

## THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TRAFFIC IN WOMEN

The custom of the Muslims tends strongly to prevent prostitution and traffic. Women are kept in seclusion and have few opportunities of meeting men. In certain districts, infidelity on the part of women is visited with death and generally speaking, the tenets of their religion enforce strongly the protection of the chastity of women.<sup>1</sup>

No formal precautions have been taken [against traffic in women] because such measures are unnecessary in a country composed of small villages or nomads where everybody knows what the others do and where children and women are very jealously guarded.<sup>2</sup>

The starting point of this discussion is somewhat paradoxical—a denial of the trafficking phenomenon. These quotes, the first from a League of Nations report on French mandatory territories in the Levant and the second from a British report on Transjordan, state, very similarly, that traffic in women does not exist. Yet annual reports by mandatory authorities to the League of Nations committees regarding Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine include lists of women and men deported and arrested, and independent investigations by the League's investigators also provide ample examples of brothels and of foreign and local prostitutes. As the following chapters demonstrate, moreover, both British and French authorities licensed

brothels, and the French even provided field brothels for their troops. What these quotations attest to, therefore, is not the existence of traffic or its absence, but rather the kind of knowledge produced in the interwar period about traffic in women, the definitions it subscribed to, and the limits of its reach, especially in colonial contexts.

These quotes also exemplify the assumption, shared by colonial officials at the time and partially sanctioned by the League, that there was something unique about the sexuality of indigenous women in North Africa and the Levant that made them different and thus irrelevant from the perspective of international law. This chapter examines the extent to which these biased attitudes regarding the sexuality of Muslim women affected the kind of knowledge produced by mandatory powers in the Middle East and then reproduced in League of Nations' reports. This, in turn, affected the international campaign to reduce trafficking in women and children for the purpose of prostitution. Two major players in this effort were the League of Nations' Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children (CTW) and its successor, the Social Questions Committee.

This chapter therefore is also about the production of knowledge. Government agencies and voluntary organizations sent their reports; traveling committees explored evidence on the ground; and social workers interviewed prostitutes about their childhood. The reliability of all of these was questioned—government reports were criticized as self-serving, and the traveling committees were scrutinized for their choice of interviewees. This information-gathering project was an experiment in knowledge formation, in studying a social phenomenon on a global scale. Beyond the subject matter, at stake here was what would be considered proof of the existence of traffic.

This chapter sets the framework for the rest of the book by introducing the diplomatic and international context within which global debates on prostitution, venereal diseases, and regulation of prostitution came to be framed in the interwar period. It also explores the epistemological, conceptual, and methodological framework of these debates and how they shifted during the period under review. I demonstrate the rationale, processes, and power relations behind the production of knowledge on traffic and prostitution and thus frame my reading of these sources in the following chapters. I highlight the nearly transparent shadow of interwar colonialism, contextualizing women's plight in the international and gendered power relations often taken for granted by contemporary reformers.

### FROM "WHITE SLAVERY" TO "TRAFFIC IN WOMEN"

Beginning in the 1870s, the term "white slavery" came to denote international trafficking in women and children for prostitution. However, it was understood very differently by different groups of reformers: some defined prostitution itself as a form of white slavery, others saw regulation of prostitution as a form of enslavement, others referred to international traffic alone, while still others limited the term to abduction of virgins for an international market.<sup>3</sup> Two international agreements, the 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic and the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, succeeded in getting white slavery recognized as a judicial concept in international law. These, however, relied on a consensus that limited the definition of traffic to girls younger than twenty or to the use of force or fraud to procure any woman, regardless of her age, for another country. Actual cases of coerced migration were rare, but attracted most international attention. Prostitution itself continued to be seen mostly as a necessary evil, but the story of unsuspecting girls abducted for prostitution overseas played out late nineteenth-century fears of the consequences of global mobility, most notably the breakdown of families, communities, and racial boundaries. Indeed, the very term "white slavery" connoted colonial fears of miscegenation. Thus, national and colonial prestige, not merely the fate of individual women and girls, were on the line.<sup>4</sup>

The literature's verdict on the League's CTW is itself undecided. Recent scholarship on the CTW highlights its role as a harbinger of human rights and as the first international mechanism to incorporate a feminist agenda. Feminist abolitionists held key positions within the CTW, at least in the 1920s, and managed to promote feminist causes on an international scale. The change in terminology from "white slavery" to "traffic in women," claims historian Katarina Leppänen, indicates an increased awareness of traffic in women in a global context and a rethinking of the racist assumptions of the earlier movement. This body of scholarship, however, takes at face value the rhetoric of the CTW's publications. It assumes that the CTW's investigations indeed revealed that trafficking agents bought and sold women for prostitution and that it was now equally concerned with the fate of women of all races. Barbara Metzger argues, for example, that CTW members insisted that government measures against traffic in women would not impede the personal

freedom of adult women traveling alone. What she does not notice is that such concerns were raised because country reports consistently recounted deportation of prostitutes rather than the rescue of traffic victims, and travel limitations on adult women were consistently listed in such reports as antitraffic measures. Good intentions aside, the CTW's policy recommendations and their application had little to do with the protection of women from coerced migration and coerced prostitution.<sup>5</sup>

