The league of nations as an imperial assemblage: coloniality, indirect rule and the actualization of 'International Law'

Ahmed Raza Memon

School of Law and Politics, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK
Email: memona@cardiff.ac.uk

Abstract

In this article, I reconceptualise the League of Nations as an Imperial Assemblage that embeds and is embedded by coloniality. Relying on the return to the League's historisisation by Third World Approaches to International Law, I argue that we can understand the League as a governance body that works across scales of international, transnational and local actors, processes and structures to reiterate coloniality within the mandated territories. I utilise Deleuzian notions of assemblage alongside the concept of 'coloniality' within the literature of decolonial theory within International Relations and Sociology to show how the work of the League's various actors, processes and structures across different scales made, actualised and evolved the laws on Forced Labour and Slavery from 1925 to 1932 in the inter-war era with a particular focus on Mandate Territories B and C.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I reconceptualise the League of Nations in the history of international law as an imperial assemblage of transnational colonial actors across public/private spheres. My approach is inspired by, while taking further, contentions to return to the League of Nations as a site of international legal history (Tzouvala, Greenman, Bogliolo and Orford 2020) to understand the nature of international legal institutions in different ways. While the return to the League has been framed in various ways through critical international legal approaches ranging from the history of governance (Sinclair 2018), to Third World Approaches to International Law (Anghie 2001), to Marxist historical sociology (Knox 2020, Hammoudi 2022, Tzouvala 2020, Taha 2016), my reading of the League of Nations suggests a reconceptualisation of how the first international legal institution operated in practice as an imperial assemblage.

This suggestion furthers a provocation brought by Luis Eslava to comment on how indirect rule operated as a localised transformation of colonies through anthropological 'education' by the League's administrators (Eslava 2018). Taking the example of Bantu Cinema Education experiments conducted by the International Missionary Council in mandates of East and Central Africa as a technique of indirect rule to 'transform the native', Eslava motions us towards the multiplicities and mobilities of a disaggregated nature of international order we can even see in today's international governance. This analysis leaves open and invites us to further think about the nature of international organisation itself, i.e. its institutional operation, processes and

structure. My argument takes this invitation in more depth to argue that the nature of the League itself can be conceptualised as an imperial assemblage that iterates coloniality.

I take the conceptualisation of the League as an assemblage that Stephen Legg has used to describe how it has worked across scales and state 'apparatus' (Legg 2009). Legg's notion of the League as an assemblage draws on bringing together Deleuzian perspective on assemblage with Foucault's' 'apparatus' in order to respond to the criticism that a heterogenous and open notion of assemblage occludes power and politics (Legg 2011). By using Foucault's notion of apparatus, Legg suggests that we could still include notions of power and politics without resorting to 'essentialist' and closed structural analysis that is paradoxical to the concept of assemblage.

However, my use of 'assemblage' here diverges in that instead of bringing the idea of assemblage with the Foucauldian concept of 'apparatus', I rely instead on the concept of coloniality as described within decolonial literature within sociology of International Relations and Political Economy. This particular literature (Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, 2022) articulates the colonial not as a closed political objective or event but a process of transformation, i.e. coloniality of knowledge and of power (Quijano 2000). I utilise these conceptual frames together with assemblage in this case differently to Legg. Legg's reliance on notions of 'power' through Foucault deracinate and frame an imperial ordering of world in euro-centric and western frames of social analysis.[1]

Here, I am not relying on colonialism merely as an event or structure. Instead I use the concept 'coloniality', which is a process of world making and 'knowledge' that is continuously evolving and shifts in terms of space/time. Therefore, in my conceptualisation of the League as an assemblage, I describe it as an imperial assemblage that cuts across scales through actors, processes, and structures in order to reiterate coloniality. The concept of coloniality is not about inequality based on 'difference' – i.e. racial, cultural, gendered – and therefore an inclusion of 'difference' into the 'universal' to resolve the inequality. This endeavour of showing how international law reaffirms and reproduces inequality-based 'difference' is brilliantly explored by TWAIL scholarship, but the concept of coloniality is concerned with the material, epistemological and social processes through which the 'difference' is made in the first place. As a multidimensional concept, it thus concerns itself with how race (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2022; Reinaga 1969; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, Maldonado-Torres 2007; Wynter 2003; Kearney 2014; Bartholomew 2020[2]), gender/sex (Lugones 2016; Oyěwùmí 1997), and class (Grosfoguel 2009) are intertwined and constitutive products of a particular epistemological project of Euro-Western modernity tied to material social processes.[3]

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[1] For limitations of Foucauldian analysis of 'knowledge' and 'power', see, for example, D. Ferreira da Silva, 'Before man: Sylvia Wynter's rewriting of the modern episteme.' *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis* (2015): 90–105. For other uses of assemblage in a way to articulate class and race analysis, see, for example, M. DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and A. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014).

[2] All references to Reigana's works, originally in Spanish, are taken from translations of primary materials in Kearney, Patrick Louis Williams. *Insurgent Legacy Fausto Reinaga and the Indian Revolution* (San Diego: University of California, 2014).

[3] While coloniality is often traced as a conceptual term to Anibal Quijano, others such as Sylvia Rivera-Cusicanqui, Odin Avila Rojas and Jake Bartholomew point out an older use of the concept as part of the Indigenous scholarly tradition of the Andes region and anti-colonial practices of Fausto Reigana and Mexican sociologist Pablo Gonzales Casanova. See, for example, the origins of the term discussed in Cusicanqui, Silvia Rivera. 'Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A reflection on the practices and discourses of decolonization.' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (2012): 95–109 and Bartholomew, Jake M. 'Decoloniality as an ethical challenge.' *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9 (2020). 'Coloniality' as a term also found a more expansive use in Black Caribbean theory by Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Sylvia Wynter, in particular by bridging Fanon to the Black Caribbean histories of transatlantic slavery and the 1492 Conquest of New Indies.See, for example, Wynter, Sylvia. 'Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation – An argument.' *CR: The new centennial review* 3 (2003): 257–337 and Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 'On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept.' *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 240–270. In the context of African continent, scholars such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni bring coloniality in conversation with broader Africana studies which focus on the scramble for Africa, the inter-war era and decolonisation as well as an emphasis on

As coloniality is a process of Euro-Western modernity, the League conceptualised as a form of social governance – i.e. an imperial assemblage that reiterates coloniality – means that it is not simply an agnostic 'tool' of colonial governance. It is a space where 'relation of force', to borrow Rivera's terminology (Cusicanqui 2012), is engendered through authority and control in social and political organisations emblematic of Euro-Western modernity and technocratic rationality, which are co-constitutive of coloniality. Essentially, these social processes of governance – i.e. forms of organisation such as committees, expert bodies, institutional structures of authority – not just configure and reiterate but are engendered by 'coloniality'. Thus, in this article, the structures, institutions and processes of international legal order themselves are conceptualised as dimensions of 'coloniality' (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992) instead of empty vessels of power.

