MEASURING THE THREAT OF GLOBAL CRIME: INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH BY THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS INTO THE TRAFFIC IN WOMEN*

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Despite increasing concern about the threat of global crime, it remains difficult to measure. During the 1920s and 1930s, the League of Nations conducted the first social-scientific study of global crime in two studies of the worldwide traffic in women. The first study included 112 cities and 28 countries; researchers carried out 6,500 interviews in 14 languages, including 5,000 with figures in the international underworld. By drawing on archival materials in Geneva and New York, this article examines the role of ethnography in developing a social-science measure of global crime threats. The discussion covers the Rockefeller grand jury and formation of the Bureau of Social Hygiene; the League’s research in Europe, the Americas, and the Mediterranean; controversy concerning the use of undercover researchers; the League’s research in Asia; and the end of the Bureau. The League’s experience demonstrates the promise of multisite ethnography in research about global crime as well as the difficulty of mapping crime on a global scale.

Crime has become a global anxiety, alongside climate change, banking crises, and outbreaks of disease. The threat of organized crime, drug trafficking, and terrorist attack is feared to be increasing, as a result of advances in transportation and communication technologies, economic and political changes, and developments associated with “globalization” (Aas, 2007; Edwards and Gill, 2002). Global crime threats, however, remain difficult to measure. Transnational crimes do not appear in national police-based statistics nor in international crime victimization surveys. Estimates

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offered by intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations reflect a diversity in what is being measured, as well as a mixture of legal and illegal activities, and they reveal a tendency toward exaggeration (Mitsilegas, 2003; Tyldum and Brunovskis, 2005).

There are formidable methodological barriers to producing a social-science measure of global crime activity. The practical difficulties alone are a serious deterrent: confidentiality of government records, unreliability of official information, distortions from journalistic sources, scarcity of prosecutions, lack of access to informants, risks to researchers of serious crimes, and high financial costs of cross-border research (Passas, 2002: 30–1). Consequently, studies of terrorism, transnational organized crime, and human trafficking engage weak research designs (Silke, 2001, 2004; Tyldum and Brunovskis, 2005; von Lampe, 2004) and empirical support for policies ranges from thin to nonexistent (Goodey, 2008; Putt, 2007; Tyldum, 2010). Several scholars have suggested that the evidence for global crimes can only be built up from ethnographic research in particular localities (Godziak and Collett, 2005; Horgan, 2004; Oude Breuil et al., 2011; Tyldum, 2010; Van der Pijl, Oude Breuil, and Siegel, 2011). In a recent review of 100 scholarly journal articles on human trafficking, Sheldon Zhang (2009: 185, 187) found only one that contained interviews with possible traffickers. What we “know” has been derived from statements of experts, typically, members of police organizations, advocacy groups, and social service agencies. Current research has failed to retrieve information in social settings where the sex trade occurs, such as brothels, massage parlors, and strip clubs. Dick Hobbs (1998) argued that the search for credible statistics of transnational organized crimes rather misses the point because serious crime problems are never actually experienced internationally or transnationally. People experience crime as a local phenomenon, and comparing these experiences yields the capacity to gauge the severity of global threats.

Research along the lines of what is being suggested has already been carried out—it is just that we have forgotten about it. During the 1920s, the League of Nations pioneered the study of global crime. By drawing on the financial resources of John D. Rockefeller Jr., the League’s research into traffic in women encompassed fieldwork in 112 cities in 28 countries across Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Americas. Researchers conducted 6,500 interviews in 14 languages, including 5,000 undercover interviews with prostitutes, procurers, and brothel-keepers. The first study, completed in 1927, led to a second study, conducted in the 1930s, which covered human trafficking in 20 countries, colonies, and territories in Asia (League of Nations, 1927a, 1927b, 1933). Criminology, as John Laub (2004, 2006) observed, suffers from “presentism.” We tend to think of scientific understanding as work completed in the last decade or so rather than as a tradition of inquiry extending over the past century. Although we pretend that new discoveries are continually being made, in reality, “many, if not all,
of the so-called current issues in criminology have a long history” (Laub, 2006: 250).

We can learn about how to pursue social-science measurement of global crime in the future by looking back to the League’s work nearly a century ago. By utilizing materials at the League of Nations archives in Geneva, and the Rockefeller archives in New York, it is possible to reconstruct the original research process. The archived sources available comprise more than official reports of findings. The materials include transcripts of meetings and field reports, in addition to correspondence, financial records, news clippings, and other documents.¹ We can revisit arguments about the purpose of the study and research design, examine the choices made alongside alternatives, and see the way in which these choices played out. We can recall the immediate reaction from politicians, professionals, and the press, and we can see how researchers responded to criticism.

This article brings a historical perspective to the current criminological discussion of a global crime problem: human trafficking. But more than historical analysis as such, I use the archival methods of historical criminology to discuss the first effort to fashion a social-science measure a global crime. The League’s researchers managed to overcome several practical and political barriers, but they struggled with what Mariana Valverde (2011) has identified as “scale.” In criminological analysis, as in mapmaking, the choice of scale necessarily includes a choice about what objects, or activities, will become visible. Ethnography has had a prominent place in criminological research because crime tends to be viewed on a micro-local scale. But even within the micro-local context, it is difficult to avoid unannounced shifts in scale, such as conflating “local” with “urban.” Visualizing crime on a macro-global scale invites even more difficult conceptual challenges about what is being observed (Valverde, 2009, 2011). This article divides into four parts. Part 1 explains the origins of the League’s worldwide traffic study in Rockefeller’s grand jury investigation. Part 2 discusses the management of the League’s first study of the traffic in women by the Special Body of Experts and its decisions about what and how to measure. Part 3 reviews the chief criticism of the League’s study at the time: the use of undercover methods. Part 4 explores the League’s second study and the reasons for abandoning the research methods developed for the first study.

ROCKEFELLER’S GRAND JURY

The “White slave trade” attracted tremendous attention in the decades before the First World War. Moral purity campaigners, crusading

1. I also found related primary sources at the Social Welfare History Archives, Elmer Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, and the League of Nations collection at the Law Library, University of Oxford.
journalists, women’s advocates, and religious organizations produced a flurry of articles, pamphlets, and reports (Keire, 2010; Knepper, 2009). In 1911, the Vice Commission of Chicago released the findings of an investigation into the “social evil.” The report described a wide-scale and sinister business, involving more than 5,000 prostitutes and yielding up to $16 million a year city-wide. The money corrupted everyone, from tavern keepers and hotel owners to police and politicians (Vice Commission of Chicago, 1911). Jane Addams drew on the Commission’s work for her book *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*, in which she discussed how poor women in neighborhoods around Hull House fell prey to the commercial sex industry. The “organized traffic,” she declared, “in what has come to be called white slaves must be suppressed” (Addams, 1913: 17). In 1909, *McClure’s Magazine* published an exposé portraying New York City as the capital of the worldwide White-slave empire. Under the protection of Tammany Hall politicians, White slavers procured girls from East Side slums and eastern Europe for distribution throughout the United States and the four corners of the Earth (Turner, 1909).

