contrast to the British delegate Lugard who monopolized the international debate on slavery in Geneva, Roncagli did not actively contribute to the discussions. Rather, during the Commission's two sessions, Italian efforts had mainly concentrated on limiting British influence.¹²³

Like the Italian government, Italian anti-slavery activists did not think that 'from a humanitarian point of view' there was a need for an international convention against slavery.¹²⁴ In a statement forwarded to the Italian Ministry of

¹¹⁹ *Circulaire du Bureau International*, 3 (Geneva, 1927), 2.

¹²⁰ Costa Bona and Tosi, *L'Italia e la sicurezza collettiva*, 42–3.

¹²¹ *Bollettino* (Mar.–Apr. 1921), 23. Also, *Bollettino* (Mar.–Apr. 1922), 'La società antischivista alla Commissione dei Mandati nelle Colonie', 9–10.

¹²² On the Temporary Slavery Commission, see Ch. 2. G. Salvadei. 'La Convenzione contro la schiavitù, 26 settembre 1926 (relazione)', in Società Antischivista d'Italia, *Atti del quarto congresso*, 65–71.

¹²³ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 104.

¹²⁴ See article on the 'The League of Nations' Proposition for a Slavery Convention', *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1926), 40–5, 45.

Colonies, the Società Antischivista argued that previous anti-slavery agreements, such as the Berlin and Brussels Acts, were 'highly' sufficient measures against the slave trade.¹²⁵ Italian anti-slavery activists particularly criticized the fact that the Convention contained no provision to protect missionary activities.¹²⁶ This was perceived as a severe drawback for anti-slavery action, a criticism with which the Italian Ministry of Colonies 'entirely agreed'.¹²⁷

Italy's dismissive attitude towards the League, however, changed from the second half of the 1920s onwards, when Italian ambitions to counter British influence in Geneva took on a new competitive dimension. In the summer of 1926, the British Foreign Office added new weight to the League's anti-slavery campaign when it sought the support of the leading British humanitarian pressure group for an anti-slavery project in Ethiopia. In July 1926, the British Foreign Office informed the Anti-Slavery Society in London that, in cooperation with the French and Italian governments, it planned to suggest to the League Council to financially support 'charitable operations' already established in Ethiopia as a means to help the country towards abolition.¹²⁸ The British Foreign Office had in mind a specific project initiated by the Ethiopian medical doctor Charles Martin, a man who had been educated by British missionaries in India and was married to an English woman in Addis Ababa. Martin had developed a scheme through which freed Ethiopian slaves would have access to school education, and they would be taught to 'work with their own hands, cultivate the soil', in order to 'enable them eventually to earn their own living'.¹²⁹ The Foreign Office thought this could be a 'practical step in the struggle' against slavery, and emphasized that Martin's plan to solve the problem went further than the usual idea of 'merely freeing slaves and driving them out into the fields and streets'.¹³⁰ But there was more than altruism at work here: British diplomats were keen to make this an official mission not only for humanitarian but also for diplomatic reasons; the Ethiopian regent trusted Martin and had consulted him on political questions relating to Great Britain.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Società Antischivista to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 2 May 1926, on proposed draft of the Slavery Convention, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/4.

¹²⁶ Società Antischivista to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 2 May 1926.

¹²⁷ Italian Ministry of Colonies to Società Antischivista and to the notice of B. Attolico, 6 July 1926, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/4.

¹²⁸ John Murray, Foreign Office, to Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, 16 July 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 276.

¹²⁹ John Murray to Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, 16 July 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 276.

¹³⁰ John Murray to Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, 16 July 1926.

¹³¹ John Murray to Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, 16 July 1926.

Much to the satisfaction of the Foreign Office, the British Anti-Slavery Society agreed to contribute to Martin's project with annual subsidies.¹³² But in the following months, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to sabotage the British project by putting forward its own initiative, Barlassina's *Missione Spartaca*, in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Colonies. Barlassina had—in good faith and after a conversation with Ras Tafari—earlier expressed the somewhat unrealistic wish to receive an official mandate and financial subsidies from the League of Nations in order to increase his 'humanitarian authority'. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was therefore adamant that, if any money could be obtained by the League for anti-slavery work in Ethiopia, half of it should go to the Italian scheme.¹³³

In order to promote Barlassina's work and to challenge the British plan, the Italian Foreign Office collected reports that discredited Martin's project and that praised Barlassina's work as 'much more valuable' and 'worth supporting'.¹³⁴ Catholic, colonial, and diplomatic circles in Italy had many reasons to see Barlassina as the ideal person to endorse. Promoting the missionary's work meant not only that Catholic missions would receive official protection, but also that the Italian presence in Ethiopia would be officially subsidized by League members. The Italian Foreign Office believed that, if Barlassina received the mandate he would have 'a double-edged sword in his hands':¹³⁵ Ethiopia would benefit from 'anti-slavery aid', and Barlassina would also become 'the deposit of a vast documentation on the Ethiopian empire which one day could prove precious to the Italian government'.¹³⁶ In the end, because of the League's recurrent funding problems, Britain decided to abandon its plans and neither the British nor the Italian scheme was put forward to the League Council.¹³⁷ For Italy, however, the key objective was achieved: it had succeeded in establishing a claim, which previously did not exist, to moral agency in anti-slavery politics in Geneva. This not only contributed to increasing the Mediterranean country's international visibility and political recognition as a colonial power; it also laid the foundations for future ideological and political interventions in the League of Nations.

¹³² Murray to Harris, 3 Nov. 1926, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 276.

¹³³ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 28 Mar. 1927, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38 B, 121/4.

¹³⁴ Giuseppe Colli, Italian ambassador in Ethiopia, to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 20 Aug. 1926, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38, 120 and Colli to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 Aug. 1926, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38, 120.

¹³⁵ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 28 Mar. 1927, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38 B, 121/4.

¹³⁶ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 28 Mar. 1927.

¹³⁷ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 175.

In the following years, the strengthening of Italy's colonial design and its increasing ambition to compete with French and British colonial empires became a constant feature in Italian anti-slavery publications. Indeed, in January 1928, the anti-slavery newsletter presented a new section, the 'review of the colonial movement' (' *rassegna del movimento coloniale*'). The anonymous review was pro-colonial, pro-Mussolini, and pro-Fascist in tone. Its first edition appraised the progress of French, British, and Italian colonial empires in Africa, criticizing the League of Nations for wanting to meddle in colonial affairs, and arguing that the 'lesser peoples' (*popoli minori*) still needed the protection and guardianship (*tutela*) of European powers.¹³⁸ Anti-slavery activists were convinced of the legitimacy of their colonial claims and they were full of hope that the regime would deliver them an empire in which to operate.

THE CONCILIATION OF 'TWO IDEAL FORCES'

In February 1929, a long-anticipated event firmly consolidated the Catholic–Fascist alignment in Italy and thereby boosted the Società Antischivistica's ideological claims: the Lateran Treaties brought about a formal reconciliation (*conciliazione*) between the Catholic Church and the Fascist state. Historians have described the treaties as a 'marriage of convenience' re-establishing 'a tiny portion of papal temporal power' in the form of a sovereign Vatican City State.¹³⁹ The Lateran Treaties laid the basis for a friendly relationship between church and state until 1943. The Vatican obtained formal assurances with regard, for instance, to the role of Catholic schools, and the teaching of the catechism in public schools.¹⁴⁰ The Fascist regime, on the other hand, succeeded in incorporating what was regarded as one of the last major centres of independent power on the Italian peninsula, a development which had important implications for anti-slavery activism. The regime could now use the church's institutionalized link to the rural population and the middle class. With regard to foreign policy, the treaties increased the Fascist state's international prestige. Italian anti-slavery activists celebrated the treaties as a *dies memorabilis* and the fusion of 'two ideal forces'.¹⁴¹ The Società Antischivistica in

¹³⁸ *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1928), 22–3.

¹³⁹ See De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 76.

¹⁴⁰ John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929–32: A Study in Conflict* (Cambridge, 1985), 42–7.

¹⁴¹ *Antischivismo* (Mar. 1929), 67

particular rejoiced at the new legitimacy of its work, claiming that Italy had been 'returned to God'.¹⁴²

The 'fusion' between church and state in Italy gave new impetus to clerical organizations who saw the Lateran Treaties as the regime's concession to their influence in Italian society. But the treaties also placed Catholic organizations, notably Azione Cattolica Italiana which in 1930 could claim the membership of a million people, in direct competition with the Fascist Party's increasing control of leisure and youth activities. In early 1931 this led to a crisis between the Fascist government and the Catholic organization, which resisted cooption and as a consequence was temporarily suspended.¹⁴³ These tensions, however, had little impact on the otherwise close relationship between the Vatican and the Fascist state, a relationship which was anchored in a strong aversion to communism. Given the apparent spread of atheistic communism, the government's anti-Bolshevik propaganda assumed an international importance for the Vatican, and the church was well disposed to express its support for the regime's ideology and policies.¹⁴⁴ The onset of the global crisis and the worldwide economic depression of the late 1920s and 1930s further enhanced the need for internal cohesion. The Wall Street crash severely affected both Italy and the Vatican.¹⁴⁵ Economic crisis and domestic stagnation called for new ideological and economic ideas. As a result, colonial propaganda took on a renewed importance as a means of stabilizing the hold over the nation and countering the activities of anti-Fascist exiles.¹⁴⁶

After 1930, the Fascist government further intensified the production of propaganda directed at the Italian masses by using populist techniques across an ever-widening range of media. The government bodies responsible for the control and manipulation of opinion through means of mass communication such as the cinema, the radio, and the Italian film institute (Istituto Luce), were constantly upgraded.¹⁴⁷ The anti-slavery leadership, which since the 1920s had been close to the Fascist movement in sentiment, now became more entangled with the Fascist state. Judging from the propaganda it disseminated, the Società Antischiavista became increasingly complicit with Fascist ideology and with the regime's aims to generate popular enthusiasm for expansion.

¹⁴² 'Italy Given Back to God', *Antischiavismo* (June 1929), 162–5.

¹⁴³ On this, see Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism*, 133–57. Also, Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 116–32.

¹⁴⁴ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 77.

¹⁴⁵ John F. Pollard, 'The Vatican and the Wall Street Crash: Bernardino Nogara and Papal Finances in the Early 1930s', *Historical Journal*, 42, 4 (1999), 1083.

¹⁴⁶ De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce*.

¹⁴⁷ See chs. 5 and 6 in Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*.

Thus, by 1930, anti-slavery discourse as conveyed in the *Bollettino* was openly aggressive and contributions on Africa were infused with Fascist rhetoric.¹⁴⁸ Echoing the regime's anti-communism, Italian anti-slavery activists claimed that 'Bolshevik' organizations were undermining European anti-slavery efforts in Africa. Anti-slavery leader and Fascist sympathizer Aldo Blesich vigorously attacked 'Bolshevik' movements for wanting the 'dissolution of Africa'. Together with his fellow campaigners, he blamed mischievous 'Bolshevik' influences for creating tensions between European colonial powers, and for fostering 'uproar' in indigenous communities. Blesich condemned radical pan-Africanist tendencies as 'elements of perturbation' and he labelled political currents such as Marcus Garvey's Black nationalist movement as 'carriers of germs'.¹⁴⁹ Blesich's attacks were also directed against other anti-slavery organizations, such as the Bureau International and the League against Imperialism, an international anti-colonial body formed in 1927 on communist initiative.¹⁵⁰ To add to this anti-Bolshevik propaganda, the *Bollettino* featured a growing number of references to slavery and serfdom in Russia—a phenomenon which, at the time, was receiving wide press coverage in anti-communist circles in Britain.¹⁵¹

Alongside this increasingly alarmist propaganda, the Società Antischiavista assiduously collected donations for its anti-slavery campaign, which it presented as an effective means of infusing Italy's colonial expansion with spiritual values. The anti-slavery newsletter called on its subscribers to 'intensify solidarity' and encouraged readers to help with 'prayers, propaganda and donations'.¹⁵² In an attempt to mobilize their Catholic readers for imperial pursuits, Italian anti-slavery activists now glorified Fascist colonial ventures, contrasting them with the failures of the pre-Fascist liberal regime. The Società Antischiavista boasted in a review of its African activities in 1930 that Fascist Italy had, in a very short period, brought its colonies to a level of civilization which other colonial powers had reached only after at least twice that time.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, 136–7.

¹⁴⁹ See lead article 'The Bolshevik menace in Africa', *Antischiavismo* (Feb. 1930), 33–7.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the League Against Imperialism, whose ten years of existence were marked by a 'gradual decline from the very start', see Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918–1964* (Oxford, 1993), 71.

¹⁵¹ See, for instance, the references to Russian serfdom in *Antischiavismo* (Nov. 1929), 321–5, and the overview 'From the Communist Failure to the Enquiry of the League of Nations', *Antischiavismo* (July 1933), 187–95. On the British campaign, see Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, 2009), 112–13.

¹⁵² *Antischiavismo* (June 1930), 165.

¹⁵³ *Antischiavismo* (Dec. 1930), 321.

In tune with the regime's increasing colonial propaganda, the Società Antischiaivista's campaign aimed at convincing Italian people that they were destined to be colonizers.¹⁵⁴ Anti-slavery activists intended to convey a sense of legitimate supremacy and civilizing mission and thus evoked the supposed benefits of agricultural settlements in Somalia and the emancipating effects of abolitionist policies in Eritrea.¹⁵⁵ Italy's so-called pacification campaign against Libyan rebels, which eventually ended in January 1932 and was characterized by the use of chemical weapons and the construction of concentration camps, was celebrated as a new beginning for Italy's imperial enterprise.¹⁵⁶ The anti-slavery lobby presented the Italian expansion in Africa as a sign of national regeneration, professing that, thanks to the innovatory political ideology of Fascism, Italy could now benefit from a new position of power.¹⁵⁷

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

It is difficult to establish the degree to which Italian anti-slavery activists in the 1930s were drawn into the regime's propaganda machinery through a lack of alternative routes to get their message across, or whether they were actively adding grist to the regime's propaganda mills. Unlike other patriotic pressure groups created in the liberal era such as the Touring Club Italiano, which entertained a more ambivalent relationship with the regime, the anti-slavery organization fully identified with Mussolini's dictatorship.¹⁵⁸ The Società Antischiaivista seems to have been one of those groups which, as Paul Corner puts it, accorded their support for the regime 'for reasons of material gain, social status or for real, if misguided, ideas related to national resurgence'.¹⁵⁹ Given the Società Antischiaivista's historical support for colonial expansion, it can safely be assumed, that anti-slavery activists voluntarily and readily engaged in the legitimization of Fascist imperialism by raising claims to an Italian civilizing mission. But did this legitimization earn the Società Antischiaivista the recognition

¹⁵⁴ Strang, 'Places in the African Sun', 19.

¹⁵⁵ *Antischiaivismo* (Dec. 1930), 322–4.

¹⁵⁶ *Antischiaivismo* (June 1929), 6. On Italian war crimes, see Nicola Labanca, 'Colonial Rule, Colonial Repression and Italian War Crimes in the Italian Colonies', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9, 3 (2004), 300–13. On Italian violence in Libya, see also Aram Mattioli, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt: Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung 1935–1941* (Zurich, 2005), 41–54.

¹⁵⁷ *Antischiaivismo* (Dec. 1930), 325.

¹⁵⁸ R. J. B. Bosworth, 'The Touring Club Italiano and the Nationalization of the Italian Bourgeoisie', *European History Quarterly*, 27, 3 (1997), 371–410.

¹⁵⁹ Corner, 'Italian Fascism', 348.

it craved? Did the organization achieve its primary goal of painting Italy as an abolitionist nation?

When, in 1932, the British Anti-Slavery Society began to launch preparations for the centenary of emancipation, Italian activists challenged the established narrative of British humanitarian leadership. They criticized the fact that Kathleen Simon's book *Slavery* did not mention Italian anti-slavery efforts, and that there was no place for Catholic and missionary initiatives in the otherwise extensive range of British celebrations.¹⁶⁰ In reality, the Società Antischivistà's claim that it was contributing to the abolition of the modern slave trade and to the emancipation of African slaves also lacked popular and official acknowledgement in Italy. Although there is little doubt as to the Società Antischivistà's imperial mindset, the extent to which Italian people shared expansionist convictions remains questionable. It is impossible to extrapolate from anti-slavery sources how Italian Catholics, for instance, responded to the new type of Fascist anti-slavery propaganda. As has been convincingly shown by recent studies, Italian people retained some degree of autonomy and of 'choice in belief and behaviour' even under the coercive and repressive dictatorship of the 1930s.¹⁶¹ With regard to the government, the regime's endorsement of anti-slavery action remained purely pragmatic. Not even the monumental *Enciclopedia Italiana*, a Fascist project begun in 1925 and published in serial volumes between 1929 and 1936, considered 'anti-slavery' to be important enough for an entry, a fact which the Società Antischivistà deplored.¹⁶²

The efforts undertaken by Italian anti-slavery activists around the time of the British centenary to boost their image and to create their own national and historical landmarks, smack of delusion and fantasy. Because it could not draw on meaningful jubilees and significant abolitionist achievements, the Società Antischivistà fabricated self-congratulatory propaganda, portraying its central importance for the history of anti-slavery activism. The organization deliberately fabricated its own version of abolitionist history by collapsing different historical periods with little regard for factual details. Great emphasis was laid on the society's pedigree and its foundation by Cardinal Lavigerie in the late 1880s. Filippo Tolle's leadership of the Società Antischivistà was compared to the campaign waged by William Wilberforce in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶³ Guglielmo Massaia, an Italian capuchin who

¹⁶⁰ *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1932), 1–7, particularly 5.

¹⁶¹ Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice*, 8.

¹⁶² *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1932), 6.

¹⁶³ *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1932), 1–7, 2.

became the first archbishop of Galla in Ethiopia in the mid-nineteenth century, was presented as a pioneering spirit of anti-slavery action in Africa, alongside the British explorer and anti-slavery campaigner David Livingstone.¹⁶⁴ In short, Italian activists were keen to position themselves on equal footing with their British counterparts, which led them to inflate their contributions to African progress and civilization.

The leaders of the Società Antischivista thus professed that their organization had achieved 'immense emancipation work' in North-East Africa and the Mediterranean in the late nineteenth century, and they characterized their Roman headquarters as an 'eminent centre of international anti-slavery activism'.¹⁶⁵ In a veritable 'invention of tradition', contributors to the anti-slavery newsletter sought to construct an ideological continuity between Fascist expansion and what they claimed were the values and norms of Italy's antique past.¹⁶⁶ Analogies were established between the abolition of modern African slavery and slavery in the Roman Empire, linked by an Italian 'anti-slavery tradition' allegedly based on Christian colonial expansion and Italian cultural superiority.

These statements formed part of what Patrizia Palumbo describes as Fascism's 'fictive narratives of cultural identity and continuity'.¹⁶⁷ The construction of Italy's abolitionist tradition was combined with a description of the progress achieved under Fascist rule. The *Bollettino* commemorated the flourishing of anti-slavery activism in the decade since the Fascist March on Rome of 1922.¹⁶⁸ Contributors celebrated the 'Glory of Italian Anti-Slavery' under Fascist rule, evoking the spirit of enterprise of Fascist colonial policy.¹⁶⁹ As one contributor in the anti-slavery newsletter eagerly anticipated, one could be sure that the recent achievements of the Fascist regime 'would soon lead to more important accomplishments'.¹⁷⁰ Judging from the increasingly interventionist reports on Ethiopian slavery in the early 1930s, his words would prove to be prophetic.

¹⁶⁴ 'Per la gloria del Massaia', *Antischivismo* (Sept. 1932), 1–2.

¹⁶⁵ *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1932), 1–7, 5.

¹⁶⁶ For the concept of 'invention of tradition' see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 1–14.

¹⁶⁷ Patrizia Palumbo, 'Introduction', in Palumbo, *Place in the Sun*, 6–7.

¹⁶⁸ *Antischivismo* (Jan. 1932), 27.

¹⁶⁹ 'The Glory of Italian Anti-Slavery', *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1932), 21–9.

¹⁷⁰ 'The Glory of Italian Anti-Slavery', *Antischivismo* (Dec. 1932), 28.

The War on Slavery

The 1930s were to bring a distinct change to the ideological conception, general understanding, and implementation of humanitarian imperialism, with a definite shift from liberal paternalism to aggressive militarism. Described by Zara Steiner as 'the Hinge Years', the years between 1929 and 1933 were a time of rising tension in international relations as the economic and foreign policies of European countries were rapidly changing under the impact of the Great Depression, which was felt throughout the world.¹ The emergence of centralized and interventionist policies, particularly in Eastern Europe, strengthened the power of the states. Ideas of economic self-sufficiency and state-assisted economic measures favoured the popular rise of right-wing and neo-fascist movements.² By the early 1930s, one of the key questions faced by international diplomacy in the 1920s, namely the problem of disarmament, had been superseded by a rise of totalitarian systems pursuing a policy of aggressive nationalism.³ Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931–2 and its subsequent resignation as a member of the League Council; Hitler's ascension to power and Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations during the World Disarmament Conference in 1933; and finally the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, all contributed to the perceived 'decline' of international cooperation.

Recently, Steiner's conventional narrative of decline has been challenged by historians who have emphasized that the diversity of transnational ideas and movements, and the host of philanthropic, humanitarian,

¹ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford, 2005), 635–706.

² Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933–1939* (Oxford, 2011), 9–10.

³ On the challenges faced by the League's disarmament committee, see Andrew Webster, 'The Transnational Dream: Politicians, Diplomats and Soldiers in the League of Nations' Pursuit of International Disarmament, 1920–1938', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 4 (2005), 493–518.

economic, and scientific networks and structures which were part of the League system did not simply disappear with mounting international tensions. On the contrary, with regard to economic cooperation, public health programmes, and labour standards, for instance, the challenges of the 1930s brought new impulse to the work of the League of Nations and also gave rise to international cooperation outside the organization.⁴ This does not mean, however, that transnational endeavours were left untouched by the changing political realities and by the rise of various forms of Fascist states, nor that international cooperation, even where it could be found, was at the cost of national interest. Rather, as in the case of the League's work against slavery, which experienced a revival in the early 1930s, international humanitarian issues were successfully used to pursue nationalist goals.

This chapter shows how, mainly as a result of Italian expansionist policy, the anti-slavery campaign gained a new lease of life, which had little in common with the peaceful and transnational aspirations of some of its earlier proponents. The chapter discusses the evolution of the campaign against slavery in Ethiopia against the background of the tense international climate of the early to mid-1930s and the reverberations felt around the world of a fact-finding mission to Addis Ababa launched by the British Anti-Slavery Society in 1932. The analysis centres on the years 1934–5 when the campaign to abolish slavery in Ethiopia became increasingly interventionist and the controversy was used by Italy to legitimize a military offensive against Ethiopia. For the Italian government the 'selling of the conflict' at home and abroad became as important as any strategic considerations of foreign policy.⁵ Populist techniques were used across various media and on both national and international levels to claim that it was invading Ethiopia on 'humanitarian grounds', to avoid the imposition of more stringent international economic sanctions by the members of the League of Nations. In short, the Italians used one side of

⁴ Daniel Laqua, 'Preface', in Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London, 2011), pp. xi–xvii. Also, Patricia Clavin, 'Introduction: Conceptualising Internationalism between the World Wars', in Laqua, *Internationalism Reconfigured*, 1–14. For economic cooperation in the 1930s, see P. Clavin and Jens Wilhelm Wessel, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of its Economic and Financial Organisation', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 4 (2005), 465–92, and also Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford, 2013). On health, Sunil Amrith, *Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930–1965* (Basingstoke, 2006). An argument for the evolution of the League's work on food, agriculture, environment, and health is also made in the special issue ed. Cornelia Knab and Amalia Ribi Forclaz, 'Transnational Cooperation in Food, Agriculture, Environment and Health', *Contemporary European History*, 20, 3 (2011).