I explain this re-conceptualisation of the League through first showing how at the very basis of the League's constitution, the distinction between supposed 'trans-governmental functions' from its international administration of colonial territories underscored the significance of the role played by the processes, actors, and organizational structures of the League. These processes, actors and structures, are defined as the imperial assemblage that both actualises international legal rules within the colonies based on racial difference and produces the underlying notion of 'difference'. Importantly, this imperial assemblage that actualises norms then further reproduces itself through generating its own logic of administrative and technocratic rationale – emblematic of coloniality – in the mandates locally. In this manner, it shows how questions of colonial governance were not strictly based on 'territoriality', but on law-making and actualisation of the law, which included various social processes, institutions and actors that cut across territorial constraints as well as a 'public/private' or 'trans-national' and 'international' divide. It also thus shows how social processes of governance, i.e. the League as an imperial assemblage, is a dimension of coloniality that re-deploys itself to reiterate its logic of Euro-Western modernity through technocratic rationality of governance through direct and indirect authority, control and coercion. Conceptualising the League in this manner also brings attention to the importance of understanding how international organisations operated in their earlier forms, which gives us an indication of how 'global governance' operates in the present times.

In the first section, I show how the rise of internationalism in the early 20th Century, and particularly imperial internationalism, culminated in the formation and foundations of the League of Nations. Using secondary sources that rely on archival material and historical literature on the League, my objective here is to bring to the fore literature written across disciplines of history and global governance in order to present a re-conceptualisation of the operation of the League within the discipline of international law and the history of international organisations. To demonstrate how this conceptualisation is hidden behind the constitutional separation of transgovernmental actions and mandate governance, I begin with a focus on the interplay of two separate Articles of the League's Covenant that enshrine two functions of colonial governance, i.e. Mandated Territories and Transgovernmental functions (i.e. Art. 22 and Art 23). Transgovernmental or transnational functions of the League, i.e. the social, humanitarian economic agendas, were meant to bring the rest of the world, i.e. colonised territories, into modernity and were presented as a separate 'purpose' of the League. However, their operation relied most heavily on the racialised hierarchy of the colonial mandate system, i.e. Art. 22. By revealing the functioning of the League's transnationalism as underpinned by the same logic of guiding the world into modernity, we also understand that the imperial governance through mandates commissions did not operate in a silo of its own.

In the second section I explore how, firstly, different sets of literature have already begun examining the League's departments through more horizontal and networked conceptualisations. Specifically, how the League's norm making in the language of modernity within its committees was being defined by 'experts'. This included not just committees that would rely on a network of

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distinct epistemological traditions of African political philosophy; see, for example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 'Genealogies of coloniality and implications for Africa's development.' *Africa Development* **40** (2015): 13–40.

experts from within the League but outside of it, but also those that would create further administrative and technocratic structures to operationalise its norms transnationally. Moving away from the internal, committee-focused approach to understanding a specific function, I instead turn towards how this civilising objective of the transgovernmental functions was the same underlying principle behind establishing the mandate system under the guise of the 'objective' rational mask of apolitical 'expertise'. Specifically, this bifurcation of technical and political, as already also identified by Taha in her work on the ILO's experts in Egypt (Taha 2016), in this section is brought to reflect on the institutional operation beyond just the one body/committee, to an assemblage of actors, processes and practices.

Here, I come to the main part of my argument where I show exactly the League's works as an imperial assemblage that reiterates coloniality within mandated territories through generating technocratic and administrative rationale in order to transform – and define – native life. As an example to demonstrate this reconceptualisation, I rely on the archival narrative[4] of the making of the Slavery Convention 1926 and the Forced Labour Convention 1930. I show how specific committees, institutions, personalities and procedures, within and outside the League, created these norms. In order to do so, I focus on primary archival material from a range of sources within the League of Nations' online archival repository, including the minutes of the League of Nations Temporary Committee on Antislavery, the Permanent Mandates Commission annual meetings, Mandate powers' reports to the Expert Committee on Anti Slavery 1932, communications from the United States on Mandates, the Report on Slavery by the International Labour Organisation 1926 and the Inquiry Commission on Forced Labour in Liberia 1930. This exceptionalisation of native 'labour', then, is not just about the inequality based on 'racial' difference but also characterises the making of this difference under Euro-Modern Western rationality i.e. coloniality. More clearly, it shows how the social governance process, i.e. the imperial assemblage that makes the exception, is itself a dimension of coloniality in a way that it operates to control, i.e. self-authorise, the creation of the racial difference in the first place. Unlike recent literature on the development of the Native Labour Code, which focuses only on the theoretical and discursive implications of exceptionalising forced labour as violence on racialised and colonised subjects (Hammoudi 2022), the purpose of my article is to show exactly how an international organisation operates in order to perpetuate such violence and what that tells us about the practice and nature of an international organisation and international law itself in history.

In the third section, I turn to the actualisation of these conventions within mandated territories 'B' and 'C', between 1925 and 1935, including, specifically, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Sudan and the Northern Gold Coast. This particular section focuses on the actualisation of these laws through both an assemblage of actors, institutions and structures – and also the generative character of the League's assemblage to reproduce coloniality by embedding further administrative and technocratic assemblages within territories to transform local native life. This transformation reiterates coloniality within these territories by propounding violence that is both epistemological, to the core of local life, and also compounded by 'law and order' as direct violence.

This article speaks to previous works on returning to the League to reframe our present understandings of the history and conceptualisation of international law and international organisations. In particular, it takes forward the Third World Approaches to International Law argument of the inter-connection between imperialism and international law (Anghie 2007) while recognising the opportunity to develop a sociologically informed understanding of how

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[4]While archival work of the League, and other sources of imperial power, will always have its silences, my narrative here is a reading against the grain and in between the lines of these sources to signify the practice of the League itself through the theoretical and methodological insights of historical sociology in TWAIL and the conceptual vocabulary of decolonial literature. On archival work on the League that is cognizant of its limitations due to the silences of the archives, see, for example, Taha, Mai. 'Reading "class" in international law: The labor question in interwar Egypt.' *Social & Legal Studies* **25** (2016): 567–589.

institutional practice and governance operate across multiple scales and registers. Thus the article provides a renewed theoretical framework on conceptualising international organisations and their interactions across scales of state to local through archival material and interdisciplinary histories of development in the inter-war era. In doing so it also intercedes in and complicates conversations on the separation of 'transnational' and 'international' regimes of legal regulation in public and private spheres (Canfield et al 2021; Zumbansen 2012).

2. The League as an international government: Institutionalisation of imperial internationalism

A. The discourse on internationalisation of imperialism

The notion of Imperial International Society or earlier forms of international organisations present before the First World War, emerged particularly in relation to colonial governance by European Powers over colonies. The notion of inter-imperial collaboration was not the only aspect of imperial governance that found purchase amongst European powers (Craven 2015; Harlow and Carter 2003; Mutua 1994) but due to various factors such as expansion of colonial territories leading to legislative and administrative challenges (Burroughs 1999) and technologies of industrial boom (Kubicek 1999), new techniques of governance such as indirect rule (Dalta 2015; Mantena 2010; Mamdani 2018; Myers 2008; Reynolds 2001) became important modalities of imperialism. Indirect rule also fit within changing political and legal thinking on liberal imperialism in the 20th Century, i.e. imperial pluralism (Benton and Ross 2013; Pagden 2005).