The White slave trade became the issue in the New York City elections of autumn 1909, and the following January, Judge Thomas O’Sullivan impaneled a grand jury to investigate organized prostitution in the city. He selected John D. Rockefeller Jr. as its foreman. Rockefeller protested that he had little experience of court proceedings and needed to be excused from jury duty as he would likely be absent from the city. Judge O’Sullivan insisted there was only one person whose word would be trusted to carry out such an investigation (*New York Times*, 1913a). The only son of a man with astonishing wealth, Rockefeller Jr. expended his life extending his father’s philanthropic enterprises. He had grown up in a Baptist family, surrounded by co-religionists who avoided alcohol and common leisure pursuits. (He learned to dance and attended the theatre for the first time while a university student.) He pursued the task with the sincerity and commitment of a missionary. Rockefeller’s grand jury was meant to sit for a month, but at the end of it, the jury refused to stand down. In conjunction with the District Attorney, Charles S. Whitman, Rockefeller made a “thorough and exhausting” search. He interviewed leaders of vice commissions in Chicago and other cities, reviewed confidential reports, and scrutinized pamphlets, articles, and books. He pressed journalists who claimed expertise in the White slave trade for data to support their statements. “I never worked harder in my life,” he said years later; “I was on the job morning, noon and night” (Fosdick, 1956: 137).

Rockefeller negotiated $25,000 from the mayor’s office for surreptitious investigations, going so far as to buy women on the underground market. Whitman’s office arranged for an assistant district attorney, James B. Reynolds, to burrow into the underworld. He hired two college women
(from Smith and Radcliffe) to lure the most influential White slave dealers with the ruse that they wished to supply a brothel in Alaska (*New York Times*, 1910a). In an informal summary of their efforts, Rockefeller explained to O'Sullivan that several groups of agents had been employed. These agents not only included “a woman lawyer . . . with her two women investigators” but also a special agent from a leading detective bureau, several investigators from the District Attorney's office, and “several members of the underworld in touch with prostitution in its various forms.” To collate information from these confidential agents, the grand jury opened “private offices” in the city. Rockefeller proposed to make public the details surrounding the grand jury's methods, but O'Sullivan advised him this would be “unwise” (Rockefeller, 1910a: 2–3).

Five months later, Rockefeller was ready. But O'Sullivan, fearing what he might have unearthed, refused to accept the presentment (on behalf of the public) without a preview. District Attorney Whitman insisted that grand jury deliberations, in whatever form, had to remain secret. After two weeks of wrangling, O'Sullivan surrendered, having been assured it would not support the *McClure's* allegations (*New York Times*, 1910b). There had been reports of “incorporated syndicates” and “international bands,” but the grand jury found “no evidence” of any organization in the county engaged in the traffic, nor evidence of “an organized traffic in women for immoral purposes” (Court of General Sessions, 1910: 3).\(^2\) The grand jury decided, however, that there was some reality to the White slave trade. Their presentment contained 54 indictments for rape, abduction, maintaining disorderly houses, and prostitution of women. “A trafficking in the bodies of women does exist and is carried out by individuals acting for their individual benefit,” individuals who were known to one another, and “more or less informally associated” (Court of General Sessions, 1910: 3). The grand jury surmised that it had been difficult to purchase women because of the publicity surrounding the inquiry: White slavers chose to suspend their business temporarily. Five self-described dealers did agree to supply women to undercover agents, and in two cases, they completed transactions. Reynolds's operatives purchased one woman for $60 and another for $75 (Court of General Sessions, 1910: 5).

It was out of this legal investigation that Rockefeller's commitment to social research was born. At first, he imagined the mayor should appoint a commission to further the grand jury's work, and he devoted that summer

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2. “The evidence of a large-scale human trade of this sort,” as Philippa Levine (2002: 133, 136) explained, “never been satisfactorily established.” Historians have tended to see the White slave trade as a racialized moral panic that gripped English-speaking countries in the late nineteenth century, about the same time organized women's groups began pushing for rights of citizenship.
to finding suitable commissioners. The commission should be composed of five to nine “intelligent, earnest, fearless men and women” (Rockefeller, 1910b: 4). It would employ an investigator, “probably a lawyer,” who would visit cities in the United States and Europe to make “a comparative study” of laws and practices concerning prostitution. The commissioners would then set an agenda for curtailing commercial sex and for promoting standards of sexual morality. Their agenda would call for cooperation of all existing societies arrayed against the evil: civic, protective, philanthropic, moral, commercial, and religious. It would pursue legislative, administrative, and educational programs and champion a range of healthy leisure activities (Rockefeller, 1910b).

Later, Rockefeller decided to form his own organization. In March 1911, he began meetings with a lawyer, Starr J. Murphy, and an investment banker, Paul M. Warburg. They pursued Rockefeller’s vision of the previous summer, and by October, they replaced their informal name, the Committee of Three, with a corporation registered as the Bureau of Social Hygiene. The Bureau’s program commenced with two projects. A study of prostitution in American cities, led by George Kneeland, the chief investigator behind the Vice Commission of Chicago’s report, and a study of prostitution in European cities, led by Dr. Abraham Flexner, who had conducted a Rockefeller-funded survey of medical education in America and Europe. In January 1913, Rockefeller distributed a statement to the press explaining why he had abandoned a public commission. Because public commissions were temporary, and composed of people preoccupied with other affairs, they proved ineffective. The “patient denizens of the underworld” simply waited until the reformers resumed their ordinary activities. He had decided to set up a permanent institution, one that would continue, generation after generation, “in making warfare against the forces of evil.” A private organization could remain free from publicity and political bias (Rockefeller, 1913: 2). From 1917 to 1935, Rockefeller poured more than $5.8 million into his private war against evil (Spencer, 1949).

The Bureau became the major financial underwriter of the American Social Hygiene Association. The ASHA was formed in 1914 by Rockefeller, Addams, and others, from an amalgamation of several organizations that had been set up to promote public morality. “Social hygiene” became the preferred term for the twentieth-century crusades against prostitution and liquor because it avoided overt moralistic language looking back to the

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3. The Bureau funded studies in juvenile delinquency, police problems, penology, and criminal justice administration, including development of Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) statistics (Rosen, 1995) and criminology as a field of inquiry (Laub, 2006).
religious teachings of temperance workers and it suggested forward-looking scientific approaches derived from advances in medical knowledge. Nevertheless, the social hygiene movement embodied elements of moral purity characteristic of the nineteenth century, and a racialized view that assigned responsibility for problems of sexual health to ethnic populations, immigrants, and foreigners (Donovan, 2006; Robertson, 2009). The ASHA’s first president, Charles Eliot (former president of Harvard University), announced the association would fight against venereal disease, a category of “contagious diseases most destructive to the white race.” Society could no longer afford to regard sexual immorality with “innocency, delicacy, and reticence”; rather, the attack needed to be “public and frank.” The ASHA advocated the “recognized safeguards against sexual perversions,” including abstinence from “alcohol, tobacco, hot spices, and all other drugs which impair self-control” (Eliot, 1914: 1–3).