⁵ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London, 2010; first publ. 2002), 240.

the League's activities against another, thus turning League-style internationalism against itself.

The following discussion also reveals that one of the primary characteristics of Fascist colonialism was its opportunistic and superficial borrowing from the civilizing discourse of other European powers to deflect attention from its belated imperialist aims. Italian propaganda built on decades of international debate, on the campaigning work of non-governmental organizations, and on an existing anti-slavery repertoire. The resulting presentation of the Italian invasion as an anti-slavery mission was geared at creating domestic support and at obfuscating international opinion in ways that were to prove ultimately successful for the Italian government and disastrous for liberal humanitarian internationalism.

CREATING A HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY

In the early 1930s, after more than a decade of international efforts to produce legal instruments to tackle slavery and slave-trading 'in all its forms', the country which attracted most attention from British and Italian anti-slavery activists was Ethiopia. Throughout the 1920s, evidence of ongoing slave-trading and raiding had been reported and circulated by various British, Swiss, German, and American scientists, explorers, and travellers including George Montandon, Charles F. Rey, James Baum, and Max Grühl.⁶ The most significant increase in international publicity, however, occurred in spring 1930 when Joseph Kessel (1898–1979), a famous French journalist and writer of adventure novels, travelled to Ethiopia to document the existence of slavery for the readership of the right-leaning French newspaper *Le Matin*.⁷ The purpose of Kessel's 'on-the-spot investigation of the slave traffic from Abyssinia and Sudan across the Red Sea to Arabia' was to give the French public an idea of 'the vigour and extent of the slave trade at the very doors of civilization'.⁸

⁶ George Montandon, *L'Esclavage en Abyssinie: Rapport rédigé à la demande de la ligue suisse pour la défense des indigènes* (Geneva, 1923); C. F. Rey, *Unconquered Abyssinia as it is To-Day* (London, 1923), and Rey, *In the Country of the Blue Nile* (London, 1927); Max Grühl, 'Camp of Horror in an African Forest: Modern Slave Train [Trade?] Agonies. Death March through a Jungle', *Daily Express*, 13 Dec. 1930. A full account of Grühl's expedition, in which slavery played only a minor role, was published two years later: Max Grühl, *The Citadel of Ethiopia: The Empire of the Divine Emperor* (London, 1932).

⁷ Joseph Kessel, *Slave Markets in Abyssinia* (London, 1930), 2. Kessel's highly popular feuilleton was also published in book form in 1933, J. Kessel, *Marchés d'esclaves* (Paris, 1933). For a rather uncritical bibliographical account of Kessel, see Yves Courrière, *Joseph Kessel ou sur la piste du lion* (Paris, 1985).

⁸ Kessel, *Slave Markets*, 4.

Kessel drew on the insights provided by two willing informants, a slave owner named Saïd and a slave raider named Selim, to report how the slave trade was monopolized by Arabs from the Hedjaz, Assir, and Yemen. According to Kessel, the trade had been only insignificantly affected by the Ethiopian regent's anti-slavery laws, which since 1924 prescribed the death penalty for slave raiders.⁹

Ever quick to grasp an opportunity, the Anti-Slavery Society seized on the popularity of Kessel's writing to welcome what it presented as French support for its cause. Harris confided in Lady Simon that he was delighted by the French media's attack on Ethiopian slavery, which he saw as 'indicative . . . of a big political move'. 'I knew something of what *Le Matin* had begun to do', Harris wrote, 'but I never expected that I was going to be confronted by every big *Le Matin* hoarding with huge posters, half the size of the wall of a room, depicting the tragic suffering of the Abyssinian slaves.'¹⁰ Harris also announced that he was already 'thinking hard' about how to exploit this 'entirely unexpected situation'.¹¹ He immediately contacted the editor of the newspaper for permission to republish Kessel's adventures, which he was granted without delay.¹²

The dissemination of Kessel's sensationalist account yielded even more unexpected results. In the summer of 1931, the recently crowned Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie—formerly known as Ras Tafari Makonnen—contacted the Anti-Slavery Society. In a personal letter to the British organization, Selassie expressed his unhappiness at what he perceived to be unfair allegations of slavery in his country. Selassie particularly deplored that 'certain persons forgetful of the fact that slavery was once a universal institution' and 'probably unconscious of the work . . . already accomplished' under his rule, 'exaggerate for their own private ends, when referring to Ethiopia'. He pointed out that it was 'an unjust thing to put Ethiopian slavery on a par with the industrialised forms of slavery of Europe and America in former days, which the western mind of nowadays connects with this word'.¹³ The Ethiopian emperor hoped that the Anti-Slavery Society would 'know better than these

⁹ On Ras Tafari's anti-slavery edicts, see Ch. 4.

¹⁰ Harris to Lady Simon, 13 June 1930, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 26/2.

¹¹ Harris to Lady Simon, 13 June 1930, RHO, Simon Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 26/2.

¹² Harris to the editor of *Le Matin*, 9 July 1930, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 452. Kessel's account was published by the Anti-Slavery Society in the pamphlet 'Slave Markets: Being a Résumé of an Enquiry Carried Out by M. J. Kessel in Conjunction with *Le Matin*' (London, 1930).

¹³ Haile Selassie to Anti-Slavery Society, 12 July 1931, *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1931), 137.

sensation-mongers what delicate task it is to abolish this old custom', and wanted to know 'what practical assistance the Abyssinian Government might expect from the public in Great Britain in the task of liberating the slaves?'¹⁴

British anti-slavery activists were understandably flattered by Selassie's solicitation, and instantly reassured the Ethiopian emperor that they would give him 'any assistance' he needed.¹⁵ Indeed, the Anti-Slavery Society lost no time and began to plan the dispatch of a delegation of its members to Ethiopia to investigate the problem locally in cooperation with the Ethiopian government. Aware that this might create a unique opportunity for action by British humanitarians in Ethiopia, Harris secured adequate coverage by the media, arranging for the publication of potential articles in *The Times*, and for an interview with the BBC.¹⁶ Lord Noel-Buxton, a member of the Anti-Slavery Society and Labour MP with a penchant for social reform and an impressive track record of diplomatic involvement in the Balkans, was put in charge of the fact-finding mission.¹⁷ In the eyes of the Anti-Slavery Society, Noel-Buxton who was the great-grandson of the famous abolitionist Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton was an ideal candidate for what was perceived as a potentially ground-breaking abolitionist enterprise. As Harris claimed, with Noel-Buxton the question of slavery was 'bred in the bone' and his long years of diplomatic negotiations in the Near East made him 'fully alive to the dangers of being hood-winked'.¹⁸ The Foreign Office, which had been informed of the prospective undertaking early in the planning process, tacitly endorsed it and although the mission had no official character, it was conducted 'with the knowledge and approval of the British Government'.¹⁹

In January 1932, Noel-Buxton, together with his brother-in-law Lord Polwarth, and niece Grizel Scott, wife of the former British Minister at Addis Ababa Lord Bentinck, set out to Ethiopia. They were carrying a range of gifts for the emperor donated by members of the Anti-Slavery

¹⁴ Haile Selassie to Anti-Slavery Society, 12 July 1931, 131.

¹⁵ Anti-Slavery Society to Haile Selassie, 16 July 1931, *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1931), 138.

¹⁶ Harris to Noel-Buxton, 31 Dec. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 456.

¹⁷ On Buxton, see T. P. Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy from a Back Bench: A Study Based on the Papers of Lord Noel Buxton* (London, 1932). On the mission, see also Suzanne Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in Ethiopia', *Slavery and Abolition*, 18, 3 (1997), 271–2; H. N. Fieldhouse, 'Noel-Edward Buxton, the Anti-Slavery Society and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia, 1932–1944', *Historical Papers of the Canadian Historical Association* (Ottawa, 1972), 278–312.

¹⁸ Harris to Roberts, 23 Dec. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 456.

¹⁹ Harris to Roberts, 9 Dec. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 456.

Society, including slippers from the shoe manufacturer Clarks and a box of chocolates sponsored by the confectionary business Rowntree, as well as a memorandum in which the Anti-Slavery Society suggested administrative measures to accelerate abolition.²⁰ Upon its arrival in Addis Ababa, the expectations with which the delegation had left London were quickly disappointed. According to a confidential report drafted by Noel-Buxton for the Anti-Slavery Society, during their five-week stay in Ethiopia British anti-slavery activists only acquired limited insights into the social and economic realities of slavery. Noel-Buxton did not obtain permission to travel outside of Addis Ababa and the interviews which he was granted with Haile Selassie were very formal and carried out with the help of an interpreter.²¹ Although Noel-Buxton was able to voice his society's concerns in a range of conversations with members of the Ethiopian government, the talks led to few assurances of reform on the latter's part. The British delegation tried to persuade the Ethiopian emperor to set a deadline for the complete abolition of slavery, and to accept a European adviser for this purpose. But Haile Selassie did not grant this request, and repudiated the British proposal with the remark 'that if this was the price for the support of public opinion in Europe, it was too high a price to pay'.²²

Despite this rather substantial setback, the mission acquired a symbolic meaning which widely surpassed its actual achievements. The Ethiopian emperor and the Anti-Slavery Society both took advantage of the British visit in Addis Ababa to shine a light on their internationalist efforts. Haile Selassie depicted his reception of British Anti-Slavery activists as a significant attempt at cooperating with Europe and he later remembered it as a gesture of goodwill on his part.²³ The Anti-Slavery Society, in turn, hailed its mission as the 'greatest act of emancipation in the history of the world', and invitations were sent out to its members and supporters to attend a 'Welcome Home' dinner for the delegation in London.²⁴ Almost overnight, Noel-Buxton became an authority on slavery in Abyssinia. His views on the problem were published in *The Times* and in the liberal *Contemporary Review*,

²⁰ On the choice of presents see Harris to Noel-Buxton, 31 Dec. 1931, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 456.

²¹ Lord Noel-Buxton, *Draft Report on Abyssinia*, 28 May 1932, LoN, R 2353, 11.

²² Noel-Buxton, *Draft Report on Abyssinia*, 13.

²³ See Haile Selassie's reminiscences of his 'efforts to free the slaves and the progressive improvement, year by year, in the struggle for their liberation', in H. Selassie and E. Ullendorff, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937: The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I* (Oxford, 1976), 78-81.

²⁴ Anti-Slavery Society, 'Invitation to Annual Meeting and Welcome Home to Lord Noel-Buxton and Lord Polwarth from Abyssinia, 21 April 1931 in Central Hall, Westminster', LoN, R 2352.

and, in May 1932, he delivered an account of the situation in Ethiopia to the members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, a private institution dedicated to the promotion of liberal internationalist thinking.²⁵

When asked to take a position with regard to Ethiopian slavery, Noel-Buxton was acutely aware of the potential political implications of his statements and he took great care not to directly attack Selassie's government. Thus, in the lengthy report drafted after his return for the Anti-Slavery Society, Noel-Buxton gave no clear verdict on how Britain and the international community should deal with the African country. Rather, he emphasized that the emperor was sincere in his commitment to implement social reforms, and that Selassie possessed 'the mentality which we associate with European political ethics'.²⁶ But Noel-Buxton was also frustrated that the Ethiopian regent had dismissed European involvement in his country's affairs and the report's recommendations as to how external intervention could be effective without compromising Ethiopian sovereignty therefore remained inconclusive. The head of the anti-slavery mission made a detailed case for 'toleration', only to counterbalance it with an equally detailed argument for 'external pressure'. 'The stimulus of fear' of international intervention and control, Noel-Buxton reflected, could be the abolitionist's 'chief weapon in dealing with Ethiopia and might lead to the emperor asking for an adviser'. Ideally, so Noel-Buxton thought, the pressure should come from the member states of the League of Nations.²⁷ However, he openly doubted that any country apart from Britain had 'any sincere desire that the League of Nations should take a definite line towards putting things straight in Abyssinia'.²⁸ Of course, Noel-Buxton could not foresee at that point that the desired and invoked 'pressure' would come from Italy.

THE ITALIAN TAKEOVER

By the early 1930s, Italy's attitude towards the League of Nations had matured into the conviction that diplomatic power could only be increased through active participation in Geneva and through the presence of a collaborative spirit.²⁹ The regime's increasing aspirations to

²⁵ Noel-Buxton, *Slavery in Abyssinia: Address Given at Chatham House* (London, 1932).

²⁶ Noel-Buxton, *Draft Report on Abyssinia*, 8.

²⁷ Noel-Buxton, *Draft Report on Abyssinia*, 18.

²⁸ Noel-Buxton, 'Slavery in Abyssinia: The Trade in Negroes', *The Times*, 7 April 1932; Noel-Buxton, *Slavery in Abyssinia: Address Given at Chatham House*; Noel-Buxton, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', *Contemporary Review*, 141 (June 1932), 698–707.

²⁹ Enrica Costa Bona and Luciano Tosi, *L'Italia e la sicurezza collettiva: Dalla Società delle Nazioni alle Nazioni Unite* (Perugia, 2007), 10, 80.

create a more temperate international image, and to compete with what it perceived as British hegemony in Geneva also showed in the Italian reaction to the British mission to Ethiopia. In early 1932, just before Noel-Buxton's departure, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Colonies in Rome tried to jump on the bandwagon by appointing an Italian delegate to accompany the British anti-slavery delegation to Addis Ababa.³⁰ The Società Antischiavista, however, could not make practical arrangements in time to travel, and Dino Grandi—who since 1929 had acted as the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and who would become Italian ambassador in London later that year³¹—had to limit himself to sending a telegram congratulating Haile Selassie for his cooperation with European anti-slavery organizations, and assuring him of moral and financial support from Italy.³²

It was no coincidence that this renewed interest happened just as Britain had achieved a major victory in Geneva, namely the creation of a new slavery commission, the so-called Committee of Experts on Slavery (hereafter Committee of Experts). In 1929 already, the British government had proposed the idea of setting up a permanent commission of experts in the hope that this would provide a mechanism to review any evidence on slavery transmitted by governments to the League Secretariat since the adoption of the Slavery Convention. This idea, however, was rejected by other colonial powers on the grounds that such a body might infringe on sovereign rights and that financing it would be too much of a burden in a time of emerging economic difficulty.³³ It was only in September 1931, seven years after the final meeting of the League's first expert body, the Temporary Slavery Commission, that the League Assembly agreed to set up the new Committee of Experts that was, however, limited to twelve months.³⁴ Harris, who was working closely with the British delegation in Geneva, arranged for the Anti-Slavery Society to flag its support for the new body by offering a donation of £400 sterling, a sum that considerably stretched

³⁰ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Italian Ministry of Colonies and to Italian Under Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Baron Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli, 3 Feb. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

³¹ On the 'Grandi era', see H. J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918–1940* (Westport, Conn., 1997), 57–70. On Grandi's role in Fascist foreign policy, see Robert Mallett, 'Grandi, Dino', in Victoria de Grazia and Sergio Luzzato (eds), *Dizionario del Fascismo*, i (Turin, 2003), 631.

³² Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Italian Ministry of Colonies, Italian Embassy at London, and M. Paulucci, 8 Mar. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

³³ Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Lanham, Md., 2003), 197–8.

³⁴ Records of the Twelfth Assembly, in League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Sept. 1931), 132.

the organization's precarious finances.³⁵ A few weeks later, Italian activists who had shown very limited interest in the League's first anti-slavery commission, proposed to do the same.³⁶ The League Secretariat accepted the financial offers of both organizations, emphasizing, however, that this would not give them any influence on the discussions over slavery.³⁷

The Anti-Slavery Society responded to the surge of Italian involvement in what it took to be a common cause with considerable enthusiasm. John Harris and Lady Simon visited the Italian embassy in person in order to thank Italy for its interest, and to enquire whether the Italian government would also be favourable to the installation of a permanent—rather than simply temporary—anti-slavery committee in Geneva.³⁸ During these meetings, Harris and Simon also met with the Italian diplomat and keen supporter of Mussolini, Luigi Villari, someone whom Harris described as a 'friend' and whom he did not hesitate to provide with 'useful'—and potentially delicate—information on slavery in Ethiopia.³⁹ Delighted to have found a new ally in the anti-slavery cause, Harris urged Villari 'to collect all available information on slavery and to transmit it to the League of Nations' in time for the Committee of Experts' first meeting.⁴⁰ This was interpreted by the Italian embassy as a sign that—contrary to other parts of the British establishment—British anti-slavery activists were in great favour of Italian involvement in Africa, a fact that the embassy duly reported to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴¹

A few months later, in May 1932, the seven delegates of the Committee of Experts on Slavery met for the first time in Geneva. As in the previous slavery commission, Britain was represented by Lord Lugard. The other delegates, mostly individuals with a colonial background, were appointed by Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal.⁴² The Committee's terms of reference were narrowly defined and contrary to the League's commitment to 'open diplomacy': its members met in

³⁵ This number is given by Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 197.

³⁶ For the Società Antischivistica's offer to financially support the Committee of Experts on Slavery, see *Antischivismo* (Feb. 1932), 33–4.

³⁷ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 198.

³⁸ The visit was reported in Italian Embassy at London to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 Feb. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

³⁹ On Villari, see Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935–6* (London, 1975), 122. Villari was the author of books such as *The Fascist Experiment* (London, 1926), and *The Awakening of Italy: The Fascista Regeneration* (London, 1924).

⁴⁰ Harris to Villari, 19 Feb. 1932, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 457.

⁴¹ Italian Embassy at London to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 Feb. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

⁴² League of Nations, *Report of the Committee of Experts on Slavery* (Geneva, 1932), 3.

private and the proceedings were to be kept confidential. But, as Suzanne Miers has shown, the new body had one decisive advantage over its predecessor: it could consider evidence given by members of organizations which had been vouched for by their governments.⁴³ The Anti-Slavery Society was keen to take advantage of this unprecedented situation, and, in preparation for the Expert Commission's first session, Harris forwarded a copy of Noel-Buxton's confidential report on his experiences in Addis Ababa to the Mandates Section.⁴⁴

Italy, however, had also made some preparations. Indeed, at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Grandi had anticipated that the discussion would centre on Ethiopia, rather than on the problem of slavery more generally, and he had taken great care to secure his country's adequate representation in the committee. After consultation with the Italian Ministry of Colonies, headed since September 1929 by Emilio De Bono, one of future strategists of the Ethiopian war, Grandi chose Tullio Zedda who was Secretary to the government of Eritrea to represent Italian interests. Grandi argued that Zedda was particularly suited to the job because he had lived in Africa, had a sound knowledge of Italian colonial affairs, and was a keen supporter of the imperial project. Zedda was also, so Grandi emphasized in his correspondence with the Italian Under-Secretary at the League of Nations, Baron Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli, endowed with 'natural spontaneity' and a good measure of 'tact'.⁴⁵

To no one's surprise, much of the Committee of Experts' first session focused on Ethiopia. On 6 May 1932, during the fifth meeting of the delegates, Noel Buxton and Harris were invited to give evidence in a private interview. Aware that the minutes of the meeting would be communicated to the Assembly, including the Ethiopian delegation, Noel-Buxton presented a generous account of his experience in Ethiopia, emphasizing that his journey had not been undertaken 'for the purpose of criticism' but that it was the result of the friendly relations between his organization and the Ethiopian emperor.⁴⁶ For all its diplomatic correctness, Noel-Buxton's presentation of the situation did not fail to generate controversy. In the Committee of Experts' subsequent discussions, his report, and particularly his suggestion that

⁴³ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 201.

⁴⁴ Anti-Slavery Society to Catastini (Mandates Section), 20 Apr. 1932, LoN Archives, R 2352.

⁴⁵ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Paulucci di Calboli, 18 Jan. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Committee of Experts, 6 May 1932, League of Nations, CPE, 1st session, PV5, 3.

external pressure would lead to definite results in Ethiopia, was challenged by the French member of the committee Gabriel Angoulvant, a former colonial governor of the Ivory Coast and governor-general of French West Africa.⁴⁷ Angoulvant spoke in favour of Selassie's reform policy and openly doubted that the situation in Ethiopia was one of concern. The Italian delegate Tullio Zedda simulated 'perfect political objectivity . . . with purely humanitarian aims', at least that is what he confidentially reported back to the Italian Ministry of Colonies.⁴⁸ In fact, Zedda repeatedly insisted that the 'gravity of the situation' in Ethiopia should not be underplayed.⁴⁹

The Italians were paying close attention to any British statements regarding Ethiopia. Zedda's main impression from the meetings he attended was that the British Anti-Slavery Society, and individuals such as Lord Noel-Buxton and Lord Lugard, in particular, were trying to use the slavery allegations 'to pressure the Ethiopian government' into accepting an adviser elected by the League of Nations.⁵⁰ On the basis of these observations about British influence and following Zedda's assertions that the appointment of a foreign observer could become an instrument of foreign control, the Italian government decided to adopt a more determined course of action.⁵¹ In cooperation with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Bono resolved to give the Italian delegate to the League's slavery commission more stringent directives on how to strengthen the Italian presence in Geneva and promote Italian interests. As De Bono put it, the question of slavery in Ethiopia was important for 'Italy's complex political action'. Zedda was instructed to vote in favour of a further meeting of the Committee of Experts on the basis that it might on occasion provide an 'efficient control lever'.⁵²

A few weeks later, in July 1932, Italy's opportunistic attitude towards the League of Nations as a forum for the promotion of Italian interests was further reinforced when Mussolini once more reorganized Italian diplomatic personnel. The Fascist leader personally replaced Grandi at the department of Foreign Affairs, which he was to lead until 1936,

⁴⁷ On Angoulvant's position within the commission, see also Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 199.

⁴⁸ Tullio Zedda, Italian governor of Eritrea, to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 23 May 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Tenth Meeting of the Committee of Experts, 9 May 1932, League of Nations, CPE, 1st session, PV5, 7.

⁵⁰ Zedda to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 23 May 1932.

⁵¹ Zedda as quoted in Minister De Bono to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, 15 June 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

⁵² De Bono to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, 15 June 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

thus strengthening a militant Fascist attitude in foreign policy.⁵³ Italy's new assertiveness showed at the second—and as it turned out last—session of the Committee of Experts held in Geneva from 22 to 30 August 1932. Zedda, suffering severe illness, was temporarily replaced on the committee by Ercole Vellani, head of the Office of Studies and Propaganda in the Italian Ministry of Colonies. Following closely the instructions he had received from the Italian Foreign Ministry, Vellani used the meeting to 'defend' Italian interests by emphasizing that the problem of slavery in Ethiopia called for intervention and by taking the lead in a discussion in which the French and British delegates not only disagreed about the nature of Ethiopian slavery but also about what kind of intervention the League could offer.⁵⁴

But Vellani was not able to turn the Anglo-French disagreement to his advantage by securing the Committee of Experts' endorsement of clear recommendations for action to be taken on slavery in Ethiopia. Rather unexpectedly, just before closing its session, the Committee of Experts received information through the British Foreign Office that the Ethiopian emperor had decreed new measures against slavery.⁵⁵ This development was taken into account in the final report of the Committee. Drafted by Lugard and communicated to the League Assembly together with an edited and official version of Noel-Buxton's description, the report underlined that slavery could only be abolished 'gradually' and that the Ethiopian government was already doing all it could to abolish it 'within the more or less near future'.⁵⁶ 'In dealing with Abyssinia', the report stated, 'it must never be forgotten that that country was for two centuries cut off from the outside world, that its evolution has been retarded, and that all matters concerning it cannot be judged by the principles governing European nations.'⁵⁷ The report also drew attention to the social, economic, and political 'disturbances', 'dangers', and 'difficulties' that could result from abolishing slavery in Ethiopia 'too rapidly', thus reflecting deep-seated colonial concerns about dismantling slavery.⁵⁸

⁵³ Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 71–2; A. J. De Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Development* (London, 2000; first publ. 1982), 187.

⁵⁴ E. Vellani to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 Sept. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-B, 121/5.

⁵⁵ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 202–3.