Jean-Michel Chaumont, Paul Knepper, and Magaly Rodriguez Garcia seriously challenge the assumption that the League's reports indeed prove the existence of traffic. A careful reading of the League's archives, the CTW's drafts, and unpublished reports reveal a gap between the published conclusions and the data on which they were based. These data specified migratory networks but included very little about women bought and sold. They ascribe this gap to the abolitionist agenda of the CTW's members as well as to governments' interest in limiting the migration of "undesirables." Chaumont, for example, argues that the CTW's members were falsifying their evidence to justify their crusade against licensed brothels or against prostitution in general. Their policy recommendations helped legitimize travel restrictions on, or deportation of, "undesirables," including women traveling alone.<sup>6</sup>

My examination of the Middle East and North Africa in the CTW's archives supports the latter analysis. In addition, as I show below, it challenges the assumption that changes in terminology eliminated the racist agenda of antitraffic activism and policy. In the Middle East and North Africa, the CTW showed little interest in nonwhite women or their traffic. Country reports authored by British or French colonial authorities listed mainly the deportation of foreign prostitutes and procurers. On-the-ground investigations, for their part, concentrated mainly on European prostitutes. The League's investigators spoke no Arabic and showed little interest in migrant Syrian women, for example. I thus argue that the change of title, supposedly indicating a shift of emphasis, did not change international agendas. The CTW, like the League as a whole, was mostly reproducing colonial and racial power relations.

The CTW, then, was not an instrument for saving young women from international traffic, and I therefore do not analyze it as such. I rather use its products to study it for what it was—an instrument for gathering information on prostitution and the migration of women for prostitution. More than creating a mechanism to assist women who ended up as prostitutes, it generated discourse about prostitution, accumulated data,

and created comprehensive databases of women in prostitution and their mobility across and within national borders. The motivation and enabling conditions for this seminal effort have their roots in the establishment of the League of Nations.

## THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Founded in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, in 1920, the League of Nations was the first international body of its kind. It sought to bring together former and potential enemies and preempt armed conflicts through international arbitration. The assumption was that the trauma of World War I was powerful enough to enlist international goodwill and prevent its reoccurrence. In addition, as former empires were collapsing, the League's mechanisms were designed to guarantee the sovereignty of states born out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and at the same time protect minorities in these newly formed and often ethnically mixed states.<sup>7</sup> The Ottoman territories and former German colonies, on the other hand, were deemed incapable of self-government, at least for the time being, and were entrusted as mandates to France, Britain, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Alongside its role in the transition from a world of fallen empires to a world of nation-states, the League of Nations also had a key role in the emergence of international humanitarian norms. In the first aspect, the League's challenge was to reconcile the ideal of independent sovereign nations with the reality of interwar colonialism and unequal global division of power. The second was supposed to be secondary to the League's work, but came to be its most lasting legacy. The League came to concentrate international efforts to promote scientific and economic collaboration and contain increasing traffic in humans and drugs. More immediately, problems created by the Great War made hunger relief, disease control, refugees, and minorities, to name but a few examples, pressing questions on the international agenda. Even as the League was failing to reconcile or prevent armed conflicts or reconcile belligerents, its humanitarian operations continued unabated until the Second World War, motivated, at least in part, by an honest belief that both physical and social ills could be eliminated through international goodwill.<sup>9</sup>

This effective social and technical aspect of the League managed to create an epistemic, mostly European, even Eurocentric, community

composed of representatives of governments and voluntary organizations as well as individual experts. The League's committees made serious efforts to gather information, interrogate governments, conduct field trips, hammer out basic arrangements, and monitor compliance. The accumulation of knowledge was central to this endeavor. Based on the belief that the social sciences had the power to transform social realities, what the League's mechanisms did most effectively was gather and analyze information.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its political weakness and inability to directly affect colonial rule, it created forums in which colonial powers discussed the nature and legitimacy of that form of government. Colonial power relations were reproduced in the League itself—colonized societies were analyzed without taking part in debates that would determine their future.<sup>11</sup> The League did not provide any mechanism by which colonized or mandatory societies could communicate directly with its committees—they were simply represented by their respective mandatory powers. Nevertheless, the committees enabled anticolonial criticism to be heard in international forums and later disseminated in the world press.<sup>12</sup> To some extent, the mandate system enabled the League's committees to intervene in relations between the sovereign and its citizens, something it was unable to do for sovereign nation-states.<sup>13</sup> Another such forum was the CTW.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF THE CTW AND ITS TRAVELING COMMITTEES

The protection of women and children against international traffic was incorporated into Article 23 of the League's charter:

Members of the League: . . . c) will entrust the League with the general supervision over the execution of agreements with regard to the traffic in women and children, and the traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs

Significantly, the League's Covenant replaced the nineteenth-century terminology "white slavery" with this new one. This shift in terminology was designed to remove the racial specificity of the earlier term and thus address the plight of women of all races. The focus on "traffic in women" had immediate policy implications. It meant, however, that it targeted, in practice, the international mobility of all women traveling alone, but not prostitution itself. This was because the League could not reach a consensus

regarding prostitution or licensed houses and also because its jurisdiction was limited to the international realm. Women traveling alone were potential traffic victims to be protected or repatriated, while others were potential prostitutes to be expelled. State officials ended up implementing those policy recommendations that provided them with better control of women's mobility and sexuality as well as the regulation of undesirables.<sup>14</sup>