Furthermore, the proliferation of imperial 'contracts' in the form of unequal treaties (Keene 2012; Porter 1999; Press 2017) with colonised communities integrated forms of territorial control that shifted from the discourse of 'conquest' to 'trusteeship' (Bain 2003). Treaty making in particular territories was marked by unequal terms based on civilisational rhetoric, which also meant that treaty making differentiated on racial lines across different colonies (Belmessous 2014). In territories in Africa, this was marked by inter-imperial rivalry over trade routes under the guise of anti-slavery abolition laws (Keene 2012; Porter 1999), where particularly the British Empire utilized anti-slavery laws to form treaties which allowed naval, administrative control of important ports, territories of trade across the African continent. In the Indian Subcontinent it was mediated through a recognition of princely states as semi-civilised sovereignties (Singh 2020). Treaty making thus also resulted in different territorial relationships in the inter-war era – hence marking the notable difference between African territories and Latin American territories which achieved political decolonization as well as semi-colonies like Egypt, South Asia and the broader Arab world.

The 19th Century 'concert of Europe', that is, an informal relation for the maintaining of global legal order epitomized most clearly in the Berlin Conference, was seen to be one example of the internationalisation of global legal order. Regulation over war (i.e. the Geneva Convention of 1864), trans-boundary formations of non-state actors such as the International Red Cross in 1864 and the Universal Post Union (1878) were other examples that called for a globally regulated convention or formalized set of rules for the international society (Armstrong et al 2004).

The discursive shift towards an 'international society' where imperialism was about benevolent 'progress' over 'uncivilised populations' was already established alongside transnational formations amongst imperial powers (Schroeder 1986). Critical legal scholarship that has returned to this history has questioned the assumption of territorial integrity as an egalitarian concept and the idea of the 'universalisation' of the international society as manufactured for the assimilation of colonial dependencies at the turn of the 20th Century (Anghie 2001). The underlying notion of protection of natives in the Berlin Conference was to make the civilising mission a global, international obligation held by European powers. It is for these reasons that William Bain refers to the Berlin Conference and its aftermath as the time of 'internationalisation of trusteeship' (Bain 2003). The same scepticism applies also to the codification of rules of war in

the Hague Conference of 1899 and 1907 (Jochnick and Normand 1994). Internationalisation of rules and the historiography constructed around it are criticized for ignoring the inequality on which the international legal thinking was based at the time as it corresponded to the imperialist civilising discourse of the 20th Century.

While these discursive legal critiques hold true and have shown impressive insight into how we may rethink the canon – as well as the canonization of international legal rules (Koskenniemi 2001) – it still leaves open the question of how the *law* was made socially through processes, actors and institutions within the context and due to the context of colonial rule. Here, for example, one of the most significant moments of international legal history and of international law, international organisation and global governance, the formation, practice and work of the League of Nations still leaves us opportunities to understand international law in a new light.

During this moment of the industrial revolution, the internationalisation projects based on different commercial, legal and social matters started to take the centre stage. The economic competition between great powers created the necessary tension and opportunity for total war. The internationalisation projects and sentiments before the First World War and the later part of the 19th Century also picked up after the war. As Daniel Gorman observes, there was a far more concerted effort in internationalised institutions and projects than there was before the war (Gorman 2012). The range of groups that mobilised was also from a wider spectrum which included 'international communities of feminists, humanitarians, religious leaders, athletes, academics and ethnic minorities'. This spirit of internationalism was fashioned as being 'above' politics but was replete with underlying imperial paternalism (Gorman 2012). It was nonetheless a massive impetus during the 1920s for the initiation of international projects which Gorman refers to as the 'emergence of the international society'. Thus the era of internationalisation can be seen as a proliferation of various networks guided by various liberal goals.

Nonetheless, internationalism of the 20th Century, in whatever form envisioned, was inherently an imperial form of internationalism (Sluga and Clavin 2017; Wertheim 2012). The reason being that internationalism, even when it embodied matters relating to social causes or humanitarianism that were prevalent during the time, was ultimately based on a hierarchal view of what it meant to be a 'part of the universal international society' (Harley 1938, 28). This is precisely why the League within its main objective, and throughout its obligations, gave the great powers the status of 'high contracting parties'. The League's internationalism then was based on a view of international society as envisaged by the 'High Contracting' Parties.

B. The depolicisation of transgovernmental functions

The League embraced the idea of extending its purpose beyond a political international body for the security of the world, but also to 'promote international co-operation' (Harley 1938, 28). This idea of also having a scheme for international cooperation, suggested by General Smuts, incorporated matters that were understood as trans-boundary issues at the time (Harley 1938). The British vision, as put forward by both Smuts and other legal and political leaders of the British Empire, notably Robert Cecil, was ultimately an international organisation of the nature of a commonwealth. In his address on 'international cooperation through the League of Nations', Robert Cecil had even described the League as an 'international experiment' that is a middle ground between the old European concert system and a punitive, sanctionist supra-state (Cecil 1922). International projects at the time were also concerned with similar issues and for the principal authors of the League, particularly the British, incorporating matters of international morality was also part of the new organisation of the world (Gorman 2012). These were encapsulated in Article 23 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which stipulated international cooperation and mutual support in the fields of human traffic, suppression of opium and other dangerous drugs, maintenance of freedom of communication, equitable treatment for the commerce of the Members of the League and health (Harley 1938, 28).

The political and legal arm of the League was devised for the 'safeguarding of peace', and the core component of this was the building of a new global legal order through the mandates system. The mandates system, stipulated in Article 22 of the Covenant, set up an administrative system based on classification of territories 'acquired' or, more specifically, colonised after the war (Harley 1938, 105). The principle behind it was that the high contracting parties 'were advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience and their geographical position, can best undertake the responsibility' to guide less advanced nations (Harley 1938, 105). The result of this administration was to be a guiding force for the native people 'for their wellbeing and development' as part of the 'sacred trust civilisation' so that they may also be part of the international society (Harley 1938, 104). While its rhetoric was based on moving away from colonialism, annexations of territories or extensions of an empire, how it approached a new global order resembled the imperial logic of the Berlin Conference, particularly as the Berlin Conference was the first attempt at inter-imperial administration over territories where principles of indirect rule were experimented in as a system of European imperial governance. In particular, the logics of governance (imperium) over territories (Craven 2015; Fitzmaurice 2007) through the General Act of 1885 seen together with deployment of indirect rule (Mamdani 2018; Memon 2024, Umar 2005) make it the closest model of an inter-imperial governance of colonial territories to what later became key characteristics of the League of Nations.

For the League, this rhetoric of 'sacred trust of civilisation' was meant to fulfil the Wilsonian push for self-determination of all nation-states, with the advanced states leading the less developed into international society for their social progress (Pedersen 2015). Accordingly, territories were divided based on 'backwardness' and giving classes of A, B and C, with B and C having the lowest progress of 'civilisation' (Harley 1938). Class 'A' mandates included Turkey, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Mesopotamia (Iraq), Class 'B' included territories of Central Africa (i.e. Togoland, Cameroon and East Africa) and Class 'C' included territories in South West Africa, including Samoa and Nauru (Harley 1938, 26).