⁵⁶ League of Nations, *Report of the Committee of Experts on Slavery*, LoN Archives, Slavery VIB, 1932–5, 6. For the edited version and the list of amendments to the report, see Foreign Office to Carastini, Mandates Section, 15 Aug. 1932, LoN, R 2353.

⁵⁷ League of Nations, *Report of the Committee of Experts on Slavery*, 8.

⁵⁸ League of Nations, *Report of the Committee of Experts on Slavery*, 8.

Having not made any real progress on the Ethiopian question, the Committee of Experts recommended the establishment of a further, but this time permanent slavery commission, the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery (hereafter Advisory Committee).⁵⁹ At the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mussolini was eager to ensure that Italy would be represented on the new committee.⁶⁰ There was no mistaking the signs that, after a decade of relative indifference, Italy was now ready to take on what it hoped would be a leading role in the international debate on slavery. Much to the satisfaction of the Italians and of the British Anti-Slavery Society, the League Assembly agreed to the Advisory Committee's appointment in 1933, the year of the Centenary of the Emancipation Act, and the body eventually met for five annual sessions between 1934 and 1938.

In the time between the Committee of Experts' final report and the Advisory Committee's first meeting, however, an important shift took place in the seemingly benevolent—or at least passive—attitude displayed by international circles towards the Ethiopian emperor's reform policy. This had to do with the shortcomings of Haile Selassie's new emancipation edict, which he had decreed during the Committee of Experts' session in a bid to favourably influence public opinion in Europe. The new decree not only foresaw that slaves should be freed; it theoretically also prevented the re-enslavement of manumitted slaves.⁶¹ In order to implement these measures and to enforce the registration of freed slaves, Selassie established a new government institution, a so-called anti-slavery department, despite continued opposition from conservative Ethiopian elites. To fend off further international criticism, the Ethiopian government enlisted the help of Swiss-born British civil servant Frank de Halpert who, in February 1933, was appointed as an adviser to the new office.⁶²

But the Ethiopian slavery department rapidly succumbed to mismanagement and inefficiency, and it soon became clear that the emperor's most recent anti-slavery reforms would remain ineffective. After a few months of service, De Halpert was so exasperated by what he described as

⁵⁹ Suzanne Miers, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues, 1890–1939', in S. Miers and M. A. Klein (eds), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, Or., 1999), 31.

⁶⁰ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Italian Ministry of Colonies and to Paulucci, Under-Secretary General of the League of Nations, 16 Aug. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38, 121/5.

⁶¹ See Haile Selassie's emancipation edict of 29 Aug. 1932 (Italian translation), enclosed in Italian Legation in Ethiopia to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 Sept. 1932, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38, 121/5.

⁶² Press report, Feb. 1933, Appointment of F. De Halpert, RHO, De Halpert Papers, Mss. Afr. S 1459 (3).

widespread corruption and procrastination that he resigned in December 1933.⁶³ As De Halpert later disclosed in a report he wrote to explain his resignation, the anti-slavery laws had been enforced only sporadically. While the British adviser recognized the emperor's goodwill, he attributed the failure of his policies to feudal conflicts and general resistance from conservative forces.⁶⁴ De Halpert's resignation called for an international reassessment of the progress of abolition in Ethiopia, a situation which the Italians were quick to exploit in the new Advisory Committee.

In January 1934, a few weeks after De Halpert's departure, the League's Advisory Committee met for the first time, mainly to discuss procedural issues. As its name indicated, the new body was 'strictly advisory' and had 'no powers of supervision'.⁶⁵ Its agreed goal was to 'study and examine' all reports on slavery which the League's Secretariat collected from member states in order to get a clearer idea of the contemporary social and economic realities of slavery worldwide.⁶⁶ It was the Advisory Committee's role to support measures of gradual abolition, for which it could grant financial assistance if requested.⁶⁷ The governments represented on it were the same as in the Committee of Experts but there was a notable change as to the British delegate: to Lugard's great dismay, and for reasons that are unclear, the Foreign Office decided to replace him with George Maxwell, a retired civil servant, who had served in the colonial service in Malaya and who became vice-chairman of the committee.

As a result of its first meeting, the Advisory Committee appealed to League members to send in information about slavery to be considered during its next session scheduled for April 1935.⁶⁸ At the Italian Ministry of Colonies De Bono reacted promptly by urgently requesting colonial governors in Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia to compile and send in material to promote Italy's imperial anti-slavery achievements and to illustrate how ongoing slave-raiding and slave-trading in Ethiopia was endangering Italian anti-slavery policies in its adjacent territories in Eritrea and Somalia.⁶⁹

⁶³ For De Halpert's own perspective on the situation, see the fragments of his diaries in 1932-3, RHO, De Halpert Papers, Mss. Afr. S 1459 (1).

⁶⁴ Report by de Halpert, Addis Ababa, 22 May 1934, RHO, De Halpert Papers, Mss. Afr. S 1459 (1).

⁶⁵ Advisory Committee of Experts, *Rules of Procedure*, LoN Archives, Slavery VI b, 1937, CC.EE 138, 1.

⁶⁶ Advisory Committee of Experts, *Rules of Procedure*, articles 2 and 10, 2-3.

⁶⁷ Advisory Committee of Experts, *Rules of Procedure*, article 13, 3.

⁶⁸ On the working of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 216-38.

⁶⁹ De Bono to the Governors of Italian East Africa, 8 May 1934, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38 A, 121-3.

By the end of September 1934, despite having received only limited information, De Bono sent the Advisory Committee a propagandistic statement about Italy's 'civilizing potential' in which he declared that, 'in the field of slavery', Italian policies had been not only 'energetic and completely efficient, but also very rapid'.⁷⁰ Eritrea and Somalia were hailed by De Bono as model colonies, in which slavery had allegedly disappeared due to the 'highly humanitarian ends' of Italian colonialism. The report also emphasized problems caused by slave raids from bordering Ethiopia, thus increasing Ethiopia's image as an international liability.⁷¹

In the meantime, Haile Selassie tried to get ahead of Italian propaganda by publicizing his own reform policies. On 15 August 1934, the Ethiopian government sent a report to the Advisory Committee detailing Ethiopia's progress in matters of abolition.⁷² In a remarkable speech held on the same day before the League Assembly, the Ethiopian delegate to the Assembly, Tekle Hawariat, reviewed the development and progress of Selassie's anti-slavery policies.⁷³ He pleaded for a cultural relativist attitude to the problem of Ethiopian slavery, arguing that 'even those who are known as slaves . . . are better treated than those who in the modern world are described as free men, though they are frequently crushed beneath the weight of mechanical life'.⁷⁴ Knowing that this argumentation would hardly convince fellow diplomats, Hawariat nonetheless recognized that 'men must be free' and emphasized the Ethiopian government's commitment to reform. However, he also pointed out that comprehensive socio-economic reforms could not be implemented 'in the twinkling of an eye', even if the legal basis for abolition and emancipation existed. Desperately trying to forestall a possible European intervention, the Ethiopian representative asked for 'time for adaptation'.⁷⁵ Italy's increasingly obvious positioning as a colonial and an abolitionist power in the League of Nations, however, indicated that time was running out for Ethiopia.

⁷⁰ De Bono to Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, 29 Oct. 1934, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 117. For an analysis of Italy's political propaganda in the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 246-7.

⁷¹ De Bono to Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, 29 Oct. 1934.

⁷² See 'Communication from the Ethiopian Government to the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, 15 August 1934, comprising a Report on the Application of the Ethiopian Laws for the Abolition of Slavery in Ethiopia', in League of Nations, *Report of the Second Session of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery* (Geneva, 1935), 93-5.

⁷³ For a published version of Hawariat's speech to the Assembly, see *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1935), 102.

⁷⁴ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1935), 102.

⁷⁵ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1935), 102.

THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN CAMPAIGN

By 1934, the strategic and military plans in the Horn of Africa, commissioned by Mussolini from De Bono as early as 1932, were fully formed and any justification would do to wage war on Ethiopia.⁷⁶ The Fascist regime was feeling the effects of the Depression. High unemployment, falling production and exports, and a stuttering banking system had to be countered with intensified nationalist and ideological campaigning of which the imperial expansion in Africa became an essential element.⁷⁷ Two months after Hawariat's speech to the League Assembly, Italy finally found an excuse to initiate a conflict with Ethiopia. On 22–23 November 1934, an Anglo-Ethiopian boundary commission challenged the Italian fortified positions on the border with Somalia, leading to a skirmish, which came to be known as the Wal Wal incident. Considerations of domestic as well as foreign policy led Mussolini to use this rather minor episode to press on with his plan for an invasion of Ethiopia.⁷⁸

The ten months between the Wal Wal incident in November 1934 and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 opened up a time of frantic diplomatic negotiations, during which Ethiopia invoked the assistance of the League of Nations while Britain and France followed a 'double policy' of publicly standing by the League's Covenant and secretly appeasing Italy.⁷⁹ On 9 December 1934, Ethiopia called for the Council of the League of Nations to begin a procedure of arbitration, but Italy maintained it was countering an Ethiopian 'aggression', a statement which opened the floodgates for mutual accusations.⁸⁰ French and British diplomats were reluctant to put the issue before the Council, arguing instead that Italy and Ethiopia should find a bilateral solution. Thus, despite the insistence of the Ethiopian delegate Hawariat, an international response was continuously postponed.⁸¹ Meanwhile, Mussolini took full control

⁷⁶ On the preparations for war against Ethiopia, see De Bono's personal account, E. De Bono, *La conquista dell' impero: Le preparazioni e le prime operazioni* (Rome, 1937). For the military history of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, see G. Rochat, *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d' Etiopia: Studi e documenti, 1932–1936* (Milan, 1971).

⁷⁷ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, 233.

⁷⁸ On the Wal Wal incident, see H. G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 138–9.

⁷⁹ The classic, month to month account of the diplomatic prelude to the war is still G. W. Baer's *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). See also the excellent section in Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, 100–36, and Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London, 2001), 262–82. For the latest research on the diplomatic history of the conflict, see the volume by G. Bruce Strang (ed.), *Collisions of Empire: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact* (Farnham, 2013).

⁸⁰ See the Ethiopian appeal of 15 Jan., in League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 16, 1–4 (1935), 252. The diplomatic context is detailed in 96–7.

⁸¹ Baer, *Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 96–7 and 100–5.

over military and political preparations, and on 7 January 1935 he sent his generals including De Bono to Eritrea and to Italian Somaliland to prepare for invasion, while officially still proclaiming Italy's commitment to a peaceful solution.⁸²

As is well known, Mussolini with his provocative actions in Ethiopia was exploiting a moment of particular friction in the international system. By the beginning of 1935, the League had become the public face of international disarray following the German reintegration of the Saar territory, which, as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, had been administered under the mandates system for fifteen years. The rise of Japanese militarism, coupled with a deep crisis within France and an unstable government in Spain, made France and Britain, who both sought to protect their global security interests, wary of entering into conflict with Italy over what they considered to be a colonial war.⁸³ Thus, when French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval and British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald met with Mussolini in Stresa in April 1935 to form a coalition against German rearmament, they remained silent on the Ethiopian question, thus convincing Mussolini that he would encounter little opposition to his Ethiopian venture.⁸⁴

It was only on 4 September 1935 that the members of the League Council, encouraged by British delegate and fervent League supporter Anthony Eden, finally discussed whether they would apply the League's Covenant and call for economic sanctions, a measure foreseen in the protocol to counter aggressions against League member states.⁸⁵ Eden warned Council members that if the League failed to take a stance in this dispute 'its authority for the future [would] be grievously shaken and its influence gravely impaired'.⁸⁶ In fact, Britain and France still hesitated to enforce sanctions, especially as the US, in a powerful demonstration of their isolationist policy, had passed a neutrality bill in August 1935,

⁸² De Bono, *La conquista dell'impero*, 38.

⁸³ On the various national contexts, see Brendon, *Dark Valley*, chs. 14, 15, and 17. Also, Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, 103–5.

⁸⁴ On the Stresa conference, see Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 108–15. Also, Ralf James Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935–1939* (London 1993), 20–1.

⁸⁵ For the Council's Sept. meeting, see League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 16, 11–12 (1935), 1132–43. For a classic account of the diplomatic wrangling about sanctions, see G. W. Baer, 'Sanctions and Security: The League of Nations and the Italian-Ethiopian War, 1935–1936', *International Organization*, 27, 2 (1973), 165–79. For a recent overview of the literature about sanctions, see G. Bruce Strang, 'The Worst of All Worlds': Oil Sanctions and Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia, 1935–1936', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 2 (2008), 210–35.

⁸⁶ League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 16, 11–12 (1935), 1134.

thus making it clear that they would not join in international action against Italy.⁸⁷ To add to the hesitancy of League members with regard to the crisis, the Italian representative to the Council, Baron Pompeo Aloisi, presented a lengthy memorandum on Ethiopia's humanitarian abuses, including slavery, emasculation, traffic in eunuchs, and cannibalism, arguing that such 'systematic barbarism' made Ethiopia unfit to be a member of the League and that this legitimized an Italian civilizing mission.⁸⁸

But Aloisi's sweeping allegations, against which the Ethiopian delegation protested, did not have the desired effect of rallying League members against sanctions.⁸⁹ Rather, in a speech delivered before the Assembly on 11 September 1935, British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare suggested, albeit obliquely, that his country fully accepted the 'obligations' of League membership, pleading for 'collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression'.⁹⁰ The British statement had a decisive impact on other member states, who interpreted it as a sign that Britain would enforce sanctions.⁹¹ In the following week, an unprecedented debate took place in the League Assembly, in which many member states, above all the Nordic and Baltic countries but also Portugal, Belgium, and China, asserted their willingness to enforce the Covenant and to implement economic sanctions against Italy.⁹²

The global response to Fascist aggression did not deter Mussolini from pursuing his plans. On 2 October 1935, Italian troops invaded Ethiopia along its Eritrean border. From the balcony of Palazzo Venezia in Rome, the Duce announced to the gathered masses that 'a solemn hour' was 'about to strike' in Italy's history. 'Destiny' and 'determination' had finally brought Italy nearer to its goal and the time had come to act on Ethiopia.⁹³ Four days later, on 6 October, Italian troops led by De Bono captured Adwa, thereby 'avenging' Italy's humiliating defeat by Ethiopian troops in the same place in 1896.⁹⁴ From this

⁸⁷ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, 110.

⁸⁸ For the Italian memorandum including accompanying documents and photographs, see League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 16, 11–12 (1935), 1355–1583.

⁸⁹ League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 16, 11–12 (1935), 1139–43.

⁹⁰ League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Assembly), 16 (1935), 43–6.

⁹¹ Baer, *Coming of the Italo-Ethiopian War*, 335.

⁹² The debate is recorded in League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Assembly), supplement no. 138 (1935), 46–84.

⁹³ 'Mussolini Launches the War in Ethiopia' (2 Oct. 1935), reprint of speech given by Mussolini on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, in C. F. Delzell (ed.), *Mediterranean Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York, 1971), 193–4.

⁹⁴ On Adwa's role for Italian and Ethiopian historiography, see Alessandro Triulzi 'Adwa: From Monument to Document', *Modern Italy*, 8, 1 (2003), 99–105.

point onwards, international perceptions of Ethiopia shifted within the League as the African country no longer stood for the narrowly defined issue of slavery but for the rights and wrongs of European expansionist claims. The Italo-Ethiopian conflict forced the League to assert its role as a guardian of peace in a global climate of heightened nationalism and isolationism. At the same time, however, the months following the Italian conquest of Ethiopia once again underscored that Africa was, as Patricia Clavin has argued, 'an object of the League, not an actor in its own right'.⁹⁵

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia, became the ultimate 'test case' for the League of Nations and its collective security provisions.⁹⁶ On 7 October 1935, the Council of the League of Nations—once again pressed by Britain's chief spokesman Anthony Eden—took unusually decisive collective action by formally declaring Italy an aggressor, and condemning it for attacking Ethiopia without a formal declaration of war. From 18 November onwards, for the first time in the history of the League of Nations, a group of fifty League member states applied the enforcement provisions of the Covenant by imposing a ban on imports from Italy, and by prohibiting the exportation of arms and munitions to Italy. This was itself quite a significant achievement, given that many of the League member states had political and economic reasons not to alienate Italy.⁹⁷ In the event of ongoing warfare, the sanctions were meant to be expanded to include the imposition of an oil ban on Italy. But although such a ban could at least have theoretically affected the mobility of the Italian army, it was never enforced.⁹⁸

In the months following the imposition of sanctions, government officials in Europe, and especially the French and British leaders, continued to follow an ambiguous policy towards the Italian aggressor by insisting on combining sanctions with negotiations. Thus, one of the most infamous episodes in the diplomatic handling of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis occurred in December 1935, when, backed by the British cabinet, Hoare tried to negotiate a secret agreement with French Prime Minister Pierre Laval that would satisfy Mussolini's demands by partitioning Ethiopia

⁹⁵ Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, 7.

⁹⁶ George W. Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia and the League of Nations* (Stanford, Calif., 1976).

⁹⁷ Baer, 'Sanctions and Security', 165.

⁹⁸ See C. A. Ristrucchia, 'The 1935 Sanctions against Italy: Would Coal and Oil have Made a Difference?', *European Review of Economic History*, 4 (2000), 85–110. Others have argued that European governments had little reason to believe that oil sanctions would be effective, partly because the League was missing important members such as the United States. See Strang, 'Worst of All Worlds', 210–35.

and granting Italy parts of the eastern and northern provinces Ogaden and Tigray, as well as economic influence over southern Ethiopia. When the content of the plan was made public in the French press, it caused a storm of indignation amongst the French and British public, and Hoare and Laval were subsequently forced to resign.⁹⁹

Despite the public opprobrium that surrounded the Franco-British deal, further sanctions were postponed again in March 1936, illustrating the League members' ambivalent attitude towards stopping the Italian war efforts. Not least because the United States had increased their trade in embargoed goods with Italy, the inconsistent applications of sanctions by League members had little economic or strategic impact on Mussolini's war effort.¹⁰⁰ Instead, the sanctions gave rise to a further intensification of the regime's propaganda efforts, which reverberated both within and outside Italy.

INTENSIFYING PROPAGANDA

No foreign policy event in Italy received as much attention from the regime's propaganda machinery as the Italo-Ethiopian war, reflecting Mussolini's awareness of the need to 'sell' the conflict at home and abroad.¹⁰¹ Plans for war against Ethiopia were not popular in Italy, and public opinion, as well as the Italian bureaucracy, the aristocracy, and even some military leaders, initially condemned the material and human costs of military operations.¹⁰² In the months preceding the invasion, the Italian government therefore began a large-scale domestic propaganda campaign to promote an imperial war in Ethiopia. In June 1935, Mussolini's press office was expanded into a full Ministry of Press and Propaganda, led by Mussolini's son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano (it was further renamed as the Ministry of Popular Culture in 1937).¹⁰³

⁹⁹ For the diplomatic negotiations preceding the Hoare-Laval agreement, see Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 127–30. Also, Andrew Holt, '“No More Hoares to Paris”: British Foreign Policymaking and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935', *Review of International Studies*, 37, 3 (2011), 1381–1401.

¹⁰⁰ For the economic impact, see Giovanni Federico, 'Sanzioni', in de Grazia and Luzzato (eds), *Dizionario del Fascismo*, ii (Turin, 2003), 590–2.

¹⁰¹ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, 240.

¹⁰² This point is made in Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience* (London, 1985), 24. Also, Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929–1943* (Rome, 2000), 183–6.

¹⁰³ Gianpasquale Santomassimo, 'Propaganda', in de Grazia and Luzzato, *Dizionario del Fascismo*, ii, 433–7, 435.

With the establishment of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, Fascist propaganda reached new heights, at least in the ambitions the regime had for it. The Ministry further unified and politicized the regime's cultural propaganda in Italy and abroad and centralized its use of modern media, especially radio and cinema, while simultaneously enforcing its message by censoring any possible opposing opinion in newspapers, radio broadcasts, films, theatrical performances, and foreign publications.¹⁰⁴ The propaganda developed themes that attacked the League's sanctions by launching dramatic campaigns on national unity and economic self-sufficiency, notably through extensive programmes that encouraged women to buy and cook only goods and foods made in Italy.¹⁰⁵ The Fascist regime also went to great lengths to familiarize Italian men, women, and children with the nation's 'African destiny' by disseminating exotic accounts of Eastern Africa for mass consumption through children's literature and magazines.¹⁰⁶

These campaigning efforts further intensified after De Bono's initial military success stalled. In autumn 1935, the Ministry of Press and Propaganda ordered the production of films and songs to boost Italian enthusiasm for the war in Africa.¹⁰⁷ The number of tunes glorifying the war and depicting it as evidence of Italy's 'greatness' and its 'civilizing' and 'liberating' mission soared.¹⁰⁸ The regime commissioned songs from popular Italian singers to mark military mobilization and occupation and to acknowledge the soldiers' good intentions of bringing colonial welfare to 'needy' Africans. One of the newly coined Fascist war hymns was Giuseppe Micheli's 'Faccetta

¹⁰⁴ On the structure of the Italian propaganda machine, see Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940* (London, 2006), 7–9.

¹⁰⁵ Perry Willson, 'Empire, Gender and the "Home Front" in Fascist Italy', *Women's History Review*, 16, 4 (2007), 488–9. Also, K. Ferris, "'Fare di ogni famiglia un fortifizio": The League of Nations' Economic Sanctions and Everyday Life in Venice', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2 (2006), 126.

¹⁰⁶ On colonial propaganda specifically directed at women and children, see Robin Pickering-Iazzi, 'Mass-Mediated Fantasies of Feminine Conquest, 1930–1940', in Patrizia Palumbo (ed.) *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003), 197–224; Patrizia Palumbo, 'Orphans for the Empire: Colonial Propaganda and Children's Literature during the Imperial Era', in Palumbo, *Place in the Sun*, 225–51.

¹⁰⁷ For a sample of this propaganda material, see Patrizia Caccia and Mirella Mingardo (eds), *Ti saluto e vado in Abissinia: Propaganda, consenso e vita quotidiana attraverso la stampa, le pubblicazioni e i documenti della biblioteca nazionale Braidense* (Milan, 1998). On the message conveyed by the regime, see Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 194. On the development of Fascist film policy, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001), 88–9.

¹⁰⁸ A study of Fascist propaganda songs has yet to be written. For an anthology, see A. V. Savona and M. L. Straniero, *Canti dell'Italia Fascista, 1919–1945* (Milan, 1979), 271.

nera' ('Little black-faced girl'), which soon climbed the domestic hit parade. The first verse of 'Faccetta nera' epitomized Italy's civilizing mission:

*If you look down from the plateau on to the sea,
little black girl, who are a slave among slaves,
you will see, as if in a dream, lots of ships
and a tricolour waving for you!
Little black-faced girl, pretty Abyssinian,
wait and hope as the time approaches,
when we will be near you
we will give you another law and another king.¹⁰⁹*

The song portrayed the apparently optimistic and enterprising mood of Italian soldiers who embarked on their conquest of Ethiopia to liberate pretty Abyssinian slave girls and to give them a better future as free citizens under the Italian flag. Later the tune was banned because of its ambiguous stance on relationships between Italian men and Ethiopian women and its implications of so-called 'miscegenation', a fact which did not prevent Italians from singing it.¹¹⁰

It is impossible to know what the Italian public made of the song's references to Abyssinian slavery, and to what extent they identified with Italy's civilizing mission. As has commonly been argued, the Ethiopian war formed the peak of an unprecedented if temporary level of popular consent to the Fascist regime.¹¹¹ But there is some doubt about whether the extent to which public demonstrations in favour of the war were the result of genuine enthusiasm, or whether they were the consequences of the regime's careful orchestration of support.¹¹² For Catholics who took their cue from the Holy See, at least, the war did not bring any major pangs of conscience. As the conflict dragged on, the Catholic hierarchy and the Vatican tried to stay impartial, but tended implicitly to favour Italian action.¹¹³ The Ethiopian emperor's repeated appeals to the Vatican to act as a mediator between Italy

¹⁰⁹ 'Si mo' dall'artipiano guardi er mare / moretta che sei schiava tra le schiave / vedrai come in un sogno tante nave / e un tricolore sventola' pe' te. / Faccetta nera, bella Abissina / aspetta e spera che già l'ora s'avvicina. / Quando staremo vicino a te / noi te daremo un' antra legge e un antro Re'. My translation of Giuseppe Micheli's lyrics as quoted in Savona and Straniero, *Cantri dell'Italia Fascista*, 271.