The International Conference on White Slave Traffic was held in 1921 and concluded with the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children. The final act of the Convention stipulated governments' duty to protect women and children traveling alone (Article 6) and recommended that governments require railways and shipping companies to display notices warning women and girls of the dangers of traffic, including indications of where they could obtain accommodation and assistance (Article 8).<sup>15</sup> The convention required every signatory nation to submit an annual report on measures taken to check traffic "so that every country may benefit by the experience of others" and to monitor compliance. With regard to mandatory or colonial territories, the responsibility was that of the colonial or mandatory power.<sup>16</sup>

Already in this historical moment, at the 1921 conference, three different positions emerged: limiting traffic but maintaining regulation, suppression of all forms of prostitution by containing the mobility of women, and abolition of regulation and all discriminatory laws targeting women. These positions followed the CTW throughout its existence and were played out in conflicts between feminist organizations, moralistic organizations, and state officials. The inclusion of these organizations in the committee brought the conflicts within antitraffic activism to the fore.<sup>17</sup>

Policy recommendations with regard to prostitution within national borders or concerning colonial policies on prostitution would have infringed on national (or colonial) sovereignty and were thus outside the League's jurisdiction. Any debate, policy recommendation, or convention was confined to policies with potentially international impact. Addressing prostitution as such was also beyond its scope of the CTW's work, rendering it unable to put colonialism into question by addressing the ways in which it enabled or facilitated prostitution. As long as regulated prostitution affected local women but not potential victims of international trade, the CTW chose not to intervene.

The Traffic in Women and Children Convention initially did not apply to the mandate territories. Already in the 1921 conference, a delegate of the British imperial government asked to exempt "Eastern countries" and "tropical colonies" from the convention's age standard. The colonies

were presented as an exception to liberal political universals. Climate conditions and social and religious customs were cited as justifications for this differential treatment.<sup>18</sup>

Following the 1921 international conference, an advisory committee was established to supervise the execution of international agreements with regard to traffic in women and children. The CTW started meeting in June 1922 and was incorporated into the Social Questions Committee in 1936. It included representatives of nine countries as well as five “assessors” or representatives of voluntary organizations: the International Bureau for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, International Women’s Organizations, the International Catholic Association for the Protection of Girls, the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, and a Protestant organization: la Fédération des Unions Nationale des Amies de la Jeune Fille.

This inclusion marks the first time voluntary organizations were recognized as legitimate political actors on the international stage and given legal status and a voice equivalent to that of country representatives. It reflected recognition of their decades-long social activism and the assumption that they represented the interests of the disenfranchised, if not of humanity itself, in a way that transcended the interests and perspectives of nation-states and colonial powers. In addition, it reflected twentieth-century professionalization of care, which meant that these organizations were seen as providing objective grassroots knowledge, which often escaped official authorities. The inclusion of voluntary organizations in such a capacity, then, reflected the kind and scope of knowledge that the committee sought to achieve.

Among these organizations, the main conflict was between the International Bureau and the International Abolitionist Federation. The former sought to regulate vice and worked in collaboration with governments, for example, in regulating the migration of women for prostitution, as well as the dissemination of obscene literature and extramarital sex more generally. The chief target of the Abolitionist Federation, on the other hand, was the global abolition of licensed prostitution.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, individual country representatives had their own personal agendas, and national governments also shared an interest in limiting immigration of so-called undesirables—whether traffickers or potential prostitutes. As Ronald Hyam argues, antitraffic movements proved effective because they were aligned with imperial authorities’ need for more effective control. In the case of migration regulations, the CTW’s concerns coincided with national and colonial policies of regulating the mobility



of undesirable women and preventing undesirable contact. Granted, these regulations had the potential of saving women and girls from scrupulous traffickers, and they may have done just that. They did, however, serve the parallel purpose of supervising the migration of undesirables.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to including voluntary organizations, the CTW broke new ground also by including women members—more, in fact, than any other League committee. By 1930, no fewer than six of its fourteen members were women.<sup>21</sup> This was not coincidental: victims of trafficking were mostly women; moreover, some of the voluntary organizations affiliated with the committee were women based and had a female representative. While the League Covenant stipulated that all positions be open equally to men and women, and while its commitment to combating sexual trafficking enabled both individual women and women's organizations to have their voices heard, the CTW went further than any other League body in enabling women's participation in diplomatic and administrative capacities.<sup>22</sup>

The inclusion of US representatives, experts, and funding also deserves comment here. Although the United States was not a League member, it had considerable influence, particularly on the League's social bodies. Americans participated as experts or assessors in these bodies, including the CTW. Charitable organizations based in the United States, particularly the Rockefeller Foundation, donated to the League. Because these aspects were much less controversial than the League's political aspects, they were also unofficially endorsed by the US government.<sup>23</sup> More specifically, the League called on the United States to participate in the CTW because it "had shown an active interest in the international measures taken for grappling with the evils of the traffic." The United States sent an unofficial representative in 1923.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to its constituent convention, the CTW formulated several major policy documents during these formative years. Already in 1922, a majority of its members supported banning foreign prostitutes from licensed houses, a move designed to reduce traffic catering to this source of demand.<sup>25</sup> A minority within the committee believed that such a policy disproportionately penalized foreign prostitutes in countries that legalized prostitution, limited the mobility of all women traveling alone, and gave too much power to state officials and brothel keepers over individual prostitution. The French representative, moreover, argued that such measures infringed on state sovereignty and that they were ineffective because they merely forced foreign women to resort to clandestine brothels.<sup>26</sup>

The question of the mandates, already debated in the CTW's founding conference, resurfaced in its works during its formative period.