In establishing the ASHA, Rockefeller created what was to become the most powerful institution for promoting, as Jennifer Fronc (2009) explained, “private surveillance.” The Progressive Era produced an array of reform organizations concerned with the urban vices of gambling, prostitution, delinquency, and radicalism that collectively relied on undercover investigation to further their goals. These included New York’s Committee of Fourteen, which also received financial support from Rockefeller. Social investigation had been practiced in the nineteenth century, but these organizations displayed an enthusiasm for covert operations that represented a significant innovation. They also enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with municipal governments that blurred distinctions between public and private, legal and social inquiry, as well as health and morality (Fronc, 2009: 17–8). The leaders of social activist organizations such as the ASHA justified intrusion and deceit as necessary means for a scientific understanding of pressing social problems. In practice, however, the investigators did not always possess university credentials or other preparation, nor did they receive training in methods, ethics, and legalities. Rather, investigators tended to be selected for their gender, race, and ethnicity. The Committee of Fourteen added an African American investigator (who did have a university background) after failure to break into clandestine prostitution linked to night-time entertainment in Harlem (Roberston, 2009).

In trying to gather evidence of the White slave trade, investigators conflated international with foreignness. Kneeland collected information about prostitution at more than 1,000 “vice resorts” in Manhattan: saloons, hotels, tenement houses, massage parlors, dance halls, and cabaret theatres. He declared New York to be a “center” of the worldwide sex trade because of the national origins of those who owned these establishments. “The majority” of proprietors were “foreigners by birth. Some of them
have been seducers of defenseless women all of their lives” (Kneeland, 1913: 79). They had taken young girls to different parts of Europe before setting up shop in the United States. “Here they have made a center, and from this center they go back over the old trail from time to time” (Kneeland, 1913: 80). Kneeland’s analysis reveals a suspicion of foreigners, but also it can be perceived as confusion about social scale. He claimed to see intercontinental activity, but this would be impossible from the sights at local addresses. It is one thing to say that immigrants manage a significant portion of prostitution in an area of New York and another thing to say that because there are immigrants from Europe in New York, the city represents the headquarters of criminal activities that extend throughout Europe. Such “scale shifts” occur in attempts to move from local observation to social-science knowledge, and present a special challenge in efforts to move between local and global scales (Valverde, 2011: 578). Unannounced scale shifts appeared in Rockefeller’s next project concerning the White slave trade: a worldwide study commissioned by the League of Nations.

SPECIAL BODY OF EXPERTS

At the close of the First World War, activists in the campaign against White slavery succeeded in returning their issue to the international agenda. In 1921, the League of Nations called a conference to assess compliance with pre-war treaties on the commercialized sex industry. Thirty-four nations sent delegates to Geneva, making it the most enthusiastic response to date. The delegates agreed to a convention that included a resolution to replace references to “White slave trade” with “traffic in women” within international policy documents. “White slave trade” had drawn on an analogy to the abolitionists and their successful movement for outlawing the importation of slaves from Africa. “Traffic in women” drew a parallel to the League’s efforts concerning trafficking in opium and trafficking in armaments (Knepper, 2011: 168–9).

Despite the League’s intervention, campaigners never really settled on a consistent definition of the problem. Stephanie Limoncelli, who explores the politics of the anti-trafficking movement, has explained that the international campaign brought together activists with different political objectives, which led them to construct their mission in different ways. Purity reformers tended to understand trafficking as concerning women forced into prostitution, or child prostitution, but expanded their concern to issues such as obscene literature as part of the sexual immorality to be suppressed. Feminist campaigners included arranged marriage, child marriage, voluntary migratory adult prostitution, and unsuitable adoptions of girls. They regarded as victims of traffic women in virtually any situation in which
they were subject to unwanted sexual advances from men (Limoncelli, 2010: 14–5).4

To monitor the 1921 Convention, the League Council created the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children. As one area of “technical work,” this body functioned under the direction of Dame Rachel Crowdy, renowned for her efforts to organize volunteer corps of nurses during the First World War. She became secretary-general of the social section of the League. At their inaugural meeting, the Advisory Committee invited the United States to send a delegate. Although the United States never joined the League of Nations, it did participate in technical committees concerned with disease, opium, and prostitutes. President Harding designated Grace Abbott, head of the Children’s Bureau in Washington, DC, to “cooperate in an unofficial and consultative capacity” (League of Nations, 1922). However unofficial she was meant to be, Abbott arrived in Geneva determined to advance the position of the American reform movement.

Abbott insisted the fight against the traffic in women could only proceed from a platform of social-scientific fact-finding. Official correspondence with governments was not enough because governments lacked the tools for proper social inquiry. She urged a cross-border study to determine “whether there is an international traffic in women and girls for purposes of prostitution” and to establish “between what countries the traffic is being carried on, by what methods, and about the effectiveness of national measures undertaken to suppress the traffic” (League of Nations, 1924: 3). After she announced that Rockefeller’s Bureau of Social Hygiene in New York City would underwrite the project, she won enough votes on the Advisory Committee for the League to commission the research. Committee members welcomed the introduction of scientific evidence as a counterweight to distortions in the press and entertainment. “Extravagant and baseless stories” had circulated in the public, and although experienced workers knew better, these stories “misled others and had mischievous results” (League of Nations, 1924: 3). As a result of sensational and dramatic accounts, claims about trafficking on a wide scale by systematic methods “may be perceived with caution and even credulity” (League of Nations, 1924: 4).5

4. Even now, the definition remains contested terrain. Measures of human trafficking are impossible to separate from conceptual and practical problems in identifying a “victim of human trafficking” (Tyldum and Brunovksis, 2005: 21).

5. For its part, the Bureau of Social Hygiene supported the study of traffic in women proposed by the Advisory Committee “because the subject is one in which we have long been interested and because we believe that this proposed step is essential to any solution of the problem” (Heydt, 1923: 1).
To manage the overall direction of the research, the League Council created the Special Body of Experts. This committee would be led by Dr. William Snow, professor of public health at Stanford University, and from 1916, president of the ASHA. He would be joined by Princess Cristina Giustiani Bandini, a leader of the Catholic women’s movement; Françias Hennequin, French under-secretary of the Interior; Dr. Isidore Maus, from the Belgian Ministry of Justice; Alfred de Meuron, president of the Swiss anti-trafficking organization; Sidney Harris of the British Home Office; Tadakastu Suzuki, from the Japanese embassy in Paris; and Dr. Paulina Luisi, pioneer educator and women’s advocate from Uruguay. The committee of experts represented a syncretism of views. American reformers, like their British counterparts, regarded the system of *maisons tolérée* (licensed houses of prostitution) in several European and South American countries as the primary source for the worldwide economy in women’s bodies. The French opposed this. They tended to see poverty as the ultimate source of the *traite des blanches* (White slave trade) and viewed the Anglo American doctrine of prohibition as a hypocritical attitude that failed to address the root problem. Whether streetwalking prostitutes were to be preferred over regulated brothels was a question best left to city governments (Knepper, 2011: 96).