¹¹⁰ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life under the Dictatorship, 1915–1945* (London, 2005), 369.

¹¹¹ Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 385–7.

¹¹² On this, see Paul Corner, 'Italian Fascism: Organization, Enthusiasm, Opinion', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 15, 3 (2010), 378–89.

¹¹³ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 199–220. This is not the space to go into the complex and changing relations between the church and the Fascist regime during the interwar years. For a good overview, see John F. Pollard, 'Fascism and Catholicism', in R. J. B. Bosworth (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford, 2009), 166–84. A. Sbacchi

and Ethiopia remained unheard. Rather, the Pope emphatically declared that he 'did not want to have anything to do with Geneva' and reacted 'allergically' to the mention of it.¹¹⁴ Geneva, so the argument ran at the Vatican, was a 'Protestant' and 'bourgeois institution', which worked against the Holy See's spiritual ideas. There was an insurmountable difference between the 'Church's divine, inherent and universal conceptualisation of peace' and the 'human and fallible norms' propagated by the League of Nations.¹¹⁵

For the missionaries on the ground, it was more difficult to avoid taking sides. The few French missionaries who officially declared their opposition to the war were reported to the Italian Foreign Office by the Italian ambassador at the Holy See.¹¹⁶ With a few exceptions, members of the Consolata had no scruples in assisting the Italian military by sharing the mission's unique topographical and cartographical knowledge.¹¹⁷ Italian missionaries took pride in Ethiopia's annexation which they attributed to 'merit and sacrifice', as well as 'the solidarity of the Italian people'.¹¹⁸ One notable exception was Gaudenzio Barlassina, whose long engagement in Ethiopia had turned him into a supporter of Selassie's reform policy, and who was repatriated before the military invasion because he refused to cooperate with the Italian army.¹¹⁹

In contrast, the Società Antischivista was quick to embrace the Fascist invasion and could—given its connections and previous history—draw on unlimited resources when celebrating its own role in it.¹²⁰ The Italian anti-slavery organization spent most of the summer and autumn of 1935 justifying Italy's civilizing mission, printing evidence allegedly given by Abyssinian slaves who had fled to Eritrea, and accusing the 'pacifists' of tolerating Ethiopia's 'crime against humanity'.¹²¹ After the beginning of military action, the Società Antischivista multiplied its commentaries on the humanitarian aspects of the Italo-Ethiopian war. It published heart-rending

and L. Ceci have provided useful insights into the cooperation of Consolata missionaries with the Italian military. A. Sbacchi, 'The Archives of the Consolata Mission and the Formation of the Italian Empire, 1913–1943', *History in Africa*, 25 (1998), 319–40; L. Ceci, 'Chiesa e questione coloniale: Guerra e missione nell'impresa d'Etiopia', *Italia contemporanea*, 233 (2003), 321–56.

¹¹⁴ Italian ambassador to Holy See to Italian Foreign Office, 25 Sept. 1935.

¹¹⁵ Italian ambassador to Holy See to Italian Foreign Office, 25 Sept. 1935.

¹¹⁶ Italian ambassador to Holy See to Italian Foreign Office, 8 May 1936, ASMAE, ASS, 56.

¹¹⁷ Sbacchi, 'Archives of the Consolata Mission', 328. Also, Ceci, 'Chiesa e questione coloniale'.

¹¹⁸ *La Consolata* (June 1936), 82.

¹¹⁹ Sbacchi, 'Archives of the Consolata Mission', 328. On Barlassina, see also Ch. 4.

¹²⁰ On the discrepancy between the Vatican's officially neutral position and its obvious backing of the Ethiopian campaign, see Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York, 2004), 17, and Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 196–202.

¹²¹ *Antischivismo* (Aug.–Sept. 1935), 247–54.

anecdotes of liberated slaves allegedly thanking Mussolini's government in broken Italian for invading the country. The correspondent of the Roman daily *Corriere della Sera*, Alessandro Pavolini, reported meeting a slave who told him with a blissful expression that now that Italy was governing Ethiopia he 'felt like he was in heaven'.¹²² How credible such statements looked to the readers of the paper, and how effective they were in creating long-term enthusiasm for Fascist warfare however, is a different matter. Judging from the views of those Italians who expressed some form of dissent with the regime and were thus recorded in Italian police files, many people remained sceptical about the value of an African empire and detached from the regime's expansionist policies.¹²³ If Italians were able to see through Fascist propaganda, however, the question is what non-Italians would make of it.

THE PROBLEM OF INTERNATIONAL OPINION

It was one thing for the Fascist government to attempt to monitor and manage domestic opinion in favour of the war by controlling the media and administering cultural activities. But it was quite another challenge for the regime to sustain its propaganda throughout the war so as to favourably influence international opinion and avoid further sanctions. Contrary to the diplomatic attempts to handle the conflict and its possible consequences for world peace, a large majority of the general public in Europe considered the imposition of further sanctions on Italy as morally and ethically justified. Many European observers and journalists, particularly in Britain, admired the Ethiopian emperor as a civilized, courageous, and dignified diplomat—an image which contrasted with Mussolini's portrayal as a warmongering fool.¹²⁴

Britain was the country in which pro-Ethiopian views were expressed most prominently by public figures and national newspapers.¹²⁵ Whereas during the 1920s the general attitude towards Italian Fascism in the British Foreign Office had been one of benevolence, the Ethiopian invasion was putting to the test the traditional 'friendship' between Italy and Great Britain.¹²⁶

¹²² *Antischiasimo* (Apr. 1936), 10–15.

¹²³ R. J. B. Bosworth, 'War, Totalitarianism, and "Deep Belief" in Fascist Italy, 1935–43', *European History Quarterly*, 34, 4 (2004), 480.

¹²⁴ See for instance the prologue in James Dugan and Laurence Lafore, *Days of Emperor and Clown* (New York, 1973).

¹²⁵ For a study of British public reaction to the invasion, see Waley, *British Public Opinion*. For the effects of the Italian invasion on British opinion, see J. C. Robertson, 'The Origins of British Opposition to Mussolini over Ethiopia', *Journal of British Studies*, 9, 1 (1969), 122–42. For a discussion of British official and popular reactions to the Italian campaign in Ethiopia, see Ch. 6.

¹²⁶ P. G. Edwards, 'The Foreign Office and Fascism, 1924–1929', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5, 2 (1970), 153–61.

A few Italophile British Conservatives and the British Union of Fascists saw Italy as a 'rising nation' and were in favour of Italian expansion in Africa, but the greater part of the British public did not share these pro-Fascist sympathies.¹²⁷ This became clear months before the invasion, in June 1935, when a Peace Ballot held on the initiative of the League of Nations Union—an organization which still acted as a significant catalyst for League support amongst the British public—indicated that no less than 86 per cent of the British public endorsed the League's internationalist principles of collective security and that Britons welcomed the use of collective measures including economic (but not military) sanctions to protect peace.¹²⁸

During the months of diplomatic wrangling in Geneva when Mussolini was preparing for the invasion, a different type of offensive took shape in London under the leadership of Dino Grandi. Between the summers of 1935 and 1936, Grandi, who had moved into the Italian embassy in Mayfair in 1932, became a key strategist in the organization and fabrication of pro-Italian propaganda.¹²⁹ Grandi's aim was to counter pro-sanctionist sentiments in Britain by representing the Italian invasion as a 'civilizing mission' and by drawing public attention to the existence of slavery in Ethiopia. Grandi's autonomous and wide-reaching political activities became a major asset in Mussolini's attempt to legitimize Italy's military undertakings as a humanitarian mission.

Since his appointment as ambassador in 1932, Grandi had taken an active role in monitoring British and Italian attitudes towards Fascism through the 'Fasci Abroad'—propaganda groups set up to inculcate Fascist values into Italian communities in British cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool, and most successfully in London.¹³⁰ In line with the *Fasci's* policy, Grandi organized cultural and political events to generate support for the regime amongst Italians abroad. His efforts peaked between autumn 1935 and spring 1936, when he began to use existing Fascist groups and news bulletins for the promotion and celebration of Italian imperialism in Africa. Thus, Grandi supplemented *L'Italia Nostra*, the weekly flagship journal of the Italian *Fasci* in Great Britain since 1928, with a *British-Italian Bulletin* in English, distributing it almost every

¹²⁷ Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford, 2003), 101–2. Also, Martin Pugh, 'Hurray for the Blackshirts!': *Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London, 2005).

¹²⁸ Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford, 2000), 319; Ceadel, 'The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934–5', *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), 810–39.

¹²⁹ Grandi's propaganda campaign in London is discussed in Luigi Goglia, 'La propaganda italiana a sostegno della guerra contro l'Etiopia svolta in Gran Bretagna nel 1935–1936', *Storia contemporanea*, 15, 5 (1984), 845–905.

¹³⁰ See Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism*, 1.

week to as many as 400,000 British and Italian Fascist sympathizers in the UK.¹³¹ Recipients were encouraged to apply for free literature on the Italo-Abyssinian question and were urged to circulate it amongst their British acquaintances.¹³²

The *Bulletin's* hunt for British readers illustrates that Grandi's main target was not Italians living in Britain—whose majority supported the Ethiopian invasion—but the wider British public who were much less favourable to what was generally perceived as Italy's aggressive imperialism. Aside from trying to reach out to the wider public, Grandi was particularly concerned with the pro-League attitude of some members of the British cabinet, notably Anthony Eden, who became the target of sweeping criticism and unfavourable descriptions.¹³³ Grandi, who was well aware that the issue of slavery traditionally stirred British popular opinion, believed that by emphasizing the civilizing and humanitarian character of the Italian occupation and by focusing on Ethiopian slavery and Italian emancipation measures he could turn public opinion around.¹³⁴

To control the image of both Italian humanitarianism and Ethiopian barbarity, the Italian embassy engaged, in accordance with the Ministry of Press and Propaganda in Rome, in the distribution of a plethora of fabricated pamphlets and fact sheets on slavery and other Ethiopian 'atrocities'.¹³⁵ For this purpose, in October 1935, Grandi set up the Centro P, an office in charge of churning out copies of propaganda leaflets produced in Rome and London.¹³⁶ Grandi's primary objective was to demonize the Ethiopian enemy by reinforcing the image of a brutal and uncivilized nation, thus narrowing down the war to an anti-slavery and therefore humanitarian mission. Among the material distributed by the Centro P were reproductions of existing texts including Aloisi's description of Ethiopian barbarism.¹³⁷ But the bulk of propaganda material consisted

¹³¹ Goglia, 'Propaganda Italiana', 858. See *British Italian Bulletin*, 1, 1 to 2, 38 (8 Nov. 1935 to 24 Oct. 1936).

¹³² See *Italia Nostra* (Dec. 1935), ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 884, 6.2.

¹³³ For a study of the Italian perspective, and particularly of Grandi's anti-Eden campaign, see R. Mallett, 'Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian Views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s', *Historical Journal*, 43, 1 (2000), 157–87.

¹³⁴ Grandi to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 Feb. 1936, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 928, 3.5.

¹³⁵ E. Salter to Lugard, 7 Dec. 1935, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 89, 7.

¹³⁶ See Goglia, 'Propaganda italiana', 880. On pro-Italian propaganda, see also Waley, *British Public Opinion*, 117–35.

¹³⁷ *Speech of Baron Aloisi, Head of the Italian Delegation to the League of Nations Assembly on 9 October 1935* (probably printed in Italy in 1935), and *The Italo-Ethiopian Dispute: Abstracts from the Memorandum of the Italian Government to the League of Nations* (Rome, 1935).

of fabricated brochures written by anonymous authors with programmatic titles such as 'Facts Geneva Refuses to See' or 'Italian Popularity in Abyssinia'.¹³⁸ These pamphlets were mostly produced in Italy, printed in English, and falsely attributed to humanitarian organizations and academic institutions, a fact which Grandi proudly reported to Mussolini.¹³⁹

The main argument advanced in these propaganda pamphlets was that, by opposing Italy, the League was abandoning its humanitarian principles and, accordingly, so was Britain. The Italian embassy wanted to convey the message that all people and institutions interested in ending slavery should welcome the Italian invasion. In some cases, the propaganda was drawn from genuine British support. For instance, in a much circulated open letter titled *The Truth about Abyssinia by an Eye Witness* and addressed to the archbishop of Canterbury, Lieutenant-Colonel Cyril Rocke spoke warmly of Italy's military undertakings. Rocke lauded Mussolini as 'a man of supreme courage, both mental and physical', who had taken it upon himself to tackle the 'barbarous customs' in Ethiopia.¹⁴⁰ Another genuine supporter of Italy was Olivia Rossetti Agresti, British author, interpreter, and granddaughter of the poet Gabriele Rossetti. In a pamphlet titled *Not Invaders But Liberators*, Rossetti argued with evident racial prejudice that Ethiopians were 'a barbarous African people' who could not 'point to a single achievement in the field of art or literature or science or industry or agriculture' and therefore needed Italy's 'great civilizing power'.¹⁴¹ Muriel Currey, a former supporter of the League of Nations who had published a book on Italian foreign policy in 1932, and in 1935 accompanied Italian troops to Ethiopia, also openly endorsed Italy's 'humanitarian' mission.¹⁴² Currey ingenuously portrayed the Italians as 'liberators' whose 'innate good breeding' and 'kindliness' resulted in local Ethiopian chiefs and common people imploring the Italian military to 'advance immediately' into their territory.¹⁴³

One of the most circulated brochures was a pamphlet titled *The Last Stronghold of Slavery: What Abyssinia is*, written by Professor Baravelli, allegedly 'Prof. at the University of Rome' and published in Italian, French, German, and English.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Baravelli was a pseudonym for

¹³⁸ ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 933. For a comprehensive list of these articles, all published in English by the Ministry of Press and Propaganda in 1935, see Goglia, 'Propaganda italiana', 859.

¹³⁹ Grandi to Mussolini, 28 Apr. 1936, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 927, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Cyril Rocke, *The Truth about Abyssinia by an Eye Witness: An Open Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury*, published 1 Sept. 1935 (no place).

¹⁴¹ Olivia Rossetti Agresti, *Not Invaders But Liberators* (no place, 1935).

¹⁴² M. I. Currey, *A Woman at the Abyssinian War* (London, 1936).

¹⁴³ Currey, *Woman at the Abyssinian War*, 132.

¹⁴⁴ G. C. Baravelli, *The Last Stronghold of Slavery: What Abyssinia is* (Rome, 1935).

the Fascist journalist Mario Missiroli, who received 4,374 lire for his 'forgery', of which 125,000 copies were published.¹⁴⁵ Baravelli's 70-page-long pamphlet, whose front page featured a dramatic drawing of chains in a sea of blood, was a crescendo of accusations about Ethiopia's barbarous customs, especially the 'old scourge' of slavery. In what was portrayed as a scholarly analysis of the conflict, Baravelli recounted Ethiopia's failure to fulfil its obligations to the League. He described the Ethiopian government's incapacity to take measures to improve hygiene as well as its 'cruel customs', and emphasized the lack of 'economic and social development in Abyssinia' and the 'misery of the native population'.¹⁴⁶

Italian propaganda in Britain did not limit itself to the production and circulation of pamphlets. Grandi, who thought that public speaking was a British 'national sport', also organized a wide range of public lectures as part of the propaganda offensive.¹⁴⁷ For this purpose, the Italian ambassador recruited the retired British Major Edward Polson Newman, an Italophile and admirer of Mussolini, who gave more than seventy paid speeches in support of Italy all over the country, at Rotary Clubs and other venues such as the Royal Institute of International Affairs (of which he was a member), the Naval Staff College of the Royal Navy, and at the University of London.¹⁴⁸ An expert in military matters, Polson commended Mussolini's 'victory' as 'unprecedented in the annals of colonial military history'.¹⁴⁹ Polson—like many British admirers of Fascism—rejoiced in what he termed 'the rise in Italian power and prestige' brought on by Mussolini.¹⁵⁰ He underlined Britain's need to restore 'good relations with [its] traditional friend' for the sake of 'mutual interests', 'peace', and the 'stability of [its] empire'.¹⁵¹

Grandi's efforts also extended to the creation and funding of anti-sanctionist groups. The British-Italian Council for Peace and Friendship, for instance, an association founded by the British pro-Fascist and Italophile F. V. Fisher in November 1935 to promote the Italian viewpoint, was immediately taken under the Italian embassy's wings and given financial support.¹⁵² The activities of Fisher's group consisted of weekly meetings and the production of a massive output of propaganda flyers

¹⁴⁵ Grandi to Mussolini, 28 Apr. 1936, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 927, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Baravelli, *Last Stronghold of Slavery*, 14, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Grandi as quoted in Goglia, 'Propaganda italiana', 875.

¹⁴⁸ E. W. Polson Newman, *Ethiopian Realities* (London, 1936) and *Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia* (London, 1937).

¹⁴⁹ Polson Newman, *Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia*, 9.

¹⁵⁰ Polson Newman, *Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia*, 307.

¹⁵¹ Polson Newman, *Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia*, 308.

¹⁵² F. V. Fisher to Grandi, 12 Oct. 1935, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 884, 6.4.

with titles such as 'Ten Points on the Present Crisis', 'The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict', 'Abyssinian Slave Holding! Slave Raiding! Slave Trading!', or 'The Savages of Abyssinia: The Testimony of Neutrals'.¹⁵³ The organization also held public conferences at which writers, journalists, and academics who had shown sympathy for the Italian military offensive were invited to speak in favour of Italian imperialism. Amongst those who attended was Evelyn Waugh, one of the most acclaimed British writers of the 1930s, who had travelled to Ethiopia as a war correspondent in 1935 and ardently supported Mussolini.¹⁵⁴

Even more polemical than the British-Italian Council was the Anti-Sanctionist League, created by Grandi and entrusted to the populist ex-Conservative MP Edward Doran.¹⁵⁵ The Anti-Sanctionist League was masked as a British organization and specifically directed at countering pro-sanctionist sentiment through mass propaganda amongst working-class British people. It produced 'fact-sheets' with titles such as 'There Can Be No Slavery Where the Flag of Italy Flies'. The propaganda was so overtly political that a young British typist in London who, in her own words, had 'the misfortune of being concerned with [the] distribution' of these pamphlets, contacted Lugard to draw his attention to the alarming way these 'exceedingly unsuitable [publications] were sent out for indiscriminate distribution'.¹⁵⁶

It is, of course, difficult to evaluate how these occasionally crude and rather obvious propaganda efforts were received by British public opinion. Grandi reported to Rome that his activities inspired both Italian and British supporters of Italian Fascism in London to donate money, and in some cases jewellery, to financially support the Italian colonial project.¹⁵⁷ Largely, however, Italian propaganda—energetic and inflated as it was—'preached mainly to the converted'.¹⁵⁸ And although the London *Fascio* achieved the highest degree of Italian support in a foreign country during the Italo-Ethiopian war, the same cannot be said for the majority of the British public, which tended to side with Ethiopia.¹⁵⁹ In fact, the undecided seem to have been rather put off by the often heavy-handed rhetoric and the vulgar illustrations of alleged Ethiopian 'atrocities', which

¹⁵³ For a sample of the mostly undated pamphlets published by the British-Italian Council for Peace and Friendship, see ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 884, 6.4.

¹⁵⁴ Waugh wrote both fiction and non-fiction about the conflict. E. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (London, 1936) and *Scoop* (London, 1938).

¹⁵⁵ Goglia, 'Propaganda italiana', 872.

¹⁵⁶ E. Salter to Lugard, 7 Dec. 1935, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 89, 7.

¹⁵⁷ These donations are listed in ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 934, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Waley, *British Public Opinion*, 131.

¹⁵⁹ Roberta Suzzi Valli, 'Il Fascio Italiano a Londra: L'attività politica di Camillo Pellizzi', *Storia Contemporanea*, 6 (1995), 957-1001, here 957.

included unverifiable pictures of mutilations, public floggings, and hangings.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, when it came to shaping both British and international opinion, Italy had yet to produce more credible proof of its abolitionist intentions in Ethiopia.

THE CAMPAIGN REACHES ITS PEAK

Whereas the compilation and diffusion of propaganda material on slavery in Ethiopia was easily achieved, the collection of factual evidence as to the beneficial influence of the Italian military proved more challenging. Only two weeks after the beginning of military operations in October 1935, Mussolini, who at that point still anticipated the implementation of international sanctions against his regime, nervously instructed his military officers in East Africa as to how to promote Italy's image as an abolitionist power. He ordered general De Bono, who was advancing into Tigray, to decree the 'immediate emancipation of all the slaves within the controlled territory . . . even if not strictly necessary'. As Mussolini emphasized, such a statement would undoubtedly 'please international public opinion'.¹⁶¹ Two days later, on 19 October 1935, De Bono duly issued an edict granting immediate freedom to all Tigrayan slaves and in the following two weeks the military reported the alleged emancipation of 16,000 slaves.¹⁶² The Italian Anti-Slavery Society reacted with a congratulatory message to Mussolini, which stated that 'the declaration of the abolition of slavery in [Ethiopia], [was] the most brilliant affirmation of Italy's generous civilizing mission in the World'.¹⁶³ Mussolini, however, feared that such superficial measures would not suffice to appease international anti-Italian feelings. He therefore asked De Bono to provide him with photographic evidence of slaves before and after manumission to back up the 'humanitarian' character of the Italian invasion.¹⁶⁴

General De Bono's reply reveals the unease with which the Italian military leaders responded to Mussolini's demands. As De Bono explained, slavery in Ethiopia was of a domestic and mostly benign nature and pictures of violence would have to be 'invented'.¹⁶⁵ De Bono also argued that

¹⁶⁰ This point is made by Waley, *British Public Opinion*, 121 and 133.

¹⁶¹ Mussolini to De Bono, 17 Oct. 1935, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

¹⁶² 'Bando di soppressione della schiavitù in Tigre', dated 19 Oct. 1935, *Antischiasmismo* (Oct.-Dec. 1935), 280.

¹⁶³ Società Antischiasmista to Mussolini, 4 Nov. 1935, reprinted in *Antischiasmismo* (Oct.-Dec. 1935), 284.

¹⁶⁴ Mussolini to De Bono, 17 Oct. 1935, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

¹⁶⁵ De Bono to Mussolini, 30 Oct. 1935, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

photographic documentation of the benefits of emancipation could prove extremely delicate as freed slaves faced the threat of starvation. According to De Bono, the freeing of slaves could, therefore, only happen on a voluntary basis. In short, he concluded, if Italy wanted to 'take advantage of the slavery question', it was advised to do so in a 'very measured way', because—as he surprisingly declared—'neither slave trading nor [a] cruel system' existed.¹⁶⁶

As was to be expected, these objections did not please Mussolini, who soon judged that De Bono's progress was too slow and replaced him with General Pietro Badoglio, a former governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica who had played a central role in the military 'pacification' of Libyan rebels.¹⁶⁷ In December 1935, Badoglio was made high commander of all Italian troops in East Africa, and he promised to issue further emancipation decrees as a humanitarian façade while advancing into Ethiopian territory. Only a couple of weeks later, however, he came to a similar conclusion as his predecessor. In January 1936, Badoglio warned Mussolini that the creation of 'documentation' about freed slaves would have disastrous effects on the already hostile free indigenous population. Similarly to De Bono, Badoglio pointed out that any such propaganda would have to be 'invented', and that it would threaten the 'political work' of pacifying Ethiopian resistance fighters, against whom the Italian army was still struggling.¹⁶⁸ Badoglio used the classic apologetic attitude of many colonial and military officials when faced with the potential social and economic unrest created by emancipating slaves. He argued that the compilation of lists of 'liberated' slaves and the distribution of certificates of emancipation amongst the population for the sole purpose of pleasing League members in Geneva, would create further disorder amongst the indigenous population, to the detriment of the Italian occupation.¹⁶⁹

Mussolini, however, was determined to 'take advantage' of the upcoming session of the Advisory Committee in Geneva which was to meet in early April 1936, and persisted in using the 'slavery issue' despite the warnings of his generals.¹⁷⁰ In February 1936, he therefore solicited Badoglio as well as military leader General Rodolfo Graziani, a notoriously brutal perpetrator of the war in Libya,¹⁷¹ to urgently send in a

¹⁶⁶ De Bono to Mussolini, 30 Oct. 1935.