Women's organizations wrote to the CTW and asked for the convention to apply to the mandate territories. "We have frequently been informed that the reason why the convention is not enforced in those territories is because traffic does not exist, but on pressing the matter we learn that in many cases this is the case only because the moral condition of the people is so bad that actual traffic is superfluous," wrote Katherine Bompass, headquarters secretary of the International Women Suffrage Alliance, urging the Council of the League of Nation to reconsider the application of the convention to mandate territories.<sup>27</sup> Great Britain acceded to the convention with respect to Palestine in 1931.<sup>28</sup> France acceded on behalf of Syria and Lebanon on May 28, 1930.<sup>29</sup>

This realm of colonial sovereignty had several implications on prostitution in the Middle East and North Africa. Most countries in the region were represented by their respective colonial or mandatory powers, namely France and Britain. The colonial powers were authorized to determine regulatory policies with regard to both prostitution and migration. Local inhabitants therefore had neither a say on regulation policies nor the means to mobilize the international community against them. The other implication was that country reports were prepared mainly by colonial police forces, and investigations for the CTW were conducted by investigators who spoke none of the local languages and thus interviewed mainly colonial officials and foreign procurers.

One of the main written products of the CTW was compilations of reports submitted to the League's secretariat annually by dozens of countries regarding the implementation of the 1921 convention. Notably, when the League of Nations' experts were asked to report what nations were doing to curtail trafficking, or when the annual reports themselves detailed such measures, what they actually described were measures to control the migration of unaccompanied women.<sup>30</sup>

The written products of the CTW in its formative years illustrate, moreover, a conceptual ambiguity regarding terminology. This ambiguity was both ideological and practical: the definition of its mandate affected the ability to reach a consensus between League members, as well as the ability to create agreed-on rules that would not infringe on individual countries' sovereignty. Committee members and representatives of voluntary organizations debated the very definition of traffic and, consequently, who should be protected and who could (or should) be left alone.

In a letter to the CTW, British feminist Alison Neilans, general secretary of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, commented that a

definition that included willing women would be more desirable than one limited to victims of coercion or fraud: "Few people seem to realize that the real traffic in women, which must be combated, is a trade in willing women who are moved about from place to place simply as a matter of business, in order to satisfy the desire of men for change and variety in the personnel of women who minister to their physical appetite." Traffic in women would then be portrayed not as a crime by a few greedy traffickers and rare occasions of abducted minors, but rather as a trade "capitalized by the numbers of quite ordinary men, who are willing to pay a prostitute for her services."<sup>31</sup> In other words, the implications were that every man who paid a prostitute was in fact financing a trafficker. For practical and ideological reasons, then, the CTW preferred ambiguity, which allowed hard-core abolitionists, moralists, and state representatives to sit around the same table and promote their respective agendas. This ambiguity, I believe, was intentional.

The 1924 expert committee and the traveling commission it sent out marked a conceptual and epistemological shift in the CTW's work: fact-finding missions were supposed to bypass self-presentation in the form of country reports and attain the objective proof. The American unofficial representative, Grace Abbott, suggested earlier, in 1923, that the fight against traffic could proceed only from a platform of socioscientific fact finding. Formal reports, she claimed, were not sufficient because they said very little about the implementation and success of official policies and because individual governments did not have the tools for such a social inquiry. Uruguayan delegate Dr. Paulina Luisi suggested focusing on port cities.<sup>32</sup> In the ensuing debate, several government representatives objected to fact-finding missions as potentially infringing on their national sovereignty.<sup>33</sup>

As noted above, the League's social committees, including the CTW, reflected a belief that the meeting of minds could help eliminate disease and social evils. Similarly, the rationale of the traveling commission was to establish the truth about traffic, providing the League and the international community with the necessary information for international collaboration against it. Its aim was to create a nongovernmental, supranational alliance of minds committed to the truth rather than to national agendas.<sup>34</sup>

The first traveling commission was made up of American researchers and was financed and supervised by the America Bureau of Social Hygiene. Its director was Bascom Johnson, head of the Bureau's legal affairs section.<sup>35</sup> The commission's methodology followed previous work

by American researchers—George Kneeland’s study on commercial prostitution in New York City and Abraham Flexner’s study on prostitution in Europe—that relied mainly on undercover visits of brothels, bars, and hotels of disrepute and reported the role of police corruption in enabling the exploitation of women. The traveling commission relied on contacts Kneeland had established in New York, mainly in the Jewish underworld, for reference in other locales. Indeed, this starting point, and the fact that two of the three commission members, Samuel Auerbach and Paul Kinsie (who had previously worked for Kneeland) knew Yiddish, resulted in an overrepresentation of Jews in the report, and some of the subsequent criticism against the report was indeed related to this bias.<sup>36</sup>