The disagreement over licensed houses made the choice of data collection strategies difficult, but the debate over methods really had to do with differing assumptions about whether the sex trade was ultimately an international, national, or municipal problem. When the Special Body of Experts began their discussion in April 1924 with construction of a questionnaire for governments, Dr. Maus wanted to ask about licensed houses (Special Body of Experts, 1924a: 4). Hennequin thought this question exceeded the committee’s terms of reference; prostitution was a separate matter from traffic. De Meuron thought the best way to get at the problem of licensed houses was through field visits. Asking governments anything was a waste of time as “questionnaires rarely gave satisfactory results.” Account had to be taken of varying circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Governments could only furnish a single national reply, whereas the experts needed detailed information for particular regions and localities within countries (Special Body of Experts, 1924a: 6). Luisi, who sided with Hennequin, argued that the committee should limit its questions to the traffic and leave questions of prostitution to the Advisory Committee. Bandini agreed: “No great result was to be hoped for from a questionnaire addressed to governments.”

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6. The abolitionist and regulationist views, it is worth pointing out, did not completely break down along national lines. Avril de Sainte-Croix, a founder of the Conseil National des Femmes Françaises, campaigned for the abolition of regulated prostitution in France (Offen, 2005).
expert could supply more and better information from his or her own country (Special Body of Experts, 1924a: 8). Eventually, the committee circulated a questionnaire to 67 states, members and nonmembers of the League, asking for information about the existence and extent of traffic in women (and received 32 replies).7

The committee then developed the research strategy of “on the spot” observations. Harris proposed that on-the-spot inquiries should be “limited in area.” He favored a series of small-scale field studies, focused on a “single country or area,” beginning with South America. Luisi conceded that although there were many reports of traffic in Latin America, those engaged were almost all foreigners, as it was not within the “character of the people of the country to practice the traffic” (Special Body of Experts, 1924c: 1–2). Instead of choosing only one or two countries to study, she proposed the inquiry should be made in several cities. These cities should be seaports because they represented places of embarkation and disembarkation for the international traffic. Researchers could document connections between cities and chart routes and identify sources and destinations. The committee approved of her proposal, and Snow offered to draw up a list of ports and cities (Special Body of Experts, 1924c: 3).

Harris pointed to the need for “competent investigators” and proposed to call in ASHA expertise. Hennequin was reluctant: If specialists were to make the inquiries, what was the role of the Special Body of Experts? Maus affirmed that any investigators would require special training as the task would prove delicate and difficult. Snow followed up with reference to inquiries made in the United States. The Rockefeller grand jury, he said, had learned of the “necessity for adequate investigation.” The ASHA “would be quite ready to collaborate with the body of experts,” and in any case, he had agreed to chair on the understanding that he would be able to “make use of the services of competent experts” (Special Body of Experts, 1924b: 9–10). Later that same day, Hennequin renewed his protest. He had understood the New York organization would carry out the fieldwork within the United States, but he feared the governments of Europe would not appreciate American investigators prying into their domestic affairs. Snow reminded him that the resolution had already been agreed to (Special Body of Experts, 1924c: 1).

Snow named Bascom Johnson, head of the ASHA’s legal affairs section, as director of field investigations. Johnson had received a law degree in Pennsylvania and had joined a legal practice in Philadelphia. During the war, he served as director of law enforcement for the War Department’s

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7. They also assembled laws, reports, and other documents governments submitted in response to previous League questionnaires, as well as annual reports of charities and voluntary organizations (Johnson, 1928).
Commission on Training Camp Activities, and he mobilized support for closing down red-light districts adjacent to military bases. He began his League research in April 1924 with a voyage to Buenos Aires, the alleged destination for the White slaves of Europe. In October of that year, he traveled to Geneva to offer an initial report of what he had learned. Johnson conceded that he could not speak any foreign language “except a little French.” What he uncovered while aboard ship about the traffic between Europe and South America had been secured with the assistance of a chaplain and some Chilean diplomats. To carry out his formal interviews with officials in Argentina, he relied on an assistant who possessed an enviable “facility for languages” (Special Body of Experts, 1924d: 14–5). By the end of 1926, Johnson’s team had visited more than 100 cities across North and South America, central and southern Europe, and North Africa.

During each field visit, Johnson followed a data-gathering protocol worked out on that first trip to Buenos Aires: While he and his translator made the rounds of officials, “another member of my staff was mingling quietly with the people in the underworld.” This investigator played the “role of an American visitor”; he pretended to be a “newspaperman” or a dealer thinking about “buying a house,” or he took on “any guise that seemed to be convenient” (Special Body of Experts, 1924d: 18–9). As explained in an ASHA publication, Johnson assigned undercover fieldworkers the “difficult task of establishing contact with the underworld.” These individuals associated with procurers and prostitutes; visited clubs, cafés, and music halls; and became well acquainted with brothel-keepers and the women in their charge. They initiated their inquiries by talking with managers and artistes in music halls, and in this way, they gained access to brothels, massage parlors, photographic studios, and other locations of the international sex trade. “It is evident,” Johnson declared, “that information of such a nature could only have been obtained by skilled investigators, full of resource, able to extricate themselves from dangerous situations, and prepared to risk the dangerous consequences which would follow detection” (Johnson, 1928: 70–1).

Snow and Johnson shielded the identities of their operatives. The names of field researchers do not appear in the official publications, nor even in many field reports, so it is less than straightforward to learn how many researchers were employed and precisely what they did. There is evidence indicating that most were American men, although Snow and Johnson did

8. They also made inquiries to the Nordic countries and the West Indies but decided these countries did not warrant “detailed studies” (Johnson, 1928: 68).
engage Christine Galitzi, an Italian woman who worked for a migration organization in Paris, the Service International d’Aide aux Émigrants. More than anyone else, Snow and Johnson relied on Paul Kinsie. Kinsie, who attended the University of Kentucky, directed the ASHA’s undercover research program from 1917. He learned his craft as an apprentice to Kneeland and perfected his technique “by trial and error,” building a repertoire of false identities and cover stories “to cope with changing circumstances” (Winick and Kinsie, 1971: 262, 270). In reading Kinsie’s field reports, it is clear that he was an excellent ethnographer. But even as good as he was, it is worth reflecting on precisely the kind of evidence he found. Kinsie focused on activities and relationships that comprised the White slave trade, such as tricks for evading surveillance at borders. In following Johnson’s instructions, he did not systematically document individual cases, but he aimed to acquire knowledge of procurement, routes of travel, use of false documents, and the impact of regulations concerning immigration and music hall performers (Johnson, 1925).