The division of social progress embedded within the mandates system was not separate from the idea of international cooperation. These two aims, the social and political, were interdependent (Harley 1938, 26–27), not just in the sense that they embodied what international society meant for the League but also in how the world would be divided and interdependently administered according to the League's ideas of social and moral values. Specifically, within the Mandates Manual of the League of Nations, Mandate Class 'B' territories were explicitly linked to Article 23's general social, economic and moral concerns. The manual describes conditions under which mandated territories of 'B' class are to be administered subject to 'maintenance of public order and morals, the prohibition of arms traffic and liquor ... and secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other Members of the League (Myers 1935, 305).

Robert Cecil went as far as explaining the international cooperation function of the League to include 'control of backward races' (Rappard 1926). To do this, mandate administration through indirect rule was an integral concept and one that was not only a part of Article 22 but essential to give effect to the conditions, as described in the Mandates Manual, of social, moral and economic concerns that were part of Article 23. Despite the underlying intellectual and political discourses as mentioned within the League's manual being underpinned by a politically charged idea of a ladder of civilisation, the League's trans-boundary work is presented as 'common to all mankind' (Zanasi 2007).[5] The incorporation of Article 23 or international corporation as embodying the moral universal discourse of the 20th Century essentially separated itself from the politics of the international organisation as made up of the interests of Member States and the bias of 'international society'.

This 'depoliticisation' of social, economic and moral concerns can be seen in both the political discourses of the League and the intellectual legal tradition at the time. From the perspective of the

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[5]Zanasi explores how the League's expert advisers would deploy the language of civilising discourse with respect to different states in accordance to their positions of development in the civilisational 'ladder'.

British administrators such as Smuts, the League as an international organisation could not only build a new world order to bring peace, but could also allow the civilised states to regulate trans-boundary social and economic issues that are presented as necessary to a peaceful world (Cecil 1922, 419). This trans-boundary work is presented as essentially lacking political character, as it affects all nations equally and can be governed only under the League's supervision and through peace preserved by the League.

As a whole, the League was a separate entity that not only resembled the blueprint for colonial governance set out in the Berlin Conference but was also an institutional structure that oversaw the implementation of indirect rule over the territories assigned to 'high contracting powers'. In other ways, it went further than the conference system by making social and moral progress on trans-boundary matters a part of its core aims. By interlinking trans-boundary work with its political divisions of the international society based on a scale of civilisation, the League created a governance structure that draws its legitimacy from a moralising discourse of progress. Sovereignty at this juncture is then linked to the capability of mandated territories to conform to the 'universal' moral and social issues of the international society. The League as an organisation created a different method of governing through collaboration and connection between departments and organisations under it.

3. The League as an imperial assemblage: Actualising international law in the colony

A. The League's expert networks and transgovernmental functions

At this point, turning to the organisation structure of the League and its operation is important. In all respects, the League was a separate entity, even if it was an assembly of Member States. It had a bureaucratic structure which included a Secretariat, an Assembly and a Council (Harley 1938, 107). The League had a further prerogative to initiate separate commissions, committees and bodies that coordinated, supervised and collected information at the Assembly and were given approval by the Council. These separate committees initiated by the League through its Assembly included the committees of the Economic and Financial organisation of the League, the Permanent Mandate Commission, the Advisory Committee established under Article 23 of the Covenant for the prohibition of the traffic in opium and dangerous drugs, the traffic in women and children and the Committee for Intellectual Cooperation. The League secretariat was the technical expertise body of the League, which consisted of civil servants as well as 'independent experts' on subjects of technical duties (Clavin 2013).

These 'independent experts' nominated by the Council and appointed to the sub-bodies served as advisers on the various committees of the sub-bodies (Clavin 2013, 6). Even within the structure, publicly the underlying assumption presented was that these were independent bodies (i.e. independent of politics and interests to serve technical duties common to all). Formally, as Patricia Clavin observes, policy-making and influencing across boundaries are not explicit within the League's functions and parameters. The League's norm production within its own various committees was a result of and an amalgamation of actors, structures and processes that transgressed its own supposed bureaucratic structure. Often these structures drew on other transgovernmental actors, private actors, public bodies as well as creating new administrative structures to carry out its work. Furthermore, ideologically and structurally there was an emphasis on the 'depoliticised' work of the League's technical organisations as part of its international cooperation objectives. In reality, this was not the case.

For example, Clavin's work focuses on the norm production of the League's Financial and Economic Committee – specifically how it included 'experts' who came from private interest backgrounds including, notably, economists or bankers (Clavin 2013, 6–7). These committees would be formed as part of 'technical duties', for example, the League of Nations Gold Delegation formed under the economic and financial organisation's committee (Clavin 2013, 19–20). These

subcommittees would often be created for specific topics under the technical duties, and the 'experts' leading them would have transnational affiliations and connections to think-tanks, other international organisations and universities (Clavin 2013, 6). Slobodian further notes how the League of Nations' involvement in the World Economic Conference 1927 was led by economists who would later be identified as progenitors of neoliberal economic thinking (Slobodian 2018). Jamie Martin, for example, recently has written about the conceptualising of the League's Financial and Economic Organization as originated by a close-knit network of bankers, ex-treasurers of state who, regardless of any differences in political orientation, were determined to create a system of international economic governance to control domestic policy (Martin 2022). In international legal history, Mai Taha, for example, shows how the ILO's expertise in inter-war-era Egypt was crucial in shaping labour policy on the ground through a separation of law as technical from the political formation of Egypt as a 'semi-colony' (Taha 2016).

In other areas and committees specifically dedicated to social matters, Stephen Legg, for instance, argues how, under the committee for the prevention of trafficking of woman and children, a travelling investigation commission was made and led by the head of the League's Department for Opium Traffic and Social Issues, Rachel Crowdy (1884–1964), to pressure and involve itself within the local as well as the state regulations on prostitution in colonial India (Legg 2010). Rachel Crowdy, who led the travelling commission, understood the issue of trafficking as not a racial or ethnic problem but as gendered. This generic division, among global patriarchies and women of all races, was a hallmark of the imperial feminist movement at the time, where the native intersectional experience was blatantly absorbed and represented only as of the international – i.e. European – experience.[6] The League's travelling commission justified its presence and investigation based on colonial justification of moralizing the 'social evils', i.e. in this case prostitution, in the domestic sphere of native nation states to address properly its international character.

The League, through its universalisation of international morals and economic progress as depolitical factors to be promoted and sustained throughout the world, provided authority and most importantly the structure to these networks to translate their ideological reforms into governmental policy. The League of Nations, then, can be understood as working not as a strict, bureaucratic 'international' government – but as an assemblage of actors, processes and structures, deploying language of expertise and 'trust' over the international society, while operating through categorisation of nation states through the ladder of civilisation. This allows and justifies its own ends to develop and rely on the structure of its organisation as a means for colonial administrators, imperial state interests and commercial private and civil society interests to translate their ideological reform into policy through its trans-boundary governmental channels, travelling commissions, international expert missions and interdepartmental committees on issues of international concern.