Conceptually, the traveling commission followed Flexner’s focus on licensed brothels as centers of traffic.<sup>37</sup> A questionnaire prepared by the CTW’s Belgian member, Isidore Maus, outlined the kind of information the investigators were supposed to collect, thus predefining the categories of analysis to conform to international conventions. They were therefore required to report the number of traffic victims; distinguish between adults and minors (and then between those younger and older than sixteen); and classify prostitutes into those who had consented, been misled, or coerced to take the journey. Then trade routes were to be mapped: countries of origin and destination, and any correlation with the licensing system—as contributing to supply or demand—had to be noted. Another set of questions was related to ruses and ploys of procuring and inducing women and girls to travel abroad, and methods used to circumvent migration restrictions in both the country of origin and the country of destination. Finally, the questionnaire inquired about measures taken by state authorities to supervise women’s travel, to warn them against the dangers of international traffic, or to rescue them on arrival, indeed assuming that these women wanted to be saved—already reflecting a clear bias of the report.<sup>38</sup>

This questionnaire relied on a definition of traffic that included only cases of underage girls and coerced migration of adult women. It was to trace and map such cases but in practice documented much more. The final product said a lot about migration of women for prostitution, and very little, if anything, about abduction, coercion, or underage girls.

The investigators visited a total of 28 countries and 112 cities and districts and interviewed hundreds of people in Europe, the Americas, and around the Mediterranean. Paul Kinsie visited the Middle East and North Africa (see Figure 1.1 for his route and dates of visits). Equipped with letters of introduction from the secretary general of the League of

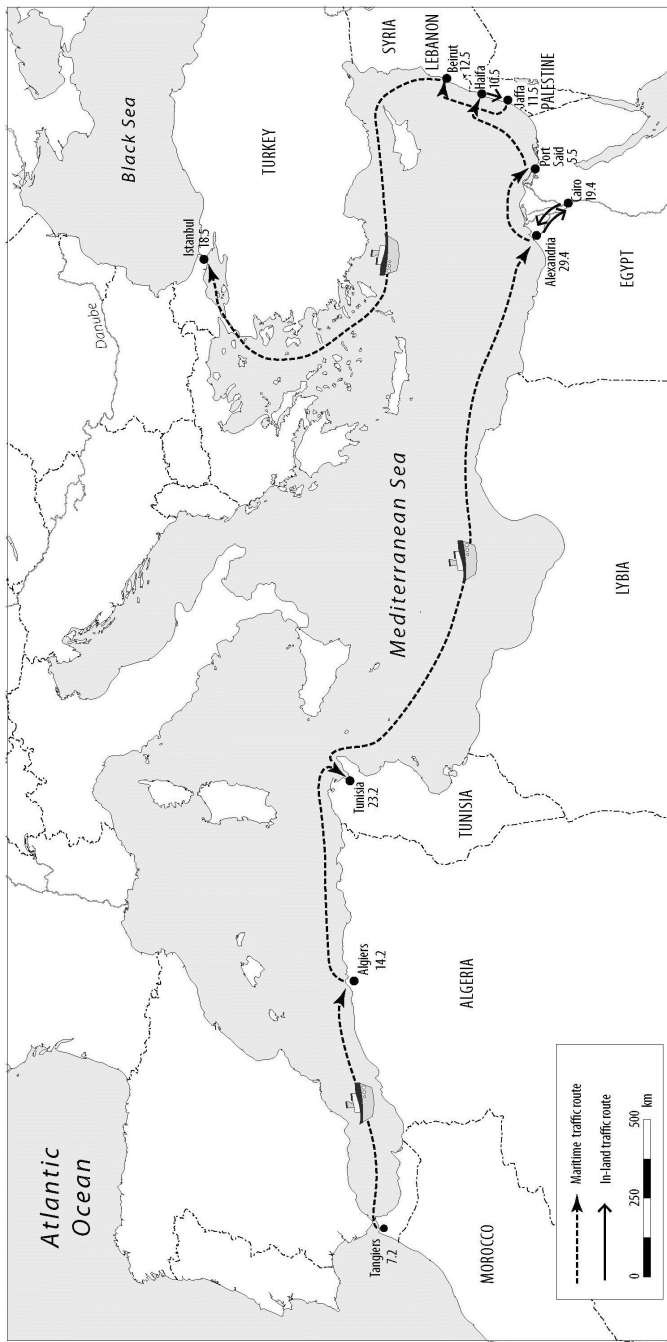


Figure 1.1. The traveling commission's Mediterranean route. (Prepared by the computational geography center, The Hebrew University)