Kinsie frequently operated in the contingent rather than the documentary mode. He made observations from the “eyewitness scale,” but there are two ways of using the eyewitness perspective. There is the journalistic way: description of a specific encounter or event, based on first-hand observation. And there is an anecdotal way: projection of a generic encounter from the typical point of view. Anecdotes concerning typical or usual behaviors are not the same as occurrences. Although such distinctions were less clear because the means of collecting the evidence was kept secret, questions about how Johnson’s investigators had arrived at certain “facts” did become a point of contention within the committee of experts. The French representative, Pierre Le Luc (who replaced Hennequin who died in 1926), objected to a reference implying the complicity of a French consul. Johnson admitted that “the investigator” (Kinsie) had obtained the information “not from French souteneurs, but from Roumanians, Greeks and Jews in Alexandria and Cairo.” Furthermore, Kinsie had learned of “the incident” by asking: “Suppose I had a girl in France and I wanted to get her to Egypt, how could it be done?” (Special Body of Experts, 1927: 36). This is not an actual measurement (Valverde, 2011: 572–3). In the attempt to capture connections—routes, techniques, maneuvers, etc.—on the spot investigation became an account of trafficking at no spot in particular.

9. Snow remarked at one point that three full-time investigators and seven or eight part-time investigators had been employed (Special Body of Experts, 1925: 13). Dame Rachel was quoted as saying that “ten courageous men and women went for three years to live in the underworld” (Manchester Guardian, 1932).
The research commissioned by the League was not the only effort to study traffic in women during the interwar period. French social investigators carried out their own studies. Albert Londres traveled the “road to Buenos Aires” during the 1920s, and Henry Champly investigated the “road to Shanghai” in the 1930s (Champly, 1934; Londres, 1928). These studies are interesting because they support the claims of a worldwide sex trade, but they do not share the commitment to undercover investigation. From their descriptions of interviews, both men seem to have made their inquiries as themselves, without inventing false identities or cover stories. Snow, Johnson, and the ASHA investigators working on the League’s study insisted on undercover interviews as the only means of learning “what was really going on behind the scenes” (League of Nations, 1927a: 6). But this approach proved a liability in the politically charged environment of the League of Nations.

In fact, the ASHA faced controversy in New York even while working for Geneva. During the 1920s, police methods in vice cases brought about serious abuses of police authority and miscarriages of justice. One tactic, referred to as the “made case,” led to complaints of women being framed by the authorities. The procedure usually followed would be for the police officer, having met a woman suspected of being a prostitute, to pose as a liberal customer. He would talk about his sexual experiences in other cities and complain about repressive conditions in New York. During the interview, he would display a large amount of cash. His actions and remarks would make clear that an offer on the part of the woman to exchange sex for money would be accepted. Assistant District Attorney Ferdinand Pecora gave interviews in 1925 to the *New York World* and other newspapers in which he accused investigators of entrapping women (Waterman, 1932: 54–5, 61–2).

Newspapers launched several campaigns against police methods in vice investigations, and one, the *New York Evening Graphic*, targeted the ASHA. The paper claimed the association paid between 200 and 400 men to shadow women suspected of “living loosely” and to set traps for them, traps in which innocent women were likely to fall. “The work of these men is carried on so silently, under cover of such thick camouflage and all but denial on the part of their superiors that the actual facts have been unsuspected by the public” (*New York Evening Graphic*, 1925a: 6). The Graphic deployed their own investigators to track anti-vice investigators and revealed a “typical incident” in its columns. The paper described how a reasonable and friendly young woman yielded to the escalating requests of a pleasant young man for assistance, and before she realized it, she found herself alone with him. It was a compromising situation the ASHA...
investigator recorded as a finding of sexual impropriety (New York Evening Graphic, 1925a).

Even the undercover methods used by the police were not as objectionable, said the Graphic, as those of the ASHA. The personnel of the police department, including plainclothes detectives, were open to public scrutiny. A citizen could, with proper authorization, find out how many men were employed and what they were paid. But when a representative of the Graphic appealed to the ASHA, this organization refused to detail their work or methods. Dr. Snow insisted on the necessity of secrecy and refused to explain how many men the association had hired or where they had been deployed (New York Evening Graphic, 1925c). That same week, the paper denounced Snow and his colleagues in an editorial: The ASHA claimed that they wanted to suppress social vice, but their methods "reek of filth.” Under orders, or by their own initiative, young men throughout the city collected money for "sneaky, slimy spy work.” They sought evidence against immoral women, but “their methods are more than likely to lure perfectly innocent girls into a trap from which they can escape only after their reputations have been blasted.” A cartoon appeared under the caption “The Spider and the Web.” It depicted a spider’s web, with American Social Hygiene Society appearing in the lattice, and a smiling assassin in the center, with eight hairy legs and a cheap bowler hat (New York Evening Graphic, 1925b: 13).

In New York, the ASHA could deflect such criticism. Although many residents of the city did not like the social activist organizations and questioned their tactics, they also realized it was best not to voice their complaints. The leaders of the social hygiene campaign had access to tremendous stores of legal, political, and financial capital (Fronc, 2009: 8). In March 1925, the ASHA’s Executive Committee convened a special meeting in response to the newspaper campaign. Snow declared the paper’s actions “may be considered criminally and civilly libelous.” There was no basis for the allegations and no reason for any amendment of the policies and practices of the organization (Snow, 1925). The Executive Committee decided to ignore the Graphic but to review the notes taken by the investigator in the case mentioned by Pecora, and to prepare a brief setting forth the facts of investigation. The Executive Committee asked for a meeting with the District Attorney’s office to “go over the whole matter and have a clear understanding of the facts” (Luce, 1925: 1).

But within the international forum at Geneva, this was not so easy. Release of information to the public proved to be an unwieldy and unpredictable business. After hours of debate about what to write up, the Special Body of Experts decided to produce two reports. The first, for circulation to the press, would feature an overview of the findings and recommendations. The second would present the national profiles, and remain confidential,
available only to accredited officials of governments. Crowdy suggested that including names and places might create difficulties for people who supplied the information. Harris added that a “frank publication” of all the details would give away too much to the traffickers; they could adopt new methods and make it more difficult for governments to counteract their movements. Dr. Snow’s solution was to anonymize along the lines of what had been done in America. The Vice Commission of Chicago had decided to replace proper nouns with a coded system of letters and numerals, and to retain the field reports and documents with identifying information in a safe deposit box. Mr. Rockefeller had provided a vault for this purpose for his grand jury inquiry. Officials who had questions were given special access to them, and when shown the information, they “came away convinced” (Special Body of Experts, 1926: 29–30). Part 1 of the Report of the Special Body of Experts into the Traffic in Women and Children appeared in February 1927, followed by part 2 in December of that year.