In conceptualising the League in this manner, we can also question the supposed separation of the League's imperial governance through the Mandates Commission and its technical transgovernmental function as two different arms of the League. Transgovernmental or transnational functions of the League, i.e. the social, humanitarian and economic agendas, were meant to bring the rest of the world to modernity (Dubin 1983). Modernity now, instead of being defined in the language of religion or purely commercial ends, would be carried through by an assemblage of colonial administrators, imperial state actors and private interests through the language of expertise and administrative, technocratic rationality (Bonneuil 2000; Cooper 1997; Muschik 2018).

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[6]However, Legg does not emphasize the presence of caste in the subcontinent. For a clearer view of the intersections between interwar-era moral discourses and caste, see, for example, Ruth Watts, 'Breaking the boundaries of Victorian imperialism or extending a reformed "paternalism"? Mary Carpenter and India' (2000) *History of Education* 29: 443.

B. The imperial assemblage in the Mandates: Native labour, indirect rule and the making of the Forced Labour Convention 1930

While the League's many functions and departments have been noted to work through various networks of actors and interests – specifically those that I have observed in section A – to understand it as an imperial assemblage that iterates coloniality as a form of process and structure, we need to turn our attention to how exactly the governance of mandates was tied to native labour.

Here, first I show how the League's work within the mandates was beyond a notion of civilised/uncivilised tied to 'sovereignty' or 'territory', i.e. exemplified in art 22 – but one which is evidently tied to the governance of colonies that cut across local and international social matters, i.e. art 23 (transgovernmental functions). In the first place then, what I show is that the League's works as an imperial assemblage, specifically, beyond the mandates commission, norm making in the League is a result of matters of governance cutting across other actors, processes and administrative structures within the League, and outside of it – in particular, notions of economic peace and progress for the mandated powers.

The question of native labour in the mandates came about as a question tied to the idea of mandates themselves. Particularly through channels outside of the League itself, i.e. specifically through the pressure of missionaries and anti-slavery abolition groups (Cooper 2000; Thomas 1973). Most starkly, in a 1920 report on Portuguese-controlled West Africa produced by the Society for Anti-Slavery and Protection of Aboriginals (based out of London), noted labour conditions were described as like slavery on plantations. In 1921, The Society for Anti-Slavery and Aboriginal Protection Society (based out of London), wrote letters to the Mandate Section Secretary at the time, Eric Drummond, about its concerns on continued 'domestic slavery' and 'conscription' of natives forcibly into the military in East Africa and Western Sahara (Letter from Anti-Slavery and Aboriginals Protection Society 1921).[7] The society became over the years a strong voice of pressure within the League and collected information on the mandates through various missionary groups, philanthropists and mercantile networks (Daughton 2011; Maul 2007; Slobodkin 2018).

This pressure and reports of slavery within mandates was made as an appeal to Eric Drummond. While constitutionally, its importance was of being an advisery body to respect the autonomy of mandated powers over their territories (Carnegie Endowment 1925),[8] as I show further below in this same section, it is better to understand it as a space whereby policy is created and negotiated concerning governance of mandates that cuts across official temporary committees, separate commissions, the sub-body of the International Labour Organisation and officials of the mandated powers themselves.

The Mandates Commission itself constituted members who were either noticeably former colonial administrators of the mandated powers or had significant experience as bureaucrats on matters of the colonies. These included at the point of the 6th session of the PMC, notably, Marquis Theodoli (Former Under-secretary for Ministry of Colonies, Italy), Fredrick Lugard (former Governor General of Nigeria), Van Rees (Former Vice-President of the Council of Dutch East Indies and Secretary General of Dutch Colonial Institute), Friere de Andread (Former Governor General of Mozambique), Piere Orts (Former Secretary General of Department of Foreign Affairs, Belgium), M Beau (Former Governor General of Indo-China, France) and, most noticeably as a matter of cross-organisational involvement, a representative from the International Labour office, HA Grimshaw (Carnegie Endowment 1925, 295 [Jenks 1935]).

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[7]Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, Labour Conditions in Portuguese West Africa, 21 October 1920. United Nations Archive at Geneva: Pg. 6–7. Letter from Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society to Mandates Commission, Domestic Slavery in the Mandated Territories of East African and Conscription in West Africa, 2 August 1921, Geneva. United Nations Archives at Geneva (accessed 18 August 2023).

[8]Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, International Reconciliation no. 213, 'Information regarding the mandate system', October 1925, United Nations Archive at Geneva: Pg 294 (accessed 18 August 2023).

These appointments also represent a particular furthering of knowledge through careering of colonial administrators into international organisations at the time (Hodge 2010; Muschik 2018). This shows how particular notions of colonial knowledge led by former colonial administrators and bureaucrats continued to proliferate and circulate into international law-making at the time. While the international organisation, i.e. the League's PMC procedures, explicitly obfuscate this by stating that 'they should not hold any office of direct dependence in their government while being members of the commission' (Carnegie Endowment 1925, 294), in truth much of how these members communicated within commission meetings exhibited a detailed knowledge of how mandate powers governed, and what forms of advice would be acceptable to their current practices.

The question of native labour and slavery became a key issue for the Mandates to tackle through these mechanisms and is thus a useful example of its work as an imperial assemblage. As a way to move forward on this concern, the PMC formulated a Temporary Slavery Commission in 1925 (hereafter referred to as Temporary Slavery Committee, as it was referred to in the archival documents except for its official title, which was the Temporary Slavery Commission). The committee's composition reflected essentially the various interests and groups of mandated powers. Most noticeably, this committee was dominated by members of the commission, including most noticeably Fredrick Lugard, Van Rees and Friere de Andread (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925).[9] The committee also included, notably, a representative of the ILO, HA Grimshaw, who also sat in the Mandates Commission. Other members of the committee represented broad interests of mandated powers, including being chaired by a sitting official of Belgium, Director General of Ministry of Colonies and French Delegate to Haiti from France. The discussion of this committee thus revealed invested interests through the explicit involvement of officials from Mandate Powers.

The making of the committee occurred not only because of the conditions brought into attention by public pressure but also as an appeal to the fact that the question of the mandates was essentially a question of 'labour'. In the International Labour Organisation Report on Native Labour 1926, this is emphasized significantly. The report mentions specifically how 'the remote corners of the world which was of interests only to missionaries and colonisers are become rapidly part and parcel of the industrial system' and on which 'civilisation relies on their comforts' (International Labour Office 1926).[10] The specificity of labour convention to this world, according to the ILO, requires more attention to the problems of this world and are not 'general problems of the twentieth century, they relate to suppression of slavery, the progress from servile mentality and organisation to wage-earning labour' (International Labour Office 1926, 6–7) . It is for this reason that a representative from the ILO was present in the mandates commission and a further expert may be called when needed (Carnegie Endowment 1925, 294). According to the report, the ILO specifically created the 'Diplomatic Division' for staff that would collect and disseminate information on native labour as part of its work with the Permanent Mandate Commission and the Temporary Committee on Slavery (International Labour Office 1926, 36).