¹⁶⁷ For Badoglio see Nicola Labanca, 'Badoglio, Pietro', in de Grazia and Luzzato, *Dizionario del Fascismo*, i. 128–32.

¹⁶⁸ Badoglio to Mussolini, 26 Jan. 1936, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

¹⁶⁹ Badoglio to Mussolini, 26 Jan. 1936.

¹⁷⁰ Mussolini to Badoglio and Graziani, 22 Feb. 1936, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

¹⁷¹ On Graziani, see Nicola Labanca, 'Graziani, Rodolfo', in de Grazia and Luzzato, *Dizionario del Fascismo*, i. 633–5. On his role in Libya, see Atam Mattioli, *Experimentierfeld*

'vast report, possibly filled with data, documentation and photographs' to illustrate the importance of Italy's emancipation decree.¹⁷² The response was unsatisfactory. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs only received a single picture of a fettered and starved Ethiopian man.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, on 2 March 1936, the scarce 'evidence' was compiled into a report and sent to the League of Nations. A copy of the Bando Badoglio, a second Italian emancipation decree hastily promulgated by Badoglio on 12 April 1936 at Makalle in the northern region of Tigray was added just in time to be considered for the third session of the Advisory Committee on 15–24 April 1936.¹⁷⁴ The Bando Badoglio extended the abolition of slaves to the central highlands of Amhara and to the north-western region of Gojam, vaguely stating that 'wherever the Italian flag flies, slavery is suppressed. The buying and selling of slaves is forbidden. Slaves [in Tigray, Gojam and Amhara] are free.'¹⁷⁵ In Geneva, Mario Moreno, successor of Zedda and Vellani, and inspector general and chief of the Office of Studies and Propaganda at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presented the Bando to the delegates of the Advisory Committee as 'the new and dazzling proof of the civilizing and humanitarian action completed by Fascist Italy in Africa'.¹⁷⁶

From Rome, Mussolini immediately ordered Grandi in London to 'highly emphasize in all possible ways Italian emancipatory effects'.¹⁷⁷ In response, Grandi advised the Centro P to diffuse the emancipation decree 'all over the place', resulting in the distribution of 700,000 copies of the declaration in the London Underground, in front of cinemas and theatres in the West End, and in Italian restaurants in Soho.¹⁷⁸ The Italian ambassador even took particular care to send copies of the Italian emancipation order to all associations concerned with humanitarian

der Gewalt: Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung 1935–1941 (Zurich, 2005), 41–54.

¹⁷² Mussolini to Badoglio and Graziani, 22 Feb. 1936, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

¹⁷³ See photograph enclosed in a 'very urgent' communication from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Italian Ministry of Colonies, 27 Feb. 1936, ASMAE, MAI, 180/38-A, 121/3.

¹⁷⁴ Communication from the Italian government to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 2 Mar. 1936, LoN, Slavery VIB, 1936, CC.EE.88, Annex 17. For the reception of the report, see Ch. 6.

¹⁷⁵ For the full text of the Bando Badoglio, see P. Badoglio, 'Dov'è la bandiera italiana non v'è schiavitù', in L. Goglia and F. Grassi (eds), *Il colonialismo italiano da Adua all'Impero* (Rome, 2006; first publ. 1981), 357.

¹⁷⁶ Report Moreno to Italian Ministry of Colonies, 18 Apr. 1936, ASMAE, MAI, 180/37, 116.

¹⁷⁷ Mussolini to Grandi, 12 Apr. 1936, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 928, 1.

¹⁷⁸ Grandi to Mussolini, 15 Apr. 1936.

endeavours, particularly targeting religious groups, women's organizations, and, last but not least, the British Anti-Slavery Society.¹⁷⁹ If one was to believe the claims made in the distributed material, Italy had gone a long way in international anti-slavery politics. The country had evolved from a disinterested bystander into an enforcer of anti-slavery measures, and an advocate of a new, aggressive kind of humanitarian imperialism. The question remained how the world, and in particular the members of the Anti-Slavery Society, would react to Italy's civilizing claims and whether the humanitarian part of the argument was at all credible by national and international humanitarian standards.

¹⁷⁹ Grandi to Mussolini, 15 Apr. 1936.

6

The Crisis of Anti-Slavery Activism

The events which took place in Ethiopia between autumn 1935 and summer 1936 marked the final chapter of anti-slavery activism in the interwar period. The Italo-Ethiopian war lasted a short seven months but it profoundly affected the national, international, and global political climate. The perceived injustice of the Italian aggression provoked an outburst of sympathy for the Ethiopian emperor and his people, and protest from the worldwide public.¹ On a diplomatic level, Europe's abandonment of Ethiopia to Italy did not prevent a German-Italian rapprochement but rather turned it into a 'new fact of geopolitical life'.² The double-faced conduct of European diplomats over the crisis, epitomized by the Hoare-Laval debacle, and the half-hearted handling of sanctions by the Council of the League of Nations, accelerated the dismantling of international peace and security provisions.³

In Britain, the Italo-Ethiopian war came to be perceived as a deathblow to collective security. As Martin Ceadel has famously shown, the public attitude of support for the League's peacekeeping mechanism articulated by the Peace Ballot before the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, became obsolete with extraordinary speed, due to the sudden deterioration of the international situation.⁴ Hitler's expansionist policies in Central and Eastern Europe reignited fears of war amongst the British public, who now favoured retreating into Empire and, in many quarters, appeasing the dictators.

The discussion which follows considers how the anti-slavery movement's reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia evolved over the course of the

¹ Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (New York, 1997), 7–21.

² John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009), 429.

³ Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933–1939* (Oxford, 2011), 100–65.

⁴ Martin Ceadel, 'The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934–5', *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), 810–39.

war, and it examines how the judgements of anti-slavery leader John Harris contrasted with the attitude of other non-governmental pressure groups. The Anti-Slavery Society initially manifested an ambivalent but fundamentally pro-Italian attitude, which differed markedly from the pro-sanctionist stance of other civic bodies such as the League of Nations Union and a range of emerging pro-Ethiopian relief organizations.⁵ Although anti-slavery leaders were forced to revise their position when confronted with reports about the Italian military's use of poison gas, their condemnation of Italian action remained tentative and tempered. This, combined with the gradual realization that Italian control in Ethiopia was not bringing the desired end to slavery, had long-term implications for the Anti-Slavery Society's humanitarian credentials. The war gave rise to new types of humanitarian relief campaigns in Ethiopia, and it also fuelled anti-colonial lobbies in London, thus bringing about a crisis of the anti-slavery movement, to which the anti-slavery leadership struggled to respond. Growing discontent amongst British colonial subjects in the West Indies, shifts in the public and political perception of the 'colonial problem', and the anticipation of a second world war, were all factors which affected how, in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the Anti-Slavery Society positioned itself with regard to colonial questions and to the future administration of British territories in Africa.

BRITISH REACTIONS TO THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN WAR

Throughout the late summer months leading up to Italy's military attack on Ethiopia in October 1935, the Italian ambassador in London, Dino Grandi, closely monitored the British Anti-Slavery Society's moves.⁶ Grandi, who was conscious of the anti-slavery movement's influence on public opinion and foreign policy, analysed all public statements emanating from the organization's leadership. In August 1935, when John Harris delivered a speech at an anti-slavery meeting in Oxford in which he expressed his approval for Italian action against slavery in Ethiopia, Grandi reported this news with great satisfaction to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷ Harris, who at that point

⁵ On the League of Nations Union's reaction to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, see Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918-1945* (Manchester, 2011), 212-42. Also, Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935-6* (London, 1975).

⁶ For Grandi's activities as ambassador in London and his role in setting up an Italian propaganda campaign in Britain, see Ch. 5.

⁷ Grandi to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Press and Propaganda, 2 Aug. 1935, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 881, 9.

in time could not foresee the full scale of Italy's military agenda, had argued that Italian resentment against Ethiopia was understandable in view of the frequent slave raids on Italian colonies, and that Britain too was suffering from such incursions.⁸ The Italian diplomat took this to mean that the Anti-Slavery Society fully supported the now foreseeable Italian invasion. Indeed, Grandi could hardly hide his excitement when the *Evening News*, one of London's most popular leading dailies, rendered Harris's statements under the headline 'Mussolini is also fighting our own battle'.⁹

Contrary to the received history of the Italian incursion into Ethiopia, Italy's propaganda on slavery in Abyssinia was not completely random but directed at humanitarian activists. The Anti-Slavery Society undoubtedly welcomed the renewed interest in slavery brought about by the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Harris revelled in the sudden publicity on slavery in Ethiopia created by Italian propaganda. London press and publicity services were demanding interviews from the anti-slavery leader who was hailed as the 'greatest living authority on slavery'.¹⁰ As in previous years, Harris also travelled to Geneva to attend the League of Nations Assembly and on his return the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society enthusiastically reported to his fellow campaigners that 'a great change [had] come over the scene' and that 'the interest created in slavery was enormous'. Harris expected that the soaring demand for information on Ethiopian slavery would mean that his organization would be able to 'reach a greater advance' than ever in its abolitionist campaign.¹¹ 'Slavery is now right in front of the picture and has assumed the position of a big international problem', he wrote to George Maxwell, the British delegate at the League's Advisory Committee on Slavery in Geneva, confident that the Anti-Slavery Society would be 'called upon to play a large part'.¹²

Amidst this renewed excitement, the Anti-Slavery Society's leadership failed to recognize and to address several more worrying developments. Unspecified 'rumours' circulated from late August 1935 that Italian armed forces planned to launch an aerial bombardment of Addis Ababa by using chemical weapons. When a concerned member of the Anti-Slavery Society mentioned this to Harris, the latter decided with

⁸ Following the speech, Harris published his views in the pamphlet, *Where Slavery Still Survives: Emancipation Too Big a Task for Abyssinia to Tackle Alone* (London, 1935).

⁹ Grandi to Italian Foreign Office, Ministry of Press and Propaganda, 2 Aug. 1935.

¹⁰ London Press and Publicity Services to Harris, 28 Aug. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

¹¹ Harris to Charles Roberts, 27 Sept. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

¹² Harris to Maxwell, 27 Sept. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

Lord Noel-Buxton that 'suggesting that Mussolini had no such intentions' would be 'the most tactful method of protesting against any such proposal'.¹³ Despite having no evidence on which to base such an assertion, both leaders reassured British readers in a letter to *The Times* that the Duce was aware that, by subjecting 'the women and children of Addis Ababa to massacre and destruction', (he) would gain an 'unenviable place in history' and 'rob the Italian army of the record of chivalry of which it is proud'. The authors also remarked 'that any such action' was 'specifically excluded by the well-defined international obligations of the Italian Government', notably the humanitarian tenets of the Geneva Conventions but also the League of Nations' Covenant which condemned the use of military force as a means for solving international disputes.¹⁴

The lack of concern displayed by the Anti-Slavery Society about the effects of military action on the civilian population in Ethiopia placed it at odds with increasingly vigorous protests from a variety of sources and profoundly undermined the organization's humanitarian credentials. Once the invasion had been launched in October 1935, and General De Bono's troops had given the world a taste of Italy's military belligerence, Harris still continued to revel in the sudden enhancement of his society's public profile, despite evidence that events would jeopardize his credentials in the field. As the Italian army proceeded to take Adwa, Harris persistently raved about the 'wonderful meetings everywhere' at which he was invited to speak on the subject of 'Italy, Abyssinia, and the League'.¹⁵ This contrasted with the mounting protest staged by socialist, internationalist, pacifist, and anti-Fascist organizations in London. Political and charitable groups including the Cooperative Women's Guild, the Independent Labour Party, the National Union of Railwaymen, the British Labour Esperanto Association, but also the Quaker Society of Friends, flooded the Italian embassy in London with pictures of anti-Italian demonstrations, petitions for the withdrawal of troops, allegations of bombing of women and children, and accusations of inhuman and uncivilized warfare.¹⁶ Regular anti-Italian demonstrations

¹³ Harris to Noel-Buxton, 28 Aug. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

¹⁴ See draft letter by Harris and Noel-Buxton submitted to *The Times*, enclosed in Harris to Ralph Deakin, editor of *The Times*, 3 Sept. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

¹⁵ Harris to Lord Crichton-Stuart, 29 Oct. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

¹⁶ For these reactions see 'Conflitto Italo-Etiopico: Mozioni Pacifiste' ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 855, 3.

took place in the British capital, and some protesters even ransacked Italian shops in Soho.¹⁷

Some of the most sustained opposition to the Italian invasion came from the League of Nations Union which, despite the League's failed attempts to avert a war, continued to believe in the organization's political effectiveness.¹⁸ In autumn 1935, the Union launched a counter-attack on Italian propaganda, and a political and public campaign in support of collective security. In the months following the invasion, the League of Nations Union dispatched frequent deputations to members of the British government, and sent regular messages to the Foreign Secretary urging the government to fulfil the obligations of the League's Covenant and maintain effective economic sanctions against Italy.¹⁹ These lobbying efforts were accompanied by the production of pamphlets, in which League supporters, claiming to express the feelings of the British public, condemned the Italian invasion as a 'crime', an 'insult', and a 'double breach of faith and morality'.²⁰ The Union's strong pro-sanctionist stance was also publicized in a newsletter, initially published under the heading 'Enforcing Peace', and after the first issue simply titled 'Abyssinia'.²¹ In an attempt to counter the increasing fragmentation of public opinion over the issue of expanding economic sanctions, the journal presented a case for enforcing an oil embargo to achieve peace.²² In an appeal against defeatism, the Vice-President of the League of Nations Union Gilbert Murray emphatically called on League member states to opt for 'effective restraint of the aggressor' and for a 'vindication' of the League's authority.²³ Other contributors argued that the League's initial plan of sanctions proved that the League 'was working',²⁴ and that the enforcement of sanctions could mark 'a turning point in history'.²⁵

¹⁷ ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 855, 3.

¹⁸ McCarthy, *British People*, 212–13. Also Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford, 2000), 320–5.

¹⁹ Waley, *British Public Opinion*, 95–101.

²⁰ League of Nations Union (ed.), *The Tragedy of Abyssinia: What Britain Feels and Thinks and Wants: A Selection of Some Recent Expressions of Feeling and Opinion by British Men and Women: Letters, Articles, Resolutions, Speeches, Cartoons by Bernard Partridge and David Law* (London, 1936).

²¹ *Abyssinia: A Weekly Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action*, 2–15 (20 Nov. 1935–11 Mar. 1936).

²² 'Oil Must Be Banned: A Challenge the League Dare Not Evade', *Abyssinia: A Weekly Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action*, 7 (8 Jan. 1936), 1.

²³ Gilbert Murray, 'The Authority of the League Must Be Vindicated', *Abyssinia: A Weekly Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action*, 5 (11 Dec. 1935), 1.

²⁴ 'Sanctions Step by Step: Plan Which Marks Turning Point in History', *Enforcing Peace: A Weekly Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action*, 1 (23 Oct. 1935), 2–3.

²⁵ 'Sanctions in Force', *Abyssinia: A Weekly Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action*, 2 (20 Nov. 1935), 2.

The League of Nations Union was not the only civic group whose campaign was galvanized by the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The beginning of military action in Ethiopia also led to the mobilization of other self-declared humanitarian organizations in support of Ethiopian victims of war, thus creating a break with the patronizing anti-slavery rhetoric of the Anti-Slavery Society. The most important in this respect was the International Committee of the Red Cross, which embarked on a medical relief operation financially and materially supported by an unprecedented twenty-eight National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.²⁶ The war also motivated the Save The Children Fund, a British organization established in 1919, to extend its assistance to children suffering from the effects of armed conflict beyond Europe and to Africa.²⁷ The beginning of military warfare and of unprecedented relief operations in Africa caused some anti-slavery activists, notably Lord Noel-Buxton, to abandon anti-slavery campaigning for Ethiopian support. Noel-Buxton's public statements displayed a new awareness of the potentially devastating effects of armed conflict on the Ethiopian population. A few days after the beginning of Italy's military operations, Noel-Buxton asked readers of *The Times* to support the Save The Children Fund's plan to set up a child welfare centre in Addis Ababa to help orphans who had been rendered destitute and homeless because of the war.²⁸ Other initiatives were also flourishing. Thus, the British public was urged to donate money for a British Ambulance Unit in Abyssinia, set up in November 1935 under the leadership of London surgeon André J. M. Melly.²⁹ In a bid to mobilize funds to succour the sick and wounded, Melly succeeded in roping in the support of influential public figures notably the archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Lothian, and Lord Lugard.³⁰ Privately, however, Lugard thought little of the Ambulance Unit, which he called a 'dilatory and argumentative organization'.³¹

Lugard's reaction to the new type of relief work was characteristic of the unease with which promoters of anti-slavery intervention reacted to the Italo-Ethiopian war. British anti-slavery activists were

²⁶ Rainer Baudendistel, *Between Bombs and Good Intentions: The Red Cross and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1936* (New York, 2006).

²⁷ D. Marshall, 'The Rights of African Children, the Save the Children Fund and Public Opinion in Europe and Ethiopia: The Centre of Child Welfare of Addis Abeba, Spring 1936', in S. Uhlig (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 297.

²⁸ Noel-Buxton in *The Times*, 10 Oct. 1935.

²⁹ *The Times*, 2 Nov. 1935.

³⁰ *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1935.

³¹ Lugard to Sir Sidney [Barton], undated [probably Mar. 1937], RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 89, 3.

torn between two camps, flooded by pro-Italian propaganda and criticized by anti-Italian protesters. As League supporters and humanitarian workers were stepping up their game, anti-slavery campaigners felt increasingly embarrassed by the plethora of Italian propaganda pamphlets which routinely reproduced the Anti-Slavery Society's statements on Ethiopian slavery in order to legitimize the Fascist regime's colonial war. Like other spokespersons of the movement who did not want to be seen as supporters of the Fascist regime, Harris self-consciously tried to distance himself from Italy. By November 1935, the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society grudgingly conceded when challenged by Lord Cecil on his pro-Italian stance that, in view of Italy's breaching of international agreements, it was difficult to believe in anything the Italian government claimed.³² Lugard, meanwhile, was perturbed about Italian claims that he had provided a model for the Italian anti-slavery invasion by suggesting foreign control of Ethiopia as 'an anti-slavery remedy'.³³ In an open letter to *The Times*, Lugard maintained, somewhat hypocritically given his previous proposal to turn Ethiopia into a mandate in the 1920s, that the statement referring to his views was 'absolutely without any foundation whatsoever', and that the Italian claims were 'fantastic and devoid of any vestige of truth'.³⁴ But Lugard's written reflections on the legitimacy of colonial expansion showed that his perspective had changed little since the 1920s. In scholarly articles published in the *Journal of the Royal African Society* at the height of the Italo-Ethiopian war, Lugard embraced an imperialist rather than pacifist or humanitarian stance, asserting that the League of Nations should facilitate rather than restrain imperialism and colonial expansion. 'The League', Lugard professed, 'cannot survive if it assumes only the negative role of endeavouring to prevent war when crises arise. . . . It must recognise and provide for the insistent demands of the nations which need room to expand, and the due share of their raw material for their industries and the foodstuffs which the tropical and subtropical colonies can supply.'³⁵

Other leading figures of the British anti-slavery movement were even more outspoken in their pro-colonial sentiment. Lady Simon, for example, whose written and spoken publicity on Ethiopian slavery had provided useful documentation for Italian and British supporters of

³² Harris to Lord Cecil, 20 Nov. 1935. RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

³³ On Baravelli and the fabrication of Italian propaganda in general, see Ch. 5.

³⁴ Lugard to the editor of *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1935, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 89, 7.

³⁵ Lord Lugard, 'Africa and the Powers', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 35, 138 (Jan. 1936), 4-17.

military intervention in Ethiopia, did not try to mask her approval of Mussolini's colonial war. Despite her delicate position as the wife of Foreign Secretary John Simon, who was directly involved in Britain's diplomatic negotiations with Italy and who since the Stresa meeting had gained a reputation as one of the main proponents of British appeasement policy, Simon openly praised the Fascist leader.³⁶ She vouched for 'Signor Mussolini's abolitionist intentions', which she claimed the Italian leader had discussed with her during private interviews. Simon believed that Mussolini 'would go a long way to reconcile the Italian conquest of Abyssinia to those who uphold the Wilberforce doctrine that slavery is an abomination'.³⁷

Similarly, even though Harris was unnerved by Italian anti-slavery propaganda, he was far from opposing Italian colonial expansion in Ethiopia. 'Of course', Harris admitted in January 1936 when challenged by his Quaker friend William Dent Priestman from Hull, 'the material being sent out from Italy is propaganda'. Yet, the anti-slavery leader emphasized that 'separating specific facts from a national and selfish interest [was] very difficult'. It was the Anti-Slavery Society's duty, Harris remarked, 'not to let the public go to sleep over the question of Slavery in Abyssinia'.³⁸ Despite his Quaker beliefs, Harris did not explicitly condemn Italian actions, but instead continued to maintain that 'slave owning and slave raiding were largely responsible for the war' and that 'the Emperor was unable to abolish it single-handed'.³⁹ Harris evidently regarded the Italian invasion as a legitimate means to enforce anti-slavery measures, naively hoping that—with adequate international supervision—it would bring about an end to slavery. To observers of the conflict, it seemed unlikely at the time that Italy would win the war quickly, and it was commonly thought that the beginning of the rainy season in February 1936 would make military operations considerably more difficult, forcing Mussolini to negotiate a settlement. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Anti-Slavery Society believed that Italy's colonial expansion in Ethiopia could still be monitored internationally and that there was enough time 'to secure from Mussolini his abolitionist objectives'.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ralf James Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935–1939* (London, 1993), 20–1.

³⁷ Simon, undated, no address [probably to Harris], RHO, Simon Papers, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 25, K 23, 3.

³⁸ Harris to Priestman, 22 Jan. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

³⁹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1936), 133–4.

⁴⁰ Harris to the editor of *The Times*, 22 Nov. 1935, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 464.

POISON GAS, ANNEXATION, AND THE
'FAILURE' OF THE LEAGUE

Two factors polarized the British response to the Italo-Ethiopian war after January 1936: the growing rumours about Italy's use of poison gas on Ethiopian civilians, and the decline of large-scale public support for British entanglement in the conflict.⁴¹ At the beginning of January 1936, first reports by local Red Cross field workers about the illegal use of poison gas on defenceless Ethiopian civilians reached the headquarters of the Red Cross in Geneva.⁴² According to this evidence, Italian armed forces were breaching the 1925 Geneva Protocol against the use of asphyxiating gas (a protocol which the Italian government had signed on 3 April 1928) by showering the northern front almost daily with mustard gas—an oily substance which could cause severe burnings, disfigurement, blindness, and often death.⁴³ This was not the first time that Italy had violated international law. In December 1935, Ethiopia had already appealed to the Council of the League of Nations and denounced the Italian conduct of military operations, particularly the deliberate killing of women and children, and the Italian air force's bombardment of Red Cross hospitals.⁴⁴ But Italy had dismissed the allegations, including the charges over the use of gas, by claiming it was merely retaliating against the Ethiopians' use of explosive bullets (*DumDum*) which it self-righteously condemned as the violation of 'a high humanitarian principle universally recognised and forming part of the oral heritage of all civilized States'.⁴⁵

The Ethiopian government would not be cowed. On 3 January 1936, it complained about Italy's use of chemical weapons to the League's Committee of Thirteen, the agency set up by the League in December 1935 to follow the dispute, requesting it to launch an 'impartial enquiry into the conduct of hostilities'.⁴⁶ The latter ducked the issue by forwarding the demand to the International Committee of the Red Cross asking it to

⁴¹ Ceadel, 'First British Referendum', 810–39.