The delay attracted speculation, which found its way from England to America, that evidence had been suppressed. It was stated in the House of Commons that the reluctance to release the full report was a result of the political sensitivity of countries identified as having active traffic (The Times, 1927a). Newspaper editors, delegates to the League, leaders of women’s organizations, and political leaders urged release of the complete findings, arguing that publicity was the most important weapon in the fight against traffic in women (Manchester Guardian, 1927; The Times, 1927b, 1927c). One newspaper, also published in England, claimed that a woman member of the Special Body of Experts had posed as the madam of a brothel to collect first-hand information. According to the story, “Sister Paulina Luisa” left an Italian convent to spy out White slave secrets in questionable houses in Mediterranean cities. Officials at Geneva indignantly explained the rumors had confused Princess Cristina Bandini, who had been a member of a religious order, and Dr. Paulina Luisi of the University of Montevideo, both of whom were well known in Europe and Latin America. Bandini had the endorsement of King Victor Emmanuel and Premier Mussolini for her work on the Special Body of Experts. Later in the day, League officials clarified their statement: “It would be a mistake to deduce from their repudiation of the report concerning women members of the committee that women have never been employed in tracking down those engaged in White slavery. It was a fact, they added, that both men and women investigators had been employed to enter underworld dens to obtain direct information as to real conditions, sometimes even posing as undesirable characters” (New York Times, 1927a: 2).

The ASHA and their allies regarded the Report of the Special Body of Experts as a success. The inquiry provided the League with “facts showing
the existence, extent and methods” of the traffic, whereas before officials only had opinions. It demonstrated the “possibility and value” of on-the-spot investigations by the League in contrast to investigations by questionnaire alone. Snow stated the study had been effective in “strengthening national laws and international cooperation”; policy changes linked to recommendations in the report had yielded new laws in Cuba, Italy, France, and Poland. From a “scientific and sociological point of view, the working out of a technique of investigation and preparation of data on this type of complicated problem has made a distinct contribution” (Executive Committee, 1929). The Social Service Review, co-edited by Edith Abbott (Grace Abbott’s sister), at the University Chicago, agreed. The report was a document of international significance, and Americans had a right to be proud given that it was their work. The Special Body of Experts, led by Dr. Snow, should be congratulated for having 28 nations face the “unpleasant truth” about their responsibility for continuing the fight into the twentieth century against the “terrible evil known as the white slave traffic” (Social Service Review, 1927: 356; 1928: 166).

But others did not regard the study in this way. When part 2 appeared, the French Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand, complained about publication of material that could not be corroborated. Much of the information had been “received by unauthorized agents” and not by “members of the White Slave committee themselves.” Most findings came from those engaged in exploitation of women or others with equally dubious morals. The report “conveys a general picture which does not in the least represent the truth” (New York Times, 1927b: 10; Washington Post, 1927). Protests came from Italy, Poland, Argentina, Brazil, and Hungary. The Hungarian government ignored findings about “conditions in the side streets of Budapest” and objected “most emphatically” to the methods on which they were based. Conversations with brothel-keepers at 16 premises were insufficient to characterize the national situation. Snow and Johnson agreed to amend some of the language in the report, but they defended their methods; the findings were made by more than one investigator on several visits to Hungary (The Times, 1927a: 16).

The problem was mapping the “organization” of traffic in women. Rockefeller’s grand jury inquiry had concluded, following the Vice Commission of Chicago, that the White slave trade was “not organized.” As the Chicago report explained, the operations of those engaged in the social evil were “so similar” and they used the “same methods to such an extent” it was “safe to infer that they are in some way working together” (Vice Commission of Chicago, 1911: 41). Snow and Johnson tried to use the language of “traffic” to bridge the distance between visible features of prostitution and the invisible cross-border trade in women. The Report of the Special Body of Experts insisted that “international traffic” could not be separated from
“national traffic.” They could not make an “adequate study of international traffic without paying considerable attention to internal conditions” (League of Nations, 1927a: 9). They also referred to the “underworld,” an elastic term that could stretch across cities and continents. They portrayed the underworld as a “ring” stretching from country to country, and they claimed to have found the “‘right people’ in each centre studied” (League of Nations, 1927a: 6). \(^\text{10}\) In the sense that “trafficking” became the conceptual language for understanding international crime throughout the twentieth century (and remains so today), Snow and Johnson succeeded. But at the time, their arguments ran into skeptical local and national officials who claimed to know better.

In New York, publication of part 2 had caused a stir among theatrical booking agencies as a result of a reference to a mysterious agent (referred to as “18-R”), who was reported as having “sent more than 200 girls to Panama” for immoral purposes and could furnish cabaret managers there with “any kind of girls they would want” (League of Nations, 1927b: 165). Charles H. Tuttle, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, demanded to know what agencies in the city were involved. Johnson would only release information in which names and locations appeared in code. Tuttle threatened to make a formal request through the State Department because as it stood, the findings concerning Panama were “without foundation in fact.” They distilled down to unsubstantiated statements by a lone investigator. Johnson conceded that he did not personally observe any aspect of the Panama Canal traffic. “Thus,” Tuttle thundered, “the League’s report, published in December 1927, comes down to the uncorroborated statements of an investigator from the Social Hygiene Association that in August, 1924, he had from certain persons, some of whom could not be identified, certain verbal admissions which inevitably such persons would deny, and so far as I have been able to reach them, have denied” (New York Times, 1928: 26). Tuttle collected denials from the governor of the Panama Canal Zone, the major general of the U.S. Army in the Zone, and the American Consul at Colon (New York Times, 1928).

To defend their research, the ASHA retreated to a distinction between legal investigation and social investigation. The Bureau of Social Hygiene’s director, Lawrence Dunham, noted in an interoffice memorandum that “Mr Tuttle’s statement is apt to cause some repercussions at Geneva.” Dunham drew a distinction between “getting the facts” as a matter of social-scientific inquiry and “getting legal evidence” for presentation to a grand jury or trial court. Nevertheless, Tuttle presented a formidable critic.

\(^{10}\) Snow believed that the “underworld” controlled regulated systems of prostitution and that “underworld forces” effectively resisted attempts of reformers to abolish them (Snow, 1926).
The ASHA, Dunham advised, “should use a very considerable amount of conservatism” and be “pretty sure of the ground upon which they stood” before making “allegations that might be publicly interpreted as charging the existence of the white slave traffic on a substantial scale in any given locality.” Snow claimed (once again) the remarks had been “unfair.” The report was not intended to take a “legal form.” Besides, Snow decided, nothing in Tuttle’s remarks about Panama “disproved” the general conclusions (Dunham, 1928: 3–4). In other words, the social investigation of the international traffic in women did not rely on information about local conditions that would meet the standard of legal proof in any jurisdiction. It was a curious argument because the observational technique on which the ASHA researchers relied for their social science had been developed for a legal inquiry into individual cases.

**FAILURE IN THE FAR EAST**

In 1929, the Bureau of Social Hygiene’s representatives in Geneva informed the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children that funds would be available for further study of the worldwide traffic in women. This proposed inquiry could cover the Far East and those parts of South America and Africa neglected by the first study. The Bureau said it would provide $125,000 as soon as the League could confirm it had the cooperation from governments to be involved. The Bureau also wanted assurance that the study would be supervised by the same Special Body of Experts as had made the first survey (Executive Committee, 1929).