For the purposes of the mandates commission, this question of labour was also essentially a question of economic order. In the discussions of the mandates system, in a document prepared by Walter Russel of the Carnegie Peace Foundation on the United States and the Mandate System, the influence and concern of colonial policy of the United States directly linked to securing its private economic interests in 'petroleum, rubber, palm oil, and food'.[11] Understanding the

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[9]Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, Minutes of 1st Session, 9–12 July 1924, Geneva, League of Nations, A18, VI, 16 August 1924, United Nations Archive at Geneva (accessed 18 August 2023).

[10]International Labour Office, Native and Colonial Labour 1926, Geneva, 1927, United Nations Archive at Geneva: Pg. 3 (accessed 18 August 2023).

[11]Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, International Reconciliation no. 213, Walter Russell Batsel, 'United States and the system of mandates', October 1925, United Nations Archive at Geneva: Pg. 269 (accessed 18 August 2023).

mandate system thus as a necessary component of dependency primarily to the US need for 'petroleum' is important. The US involvement in the making of the mandates system extended not just to those where they knew their interests needed to be secured, i.e. 'gunboats on Yangtze River, China' or 'destroyer in Samson, Turkey' and, further, 'naval presence in East Africa' (Batsell 1925). The question of Mandates as a colonial administration that secures economic interests and trade for an important ally in the inter-war era became a key consideration for other imperial powers. In particular, concerns of restricting monopoly in mandates, implementing a 'Most favoured Nations' clause for the United States and extending similar policy that afforded the United States these assurances in Turkey and the Middle East to former German colonies in East Africa were key parts of the negotiations (Batsell 1925, 270). The significance of mandated territories, particularly B and C, to mandated powers economically also appears in a document surveying the economic reform under the League of Nations. The report on 'Networks of Trade', by the League's Economic and Financial committee, notes how exports within African territories outweigh imports or interregion trade due to its primary focus on sending goods to its 'parent' territory (League 1942)[12] This is noted as part of the 'political' situation – owing to the mandated powers' control over these territories. This dependency of labour production by native labourers is pointed out by the ILO Native Labour report 1926 as well (International Labour Office 1926).

It comes as a clear notion then that the necessity of native labour is part of a broader engagement with economic reasons of the League's covenant itself. In particular, any pushback for regulating this labour came with the cost of its co-dependence towards the economic benefit of private and public actors of colonial mandated powers. The PMC then, along with the ILO, became the negotiating space for perpetuating the economic benefit accrued to mandated territories for native labour. The overarching conversation on slavery and forced labour, due to the fact that most labour production within native territories was one of dependency on native labour, was described instead in a challenge of 'slow change of society' (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925; International Labour Office 1926).

The committee itself also specifically separated slavery proper, i.e. domestic slavery, 'dowery', child labour – put in a racialised way on the natives, Islamic community and 'law' –, from 'other' considerations to do with governance over mandates by mandatory powers that may slip into the category of slavery. These specifically included 'forced labour, traffic of arms, liquor, segregations of race' that 'complicate the question of slavery' (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, 15–16). For the committee it was necessary to clarify that these are not within the ambit of legal definition of 'slavery' per se, but matters where abuses close to slavery might occur.

Given the dependence of mandated governments on production by native labour for their exports, and as a major source of other economic interests for mandated powers beyond the mandated trustees, compulsory or forced labour was a key part of the broader machinery of imperialism that supported the economic trade of the mandated powers. The mandatory principle, though, while emphasizing this aspect, goes further than the link between labour and economic potential. As Lugard observes quite bluntly in his note on Forced Labour as a supplement to the discussions of the Permanent Mandate Commission meeting on the question of Forced Labour, 'natives are considered the greatest asset to a country because of their potential value as labourers' (League 1926).[13] But goes on to say that the purpose of colonial administration is essentially 'social transformation of the village life'. Thus, in justifying forced labour through an exemption extended most starkly to 'public works' – i.e. development of roads, infrastructure,

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[12]League of Nations Economic and Financial Committee, 'The networks of world trade: A companion volume to Europe's trade', Economic Intelligence Services, LNP II, Economic and Financial, 1942, IL A3, United Nations Archive at Geneva: Pg. 46–47 (accessed 18 August 2023).

[13]League of Nations, Permanent Mandate Commission, Memorandum by Sir Fredrick Lugard, 'Economic development vis a vis the well-being of the natives in mandated territories', Geneva, 1 February 1926. CPM 275 (1). United Nations Archive at Geneva: Pg. 7 (accessed 18 August 2023).

agriculture for export production – the overarching purpose is establishing a form of colonial administration that goes beyond what Lugard calls 'short term economic goals'.

Thus, forced labour in particular became the lynchpin on which the point of not just 'economic benefit' of mandated powers rested for all members of the temporary committee but more importantly of a more embedded colonial administration to transform every aspect of the native life. Other areas considered part of Art 23 'transgovernmental' functions became tied inextricably to the economic benefit of the mandates' powers and the 'development' of natives, hence the discussion on the role of 'forced labour' extends to 'education', 'taxation' or 'prestation', indirect administration which includes relations with native 'chiefs', policing and penal laws. This particular group of actors brought together within the committee, almost all of whom were not just familiar with colonial administration but deeply embedded within it, reiterated policy based on the practice of colonial administration that suited their respective mandated powers.

More importantly, this racialisation that was an inherent part of this colonial administration was reiterated through various actors, i.e. the PMC, the temporary committee and the ILO. This racialisation was not just about a 'differential' treatment but rather about making the fiction of this difference 'real' through the imperial assemblage and its structures that I have identified in this section in the above paragraphs. The descriptions of the 'native' life, the transformation of 'village' life, and social systems – to make them 'objectively' legible to the Euro-Western epistemological project of the League of Nations - precede the notion of native 'labour' in order to then 'exceptionalise' this labour. In this sense, the structures, i.e. social processes of the commission, its actors, the committee, the ILO, themselves, are engendered with authority and control (referred to as expertise) in how they *see* and *make* the 'native' as part of the imperial governance.

Developmental aims, such as one of the most crucial points of discussion in the committee, namely, 'public works', which included 'infrastructure, roads, railways and communications', became the key component of defining the 'native'. Lugard in his memorandum for economic development of natives highlights this further in the context of drafting the Slavery Convention and Forced Labour concern. The idea of public works is directly linked to 'render possible administration of the country, establishing law and order, and advent of commerce from which revenue can be derived for administration purposes' (League 1926, 2). Lugard expands this further to link the notion of 'public works' to the overall administration of the colony as he describes how 'almost any sacrifice is necessary for these work' as slave trade could not be suppressed without 'railways' or armed forces could not 'supress these evils' without roads or 'native production for export' could not thrive for the 'material well-being' of the native. The notion of 'public works' was not simply a matter of 'commerce' for mandated powers, then – it was justified as an 'educative agency' to 'teach natives the value of co-operation'.