⁴² Baudendistel, *Between Bombs and Good Intentions*, 273. Also, Rainer Baudendistel, 'Force versus Law: The International Committee of the Red Cross and Chemical Warfare in the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1936', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 322 (1998), 81–104.

⁴³ Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941* (Lawrenceville, 1997), 55.

⁴⁴ Telegram from his majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia to the Secretary-General, 6 Dec. 1935, in League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 17, 1 (Jan. 1936), 29.

⁴⁵ Telegram from the Italian Government to the Secretary-General, 18 Dec. 1935, League of Nations, 'Minutes of the Eighty-Ninth Session of the Council', *Official Journal* (Council), 17, 1 (1936), 37.

⁴⁶ Ethiopian representative to Secretary-General, 3 Jan. 1936, *League of Nations Official Journal* (Council), 17, 2 (1936), 240.

confirm the allegations. But to the League Committee's great regret, the Red Cross refused to corroborate information about Italy's use of chemical weapons, despite the fact that it had enough intelligence to do so. Red Cross leaders felt bound by the principle of neutrality, and they were afraid that any revelations on poison gas would compromise their organization's relief operations.⁴⁷

This decision not only severely undermined the deliberations of the Committee of Thirteen, it also further delayed any League intervention at a crucial time in the conflict. When, at the beginning of March 1936, the rumours about Italy's use of poison gas was confirmed by *The Times's* correspondent Walter M. Holmes, the international situation had deteriorated to the point of making concerted action against Italy unlikely.⁴⁸ In March 1936 international security provisions were further violated when Hitler's army invaded the Rhineland, and Western eyes turned away from Africa and back to Europe.⁴⁹ Despite Italy's considerable advance into Ethiopian territory, the formerly pro-sanctionist and pro-League feelings of the British public shifted towards appeasement because of increasing fears that, if Britain were to further engage in sanctions, it might cause Italy to attack its Mediterranean positions.⁵⁰ The rise of Franco in Spain, accompanied by increasingly violent clashes between Franco's Nationalists and loyal Republicans in the early months of 1936 threatened to intensify international tensions and further undermined collective security.⁵¹

A growing concern amongst League member states not to alienate Mussolini encouraged an equivocal stance towards Italian propaganda and the League of Nations became once again a forum for Italian manipulation. When in early March—after considerable efforts invested by Mussolini to fabricate a report to that effect—Italy notified the League's Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery that it had freed slaves in the occupied Ethiopian areas, the response of the League Council was one of unease.⁵² The question arose in the League Council as to whether the

⁴⁷ On the Red Cross's dilemma, see Baudendistel, *Between Bombs and Good Intentions*, 285–93.

⁴⁸ Holmes in *The Times*, 5 Mar. 1936.

⁴⁹ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, 142–4.

⁵⁰ Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, 327. Also, Steven Morewood, 'The Chiefs of Staff, the "Men on the Spot" and the Italo-Abyssinian Emergency, 1935–1936', in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone (eds), *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth-Century International History* (London, 1995), 85–110.

⁵¹ Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London, 2001), 307–29.

⁵² Communication from the Italian government to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 2 Mar. 1936, LoN, Slavery VIB, 1936, CC.EE.88, Annex 17. For the Italian preparation of the report for the Advisory Committee of Experts, see Ch. 5.

Italian statements should be published. Some members pointed out that the Italian information on slavery in Ethiopia had been obtained in the course of military action undertaken 'in breach of the Covenant'.⁵³ But on 13 March the Council nevertheless decided to proceed with publication. Although, on 10 April, the leader of the British Ambulance Unit, Melly, provided the League Council with further evidence about the Italian military's frequent use of mustard gas on women, children, and infants, attempts to stop the Italian war effort unravelled almost completely.⁵⁴ On 18 April 1936, the Committee of Thirteen publicly admitted it had failed to facilitate negotiations between Italy and Ethiopia.⁵⁵ Instead, the report of the Advisory Committee for its third (extraordinary) session, held in April 1936 and later published on 14 May, simply reproduced Italy's announcement with the corresponding propaganda material, including photographs of shackled slaves.⁵⁶ On the surface, at least, Mussolini's intensive campaign to portray Italian military action in such a light as to make it palatable to international opinion had reached its desired end. Through the reports of the League's expert body, Italian propaganda was officially and internationally endorsed, illustrating the power of humanitarian imperialism.

Against the backdrop of a generalized mood of appeasement, and helped by the use of poison gas and the general technological superiority of its weapons, the Italian military now steadily advanced towards Addis Ababa. On 5 May 1936, Italian forces captured the Ethiopian capital. Two days later, although the greater part of the country was still unoccupied and controlled by local authorities, Italy officially annexed Ethiopia.⁵⁷ With habitual Fascist exuberance, and to the cheers of local crowds in Italy, Mussolini promoted Marshal Badoglio to the position of viceroy of the new colony.⁵⁸ In yet another superficial imitation of British colonial rhetoric, King Victor Emmanuel III was proclaimed 'Emperor of Ethiopia', in analogy to the British monarch's title of Emperor of India.⁵⁹

⁵³ See 'Question of the Publication of the Report of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery on the Work of its Third (Extraordinary) Session', in League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 17, 6 (1936), 541-2.

⁵⁴ John Melly, 'Report on the Use of Gas on the Northern Front', 10 Apr. 1936, *League of Nations Official Journal* (Council), 17, 6 (1936), 629.

⁵⁵ 'Geneva Peace Effort: Causes of Failure', *The Times*, 20 Apr. 1936.

⁵⁶ *Report of the Third Extraordinary Session of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery* (Geneva, 1936), LoN, Slavery, VIB, 1936.

⁵⁷ Richard Pankhurst, 'Resistance to Italian Colonialism: The Case of the Ethiopian Patriots (1936-1941)', in Nicola Labanca (ed.), *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana* (Rome, 1996), 735-70.

⁵⁸ 'Roman Triumph: Marshal Badoglio's Homecoming', *The Times*, 3 June 1936.

⁵⁹ 'Victory Stamps for Italy', *The Times*, 1 June 1936.

At this announcement Haile Selassie, who was still internationally regarded as the legitimate ruler of Ethiopia, appealed one last time to the League to respect the Covenant and not to recognize any territorial claims made by Italy.⁶⁰ In June 1936, the Ethiopian emperor famously travelled to Geneva hoping to persuade League member states to take a stance against Italy. In a memorable speech, Selassie addressed the League of Nations' Assembly to the sound of whistling and catcalls from Italian press representatives.⁶¹ The emperor openly criticized the League's handling of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis and condemned the international community in Geneva for failing to protect the Ethiopian people from the Italian attack. Selassie argued that Italy's attack on Ethiopia was not only a matter of 'collective security' but of 'international morality', and he implored League members to respect the Covenant and 'avert the final blow' (official recognition of Italian annexation) by enforcing rather than lifting sanctions on Italy.⁶² But Selassie's speech did not have the desired effect. Although League members had previously officially rebuked Italy, they voted against the imposition of further sanctions on 4 July, and the existing sanctions were lifted a week later.⁶³ This shattered the credibility of the League as an institution able to secure peace, and led to the common view amongst contemporary observers and later generations of historians that the League had 'failed' in its most basic task. Although the Italian annexation was not generally acknowledged until 1938, Italy perceived the lift of sanctions as a *de facto* recognition. From London, Grandi enthusiastically congratulated Mussolini on the Italian victory. Satisfied with his personal war effort, the Italian ambassador carefully listed all the expenses incurred for 'Italian propaganda in Great Britain', thus closing the embassy's file on the Italo-Ethiopian war.⁶⁴

In contrast with the public outcry over the Hoare-Laval agreement a few months earlier, this time protest in Britain was muted, pointing to an evident shift in popular and governmental attitudes to British interference in foreign conflicts.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the territorial annexation of Ethiopia continued to provoke strong reactions from a range of white, middle-class, left-wing pro-Ethiopian groups, which had emerged towards

⁶⁰ Telegram from His Majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia to the Secretary-General, 10 May 1936, in League of Nations, *Official Journal* (Council), 17, 6 (1936), 660.

⁶¹ For a description of the scene, see Abyssinia Association, *Speech of his Majesty the Emperor of Abyssinia at Geneva* (London, 1936), 1-2.

⁶² Abyssinian Association, *Speech of his Majesty*, 13.

⁶³ G. W. Baer, 'Sanctions and Security: The League of Nations and the Italian-Ethiopian War, 1935-1936', *International Organization*, 27, 2 (1973), 165-79.

⁶⁴ See listings by Grandi, July 1936, ASMAE, AL, Grandi Papers, B 940, 3.

⁶⁵ Ceadel, 'First British Referendum', 835-9.

the end of the conflict. One of them was the Abyssinian Association, a pro-Abyssinian pressure group, formed in April 1936 by Herbert Stanley Jevons, a Professor of Economics and Political Science at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire. The association, whose agenda it was to offer assistance to the exiled Ethiopian government, could count on the support of illustrious British members, notably the Labour MP and leading figure in the League of Nations Union Norman Angell, and the women's rights campaigner Eleanor Rathbone.⁶⁶

Another similar organization was set up in May 1936 called Friends of Abyssinia (not to be confused with the more radical International African Friends of Abyssinia). Led by Hazel Napier, the Friends of Abyssinia, whose agenda and public base overlapped with the Abyssinian Association, drew on the support of pacifists Thomas Edmund Harvey and Leyton Richards, as well as the British journalist and editor Henry Wickham Steed. The group's aim was 'to assist in the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Abyssinia and to alert the British public to the threat of Fascism'.⁶⁷ The organization also closely cooperated with one of the most outspoken Ethiopian sympathizers: British feminist Sylvia Pankhurst. Pankhurst famously engaged in anti-racist and anti-imperialist journalism, through a radical newsletter, the *New Times and Ethiopian News*, which she had launched on 5 May 1936, the day the Italians claimed victory over Addis Ababa.⁶⁸ As these private efforts to set in motion non-governmental support for Ethiopia illustrate, a new form of humanitarian activism had emerged with regard to Africa.

These pro-Ethiopian support groups, with their left-wing credentials, had little in common with the conservative and liberal leaders and patrons of the Anti-Slavery Society, and the interactions between the two remained minimal. When asked to join the Abyssinian Association, Lugard, for instance, replied that he preferred 'to remain detached' and work for 'the cause' in his 'own way'.⁶⁹ The Friends of Abyssinia did not fare better when trying to enlist his help. When months after the annexation Napier appealed to Lugard to join a deputation in support of Abyssinia to the Foreign Office, and to sign a Christmas card [!] to the exiled Ethiopian emperor, Lugard declined again.⁷⁰ He maintained that,

⁶⁶ 'Abyssinian Association', *The Times*, 30 Apr. 1936.

⁶⁷ Memorandum issued by the Friends of Abyssinia, [undated], RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 471. Also, P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 340, 345.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* (London, 2008), 338.

⁶⁹ Lugard to Jevons, Abyssinian Association, 15 Feb. 1936, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 89, 6.

⁷⁰ Napier to Lugard, 27 Oct. 1936, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 90, 4,

given the 'present deplorable circumstances . . . no useful purpose would be achieved by telling the Italian government that they had violated an International Convention by using poison gas'.⁷¹ Napier's response was tinged with disappointment and reproach. 'However completely and apparently hopeless the Abyssinian situation may have become', she replied, 'the tragic condition of the Abyssinians should not be forgotten by the world'.⁷² As Napier's words implied, taking a stance against Italy's conduct was a matter of principle. 'Protest, even if ineffectual to reverse events', Napier argued, 'should be constantly made' as it will 'help to combat defeatism, revive faith in the principle of collective security and even curb in some measure ruthless subjugation and promote some form of safeguard in the future for these abandoned peoples of Ethiopia'.⁷³ Yet, even Napier's forceful conclusion that 'silence in these matters is interpreted as consent' did not provoke any further formal statements by the Anti-Slavery Society.

'WHERE HAVE ALL THE SLAVES GONE?'

The Anti-Slavery Society's attitude towards the Italian attack on Ethiopia remained surprisingly uncritical and unchanged throughout the period of hostilities. But in the wake of Italy's proclamation of victory there was one question which anti-slavery leaders could not avoid facing, namely what the invasion had done to the slaves in Ethiopia. During the fifteen years preceding the Italo-Ethiopian war, the Anti-Slavery Society had waged a much-publicized campaign against slavery in Ethiopia. This campaign, at its height in the autumn of 1935, had completely dissipated by the summer of 1936. This was partly due to the fact that the Italians had stopped their propaganda on slavery, and partly it was a consequence of European preoccupations with events that were much closer to home. The outbreak of civil war in Spain in July 1936 led international diplomacy, the media, and humanitarian organizations to shift their attention to Southern Europe where Italy and Germany were lending military support to General Franco's coup against the Republican government.⁷⁴

For those who had engaged in one form or another in the campaign against slavery, however, the situation in Ethiopia was far from transparent. Observers outside Italy remained sceptical about the humanitarian effects of the war, some even openly criticizing Italian claims of

⁷¹ Lugard to Napier, 31 Oct. 1936, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 90, 4.

⁷² Napier to Lugard, 2 Nov. 1936, RHO, Lugard Papers, Mss. Lugard, 90, 4.

⁷³ Napier to Lugard, 2 Nov. 1936. ⁷⁴ Brendon, *Dark Valley*, 332-3.

liberation. The Bureau International pour la Protection des Indigènes in Geneva, for example, after openly expressing its concern about the Italian attack in autumn 1935, now felt 'a duty' to point out that the problem of slavery was 'much more complicated' than its portrayal by the Italian government.⁷⁵ The Bureau remarked that, 'if a simple decree had been sufficient to eliminate this secular institution, the Ethiopian emperor would certainly have promulgated it long ago', a criticism which prompted the Italian Anti-Slavery Society to publicly attack the Bureau, claiming it was a 'Bolshevik organization'.⁷⁶

The lack of Italian surveys and reports measuring the impact of the Bando Badoglio on the slave population, however, speaks for itself. Besides a few misty-eyed accounts about freed Ethiopian slaves published by supporters of Italy and members of the Italian anti-slavery society, there was little reliable information about the effects of the new abolitionist decrees.⁷⁷ For many Ethiopian slaves the transition to freedom had probably little in common with abolitionist ideals, and postwar realities fell short of the hoped for transformative socio-economic effects of the war. As James McCann has shown, at least during the early months of the military conflict, slaves could claim protection within the limited areas under Italian control in Northern Ethiopia.⁷⁸ Because freed slaves lacked any means of survival, however, many were drawn into the Eritrean militia, while others served as paid labourers in Italian military camps and female ex-slaves became concubines of Italian and Eritrean soldiers.⁷⁹

The situation was considerably worse in areas outside of Italian control, where poor security conditions during the war and occupation brought about a resurgence, not the decline, of slavery and the slave trade. Earlier during the military conflict, the Anti-Slavery Society had received alarming reports about an increase in slave-trading from Christine Sandford, wife of the British colonel Daniel Sandford who had been appointed by Haile Selassie in 1935 to assist the Ethiopian government after De Halpert's departure. Christine Sandford described her husband's concern and the great difficulties which he encountered due to 'the burden of war' and the 'dislocation caused by the Italian invasion' whilst supervising the

⁷⁵ *Circulaire du Bureau International*, 15 (Geneva, 1935), 6. *Circulaire du Bureau International*, 16 (Geneva, 1936), 1.

⁷⁶ This controversial correspondence was fully published in *Antischiasmismo* (Aug.–Dec. 1936), 113–19, 113.

⁷⁷ On this see Ch. 5.

⁷⁸ James McCann, 'Children of the House: Slavery and its Suppression in Lasta, Northern Ethiopia, 1916–1935', in S. Miers and R. L. Roberts (eds), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1988), 332–61.

⁷⁹ McCann, 'Children of the House', 350.

implementation of Selassie's abolitionist decrees.⁸⁰ This prompted Harris to send a letter to *The Times* in which he underlined how 'unfortunate' it was that the Italian government had not made any communications with regard to the practical implementation of the Bando Badoglio.⁸¹ The leader of the Anti-Slavery Society also remarked that if the Italian decree was to be 'anything other than a dead letter', rigorous steps had to be taken by the Italian authorities to implement abolition. 'Slavery dies hard', Harris warned *Times* readers, 'it has never yet been abolished by proclamation alone'.⁸²

For want of official information on Ethiopian slaves, Harris asked the Italian sympathizers amongst his acquaintances to reassure him on Italy's anti-slavery agenda. The Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society pressed his old acquaintance, the Italophile director of the British Institute in Florence, Harold Goad, for evidence of the progress of emancipation as well as proofs of slave liberations. Goad, who had long defended the Italian war as an essentially humanitarian undertaking, simply answered that under Italian rule 'papers of manumission [were] not necessary, as all slavery is abolished and no master can attempt to re-enslave any ex-slave'.⁸³ He wilfully ignored the complexity and reality of events on the ground. Similarly, shortly after the fall of Addis Ababa, Harris urged his friend Villari to send him 'any reliable material . . . on the progress of the liberation of slaves', to which the anti-slavery leader received the usual reply that slavery was abolished and all slaves were free.⁸⁴

At the annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society held in Westminster in June 1936, guest speaker Norman Angell, a renowned writer and peace campaigner, spoke of the real 'danger of Abyssinian natives being subjected to a form of military slavery' by the Italian invaders. However, he remained optimistic—at least publicly—about the League's ability to keep check on the situation in Ethiopia, and the Anti-Slavery Society passed a resolution that 'in any settlement of the conflict . . . provisions should be made by the League for the emancipation of slaves throughout Abyssinia'.⁸⁵ When in August 1936, League member states decided to lift sanctions, Harris definitively lost any belief in a positive outcome for Ethiopian slaves. Frustrated by what could only be considered a regression

⁸⁰ Christine Stanford to Buxton, 4 Apr. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸¹ Harris to editor of *The Times*, 15 Apr. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸² Harris to editor of *The Times*, 15 Apr. 1936.

⁸³ Goad to Harris, 21 Apr. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸⁴ Harris to Villari, 6 May 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 11 June 1936.

and failure in humanitarian terms, and shaken by the now official reports about poison gas, he bitterly concluded that 'the wrong done by Italy to Abyssinia and to world peace and security is so grave that terrible penalties must follow'.⁸⁶ Of course, Harris did not know at the time that Italy's victory would only be short-lived and that, merely five years later, its rule in Ethiopia was to be cut short by its own defeat by Allied troops.

Concerns amongst anti-slavery activists that the war might have aggravated the problem of slavery in Ethiopia were confirmed in November 1936 when the British Anti-Slavery Society received a delayed and confidential report on Ethiopian slavery from the British Foreign Office. As Harris confided to Noel-Buxton, the report was a 'terrible document' of a 'most depressing nature'.⁸⁷ The report demonstrated that slavery had been endemic before the Italian invasion, and that the emperor's social reforms, which intended to undermine its influence, were completely disrupted by the Italian attack. 'Slave caravans revived everywhere, and the slaves taken to markets reached abnormal figures—sometimes as many as a thousand lives were sent to market at one time'.⁸⁸ This was the final blow for the advocates of military intervention and in a letter to Lady Simon, the anti-slavery leader openly wondered 'where all these slaves [had] gone'. 'Somebody has got them in slavery', Harris speculated, 'and they must number many thousands'.⁸⁹

But despite such late insights, the probable deterioration of the situation of Ethiopian slaves due to the war did not trigger any further debates, neither within the British Foreign Office, nor in Geneva.⁹⁰ Neither the resurgence of forms of bonded labour in Ethiopia nor Italy's increasingly racist colonial policies were discussed again in the meetings of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery.⁹¹ In fact, the Italian delegate did not attend the committee's fourth session in Geneva in April 1937, and the report on slavery therefore contained no mention of Italian anti-slavery policies. Rather, owing to the exceptionally detailed input from the new British delegate to the Advisory Committee, George Maxwell, and due to the scarcity of information supplied by other members of the committee, the report focused predominantly on slavery in the British Empire.⁹²

⁸⁶ Harris to Goad, 12 Aug. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸⁷ Harris to Noel-Buxton, 5 Nov. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸⁸ Harris to Simon, 17 Nov. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 465.

⁸⁹ Harris to Simon, 17 Nov. 1936.

⁹⁰ Bronwen Everill, 'The Italo-Abyssinian Crisis and the Shift from Slave to Refugee', *Slavery and Abolition*, 34, 4 (2013).

⁹¹ G. Barrera, 'Mussolini's Colonial Race Laws and State-Settler Relations in AOI (1933-1941)', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8, 3 (2003), 425-43.

⁹² *Report of the Fourth Session of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery* (Geneva, 1937), LoN, Slavery, VI. B. 1937.

In December 1937, in the wake of months of Italo-German courting that resulted in Mussolini's signing of an Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Japan, Italy completely withdrew from the League of Nations.⁹³ For the next five years, Italian colonization of Ethiopia and with it the violent repression of and racial discrimination against the indigenous population evolved unchecked by international oversight.⁹⁴ The effects of Italian colonial rule for those people whose 'civilization' had been the pillar of Italian propaganda were mostly negative. The Italian colonial government took no measures—financial or otherwise—to free slaves. Rather, the metropolitan government's emphasis on immigration and settlements made land appropriation and land use a central policy of Italian colonialism, thus creating socio-political problems that far exceeded the problem of slavery.⁹⁵

What then happened to the Società Antischivista d'Italia, formerly so active? The loss of Italian interest in the question of slavery placed the Italian Anti-Slavery Society at odds with the Fascist regime. In what was to be one of the movement's last public appearances, two dozen active members of the Società Antischivista, a few Italian Cardinals, and General Badoglio staged an Anti-Slavery Day ('giornata antischivista') in Rome in April 1937 to celebrate the first anniversary of Badoglio's proclamation. On this occasion, a special honour was posthumously bestowed upon the founder of the Italian anti-slavery movement, Filippo Tolti, to whom Rome's governor dedicated a street in the historical centre of the city.⁹⁶ Not long after this event, however, the activities of the Società Antischivista abruptly came to an end and the anti-slavery newsletter—published without interruption since 1889—ceased to appear in December 1937.⁹⁷

The reasons for this sudden decline remain unclear. The fact that, in the two years preceding its end, the newsletter had only intermittently been published points to the colonial lobby's financial difficulties.⁹⁸

⁹³ On Italy's withdrawal from the League, see Enrica Costa Bona and Luciano Tosi, *L'Italia e la sicurezza collettiva: Dalla Società delle Nazioni alle Nazioni Unite* (Perugia, 2007), 126–9.

⁹⁴ Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness*, 103–22. On the development of a German-Italian axis, see Brendon, *Dark Valley*, 481–4.

⁹⁵ On Italian colonial administration and settlement policy, see Haile Larebo, 'Empire Building and its Limitations: Ethiopia, 1935–1941', in R. Ben-Ghior and M. Fuller (eds), *Italian Colonialism* (New York, 2005), 83.

⁹⁶ 'The Anti-Slavery Day 1937', in *Antischivismo* (Apr.–Sept. 1937), 49.

⁹⁷ The last existing issue was *Antischivismo* (Oct.–Dec. 1937).

⁹⁸ At least this is the reason given in a recently published article on the organization, but it seems too simplistic an answer. Lorenzo Ertore, 'La società antischivista d'Italia, 1888–1937', *Studi Storici*, 3 (2012), 720.