The study won League approval over the objections of Paulina Luisi who became the leading critic of the first study. She avoided the final three sessions of the Special Body of Experts and neglected to sign the official report. “The chief complaints made against the American chairman, William F. Snow,” the *New York Times* summed up when the League’s report first appeared, “are, in effect, that the expert investigators were handpicked by himself and have given a rough whitewashing to the Anglo-Saxon nations while the Latin nations come in for bitter criticism.” Critics from Spanish-speaking countries charged that an incomplete study was made in their nations because the investigators, who could speak only English, simply repeated biased statements. Dr. Luisi represented the “chief opposition” to the study (*New York Times*, 1927c: 27, 1927d: 20).

In estimating the extent of traffic worldwide, the *Report of the Special Body of Experts* lapsed into equating international with foreignness. The authors pointed to a statistic supplied by the Brazilian government that 80 percent of women kept in brothels of the country were foreign. Buenos Aires and Montevideo had similar figures (League of Nations, 1927a: 10–11). The text acknowledged that some of these women would have come
from “foreign residents” and “were not women transported from abroad by traffickers” but went on to claim that a “large proportion of the newly registered foreign women” had come from abroad to engage in prostitution. Based on “statements of the underworld,” the report surmised that the women did not make the voyage by themselves. There had to be men involved in procuring, forging documents, arranging for passage, and so on. “All this evidence suggests, therefore, that traffic in women is extensive, although no exact estimate of its extent can be given” (League of Nations, 1927a: 12). This was good enough for Crowdy, who agreed that the proportion of foreign women proved the existence of the traffic.

It was not good enough for Luisi, who questioned the overall methodological design. Within the Advisory Committee, Luisi repeated doubts about the methodology of the first study as a model for the second. Although she did not oppose extension of the research to the Far East (she said publicly), the inquiry made in South America had been “inadequate and superficial.” The ASHA researchers had spent too little time in various countries to understand the situation, and they never managed to visit key cities important to the White slave traffic (League of Nations, 1930: 61). The League’s research, to return to Valverde (2011), rested on the assumption that it possessed a “scalar” dimension. Snow and Johnson claimed to have measured the activities of sex traffickers from “disorderly houses” at the local level to “intermediaries” at the global level. Luisi denied Johnson’s researchers knew enough about language, culture, and relationships to understand what was really going on. She proposed that collecting information from local sites, or at least in the way the ASHA’s researchers went about it, could not yield information about international traffic in women. What they could see from their visits amounted to local problems of prostitution and these were effectively dealt with by municipal and national legislation.

The League of Nations accepted the Bureau’s offer, but it decided on a different management and methodology. This time, the French, and not the Americans, would oversee the project. The League Council replaced Snow with Eugène Regnault, the former French ambassador to Tokyo. Regnault’s committee of experts, the Committee of Enquiry on the Traffic in Women and Children in the East, met in August to plan the overall design in conjunction with the Travelling Commission, led by Johnson. Johnson would make on-the-spot enquiries, along with Dr. Alma Sundquist, a Swedish physician, and Karol Pindor, Polish ambassador to China. The research would begin with a questionnaire to governments, to be distributed in advance of field visits and discussed with officials on arrival. The Travelling Commission also would arrange for sittings to hear from witnesses: police, government officials (social welfare, health, labor, and education); judges, lawyers, and social welfare workers; as well as
members of religious organizations and missionaries. Arrangements would be made in each country with the “assistance” of an official who would guide the investigators in their fieldwork and review their reports before they were submitted. The Commission also placed newspaper advertisements inviting any private person with information to share it with the commission, but this “did not bring important results” (League of Nations, 1933: 16–7).

The League Council permitted the investigators to seek information from unofficial sources but within the limits of their official handlers. Representatives from the various governments had pointed out the dangers involved to investigators had the same methods been followed as had been used in the first study. If the Travelling Commission felt it necessary to obtain secret information, it needed to reach an agreement beforehand. As Johnson reported to Snow, the League had wished to “shut off undercover investigators altogether.” Johnson promised the Council he had a man in New York of “unimpeachable character and superhuman abilities” and threatened to resign if he could not get his way (meaning the Bureau would withdraw its $125,000). He managed to insert into the budget 60,000 gold francs to “cover the expenses of an investigator” despite “considerable opposition from many sources.” In the end, the “opposition caved in,” and he assured Snow, “we have a free hand with certain limitations which I will explain later” (Johnson, 1930: 2). The fact that Johnson never deployed Kinsie was not a result of political restrictions as Johnson was prepared to side-step these. Snow asked the Bureau of Social Hygiene to set aside $12,000 to be made as advances directly to Kinsie. “Mr Johnson,” he explained, “has some reason for avoiding the recording of his [Kinsie’s] name in League or other records” (Snow, 1930a: 1). In further correspondence, Snow spelled it out: “Mr Johnson desires to draw this money directly and not have it pass through the League of Nations Secretariat to his investigator. As I understand the matter, the investigator will not travel directly with Mr. Johnson” (Snow, 1930b: 1).

Johnson came to realize that the techniques used for legal investigation of law-breaking in American cities did not have universal application. Because the traffic in women in Asia involved Asian women, he had “little use for [a] white investigator” (Johnson, 1930: 2). But he left Dr. Snow to explain this in December 1931 to the Executive Committee of the Bureau of Social Hygiene in New York. Snow confessed that he was “still in the dark” about the degree of success or failure of Johnson’s investigations. Johnson had informed him that conditions in China and

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11. Early in 1931, Pindor warned the Committee of Enquiry not to expect much as “conditions in the Far East will greatly hamper the work of the Commission” (Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1931: 62).
Japan made “clandestine underworld investigations in those countries impossible.” Johnson indicated he would let the ASHA know when and where Kinsie should meet him—probably Syria in early February. None of the secret fund had been withdrawn. Snow was confident that if Johnson called for Kinsie, it was because some undercover investigations could be made in at least Syria and Palestine. This would show “how cautiously facts obtained in other countries, without the check of clandestine investigations, must be interpreted” (Farnham, 1931). But Snow acknowledged that he did not receive reports from Johnson about progress in getting at “essential facts.” Johnson probably could not “write fully and frankly” about what he was doing for fear it would leak to the newspapers and present, from the League’s point of view, a “fatal error.” He was “greatly puzzled” about what to do, but he believed the survey would prove to be of value even if “in some respects it falls short of expectations.” Johnson had hoped to do some covert investigations in India, but he was not able to (Topping, 1931).

