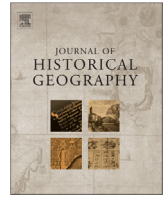




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# An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies



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### Abstract

This paper examines India's experiences as the only non-self-governing member of the League of Nations as a means of addressing the broader question: where was the international? As the only non-self-governing member of the League, India's new international status exposed both its external, more imperial, as well as its internal, more colonial, anomalies. This paper examines, first, the Indian anomaly from the 'inside out', looking at India's representation and silencing at Geneva, and how Indian commentators assessed India's external status in the League. Secondly, it considers the Indian anomaly from the 'outside in', by exploring colonial tensions that the internationalism of the League provoked relating to India's internal political geography. The League posed taxing questions about the Government of India's decision to exclude international law from the spaces between British and Princely India, examined here through the example of trafficking in women and children. In exploring India's anomalous situation two broader approaches are deployed. The first is a scalar methodology, which shows how the concepts of the national and international operated at various scales, with India's burgeoning sense of nationhood taking one of its many shapes in the international sphere, while the internationalism of the League seeped into the national fissures between British and Princely India. Secondly, the paper approaches these questions through the lens of sovereignty. Moving beyond associations with the juridical and the territorial, it explores sovereignty as: representational (diplomacy); governmental (administration), theoretical (political philosophy), political (anti-colonialism), territorial (political geography) and contractual (international law).  
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Thanks, in part, to its contribution of men and materiel to the First World War, India secured a place at the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, which (unexpectedly) made it a founding member of the League of Nations. The League itself is the subject of increasing academic interest,<sup>1</sup> which is moving beyond traditional areas of concern such as international relations and the 'problem of "security"', to 'humanitarian and educational initiatives', the role of 'experts, officials, lobbies and publics', 'the construction of rights and identities' and the 'redrawing of empires, nations and regions'.<sup>2</sup> In terms of the latter, India's position was of especial interest. No other non-self-governing state was allowed to join the League after

Versailles, making India a permanent anomaly in a membership of otherwise free nation-states.

This paper will expose the troubling questions of scale and sovereignty that India's membership of the League provoked. In terms of scale, the Indian nation started to take shape through its international activities, while international concerns seeped into national politics, provoking troubling tensions for the colonial government. In terms of sovereignty, these interactions provoked the fundamental question of whether India was even a state at all, and raised the problem of the 'quasi-sovereignty' of the Princely States. By tracing debates about sovereignty beyond the juridical

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<sup>1</sup> See S. Pedersen, Back to the League of Nations, *American Historical Review* 112 (2007) 1091–1117; M. Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organization of Peace*, London, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> These headings are taken from the 'Towards a New History of the League of Nations' conference, held at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva in August 2011, at which a version of this paper was presented. The conference included 21 presented papers and 26 tabled papers; a research network of League scholars now exists at: <http://www.leagueofnationshistory.org/homepage.shtml>. This expanding interest is reflected in recent works on the League and health, economy and colonial critique: I. Borowy, *Coming to Terms With World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation 1921–1946*, Frankfurt, 2009; P. Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946*, Oxford, 2013; J.P. Daughton, Behind the imperial curtain: international humanitarian efforts and the critique of French colonialism in the interwar years, *French Historical Studies* 34 (2011) 503–528.

and the territorial this paper tracks the fundamentally geographical and historical question: where was the international?<sup>3</sup>

The paper will proceed in two parts. The first looks at India 'inside out', examining its representation abroad and the debates within India about its external position, in terms of internationalism and India's 'imperial' status. This is the scale at which India's anomalous nature has been mostly commented upon,<sup>4</sup> but it is also the scale at which most League members could claim to be anomalous, given the newness of the League experiment and the ruptured imperial and nation-state system across which it was attempting the 'organisation of peace'.<sup>5</sup> The second section examines the subcontinent from the 'outside in', charting a lesser known Indian anomaly, which raised more 'colonial' questions about territory and the indirect rule of India's Princely States (as opposed to directly ruled British India). The League's activities provoked tensions between these two sovereign regimes, which will here be examined through the lens of trafficking in women and children (TWC).

Trafficking was an international concern which emerged in the interwar period, especially through the activities of the League,<sup>6</sup> augmenting previous concerns about the white slave trade, and prostitution—regulation policies which focused on the health of colonial elites,<sup>7</sup> with a concern for mobility, rights and human dignity.<sup>8</sup> In late-colonial India this development was clearly part of a broader and ongoing negotiation of imperialism, gender and sexuality.<sup>9</sup> But trafficking also fitted into the 'social and technical' section of the League's duties, which saw it move beyond peace-keeping and international law to investigate economics, epidemics, refugees, arms and opium trafficking.<sup>10</sup> The League could only concern itself with the international elements of these topics, but in this respect TWC is of special interest to the geographer.<sup>11</sup> This sort of trafficking did not entail large shipments or bulky goods; a girl or woman, often seemingly willing, could be easily concealed, or openly flaunted.<sup>12</sup> But, most importantly, there was evidence of 'trafficking' in India, but it was 'regional' trafficking between states of the Indian Empire. So defined, it was beyond the a League of Nations' purview, but a 1933 draft of a League convention questioned this territorial definition of sovereignty by redefining the relationship between 'protectorates', 'suzerainties' and 'colonies'.