Another possible explanation could lie in the Fascist regime's attempts to counter any opposition by imposing censorship and control in the years following the Italo-Ethiopian war. In 1937 'cracks in the façade' of the regime began to appear and Mussolini was facing growing discontentment from the conservative industrial and cultural establishment and an increasingly weary public opinion.⁹⁹ The regime tried to regain control by expanding the Ministry of Press and Propaganda into a Ministry of Popular Culture and tightening its rules on censorship, a policy through which many civic organizations lost their autonomy or even completely disappeared.¹⁰⁰

It seems surprising—given the Società's enthusiastic support for the regime's Ethiopian war—that the government's efforts to increase totalitarian control should have affected it in such a drastic manner. It is impossible to say, given the lack of evidence, whether it was the fact that the Italian anti-slavery movement never abandoned its strong Catholicism that created tensions with the regime's increasing repression of Catholic activity.¹⁰¹ Or whether it was the church's lack of enthusiasm for Mussolini's racial laws that was putting an additional strain on the relations between the Vatican and the regime. But it is probable that these ideological tensions coupled with financial concerns contributed to the decline of the organization. In any case, it is further proof of the volatility of the Italian civilizing mission that the political interest in manipulating the slavery question ended precisely when the campaign against slavery in Ethiopia had served its end as an aptly timed sham.

THE CRISIS OF ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISM

In many ways, the Italo-Ethiopian conflict brought about a crisis for British anti-slavery activism. British promoters of abolitionism had nursed high hopes that the Italo-Ethiopian conflict would increase public and political interest in slavery, but by autumn 1936 it was clear that the war was inspiring a very different response. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia ignited global controversy over the legitimacy of European imperialism, the credibility of humanitarian aims and Western perceptions of

⁹⁹ A. De Grand, 'Cracks in the Façade: The Failure of Fascist Totalitarianism in Italy 1935–1939', *European History Quarterly*, 21 (1991), 515–35.

¹⁰⁰ V. De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1981), 227. Also, Philip V. Cannistrato, *La fabbrica del consenso: Fascismo e mass media* (Rome, 1975), 136–40.

¹⁰¹ For the increasing confrontations between the Fascist regime and the Vatican after 1937, see P. Morgan, *Italian Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York, 2004), 202–4.

civilizing hierarchies. The Fascist invasion helped galvanize existing anti-colonial currents in Africa, and stirred transatlantic, pan-African nationalism amongst the West Indian and African-American population in the Americas.¹⁰² The failure of Great Britain and other European members of the League of Nations to check Italy's aggressive militarism was perceived as a 'breach of faith' not only with Ethiopians but with colonial subjects all over the world.¹⁰³ African descendants in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and other areas of the Caribbean rallied in protest against Italy. Civic organizations in the United States raised funds in support of the Ethiopian government, and financed private missions such as the dispatch of a delegation to assure the exiled Ethiopian emperor of their sympathy.¹⁰⁴ William Macmillan observed with a far-sightedness that was typical of his critical attitude towards European colonialism in Africa:

Never before has an African invader roused such unanimous African protest. I read Johannesburg Native papers with fully more complete news from the war front than the great English dailies. Though hitherto powerless, the force of opinion which makes Mussolini's adventure the all-absorbing front-page news for coloured readers in three continents—which also has attracted Negro volunteers from America, and provoked untutored dock-labourers in South and South West Africa to down tools of their own volition and boycott passing Italian liners—is a world phenomenon which will not vanish in the clouds of Italian gas-bombs.¹⁰⁵

In the eyes of Macmillan, the globalization of protest was unprecedented and it announced the end of imperial trusteeship as it had been internationally proclaimed since the First World War. 'Mussolini has now given the world an example of the old imperialism in all its unashamed brutality', Macmillan argued. 'Whatever else comes of the challenge, he has made work for the welfare of Africa—sorely as it is needed—immeasurably more difficult by striking a mortal blow at black confidence in the good faith of the white man in every corner of the world.'¹⁰⁶ 'Everywhere

¹⁰² These reactions have been the topic of a few studies. See James H. Meriwether, *Proudly we can be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 12–27; Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*; William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1941* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993); Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936–1941* (Baton Rouge, La., 1994); S. K. B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis* (London, 1977); Derrick, *Africa's Agitators*, 273–422.

¹⁰³ Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, 173.

¹⁰⁴ Harris, *African-American Reactions*, 104–19.

¹⁰⁵ W. M. Macmillan, 'The Tragedy of Abyssinia, and the Future of Africa', [undated manuscript, approximately June 1936], W. M. Macmillan Private Papers; courtesy of Hugh Macmillan, Dorchester on Thames, Oxon, United Kingdom, 6. On Macmillan see also Ch. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Macmillan, 'Tragedy of Abyssinia', 12.

in Africa', Macmillan argued, 'feeling [was] hardening into a definite revolt against the leadership of the West'.¹⁰⁷

The Italo-Ethiopian war, however, was only partly responsible for the intensification of anti-imperialist protest and colonial unrest in the Empire. Economic factors and the accompanying deterioration of social conditions also fostered a growing range of political disturbances.¹⁰⁸ The Great Depression had not spared the British Empire, and the collapse in world trade had drastically reduced colonial exports, thus exacerbating the dire economic conditions of colonial dependencies. The result was growing discontentment amongst the African population, whose increasing protest manifested itself in a wave of strikes in ports, mines, and railways which began in 1935 in the Rhodesian Copper Belt and the West Indies. This new type of resistance also galvanized the emergence and radicalization of political groups in the metropole who criticized the practice of indirect rule for having retarded economic and social development in the colonies.

Nowhere was this anti-imperialist turn more evident than in Britain. London became the place where male and female pro-Abyssinian supporters, anti-Fascists, pan-Africanists, and radical critics of Empire mingled.¹⁰⁹ The popularity of the League of Coloured Peoples, a British civil rights organization set up in 1931 under the leadership of the Jamaican doctor Harold Moody to tackle racial discrimination, soared.¹¹⁰ The international African Friends of Abyssinia, set up in 1935 by young radical African activists and later transformed into the International African Service Bureau, vocally opposed imperial expansion and colonial rule in favour of independence and self-government.¹¹¹ The organization attracted to Britain several young African and West Indian nationalists, including Jomo Kenyatta,

¹⁰⁷ Macmillan, 'Tragedy of Abyssinia', 4. Almost fifty years later, historians have confirmed Macmillan's interpretation. See the epilogue in Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience* (London, 1985), 235–6.

¹⁰⁸ This is based on Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 20–37, esp. 30–1. Also, J. D. Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa* (London, 1996), 32–48.

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Bush, 'Britain's Conscience on Africa: White Women, Race and Imperial Politics in Interwar Britain', in C. Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998), 206–15; also C. Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790s–1930s', in C. Hall and S. O. Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (New York, 2006), 249–50. More generally, S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918–1964* (Oxford, 1993) and Nicholas Owen, 'Critics of Empire in Britain', in J. M. Brown and W. R. Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, iv. *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 188–211.

¹¹⁰ On the League of Coloured People, see Fryer, *Staying Power*, 326–34.

¹¹¹ Kevin Shillington (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African History*, i (New York, 2005), 598.

future leader of the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s, Jamaican activists Amy Ashwood Garvey and Una Marson, as well as the Trinidadian writer C. L. R. James and the socialist pan-Africanist George Padmore.

The British capital also saw the growing mobilization of a group of white radical intellectuals from the British dominion of South Africa under the leadership of Winifred Holtby. Holtby, a journalist and novelist who had travelled in South Africa where she had witnessed the increasing repression of the African population by Afrikaner nationalists, was the founder of two overlapping organizations, the London Group of African Affairs and the Friends of Africa in 1934.¹¹² These new organizations included people who were determined to prevent the spread of South African segregationist and racial policies to the rest of the Commonwealth, notably William Macmillan, the respected radical Africanist Norman Leys, the Labour MP Leonard Barnes, Fabian Socialist and later Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones, and South African lawyer Julius Lewin.¹¹³ By 1936, the participants met regularly and their lobbying activities contributed to a growing public debate on colonial reform.¹¹⁴

Whereas at the beginning of 1935, colonial critiques in Britain were virtually unheard of, by 1936 'the colonial question' was becoming one of the chief topics of public and political discussion. Columns on the future of British colonial policy in Africa multiplied in *The Times*, which published long tracts on the subject by the likes of Lord Lugard and Margery Perham.¹¹⁵ Also symptomatic for the new metropolitan interest in the African territories were the many research initiatives that saw the light in the mid-1930s, the most famous being Lord Hailey's *African Survey*.¹¹⁶ In 1935 and 1936, Hailey, a distinguished Indian civil servant and former governor of the Punjab, was appointed to direct a scientific investigation into the socio-economic and administrative conditions of African dependencies and to identify the problems faced by colonial governments there.¹¹⁷ Sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, Hailey toured the Union of South Africa, the Rhodesias, the Belgian Congo, British

¹¹² On Holtby see Susan Pedersen, 'Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations', *History Workshop Journal*, 66 (2008), 188–207.

¹¹³ Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain 1919–1945* (London, 1999), 131–56.

¹¹⁴ Mona Macmillan, *Champion of Africa: The Second Phase of the Work of W. M. Macmillan, 1934–1974* (Long Wittenham, 1985), 81–110.

¹¹⁵ Margery Perham, 'Our Task in Africa', *The Times*, 10 Feb. 1936.

¹¹⁶ William Malcolm Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (London, 1938).

¹¹⁷ Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago, 2011), 71–3, 100–13.

territories in East and West Africa, as well as French West and Equatorial Africa. Hailey's lengthy report, compiled with considerable help from a committee of scientists, public intellectuals, and colonial officials, became one of the foundations of the idea of colonial development, the prevailing ideology of empire after 1940.¹¹⁸

This flourishing of a new political and public consciousness of the socio-economic challenges facing colonial officials in Africa was bound to have an effect on the strategy and rhetoric of the Anti-Slavery Society. In July 1936, in response to the increasing momentum of colonial debates, Harris began to consider how to practically reform his organization so as to ensure the continuation of its leading role in African affairs.¹¹⁹ Officially, the reason Harris gave to fellow activists for organizational change was that the 'growth of the Society's work' had long hampered its efficiency and that this called for a 're-organization of its machinery'.¹²⁰ There can be little doubt, however, that the real reason for these adjustments was an awareness that governmental approaches to colonial policy were undergoing a substantial transformation. Colonial critics knew that they were likely to play an influential role, but there was a need to ease friction between overlapping bodies concerned with Africa.

Yet, because they were, as always, faced with a shortfall in financial resources, the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society did not have the necessary money to expand the organization's administrative apparatus. Nor did they think it necessary to make substantial organizational changes and to create new ideological and strategic guidelines. Rather, Harris simply suggested setting up a 'small consultative committee on Africa', the aim of which was to connect and ease tensions between different people whom Harris thought were 'particularly interested in African affairs'.¹²¹ The idea behind this new network was that participants of different civic organizations should meet informally in order to exchange views 'as to the more urgent subjects and the main lines to pursue' with regard to humanitarian lobbying work on Africa.¹²²

A month later, in August 1936, the first meeting of what came to be called 'the African Conference' was arranged at the house of Lord Noel-Buxton.¹²³ Harris had made a point of inviting experts 'with local

¹¹⁸ John W. Cell, 'Lord Hailey and the Making of the African Survey', *African Affairs*, 88, 353 (1989), 481.

¹¹⁹ Harris to Charles Roberts, 15 July 1936. RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹²⁰ Harris to Roberts, 15 July 1936.

¹²¹ Harris to Roberts, 15 July 1936.

¹²² Harris to Roberts, 15 July 1936.

¹²³ See the minutes of the Conference of African Groups, 20 Oct. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

knowledge of Africa', and these, unsurprisingly perhaps, turned out to be close acquaintances and moderate colonial reformers who were mostly supporters of trusteeship imperialism and did not harbour anti-imperial sentiments.¹²⁴ The participants included the former President of the Anti-Slavery Society Travers Buxton, the chairman of the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions Charles Roden Buxton, the secretary of the International Missionary Council J. H. Oldham, as well as a group of academics, notably the political scientist and historian Margery Perham and the social anthropologist Lucy Mair, who were simultaneously involved in a number of research projects on Africa, including Hailey's African survey.¹²⁵ Harris decided after some reflection, however, to 'open the door a little wider' and to allow for the attendance of 'one or two awkward people' with whom the anti-slavery leader admitted he did not see eye to eye, but who he thought 'could not be left out'.¹²⁶ Thus, as had been the case with humanitarian work in the past, all the people recruited to address African issues were white and middle class. These comprised members of the London Group on African Affairs and the Friends of Africa, notably Macmillan, Leys, as well as Creech Jones. It is a sign of Harris's short-sightedness that no African representatives were invited.

From the very start, the meetings of this new network were marked by divergences over programme and approach. Harris, who had naturally claimed leadership of the group, wanted it to lobby Whitehall on the protection of native populations in the colonies. But as the anti-slavery leader was soon to admit, the attendance of people of different political persuasions 'made it difficult to get a single line'.¹²⁷ Some participants, notably Leys and Macmillan, were outspoken critics of what they perceived as the failures of trusteeship imperialism, a position which went against some of Harris's deepest convictions. Macmillan and Leys did not think that imperial and native interests were mutually exclusive but they entertained radical views about racial equality, and they encouraged the political participation of the local African population.¹²⁸ In a letter to Macmillan, Leys railed against the Anti-Slavery Society for falsely clinging on to an idealist vision of Edwardian philanthropy, from a time when

¹²⁴ Harris to Charles Roden Buxton, 17 Nov. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹²⁵ Harris to Travers Buxton et al., 27 Aug. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹²⁶ Harris to Charles Roden Buxton, 17 Nov. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹²⁷ Harris to Tracy Philipps, 16 Oct. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹²⁸ Owen, 'Critics of Empire in Britain', 194-5.

African problems were discussed during tea parties at the Liberal club, and 'doing good' was the privilege of a small British elite.¹²⁹ Leys asserted, perhaps not without a sense of irony, that 'the early abolitionists had far fewer people to persuade' than contemporary anti-slavery activists. Not only did they have an aim 'that could easily be grasped', but they also lived at a time 'when fortunes were easily made'.¹³⁰ Times had changed, Leys warned, and modern-day reformers faced much bigger challenges than their forerunners. Challenges, Leys insisted, which could only be met by paying 'more regard to what they want in Africa, even when we don't approve'.¹³¹

Similar criticism came from Macmillan who, while 'always very ready to talk African affairs', doubted in a letter to Harris that 'it is more Committees that we need'.¹³² Macmillan had just published his famous critique of the future of colonial government in Africa under the prophetic title *Warning from the West Indies*.¹³³ The book detailed the failures of British colonial policy in the Caribbean, and denounced the lack of economic infrastructure and welfare services. The results, Macmillan argued, were low wages and labour unrest, which, given the colonial regime's lack of popular backing, would soon spill over into political dissent.¹³⁴ If Britain wanted to keep its empire, Macmillan warned, it had to review its policy of trusteeship imperialism and take more seriously the sentiments of the colonial population. This also meant abandoning the anti-slavery rhetoric and confronting a new set of social issues in the dependent territories, including industrial development, education, agricultural production, and health and social services.

Not surprisingly, given the tensions between Harris's characteristically patronizing attitude towards colonial subjects and the more radical views of some of the other participants, the output of the subsequent meetings of the African Conference in 1937 and 1938 remained relatively modest. In addition to ideological differences, friction was caused by Harris's reluctance to delegate any of the agenda-setting to fellow participants, and by the limited material and human resources the Anti-Slavery Society had at its disposal to undertake additional research and writing.¹³⁵ The

¹²⁹ Leys to Macmillan, 12 May 1936, W. M. Macmillan Private Papers; courtesy of Hugh Macmillan, Dorchester on Thames, Oxon, United Kingdom.

¹³⁰ Leys to Macmillan, 12 May 1936.

¹³¹ Leys to Macmillan, 12 May 1936.

¹³² Macmillan to Harris, 8 Sept. 1936, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹³³ W. M. Macmillan, *Warning from the West Indies: A Tract for Africa and the Empire* (London, 1936).

¹³⁴ J. E. Flint, 'Macmillan as a Critic of Empire: The Impact of a Historian on Colonial Policy', in H. Macmillan and S. Marks (eds), *Africa and Empire: W.M. Macmillan, Historian and Social Critic* (Aldershot, 1989), 212-13.

¹³⁵ Harris to Macmillan, 23 Feb. 1937, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

meetings lacked proper planning, the discussions were unfocused, and, as Macmillan provocatively put it, the conference's shoestring operations were creating 'confusion'.¹³⁶ Leys, on the other hand, continued to criticize the fact that 'there were no Africans at the Conference' and pointed out that if it was to have any legitimacy, 'there ought to be'.¹³⁷ 'Even if they know nothing we don't know', Leys argued, 'they feel things differently.' African participation, Leys insisted, would curb the self-righteousness of white reformers, and it would guarantee that the aim of meetings such as the African Conference was 'to do justice and help Africans to be free', rather than to try make them 'better men and women'.¹³⁸

Such warnings, however, did not resonate with Harris, who struggled to envisage a diminution of British influence, guidance, and responsibility in the colonial territories. Harris strongly supported colonial reforms but only if these would serve to maintain the status quo of the British Empire. This conviction grew further when, in spring and autumn 1937, supporters of British appeasement towards Germany, most notably Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, began to make positive noises in response to German proposals that colonial territories be transferred to its control to meet its need for *Lebensraum*.¹³⁹ Even though imperialist expansion in Africa was not high on Hitler's agenda, the dangers of such a trade absorbed the attention of the anti-slavery leader who vehemently objected to these potential concessions.¹⁴⁰

One concern, however, which the Anti-Slavery Society shared with the more critical participants of the African Conference, was the evolution of racial policies including the disenfranchisement of the African male population in electoral reforms undertaken in 1936 in the dominion of South Africa.¹⁴¹ This, and the potential amalgamation of the British protectorates of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland, preoccupied Harris after the Ethiopian campaign.¹⁴² It is perhaps not surprising, given this focus on South Africa, that it was Macmillan, whose collaboration Harris had initially been reluctant to accept, who eventually proved to be the most consistent and constructive member of the African Conference. Having lived and taught in South Africa, Macmillan had an intimate

¹³⁶ Macmillan to Harris, 24 Feb. 1937, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹³⁷ Leys to Harris, 31 May 1937, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹³⁸ Leys to Harris, 31 May 1937.

¹³⁹ Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, 2009), 241–7.

¹⁴⁰ Harris to editor of *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1937.

¹⁴¹ For a good introduction, see Shula Marks, 'Southern Africa', in Brown and Louis, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iv. *The Twentieth Century*, 545–73.

¹⁴² Harris to Macmillan, 1 Dec. 1937, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

knowledge of the social, political, and economic conditions of its population, and was therefore asked to draft a memorandum for the Colonial Office.¹⁴³ The collaboration and regular correspondence between Harris and Macmillan inspired a pamphlet titled *The Industrialisation of the African*, which focused on the need for development grants and enfranchisement of the South African native population.¹⁴⁴ As was the usual strategy of the Anti-Slavery Society, the pamphlet was sent to the Colonial Office, and widely distributed amongst anti-slavery supporters.¹⁴⁵

Unfortunately there is no evidence on how the tract was received in Whitehall. What is clear, however, is that these attempts at influencing Britain's colonial policy were happening at a moment when the Colonial Office was undergoing substantial change. Since the early 1930s, its administration had become more elaborate in design and its functions more technical. This showed in an increase in specialist departments, which focused on policy questions including labour, education, and health, rather than on geographical areas.¹⁴⁶ In spring 1938, the redefinition of Britain's colonial policy received further acceleration with the appointment of Malcolm MacDonald, son of the former Prime Minister, as Colonial Secretary.¹⁴⁷ In the midst of a crisis over the West Indian riots, MacDonald, a 'National Labour' member of the Conservative-dominated National government, began to redefine a centrally determined colonial policy in which colonial development and native welfare took centre stage.¹⁴⁸

The events which unfolded in Europe between 1938 and 1939 were to have a considerable impact on this process of adjustment in British colonial policy. Hitler's incursions into Eastern and Central Europe in the spring and summer of 1938 resulted in a European crisis, which Chamberlain tried to avert by setting up a peace settlement in Munich in September 1938.¹⁴⁹ But six months later, Germany made its warlike intentions

¹⁴³ *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Annual Report for 1937 (Apr. 1938), 29.

¹⁴⁴ Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, *The Industrialisation of the African* (London, 1937).

¹⁴⁵ Harris to Revd T. Cullen Young (The United Society for Christian Literature), 3 Dec. 1937, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and "Trusteeship" in the Colonial Empire', in Brown and Louis, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, 276–8; Robert D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy 1938–48* (London, 1982), 257–8.

¹⁴⁷ J. M. Lee and Martin Petter, *The Colonial Office, War and Development Policy: Organization and Planning of a Metropolitan Initiative, 1934–1945* (London, 1982).

¹⁴⁸ Owen, 'Critics of Empire', 199.

¹⁴⁹ Peter J. Beck, 'Searching for Peace in Munich Not Geneva: The British Government, the League of Nations, and the Sudetenland Question', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, special issue, 'The Munich Crisis, 1938: Prelude to World War II', 2–3, 10 (1999), 236–57.

clear by occupying Prague, and setting the tone for its invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939.¹⁵⁰ With the outbreak of the Second World War and the mobilization of British and French troops against Germany, the Colonial Office, at least initially, focused on holding the Empire together to contain German expansion.¹⁵¹ The threat that, as a result of hostilities, colonial reforms might be sidelined spurred the African Conference into action. A few weeks after the mobilization of British troops, at the beginning of October, Macmillan voiced his concern that 'busy and preoccupied authorities' in Britain were not paying any attention to the protection of indigenous people in the colonies, and pointed out to Harris that these issues should not be left 'to the tender mercies of the officials'.¹⁵²

In response, Harris tried to rally his disparate association of experts behind a common policy. Drawing on his experience of the First World War, Harris warned his colleagues that a war presented 'the most dangerous time [for issues such as the protection and welfare of colonial subject], because all sorts of things are drawn in a corner in the plea of all sorts of justifications, which take years to remedy later on'.¹⁵³ The Secretary of the British Anti-Slavery Society called on the participants of the African Conference to propose a 'line of advance' to the British government on how to remedy the 'dilapidated conditions' of the colonial territories in Africa.¹⁵⁴

Over the next few months, Harris proceeded to draft what turned out to be his last major piece of writing on colonial policy, a pamphlet titled 'Native Races, the War and Peace Aims'.¹⁵⁵ When, in January 1940, he presented the draft to the other participants of the African Conference, it quickly became clear that he was not ready to abandon the imperial framework when proposing measures to safeguard indigenous populations in Africa. Indeed, his analysis of the challenges faced by British colonial government in Africa did not differ much from the interpretation of international control over colonial territories based on the model of British trusteeship he had suggested after the First World War. Far from advocating any form of decolonization, the pamphlet reiterated the cherished liberal principle of 'trusteeship' imperialism, with characteristic confidence in Britain's civilizing destiny. Trusteeship, according to

¹⁵⁰ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, 556–62.

¹⁵¹ Darwin, *Empire Project*, 494.

¹⁵² Macmillan to Harris, 1 Oct. 1939, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹⁵³ Harris to Macmillan, 3 Oct. 1939, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹⁵⁴ Harris to Macmillan, 3 Oct. 1939.

¹⁵⁵ See draft of Harris's unpublished pamphlet on 'Native Races, the War and Peace Aims', enclosed in letter to Macmillan, 11 Jan. 1940, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433, 6.