The director of the Bureau of Social Hygiene, Leonard Harrison (who replaced Dunham), already knew the study of traffic in the East was headed nowhere. Not long after it had been authorized, he had received a letter from the acclaimed forensic specialist, Harry Söderman. Söderman spent some months in the Far East as a technical advisor to the government of Siam on the use of science for criminal investigation, and he offered his services to the Rockefeller project. Harrison believed Söderman would “doubtless bring some worthwhile reality” into the White slavery investigation. “While I think,” Harrison continued, “he might do the investigation good, I think it would do him harm in wasting his time” (Harrison, 1930: 3–4). Söderman himself seems to have shared Harrison’s view, at least in retrospect. In his memoirs, he describes accompanying a police colleague in Lyon in 1926 concerning a case involving a brothel. “I innocently asked the Madame what she thought of the white-slave traffic,” Söderman recalled. “She laughed so hard.” There was no need to import girls from abroad as so many local women wanted to join her establishment. “Afterwards I learned the woman was quite right. The white slave traffic in Europe was almost one hundred percent the fruit of journalistic fantasy” (Söderman, 1957: 162).

The Travelling Commission completed their field studies in March 1932. Pindor drafted the 529-page document, published in 1933 as the Report of the Commission of Enquiry in the Traffic in Women and Children in the East. Short reviews appeared in the New York Times and The Times, both noting the most serious problem in Asia concerned the plight of women among Russian refugees in Manchuria and Northern China (New York Times, 1934; The Times, 1934a). The only thing worse than a press circulating rumors and misstatements was a press completely uninterested. The chair of
the British National Committee for the Suppression of Traffic in Women, Dowager Lady Nunburnholme, begged the editor of *The Times* for some coverage. “Whereas the 1927 report received wide publicity, in ‘The Times’ and other newspapers, this report has . . . been practically ignored” (British National Committee, 1934: 12; *The Times*, 1934b). League officials decided the report had been overlooked because of its length, but the format of the report was not why the second study failed to generate much interest. For more than one reason, human trafficking did not present the issue in 1933 it did in 1910. In part, this had to do with the decline of what Daniel Rodgers (1998: 19–20) termed “social maternalism” in international policy-making. Women’s advocates had played a decisive role in advancing the issue of human trafficking in international circles, and their influence declined within the League of Nations. Rachel Crowdy, for example, was “jockeyed out” of Geneva in 1928, whereas the men heading other sections received permanent contracts (Pliley, 2010: 100). It also had to do with shifting cultural sensibilities. The image of the innocent maiden lured by the deceptive trafficker no longer represented the media sensation in the way that it had before the First World War.

In 1934, Pindor took stock of what had taken place in the 2 years since the League of Nations enquiry into traffic in the Far East. He pointed to movements within Japan and China to suppress prostitution, and to steps taken in British colonies, including Singapore and Hong Kong, to eliminate brothels. But as for international cooperation in the fight against traffic in Asia, the progress made in the past 2 years had been “most unsatisfactory.” Aside from an agreement between the Dutch East Indies and Singapore, “nothing whatsoever, as far as we know, has been done to promote international collaboration against the traffic in the East, neither on the lines recommended by the Commission of Enquiry, or in any other way” (Pindor, 1934: 28–9, italics in original).

In an effort to increase the impact of the research, the head of the social section, Erik Einar Ekstrand (Crowdy’s replacement), approved preparation of a summary. He invited Johnson to attend a meeting of the Advisory Committee in Geneva in early April (1934). Johnson wanted to attend because he feared that if he did not, “the French representatives may succeed in suppressing or mutilating his Summary of the full report.” Snow was willing for Johnson to go but found it necessary to “weigh the ASHA needs against the demands of the League.” He was unwilling to pay the cost from the ASHA budget (Harrison, 1934: 1). By this time, the Executive Committee made plans for closing the Bureau of Social Hygiene. John D. Rockefeller Jr. had stepped down from the Executive Committee, to be replaced by John D. Rockefeller 3rd. After a review of funds paid to the League of Nations for the Inquiry in the Far East, Rockefeller 3rd decided that the Bureau of Social Hygiene would cease operations as of
June 30, 1934, except for obligations previously incurred (Executive Com-
mittee, 1934). The Executive Committee agreed to hold annual meetings,
as required under the law of incorporation, until 13 November 1940, when
the Bureau of Social Hygiene was officially dissolved.

CONCLUSIONS

Criminology, as Nicole Rafter (2010) has said, has a short memory. But
research commissioned by the League of Nations is worth remembering.
The League’s study of human trafficking in the 1920s was the first attempt
to construct a social-science measure of a global crime. The ethnographic
element represents a methodological innovation, even by current standards,
and this fieldwork took place on a geographic scope that is hard to imagine
today. If problems in measuring crime on a global scale had been solved
since the 1920s, the League’s research would be interesting for historical
reasons. But practical and conceptual difficulties remain, and we can think
through current challenges by recalling the League’s effort.

To be sure, several things went wrong. The research originated in a grand
jury chaired by John D. Rockefeller Jr., which meant that a legal investi-
gation became the model for social-science investigation. The undercover
police technique on which the ASHA researchers relied for data collection
created tremendous political liabilities, not to mention moral concerns.
They focused on aspects of local prostitution, and rather than mapping
out links across sites, they mistook foreignness for internationalism. ASHA
researchers miscalculated the opposition generated by covert research and
could not manage critics in the international forum the way they had the
New York press. The French complained about secrecy, and although they
had other reasons for objecting to the research, they used this issue to
prevent fieldwork from taking place in the second study. Furthermore, it is
worth asking whether, or to what extent, the ASHA’s research model sim-
ply projected a concept of the criminal underworld, drawn from American
cities, onto the world map. This understanding worked more or less well in
South America and Europe, but it broke down in the Far East. The legacy
of the American outlook in global crime remains. Key concepts within in-
ternational policy contexts reveal an American origin, largely as a result of
the transnational capacities of American advocacy groups (Papanicolaou,
2008).

We can pursue social-science measures of global crime by criticizing
current studies. This approach tends to involve making an inventory of
shortcomings by comparing such research to an ideal standard. But rather
than trying to imagine ways in which we can approach an ideal, we also
might identify a benchmark in the form of a previous study and then
imagine ways to improve on it. We can use historical research, not merely to review previous findings but also to assess the techniques on which these findings were produced and the criticism they received at the time. Archival research represents a means of learning—to adapt a phrase—“what worked, what didn’t work, and what’s promising.” In a sense, historical criminology offers a kind of flight simulator: the possibility of testing design concepts before committing to more risky and expensive ventures.

In this article, I have focused on Valverde’s (2009, 2011) discussion of social scale because of its importance to using ethnographic methods in global crime research. In their work for the League, ASHA researchers demonstrated that many of the practical barriers to ethnography on a multisite, intercontinental scope can be overcome. Yet there remains a particular analytical challenge concerning the extent to which information gathered at specific localities can contribute to a global measure. The ASHA’s researchers struggled on this point. On the one hand, they claimed the traffic in women had a “scalar dimension” ranging from micro-local to macro-global: Traffic in women encompassed internal traffic within cities as well as the international traffic across oceans and continents. On the other hand, the ASHA’s researchers claimed that the global social-science scale should not be confused with the local legal scale. Social-science statements about the worldwide traffic were not built up from specific cases collected at local sites that would have met legal standards. Mapping crime on a global scale remains a tricky and difficult business, and it is far from clear how problems evident at a local level require international solutions.

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