Administratively, the notion of taxation as well as vagrancy laws were brought up as acceptable practices already in action within mandated colonies. In particular, these forms of administrative functions that became part of the conversation within the committee were perpetuated by the members of the committee. Lugard, for example, had written extensively on justifying taxation as a sum of money towards maintenance of public works. In British mandates territories, Lugard suggested, the policy of tax payable by those that do not work and may pay taxes in the form of labour was explicitly made part of indirect rule (Lugard 2013 [1922], 234). In his text *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, published in 1922, Lugard writes that for natives that 'are found to be living in idleness and drunkenness, special taxation is perhaps justified for their own best interest' (Lugard 2013 [1922], 234). This practice was mentioned in the meetings with a discussion of using labour in lieu of public works (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925)[14], often

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[14]Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, Minutes of 2nd Session, 13–25 July 1925, Geneva, League of Nations, CM426 M.157, 1 September 1925, United Nations Archive at Geneva (accessed 18 August 2023).

giving reference to the practices of administration carried out by the sitting members of the committee as part of their own administrative experience in the mandates (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, 75).[15] The notion of local colonial knowledge and practice of administration was a common feature in these discussions as representative of what mandated colonies would usually do. In relation to the idea of 'prestation', which is forced labour in lieu of taxes, this was brought up as a major concern of how native labour is utilised by most mandates by the Chairman of the committee, the Belgian Director General of Ministry of Colonies. This also included the practise of utilising 'vagrancy laws', which pressured native people to undertake compulsory labour, or else they would be penalised (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, 77).

In another aspect, this direct use of the reiterating and legalising through the committee practices in the mandates that the administrators wanted to justify was also clear in the discussion on forced labour for 'educative' means which was agreed upon by all members. This was especially so where some members explicitly started mentioning how they wanted to introduce some agricultural techniques and increase 'exports' for 'immediate needs' – as stated by the Chairman (for Belgian colonies) and Friere de Andread, the Portuguese member who specifically said he would like to 'introduce ploughing' into his territories (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, 76). Another aspect which all members were unanimously in agreement with as part of practices already carried out in colonies included further engraining indirect administration through Native 'Tribal' chiefs – a practice initiated from the early days of indirect administration within the continent of Africa and colonial India (Dalta 2015; Lugard 1922; Mamdani 2018; Mantena 2010; Myers 2008; Umer 2005).[16]

The committee thus reiterated and solidified local administrative practices of indirect administration over colonies while making further flexibility for mandated colonies to legalise their practices (Daughton 2013; Rodríguez-Piñero 2005; Thomas 1973). The discussion within these archives – as shown above – also shows how while seeming like an international committee under the PMC, this committee represented the interests, conversations and imperial interests that were grounded and driven by the experience of previous colonial administrators as well as the needs of colonial administrators at the local level. It was not simply an international policy – but one that cut across various actors, structures and organisations coming together in the façade of an 'international committee' which included not just colonial administrators but also ex-colonial administrators such as Lugard from the PMC, and the ILO.

4. The generative character of the imperial assemblage: Inscribing of coloniality in the Mandates

The work and output of the League as an imperial assemblage are thus not just in regards to how different actors, processes and structures come together, cutting across a transgovernmental, transnational and interdepartmental level, but also how they reiterate and generate further structures, processes and actors as key to governance over colonies. This generative quality of the

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[15]In particular, the representative of Belgium, Lugard, as well as the Dutch East Indies delegate would give reference to their own local administrative experiences. This is also noted by Frederick Cooper, 'Conditions analogous to slavery: Imperialism and free labor ideology in Africa' [2000]. *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*: 107.

[16]Historians of colonial India emphasize the early origins of indirect rule emerging in India as a practice, while in the context of the African continent, Myers indicates its official use as a term attributed to Theophilus Shepstone (1817–1893), the British government's diplomatic agent to the native people of Natal, who was the first one to implement indirect rule in Africa. While Mamdani draws parallels to Indian and African indirect rule, I point out the contextual difference between the practice of indirect rule being quite distinct and for it to be studied in the particular local sociological context rather than in broad-brushed comparisons. See, for example, this localised sociological contextualisation in the case of the Indian sub-continent in Memon, Ahmed. 'English in taste, Indian in blood': Caste hegemony in the making of British international legal thought.' *London Review of International Law* (2024): lrae005.

League's work is particularly important to understand its approach to governance as 'transforming' native colonised communities internally through administrative, technocratic structures as the building blocks for its racialising discourse (Temporary Slavery Commission 1925, 81).[17] Thus the 'transformation' that it defines as its overarching aim continues to bring in the application of conventions – in this case concerning Native Labour and Slavery – with building further assemblage of administrative and technocratic mechanisms locally and transnationally.

Therefore, some years after the passing of the Slavery convention 1926 and the Forced Labour Convention 1930, the PMC established another expert committee to consider how these conventions were applied in the mandates. The committee interestingly replicated the format of the Temporary Committee, with most notably Lugard elected as its Vice-Chairman; alongside the Director of Mandates Section, M. Castillini; as well as a representative of the ILO sitting as part of the expert committee (League 1932, 3).[18] This committee included for its consideration the reports from mandated powers on how they enacted the conventions. Notably, the Portuguese state report emphasised the same language and also the practices put forward within the committee as exceptions to forced labour, including taxation and 'public works' (League 1932).[19] Noting in particular the passing of ordinances within its colonies around Forced Labour (League 1932, 10–11), as well as creation of the office of Director of Native Services, which includes a committee to oversee native concerns including communication with tribal chiefs concerning matters of labour (League of Nations 1932b, 27). The members of this committee for the 'Protection of Natives' under the Director of Native Services were to be selected by the Governor General – and were preferably missionaries (League 1932, 27). Further administrative changes to streamline recruitment 'in accordance with' native code included creating recruiting associations to confirm that the legal compliance of the native code was ensured while seeking native labour forces (League 1932, 24).

This approach to the Slavery Convention of 1926 and the Forced Labour Convention of 1930 reflected much of how the Mandates Commission emphasised a deepening of 'indirect administration' in response to blatantly violent practices of forced labour. This was seen most clearly when a challenge was raised to the blatant violence of 'Forced Labour' practices for public purposes in French-Controlled Liberia.

Having already being mentioned in earlier reports to the Temporary Slavery Committee 1925 as one of the places where abusive practices of 'Forced Labour' were committed, as well as the pressure within the United States resulting from having their largest rubber manufacturing in a country where conditions like 'slavery' existed, the Government of Liberia initiated the proposal for an 'International Enquiry Commission' (Enquiry 1930).[20] This was primarily a response to claims that the Liberian government was in contravention of international conventions such as Forced Labour regulation and Slavery. The commission included a member from the League of Nations, a representative sent by the United States and a member from the Liberian Government (Enquiry 1930, 3).

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[17]This notion of 'education' but also 'indirect administration' that can 'change the 'servile' nature of the 'backward population' was an overarching rhetoric of the PMC, the ILO and the Temporary slavery committee 1926. In the committee meetings itself, this notion came up particularly in relation to justifying forced labour for educative means to encourage a shift from 'communal ownership' to 'private ownership'.

[18]League of Nations, Slavery, Committee of Experts, First Session, Minutes of First Meeting, 4 May 1932, Geneva, C.E.E./1st session P.V.1, United Nations Archive at Geneva.

[19]League of Nations, Slavery, Documentary materials sent since the 12th Session of the Assembly by various Governments for submission to the Committee of Experts, Second Supplement, Portugal, 6 April 1932, Geneva, C.E.E.1(b), United Nations Archive at Geneva (accessed 18 August 2023). Notably, in the development of infrastructure – the same rhetoric of roads bringing, literally, backward peoples closer to civilised White people.