Harris, still formed the fundamental 'basis of relationships between people unable at present to stand alone and the stronger nations'.¹⁵⁶ Even if Harris conceded that 'the whole question of self-government in the British Colonies and Protectorates' needed to be taken 'more seriously now than after the First World War', and that international supervision would need some 'modifications', such as, for example, the 'representation of Native inhabitants', his rhetoric was essentially based on the need for colonial oversight and control rather than independence.¹⁵⁷

Although Harris was planning to publish his 'manifesto' as a cooperative effort by the Anti-Slavery Society and the African Conference, the members of the latter greeted the draft with little enthusiasm.¹⁵⁸ One of the participants in particular, the British diplomat, explorer, and journalist James Edward Tracy Phillips strongly attacked Harris for the language he used. Phillips, who had travelled widely in Africa and the Middle East, and had published on social reform and international affairs, criticized the phrase 'native races' as being 'in itself so vague and so confused that, taken as it stands it might refer to the "natives" of Whitstable (England) or to the natives of China who were civilized while our British ancestors were going through the motions of human sacrifice and painting their behinds blue'.¹⁵⁹ As Phillips pointed out, 'the literate and politically conscious sections of colonial peoples bitterly resent[ed] this phrase. Often with truth and always with fury, they read into it the Anglo-Saxon's condescension and disdain'. In view of the danger of political unrest in the Empire, Phillips forcefully concluded, the time had come to revisit what he identified as the British attitudes of 'self-satisfaction, smuggerly or misconception' and to recognize that '[t]he "world" (alas) is NOT Western Europe'.¹⁶⁰ The vigorous critique which Harris's pamphlet triggered from Phillips, and also from other participants in the African Conference including Macmillan and Lewin, reflected a polarization of opinion amongst the supporters of colonial reform. Phillips's direct questioning of Britain's core moral assumptions and legitimacy considerably upset Harris. The memorandum never made it to government officials and its publication was delayed indefinitely.

Harris did not live long enough to re-engage with the cause. A few months later, on 30 April 1940, he died unexpectedly of a lung infection in his home in Berkshire, thus depriving the Anti-Slavery Society of its

¹⁵⁶ Harris, 'Native Races, the War and Peace Aims', 5-6.

¹⁵⁷ Harris, 'Native Races, the War and Peace Aims', 4.

¹⁵⁸ Harris to Macmillan, 11 Jan. 1940, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹⁵⁹ Tracy Phillips to Harris, 4 Feb. 1940, RHO, ASP, Mss. Brit. Emp. S 22, G 433.

¹⁶⁰ Phillips to Harris, 4 Feb. 1940.

most charismatic leader. His death came at a time when the future of the British Empire lay in the balance.¹⁶¹ A few weeks earlier, German troops had invaded Denmark, and they were progressing towards France, thus also increasing the threat of a German invasion of Britain. As had already been the case during the First World War, Britain, now under Winston Churchill's leadership, heavily relied on the loyalty and war effort of its dominions.¹⁶² But, as John Darwin has argued, the war, and particularly America's entry into the conflict in December 1941, 'set in motion a rapid, cumulative and irreversible transformation of the pre-war structure of British world power'.¹⁶³ The war brought a time of transition not only for the planners of colonial policy but also for the campaigners against slavery. Harris's leadership of the Anti-Slavery Society between 1909 and 1940 had been characterized by a deep belief in Britain's 'humanitarian' leadership and an awareness that solving problems of slave trafficking called for multilateral cooperation and the creation of normative instruments. As had become clear during the Ethiopian crisis, however, the anti-slavery engagement remained an essential feature of Europe's civilizing mission in Africa.

How then would the extraordinary national and international developments brought on by the global war affect the strategy and outlook of an organization which had acted as a keeper of the national conscience on slavery for over a hundred years? As the obstacles to African development were increasingly located in a critique of Europe's colonial shortcomings, the interwar anti-slavery rhetoric of trusteeship imperialism continued to lose ground. The problem of slavery, however, had not disappeared. If anything, the range of exploitations of human labour was to increase during and after the Second World War, and action against these forms would continue to shape international humanitarian rhetoric. The challenge the Anti-Slavery Society faced was how to reposition itself in the profoundly changed context of the postwar years, in which Britain no longer enjoyed the dominant position in international affairs it had occupied in the interwar years and African states were emerging as international actors in their own right.

¹⁶¹ Darwin, *Empire Project*, 498–9.

¹⁶² Keith Jeffery, 'The Second World War', in Brown and Louis, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iv. *The Twentieth Century*, 306–328, 310.

¹⁶³ Darwin, *Empire Project*, 501.

Conclusion

The End of Humanitarian Imperialism?

The story of anti-slavery activism between 1880 and 1940 is a history of the intertwining of religious and secular philanthropy, and the entanglement of national and international interests, as well as the coalescence of humanitarian and imperial aims. The analysis of how Catholic and Protestant groups in Britain and Italy negotiated the divide between their spiritual convictions and their governments' colonial programmes exposes the achievements and setbacks of humanitarian action within an imperial and international framework. The web of relationships between religious philanthropists, politicians, missionaries, diplomats, academics, colonial civil servants, and military officers of different national backgrounds also reveals that slavery was not only a powerful metaphor with which to express metropolitan concerns about imperial politics. It was a transnational problem, and it induced a wide range of actors to engage in strategic and often selective cooperation across national borders, based on a shared belief in their own advanced 'civilization' and in the moral legitimacy of humanitarian imperialism.

An actor whose influence was crucial in building and maintaining the functional and reciprocal relationship between imperial politics and humanitarian philanthropy was John Harris. His unexpected death in April 1940 triggered an outpouring of tributes to his work, life, and stature as a leading British philanthropist and international expert on slavery.¹ Condolences poured into the London headquarters of the Anti-Slavery Society, including messages declaring heartfelt sentiment from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs Anthony Eden, and the deputy director of the International Labour Office Edward

¹ These were published in a special tribute issue of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1940), 43–53.

Phelan. Friends and colleagues praised Harris's zealotry and commitment as well as his rhetorical skills and networking talents. According to Lord Noel-Buxton, someone who recognized the value of being an effective networker, Harris 'somehow avoided the impression of heaviness which attaches to moral efforts'.² The President of the Mandates Section, Edouard Rudolph de Haller, remembered 'the energy and enthusiasm' with which Harris 'strove to promote international cooperation in a cause to which he had devoted the fruits of a long experience and the best of his natural abilities'.³ Power, both national and international, was a recurring theme in the appreciations of Harris's work. Charles Roden Buxton emphasized that Harris had made the Anti-Slavery Society 'a *Power in the land*'.⁴ According to Gilbert Murray, a Foreign Office file concerning the mandates question bore the note: 'Who is this Mr. Harris? He seems to be a sixth Great Power.'⁵ Such statements expressed the widely held view that, far from being a bunch of pathetic busy-bodies, anti-slavery activists had played a significant role in interwar international affairs. This book bears out this perspective by uncovering not only the political ambitions of anti-slavery lobbying, but also the use and abuse of humanitarian arguments in imperial power politics.

Harris's death coincided with a time of major transformations at a national and international level, notably the retreat of the League of Nations from public view, the revisiting of the ethical and economic basis of Britain's imperial policy, as well as the rise of America's 'informal empire'. One of the biggest changes affecting the Anti-Slavery Society was doubtlessly the unprecedented attention colonial issues now received in parliament.⁶ A few months after Harris's demise, in July 1940, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed, providing imperial funds of £5.5 million per annum for the expansion of social services in the colonies.⁷ This was a departure from the idea of 'colonialism on the cheap', promoted by the first Colonial Development Act of 1929, which was formed around the notion that colonial territories had to live exclusively from their own resources.⁸ Through the 1940 Act, the Colonial

² *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1940), 45.

³ De Haller to Lady Harris, 4 May 1940, LoN, R 4146.

⁴ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1940), 48 (original emphasis).

⁵ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1940), 51.

⁶ 'The Native in Parliament', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1940), 67-78.

⁷ Joanna Lewis, 'Tropical East Ends and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 28, 20 (2000), 51.

⁸ On this shift see Frederick Cooper, 'Modernising Colonialism and the Limits of Empire', in Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore (eds), *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power* (New York, 2006), 66-8.

Office accelerated its programme of social and economic development and modernization of the British colonies, especially with regard to Africa, setting up a model of 'welfare imperialism' in close continuity with interwar trusteeship.⁹ These reforms also resulted in institutionalized cooperation between government officials and colonial reformers in the Fabian Colonial Bureau, which included supporters of the Anti-Slavery Society such as Margery Perham and Arthur Creech Jones.¹⁰ For all its limitations, Britain's new welfare imperialism differed from the humanitarian imperialism of the interwar years in that it focused on technical questions of labour, education, and agriculture rather than on vague notions of trusteeship and civilization.

In 1941, Charles Wilton Wood Greenidge succeeded John Harris as Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society—a position he was to hold until 1955. Born in 1889 in Barbados, Greenidge was a Cambridge-educated, retired British white colonial officer who had spent the interwar years filling important legal posts in the West Indian colonies.¹¹ Unlike Harris, Greenidge was not driven by religious considerations, nor did he have much experience of humanitarian lobbying work. Instead, Greenidge's credibility was based on the professional administrative and technical expertise acquired during his career in the West Indies. Like other members of the British colonial elite who were instrumental in formulating development schemes in the postwar years, Greenidge remained closely linked to the Colonial Office.¹² Greenidge's appointment did not lead to other adjustments in the structure and profile of the British anti-slavery organization. Instead, the Anti-Slavery Society continued to rely on a small popular base of just over 400 members, and a lay committee composed of Nonconformist philanthropists, civil servants, and academics, backed up by illustrious supporters from the aristocratic elite. As before the war, the Anti-Slavery Society remained the exclusive domain of white middle-class philanthropists, who undertook strategic

⁹ On colonial development in Africa, see Joanna Lewis, 'The Ruling Compassions of the Late Colonial State: Welfare versus Force, Kenya, 1945–1952', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 2, 23 (2001), <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v002/2.2lewis.html> [accessed Nov. 2013].

¹⁰ Robert Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and "Trusteeship" in the Colonial Empire', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, iv. *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 276–8.

¹¹ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1941), 21.

¹² Joseph Hodge, 'British Colonial Expertise, Postcolonial Careerism and the Early History of International Development', in Andreas Eckert, Stephan Malinowski, and Corinna Unger (eds), special issue, 'Modernizing Missions: Approaches to "Developing" the Non-Western World after 1945', *Journal of Modern European History*, 8, 1 (2010), 24–46.

lobbying, circulated specialist knowledge, and cultivated influential political contacts, but did not engage in a dialogue with African political groups.

At the time of Greenidge's election, the rise of American anti-colonialism was fuelling an intense Anglo-American debate about the principles of the postwar world order, the main lines of which were formulated in an Atlantic Charter in August 1941.¹³ The Charter's advocacy of a right to self-determination for colonial subjects, together with the loss of Singapore to Japan in February 1942 and Britain's rising dependence on the USA, made the future of the British Empire look increasingly uncertain. Anti-slavery activists, however, did not envisage revolutionary changes in colonial relationships: instead, they concentrated on redefining the language and moral stipulations of colonial trusteeship.¹⁴ This was an exercise in renovation rather than innovation, and the results were primarily rhetorical. Thus, in May 1942, the Anti-Slavery Society invited Lord Hailey to reflect on the future of colonial relationships in an address delivered at its annual plenary meeting. In his speech, which came to be known as a 'Colonial Charter', Hailey evoked a rhetorical shift from a relationship between 'trustees and wards' to a partnership between 'senior and junior partners'.¹⁵ Although Hailey envisaged giving the colonies greater control over imperial affairs, handing them 'self-government' was not his immediate concern. Hailey's intervention illustrated that the political establishment was determined to hold the imperial line against the backdrop of increasing anti-colonialism. Likewise, the Anti-Slavery Society had no desire to see the Empire dismantled but instead vigorously supported 'colonial development' as a way to 're-invigorate' Britain's imperial mission.¹⁶

The Second World War unleashed powerful internationalist forces, and renewed ambitions for peace and security, as well as liberty, democracy, and progress. Ideas of world citizenship, human rights, and social and economic justice found their apogee in the creation of the United

¹³ William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonisation of the British Empire, 1941-1945* (Oxford, 1977).

¹⁴ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993), 146.

¹⁵ 'A Colonial Charter', an address by the Rt. Hon. Lord Hailey to the Annual Meeting of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society on 28 May 1942, supplement to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (July 1942).

¹⁶ The phrase is borrowed from Frederick Cooper, 'Modernising Bureaucrats: Backward Africans, and the Development Concept', in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packer (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998), 64. See also 'The Organisation of the Colonial Service', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (1946), 30.

Nations Organization (UNO).¹⁷ Whereas in 1919, the Anti-Slavery Society had celebrated the League as a 'breath of new life', the UNO did not generate the same type of excitement and optimism. The mood was subdued as anti-slavery activists reflected on the League's unrealized potential, raising questions about the UNO's future challenges.¹⁸ The UNO was an organization profoundly shaped by the prospect of nuclear warfare and the revelations of genocide and slave labour perpetrated by Nazi Germany, but it bore considerable administrative, cultural, and political continuity with the League of Nations.¹⁹ The United Nation's Charter, issued in 1945 under British and American leadership, revived the League's conceptualization of colonial responsibilities as a 'sacred trust' by installing a new International Trusteeship System.²⁰ Under this new scheme, former League of Nations mandates, including the former German colonies in Africa, but also the territories of the defeated Japanese and Italian empires, were renamed into 'trust territories' and placed under the responsibility of colonial powers, notably Britain, France, Belgium, and Italy, which in turn were supervised by a Trusteeship Council, itself under the authority of the General Assembly.²¹ The aim was to promote the trusts' political, economic, and social advancement, with no definite commitment to work towards post-colonial sovereignty. Thus, despite the change in terminology, and the existence of increasingly active anti-colonial movements, the UN still carried a considerable colonial baggage, which threatened to turn it into a 'warmed-up League' and left veteran anti-colonial and pan-Africanist campaigners such as W. E. B. Du Bois disillusioned.²²

When the UNO's General Assembly first met in London in January 1946 to discuss the future operations and permanent location of the new organization, slavery was not an item on its agenda.²³ Indeed, because

¹⁷ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 2013), 79–117.

¹⁸ 'Can the United Nations Achieve Peace?', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1945), 65–7.

¹⁹ For a review of the new historical scholarship on the UN, see Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, 'New Histories of the United Nations', *Journal of World History*, 19, 3 (2008), 251–74.

²⁰ Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884–1926* (New York, 2005), 172.

²¹ Sluga, *Internationalism*, 92.

²² Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), 15. On Du Bois, see Marika Sherwood, "'There is No Deal for the Blackman in San Francisco': African Attempts to Influence the Founding Conference of the United Nations, April–July 1945", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 29, 1 (1996), 71–94.

²³ The most detailed and scholarly treatment of UN anti-slavery politics to date is Susan Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Lanham, 2003). See also Kathryn Zoglin, 'United Nations Action Against Slavery: A Critical Evaluation', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 8 (May 1986), 311–12, and William Korey, *NGOs*

UN officials thought that slavery no longer existed, the 1926 Slavery Convention, unlike other treaty obligations, was not transferred to the United Nations.²⁴ As in 1919, the primary challenge for the Anti-Slavery Society in the early years of the UN was to secure international interest in establishing an institutional mechanism to deal with the problem. In January 1947, Greenidge travelled to the temporary headquarters of the United Nations at Lake Success in New York to lobby the newly installed UN Commission of Human Rights (a subsidiary of the UN Economic and Social Council ECOSOC), which was to debate plans for a Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²⁵ In New York, the Anti-Slavery Society's suggestion that slavery be included in the list of human rights attracted the attention of a rather unlikely supporter. Whereas in the 1930s, Fascist Italy had assimilated and exploited anti-slavery rhetoric, it was now the Russian delegation that was keen to capture the language of anti-slavery and human rights for its own propagandistic and political agenda.²⁶ The Russian suggestion that the UN should explicitly condemn slavery was approved. In December 1948, the UN's General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Human Rights, including an article that 'no one shall be held in slavery or servitude: slavery and the slave trades shall be prohibited in all their forms'.²⁷ The Declaration, an amalgam of imperial and anti-colonial, 'Eastern' and 'Western', 'old' and 'new' universalisms, defined fundamental rights around the juridical categories of social and economic equality, property, and equal opportunities.²⁸ The practical implementation of these postulations, however, was soon exposed to the tense realities of the Cold War and for the next two decades human rights remained a peripheral concept.²⁹

By the time the Declaration was issued, Greenidge had already recognized that only a permanent expert commission could ensure that it would lead to the establishment of binding international norms. Since May 1946, the leader of the Anti-Slavery Society had sought support for the creation of a permanent United Nations slavery committee. In 1947 and 1948, following Harris's example, Greenidge attended UN meetings, lobbied delegates, made speeches, wrote pamphlets, kept up an

and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Curious Grapevine (New York, 1998), 117–38.

²⁴ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 319.

²⁵ Corey, *NGOs and the Universal Declaration*, 117–38.

²⁶ On this, see Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 317–19.

²⁷ See <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>> [accessed Oct. 2013].

²⁸ Grant, *Civilised Savagery*, 173.

²⁹ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 1–5.

extensive correspondence, all with a view to achieving this goal.³⁰ There was a strong echo of past anti-slavery campaigns in Greenidge's rhetoric, which closely followed and sometimes faithfully reproduced the wordage of John Harris's and Kathleen Simon's writings on international obligations. Drawing on the liberal internationalist tradition of the interwar years, Greenidge's language focused on the challenges of freeing millions of slaves all over the world, and on the need to educate public opinion and to establish international machinery to supervise abolition.³¹

There were further similarities between the Anti-Slavery Society's interwar and postwar campaign, especially with regard to its role in shaping the production of international standards. In 1949, after three years of lobbying, Greenidge's plans for an expert commission were finally accepted by the UN General Assembly, thanks to the support of the French and Belgian delegations. An Ad Hoc Committee on Slavery, whose name indicated its limited life and ambition, was appointed 'to survey the field of slavery and other institutions or customs resembling slavery'.³² The Committee included Greenidge as a representative for the United Kingdom—thus giving the Anti-Slavery Society, for the first time in its history, an official role in an international forum—as well as three other delegates from Chile, France, and the United States.³³ In February and March 1950, the Ad Hoc Committee held its first session in New York.³⁴ Greenidge, true to the Anti-Slavery Society's reputation and expertise in the field, had drafted a report on 'Slavery in all its forms', in which he conceptualized contemporary forms of labour exploitation.³⁵ The Ad Hoc Committee used the document to persuade a majority of the UN's Economic and Social Council to recommend the adoption of the 1926 convention. In addition, the Ad Hoc Committee also suggested that the UN should negotiate an additional agreement to include debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriage, and adoptions aimed at exploiting children.³⁶

³⁰ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 319.

³¹ See e.g. 'Suppression of Slavery an International Obligation', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1948), 51. Also, C. W. W. Greenidge, *Slavery To-Day, 1948: Measures for its Abolition*, an address delivered by Mr C. W. W. Greenidge, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society (of England), at the invitation of Les Amis de l'Abbé Grégoire, in Paris, on Saturday, 23 October 1948 (London, 1948).

³² On the Ad Hoc Committee, see 'Action on Slavery by the United Nations', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Oct. 1949), 51–8.

³³ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Jan. 1950), 91; Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 323; Claude E. Welch, 'Defining Contemporary Forms of Slavery: Updating a Venerable NGO', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 31 (2009), 93.

³⁴ 'United Nations Slavery Committee', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Apr. 1951), 7.

³⁵ Welch, 'Defining Contemporary Forms of Slavery', 94.

³⁶ This discussion is based on Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, 326–32.

In January 1956, after extensive negotiations about the forms of labour abuses to be included in the convention, ECOSOC formed a drafting committee composed of delegates from Australia, Ecuador, Egypt, France, India, the Netherlands, Turkey, USSR, the United Kingdom, and Yugoslavia. The British delegation took the lead in the debate, based on Greenidge's draft, which soon turned into a wrangle with anti-colonial nations. India and Egypt in particular criticized the British proposal for giving the metropolitan state the right to reserve any of its non-self-governing territories from the application of the convention. They also insisted that the contracting parties should furnish information on slavery not only to each other but also to the United Nations. A British proposal to allow for the search and capture of ships conveying slaves was rejected on the ground that it would infringe sovereignty.³⁷

A similar mood of contestation dominated discussions a few months later, when representatives of fifty-four states and a large number of non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations and Catholic groups, met at a conference held in Geneva to discuss the adoption of the convention's final version and to open it up for signature. After much 'shadow-boxing', participants finalized the so-called Supplementary Convention, whose main innovation was that it extended the definition of slavery to include associated forms of labour exploitation suggested in Greenidge's original report.³⁸ As had already been the case in 1926, the 1956 convention still provided for the progressive rather than immediate abolition of slavery. Also, contrary to the Ad Hoc Committee's wishes and much to the Anti-Slavery Society's regret, the convention did not foresee the creation of a permanent expert committee on slavery.³⁹

In the eyes of Greenidge, who had resigned from his post of secretary in late 1955 but continued to entertain strong ties to the anti-slavery lobby, the lack of an expert commission did not bode well for future international anti-slavery action. In a book titled *Slavery* (which echoed Lady Simon's volume issued thirty years earlier), Greenidge deplored that, due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms, old vestiges of chattel slavery in Arabia, Central Asia, and Africa (including Ethiopia), as well as the many forms of labour exploitations targeted by the Supplementary Convention, would continue to float 'unanchored in the sea of international schemes'.⁴⁰

³⁷ C. W. W. Greenidge, *Slavery* (London, 1958), 196. Also Zoglin, 'United Nations Action', 312.

³⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Joyce A. C. Gutteridge, 'Supplementary Slavery Convention', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 6, 3 (July, 1957), 449-71.

³⁹ 'The Supplementary Convention on Slavery', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (June 1956), 100-2.

⁴⁰ Greenidge, *Slavery*, 204.

Slavery, Greenidge observed, 'cannot be suppressed without making unpleasant statements about territories in which [it] exist[s].' Whereas Harris had been happy to associate his lobbying efforts with that of colonial officers such as Lugard, Greenidge emphasized that the people most likely to take a public stance against slavery were internationally acclaimed and, to his mind, apolitical experts, and not civil servants who represented the interests of nation states.⁴¹

The lack of a permanent body of international experts was not the only challenge which British anti-slavery activists would have to face in subsequent decades.⁴² In the 1960s, as the formerly 'non-self-governing' territories in Africa were gradually becoming members of the United Nations in their own right, the anti-slavery lobby had to deal with new accusations of 'neo-colonialist meddling' as well as vigorous criticism from the communist bloc. Confronted with a major loss of humanitarian authority as well as significant financial difficulties, the British organization resolved to update its image and profile. To assert its legitimacy as a disinterested and non-partisan humanitarian pressure group, it reformed its administrative core, hired full-time professional activists, and increased collaboration with other NGOs also in developing countries.⁴³

In the post-colonial world of the 1970s and 1980s, in a profoundly changed international setting, the relationship between anti-slavery and imperialism appeared less pertinent than it had in the period between 1880 and 1940. Anti-slavery rhetoric no longer drew on religious and missionary ideas of charity and Christian compassion, nor did it focus on the moral and physical rescue of African slaves. Instead the language used by humanitarian campaigners to frame the problem of global slavery was increasingly becoming one of global standards, development ethics, alternative livelihoods, and fair trade.⁴⁴ But at the core of anti-slavery activism remained the unresolved tensions between national sovereignty and international regulation, humanitarian ideals and political conjunctures, cultural relativism and universal rights. The many types of 'new slaveries' resulting from ever-growing global inequality and poverty continued to be powerful and controversial elements in the diplomatic relationships between Western and non-Western states.

⁴¹ Greenidge, *Slavery*, 200.

⁴² Not until the mid-1970s did the UN formally establish a Working Group on Slavery. Zoglin, 'United Nations Action', 314.

⁴³ Welch, 'Defining Contemporary Forms of Slavery', 104–5.

⁴⁴ See for instance, Christien van den Anker (ed.), *The Political Economy of New Slavery* (Basingstoke, 2004).

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