Nations, the investigators introduced themselves to local authorities, who, in turn, presented them to their subordinates. These were police, immigration, and health officials in charge of registration, policing, and inspection of prostitutes. The investigators also met consuls of European nations and representatives of European voluntary organizations combating traffic.<sup>39</sup> Alongside such official meetings, the investigators visited licensed and clandestine brothels, hotels, cafés, and cabarets frequented by prostitutes and procurers. Some of these visits were accompanied by local police, and many others were independent. The investigators thus managed to interview dozens of procurers, brothel keepers, and prostitutes.<sup>40</sup>

To establish the existence of traffic, Kinsie asked procurers he had met for help smuggling a seventeen-year-old French girl for prostitution in local brothels.<sup>41</sup> In Port Said, Alexandria, and Beirut, local procurers offered him advice and assistance, and in Beirut and Tangier, he also found a brothel keeper who agreed to accept a seventeen-year-old in her house.<sup>42</sup> To convince the investigator that a seventeen-year old could be safely brought to Cairo, he was introduced to foreign underage prostitutes around the city. He also used this pretext to have procurers show him around local establishments, supposedly for his newcomer girl.<sup>43</sup> His findings include ample data on the geography of international traffic as seen from the perspective of procurers and, to a lesser extent, brothel keepers and prostitutes.

As much as the official letter of introduction facilitated the investigator's interaction with state officials, contacts established in one locale were instrumental in gaining the confidence of procurers elsewhere. Thus, for example, in Cairo, Kinsie used a letter of introduction he had gotten from a procurer in Paris; upon arrival in Port Said, he met a French procurer who had been recommended to him by procurers in Alexandria; an acquaintance from Port Said gained him the trust of a Beirut-based French procurer; and, in Istanbul, Kinsie contacted procurers recommended to him in Cairo. Such local contact persons then introduced him to their colleagues.<sup>44</sup> Not all contact persons were procurers, however. In Istanbul, he befriended a Russian prostitute who had been brought up in London and thus spoke English fluently.<sup>45</sup> In Tangier, Kinsie found a local guide who took him to the various brothels around the city.<sup>46</sup>

Even before looking into the commission's findings, its routes and travel experiences can tell us much about the realities of interwar international travel. Equipped with American passports and letters of reference, the investigators traveled uninterrupted across borders that many others

could not cross. Like Baudelaire's proverbial *flâneur*, they navigated urban spaces, between official interlocutors and shady criminals, in a journey whose conclusions would change the ways in which women could travel internationally.<sup>47</sup>

The traveling commission's methodology had its limitations. The investigators did not speak the native languages of most countries visited, in this case, mainly Arabic. They also spoke none of the native tongues of the largest European foreign communities in the region, namely Romanian, Russian, Greek, and Italian, and their informers were therefore mostly English, French, or Yiddish speakers. Kinsie did have some knowledge of Turkish, which provided him with contact persons in Istanbul, who "knew personally most of the disorderly housekeepers, procurers, traffickers, etc., although not in that line of business themselves."<sup>48</sup> In Tunis, this also enabled him to present himself as a Turk ("with the aid of a fez") in order to circumvent the local ban on Muslim prostitutes having sex with non-Muslim clients.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, Kinsie had a hard time communicating with prostitutes, and he interviewed mainly procurers. Posing as a trafficker, he rarely initiated a sympathetic conversation with a prostitute, as he feared raising suspicion as to his real motivation: "It was not possible for the investigator to question pertinently all prostitutes whom he met who appeared to be under 21 years of age, inasmuch as he was usually in the company of *souteneurs* and thereby might arouse their suspicions." It is unclear from this whether he actually posed as a client and had sexual interactions with prostitutes. In his reports on the Middle East and North Africa, there is no mention of sexual exchange.<sup>50</sup>

Kinsie, moreover, complained about the difficulty navigating and mapping Middle Eastern and North African cities. In Port Said, Tangier, and Beirut, he noted, none of the streets or alleyways had name plates, and houses had no numbers. In Istanbul, streets had no signs in English, as the Latin script was adopted in Turkey only later in the decade.<sup>51</sup> Other than these comments, we know only a little about the challenges the investigators faced in their clandestine work. In Alexandria, for example, Kinsie was asked to show his passport to make sure he had a valid one and was not wanted by the police in his country of origin, but had to refuse to avoid revealing his real identity.<sup>52</sup>

Contemporary observers and reformers, as well as scholarly works written since, debated both the definition of traffic and its very existence. If traffic in women meant abducting women and children and forcing

them into prostitution, little evidence existed that such a practice was prevalent in the interwar period. As shown in the following chapters, most of the cases presented in official reports and the CTW's findings are of women and girls who migrated to other countries for prostitution: many of them had been prostitutes before migrating and traveled to places where income was more available, where family supervision was nonexistent, or where colonial privilege kept them above the law. If traffic of women was defined as prostitution of women in a country in which they were foreigners and travel facilitated by a man or a woman who also benefited from the transaction, then there were many relevant cases. The ambiguity of the term, however, was central to public, legal, and later scholarly debates. Typical of this ambiguity, one of the Turkish officials Kinsie interviewed indicated his doubts about the existence of "an organized traffic in women and children in or from Turkey, although there is no doubt a traffic in women who are already prostitutes."<sup>53</sup> Another one indicated that

there is no organized traffic in innocent girls to Istanbul at present, but that certain procurers go to some other countries to marry girls and after making certain promises to them bring them to Istanbul or other cities outside of Turkey, and induce them to enter a life of prostitution.<sup>54</sup>