[20]International Enquiry for Commission in Liberia, Communication of the Government of Liberia transmitting the Commission Report, 15 December 1930, LNP VI B Slavery 1930, C. 568.M.272. VI. United Nations Archive at Geneva (accessed 18 August 2023).

The commission formed a delegation particularly with members of the League of Nations, who then also reported their suggestions and findings to the Expert Committee formed in 1932. The commission's report, called the Christy report in reference to the League of Nation's Delegate, aimed to further expand when 'Forced Labour' (even for public works) could be considered 'analogous to slavery'. In commenting on the examples of when this 'trust' would be broken, the commission's language replicated that of mandate obligations and objectives – and were also reiterated in the conversations within the Temporary Slavery Committee. Responses to abuses of labour on roadwork boiled down to correction from expert surveyors not present, in order to discourage animosity with tribal chiefs and stricter measures on the roles/duties of Armed Forces (Enquiry 1930, 89) . Overall, suggestions by the commission upon hearing of gross acts of sexual, physical and psychological abuse of native populations were more 'effective administration' through an overhaul of the internal administrative structure of Liberia. This included reducing and replacing current District Commissioners with American and European Commissioners, developing an institution for Civil Services, and re-establishing tribal authority. Most starkly, the overall idea of suggestions from the committee was to 'allow for open door policy' and the 'barrier between civilised and uncivilised to break'. The Liberian Government accepted these proposals, starting first and foremost with the appointment of foreign specialist commissioners from the United States (Enquiry 1930, 3).[21]

The proposals replicate the logic of an administrative, technical structure that is embedded within the indirect administration of colonies as an 'efficient' (Lugard 1922) means of governance present within how norms are made and evolve within the League itself. The League's operation as an imperial assemblage thus reiterates coloniality in this way as a structure and process of transformation of local life and the social and economic world of colonised communities through its reliance on generating and replicating its logic of technocratic and administrative rationality. In the inter-war era, the work of governing mandates was essentially establishing a technocratic and administrative architecture as a mode of indirect administration. This included a transformation of local life through national bodies, offices and relations with 'native structures' that allowed for a transnational interplay with the international law of the League.

Often these included 'administration', but Lugard refers to them explicitly as 'law and order' – i.e. policing that became the enforcement arm of indirect rule, particularly in relation to penal laws on labour, including vagrancy, taxation and runaway 'workers' (Thomas 2012a). Policing within the inter-war years was focused on wage labourers and their places of work. Colonial policing of labour, as Martin Thomas observes, was 'the perennial feature and an increasingly prominent facet of police work in the inter-war years' (Thomas 2012a, 2012b). As Archibong and Obikili observe, a primary way of imposing forced labour was to penalise and then convict those who were in breach of contract and force them to engage in 'voluntary' or prescribed labour for 'public works' (Archibong and Obikili 2019).

In French West African mandates, these punishments ranged from summary punishments and fines to threats to one's life (Thomas 2012a, 451). During the 1930s and 1940s, as part of the forced labour scheme for the 'office du niger cotton production scheme' in French-Controlled Sudan, policing became central to creating forced labour (Thomas 2012a, 451). Workers were rounded up and relocated to curfew compounds, and women workers were told that their husbands would be beaten if the women's work was unsatisfactory. The response at the international level, along with the native labour convention of 1930, was the parallel Abolition of Penal Sanction (Indigenous Workers) Conventions 1930, which did not outright ban penal sanctions for 'breach of contract' but decreed a temporally vague 'abolished progressively and as soon as possible' regulation (Rodríguez-Piñero 2005). Martin Thomas notes that creating a policing structure that includes

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[21]See also WE Dubois's analysis of Liberia as a proxy of Private Company 'Firestone Ltd' and the United States protecting its private economic interest by utilizing the League as an administrative structure, in Du Bois, WE Burghardt. 'Liberia, the League and the United States'. *Foreign Affairs* **11** (1933): 682–695.

natives as part of the administration was integral to forms of colonial governance, especially in the case of indirect rule (Thomas 2012a). Creating a policing structure was also consistent with the purpose of indirect rule – i.e. to effectively govern a territory that was vast with fewer costs than would normally have resulted from a military presence or military bases.

5. Conclusion

The League's work in producing and actualizing international law is not simply an early form of global governance that operates within a central body of the commission – but rather governance that cuts across various other sub-organisations, i.e. the ILO or separate commissions and committees that work locally and across mandated powers (imperial states) to produce law. Further, this production and actualization of law on the ground by mandated powers through embedding local administrative structures that formulate the international into the local transforms the colony. The question of native labour from 1925 to 1932 then gives us a story of the life of governance over colonies by the League across scales of local, international and transnational actors, structures and processes. Beyond merely acting through a modality of governance, my assertion is that it embeds coloniality as a process of shifting the knowledge and, therefore, the life of native communities under the mandates. This shifting of knowledge within the mandates meant the defining of 'native' lives, which was part of their racialisation and included the tribal structure, the chieftaincy system, taxation, infrastructure, trade, health, policing and agricultural forms/techniques rooted in 'education' that constituted the complete erasure of the subjectivity of the native communities from themselves and their land. This shifting of knowledge thus is not conducted just 'through' the establishing of technocratic administrative structures of authority; rather, the structures themselves are a 'relation of force' that by design is engendered by and reiterates coloniality.

This reconceptualization of the League of Nations thus gives us another sociological lens to rethink how contemporary governance has traces of the imperial governance of the 20th Century. However, the post-1945 push for sovereignty cuts through this historical connection due to the proliferation of the political independence of newly decolonised nation states (Getachew 2019; Pahuja 2011) and the 'formal' end of empires, and it is worth emphasizing that new forms of indirect rule still perpetuate. My argument here gives further impetus to explore this possibility, i.e. the form and process that governance can take when, to borrow from Eslava, the local space is paid attention to in relation to the international space (Eslava 2015). This connection of the local to the international, thus operates at a scaler level through which international legal norms are actualised which includes actors, processes, institutions which I term an imperial assembelage in this historical context.

Understanding the League's work as an imperial assemblage helps us open up further conversations on how in the course of a history of global governance, the making of knowledge is embedded as part of local transformation where a range of structures, actors and processes work to continuously transform Western, European and American notions of 'development', 'modernity' and 'progress'. Particularly it also opens up a different thread of conversation on the subject of colonial continuity raised by TWAIL (Anghie 2007), amongst other critical histories of development and international economic governance. More clearly, it also gives a theoretical vocabulary that complicates the literature on the relationship among the state, international organisations and international law post-1945 (Eslava and Pahuja 2020; Sinclair 2017) and the role of expertise (Kennedy 2018; Slaughter 2004). Most fundamentally, it intervenes in recent theories of international organisation in international law (Desai 2023; Klabbers and Sinclair 2020; Van Den Meerssche 2022) that miss the opportunity to integrate these provocations of colonial continuity by emphasizing that this continuity ought to be understood instead as 'coloniality'.

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