As such, TWC brought issues of internationalist concern into the cracks and fissures between politically sovereign domestic units, as the case of the indirectly ruled Princely States in India will highlight. Trafficking in women and children will, therefore, allow us to consider India's specifically anomalous status within the League of Nations but, in so doing, will also provide insight into the aforementioned concepts which have been explored, at great length, by geographers and others, namely: sovereignty; imperialism; and internationalism.

#### *Sovereignty, imperialism, internationalism and India*

There has also been an... extensive rethinking of imperial power and where we might look for it. The battle for empire has seen military and economic might challenged by the power of discourse, identity, and representation, then by disciplinary power, biopolitics, and embodiment, and, latterly, by increased attention to sovereignty.<sup>13</sup>

The abstract notion of sovereignty as the ultimate authority over a political community requires constant tailoring to its geographies, exploring how state sovereignty is changing and how new spatialities of power negotiate 'the push and pull of centripetal globalizing forces and centrifugal forces of regionalism, separatism and nationalism'.<sup>14</sup> Historical debates about the nature of sovereignty, whether dependent on supreme command (constituted) or liberal, democratic authority (constituent), also require tailoring to context, including that of the colonial.<sup>15</sup> Colonial sovereignties were hybrid and frequently violated,<sup>16</sup> while the domination at their core could be exposed by the politics of anti-colonial nationalism.<sup>17</sup> This made it clear that sovereignty is also exerted over bodies, symbols, money, and representations.<sup>18</sup> Recent approaches to sovereignty have moved beyond the readings of political philosophy and jurisprudence to engage with geopolitics, discourse analysis, performativity, embodiment and power.<sup>19</sup> At a theoretical level, Foucault's call to examine governmentalities that triangulate disciplinary and governmental power with sovereign powers still demands attention.<sup>20</sup>

One productive frame for approaching these provocations is to think of 'sovereignty regimes' as combinations of central state

<sup>3</sup> This question follows Miles Ogborn's provocation to think 'where was the eighteenth century': M. Ogborn 'Spatiality in the long eighteenth century' contribution to panel discussion, Long Eighteenth Century Seminar Series, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 10th January 2001.

<sup>4</sup> See K.J. Schmidt, 'An anomaly among anomalies': India's entry into the League of Nations, *Proceedings of the Florida Conference of Historians* 1 (1993) 1–13.

<sup>5</sup> Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organization of Peace* (note 1).

<sup>6</sup> D. Gorman, Empire, internationalism, and the campaign against the traffic in women and children in the 1920s, *Twentieth Century British History* 19 (2008) 186–216.

<sup>7</sup> P. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire*, Cambridge, 2009; P. Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*, London, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> B. Metzger, Towards an international human rights regime during the interwar years: the League of Nations' combat of traffic in women and children, in: K. Grant et al. (Eds), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c.1880–1950*, Basingstoke, New York, 2007, 54–79.

<sup>9</sup> M. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, Durham, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Pedersen, Back to the League of Nations (note 1); S. Legg, 'The life of individuals as well as of nations': international law and the League of Nations' anti-trafficking governmentalities, *Leiden Journal of International Law* 25 (2012) 647–664.

<sup>11</sup> Article 15, paragraph eight, of the League covenant stated that: 'If the dispute between the parties is claimed by one of them, and is found by the Council, to arise out of a matter which by international law is solely within the domestic jurisdiction of that party, the Council shall so report, and shall make no recommendation as to its settlement'.

<sup>12</sup> For contemporary considerations of this 'underside of globalisation' see G. Bhattacharyya, *Traffic: The Illicit Movement of People and Things*, London, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> M. Ogborn, Review: Lauren Benton. A search for sovereignty: law and geography in European empires, 1400–1900, *American Historical Review* 117 (2012) 814–816 [814].

<sup>14</sup> C. Flint, Political geography: globalization, metapolitical geographies and everyday life, *Progress in Human Geography* 26 (2002) 391–400, 393.

<sup>15</sup> M. Coleman, Sovereignty, in: N. Thrift, R. Kitchen (Eds), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2009, 255–261. Also see R. Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea*, Cambridge, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> D. Strang, Contested sovereignty: the social construction of colonial imperialism, in: T.J. Biersteker, C. Webber (Eds), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, Cambridge, 1996, 22–49.

<sup>17</sup> D. Chakrabarty, 'In the name of politics': democracy and the power of the multitude in India, *Public Culture* 19 (2007) 35–57. For a thorough exploration of national community and popular sovereignty see B. Yack, Popular sovereignty and nationalism, *Political Theory* 29 (2001) 517–536.

<sup>18</sup> T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat (Eds), *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World*, Princeton, Oxford, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> F. McConnell, Sovereignty, in: K. Dodds et al. (Eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, Aldershot, 2013, 109–128; S. Legg and A. Vasudevan, Introduction: geographies of the nomos, in: S. Legg (Ed.), *Spatiality, Sovereignty and Carl Schmitt: Geographies of the Nomos*, London, 2011, 1–23.

<sup>20</sup> M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–78*, Basingstoke, New York, 2007; M. Dillon, Sovereignty and governmentality: from the problematics of the 'New World Order' to the ethical problematics of the world order, *Alternatives* 20 (1995) 323–368.

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