Two years after the traveling commission had completed its investigation, the CTW's special experts committee submitted a two-part report that purportedly mapped worldwide traffic in women. This report selectively quoted investigators' reports and added its conclusions. The main conclusion was that traffic did exist, even if not in the form of organized crime, and that licensed houses facilitate it.<sup>55</sup> The fact that investigators failed to trace evidence of large-scale abduction and fraud was sidelined as the CTW extended the definition of traffic to include consenting adults and exaggerated the extent of coerced traffic. The final report, moreover, used evidence selectively to prove the existence of trafficking.<sup>56</sup>

Country representatives to the League of Nations criticized the report for privileging the testimonies of underworld characters over those of state officials. The French government protested both the use of criminals as a reliable source and the practice of interviewing them without the presence of state officials. It also criticized what it saw as overrepresentation of France, Marseille, and French procurers in the report. In



addition, the French government noted that, although the CTW's mandate was to examine international traffic, its investigators extended it to include national policies of regulated brothels: it thus infringed on national sovereignty, as originally feared by some delegates, yet again particularly targeted French or Latin countries, a criticism shared by South American representatives. Alongside the French government protest, several governments attacked the reports' conclusions, given the fact that only a handful of cases in the voluminous report actually attested to the existence of traffic, and most dealt with the migration of consenting women. Jewish organizations also criticized the overrepresentation of Jews in the report, which fueled anti-Semitic propaganda.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of these and other criticisms, the traveling commission's report was widely disseminated and frequently cited in later reports and had important policy implications, including the CTW's policy recommendations and later reports.<sup>58</sup> Its limitations notwithstanding, it certainly mapped foreign prostitution worldwide and serves as an informative basis for chapters 2 and 3.

The conclusions of the first traveling commission led to two main policy recommendations: one was targeting licensed houses, or regulated prostitution, as a contributing factor to traffic in women; and the other was the elimination of the age limit from the antitraffic convention so as to enable more effective protection of traffic victims regardless of age and also without the need to prove coercion or fraud—a convention that was eventually signed in 1933. This period also witnessed a reevaluation of the CTW's earlier methodologies and recommendations on the questions of repatriation and the reliability of country reports.

As for licensed houses, two CTW studies on the abolition of licensed brothels, published in 1930 and 1934, mapped national legislations that replaced licensed houses in an attempt to determine which system would be most effective, and submitted recommendations to that effect. These reports followed, in spirit, the conclusions and recommendations of the traveling commission and concluded that while most countries had abandoned the system of licensed houses, many preserved other aspects of regulation of individual prostitutes, and a few provided both men and women with voluntary and free medical treatment. The 1930 report studied licensing systems in fifteen different countries and concluded that regulation was no longer medically justified and that licensed houses hampered efforts to stop women from entering prostitution.<sup>59</sup> Both reports asserted that abolition did not result in an increase in the incidence of

venereal diseases, thus discrediting one of the major rationales for regulation.<sup>60</sup> Importantly for our purpose, the CTW's reports included mostly European systems and hardly any colonial or semicolonial ones. For Egypt, for example, the 1934 report merely stated that no data were submitted because Egypt was in the process of reevaluating its regulatory system, a process that was to end only in 1949.<sup>61</sup>

By the late 1920s, the main topic of debate was repatriation, a euphemism for the expulsion of prostitutes. The interest of certain countries in ridding themselves of so-called undesirable women outweighed humanitarian concerns related to the well-being of traffic victims or prostitutes in general.<sup>62</sup> Members of the CTW were well aware of the problems migration regulations had created, particularly for repatriated prostitutes and potential traffic victims. Repatriation was protective and expulsion was punitive, but both essentially involved removing a woman from the country where she worked and returning her to her country of origin. Maus, the Belgian representative, contended that repatriation, when used to expel foreign prostitutes, was an unduly harsh penalty, especially when imposed in countries that did not criminalize prostitution.<sup>63</sup> The committee concluded, moreover, that "the expulsion of a foreign prostitute was not a solution to the problem of disposing of such an undesirable person," and some members argued that deportations were "both cruel towards the woman against whom they were directed and difficult to reconcile with the spirit of cooperation between states."<sup>64</sup>

Another dilemma was related to the country reports and their usefulness. In a 1931 meeting of the CTW, American representative S. M. Harris observed that different governments interpreted the questionnaire in different ways, with some reporting only international cases and not national ones, although information about national cases was "extremely useful, in order to ensure comparability and to enable the committee to ascertain whether the number of cases was increasing or decreasing."<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the reports produced by the committees and governments were only partly concerned with international traffic in women. More often, they mapped prostitution and state policies in individual countries. Because the committee's questionnaire was open to interpretation, certain country reports contained information that was, strictly speaking, irrelevant. The Iraqi reports, for example, were laconic and contained little information about prostitution, local or foreign. Instead, the Iraqi report for 1927, for instance, contained information about sodomy, mostly involving Iraqi boys, and no international dimension. Reports for Syria and Lebanon, on the

other hand, listed cases of rape and “corruption of minors,” which, again, had little to do with international traffic in women.<sup>66</sup> These reports attest to colonial policies on sexual violence and pederasty but say little about traffic or prostitution.

The traveling commission to the East launched in 1932 addressed critiques arising from the work of its predecessor. The focus on Asia was designed to compensate for the absence of Asia, with the exception of the Levant, from the first report. Criticism of the clandestine method used by the first investigating team, which infringed on the sovereignty of national and colonial governments, was addressed by relying almost exclusively on correspondence with governments. The traveling commission to the East worked in close collaboration with national or colonial authorities and avoided the undercover interviews that had given the first commission’s report its anecdotal edge and first-person feel. The first commission’s report had embarrassed governments and touched on domestic politics, which the second refrained from doing from the outset.

The initial mission of the traveling commission to the East relied on the assumption of difference—the “profound difference of mentality between East and West and even between different Eastern countries”—which was important to bear carefully in mind “in determining the nature and extent of the enquiries to be made and the methods to be followed in conducting the investigation.”<sup>67</sup> Other than this rhetorical gesture, the composition of the traveling commission to the East was not significantly different from the first: it was exclusively Western. Although the CTW had emphasized the importance of employing an investigator with some personal experience in “these countries,” the commission was composed of Western men, and this time one woman as well.<sup>68</sup>

The traveling commission was composed of the American Bascom Johnson, the Swedish Dr. Alma Sundquist, and the Polish diplomat Karol Pindór. Starting from Japan and traveling along the Asian ports of China, Indochina, Indonesia, and India, the commission visited Tehran and Bushehr in late January 1932, Baghdad in early February, and then Damascus, Beirut, and Haifa in March (see Figure 1.2).<sup>69</sup> Local governments paid for their train fares and appointed liaison agents to facilitate the commission’s inquiries. The interaction with them was variously described in terms of “initial mistrust” and “sometimes long friendship.”<sup>70</sup>

The methods employed by the first commission were abandoned: “Representatives of the various governments, particularly those with Eastern possessions, pointed out the danger which might be involved by

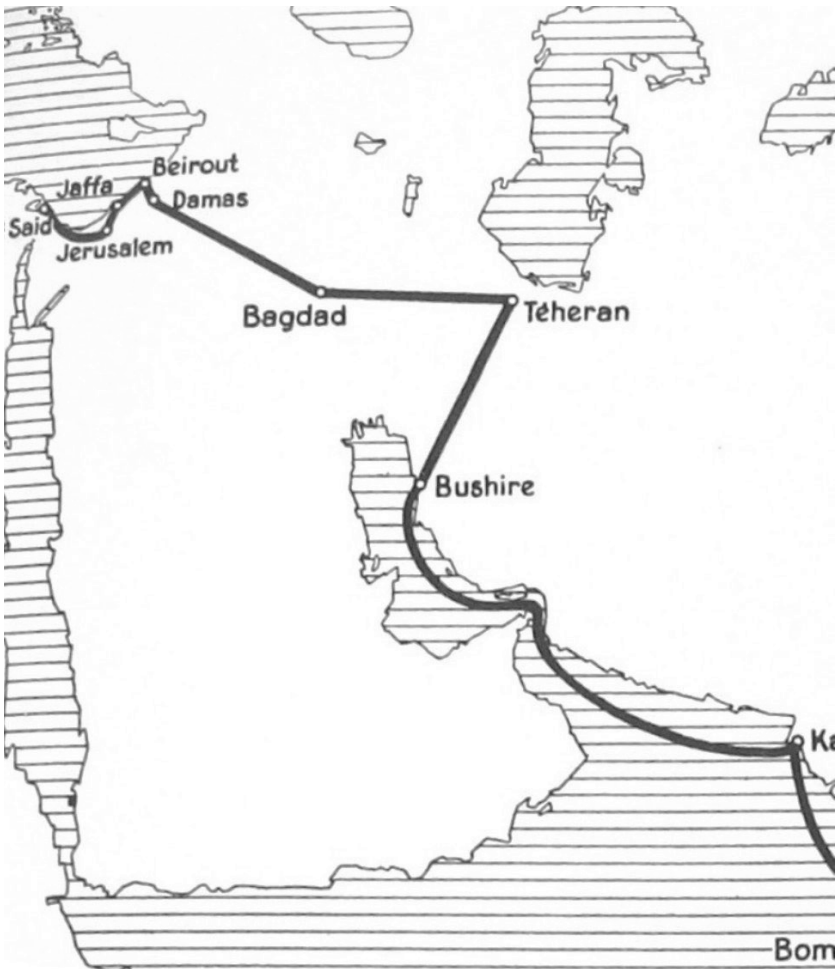


Figure 1.2. A segment from the traveling commission's itinerary map.<sup>72</sup>

certain methods used in the previous enquiry in the East. If the committee of enquiry feels that it should employ an agent to obtain secret information it ought to reach an agreement with the official representative of the country visited and obtain their consent beforehand.”<sup>71</sup>

Its mandate was also limited to international, rather than national, aspects of prostitution: “The committee realizes, however, that it is very difficult to separate the international from the national traffic. If they need