

# Embracing the Language of Human Rights: International Women's Organisations, Feminism and Campaigns Against the Marriage Bar, c.1919–1960

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## Abstract

This article considers four international women's organisations – the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, the International Federation of University Women and the Open Door International – and their campaigns for the right of married women to undertake paid work. It examines how each organisation adopted and engaged with the language of human rights in the late 1920s and 1930s. It is argued that after 1948, precisely because of its formal adoption by the UN, the language of human rights became less usable as a way to make the point that women still faced inequalities, and so other framings became more significant. This article contributes to historiographies on international women's organisations, offers a detailed discussion of their activism against the marriage bar, and challenges the conventional chronology of the concept and language of human rights.

This article examines how four international women's organisations – the International Council of Women (ICW), the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC), the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) and the Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker (ODI) – deployed the rhetoric of human rights in their campaigns for married women's right to undertake paid work in the mid-twentieth century. Whilst framing married women's paid work as an equality issue never disappeared, using the language of human rights tapped into the new languages of internationalism and served as a strategic attempt to reframe the argument away from one solely associated with feminism (which was generally perceived negatively by wider society in this period) and towards more of an association with social justice issues.<sup>1</sup> Once the language of human rights was adopted and encapsulated in the UN Declaration in

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1948, it paradoxically became less of a useable strategy against the backdrop of continuing gender inequality, and the discourse notably shifted in other directions.

The marriage bar – that is, the requirement that women resign employment when they married – became a significant issue for women workers in North America, Europe and Australasia from the 1870s onwards and reached its peak in the interwar years. Examining how international women's organisations used the framing of human rights to argue against the marriage bar contributes to several historiographies. There is a slowly growing historiography of the marriage bar itself but it remains understudied as a structural employment condition affecting the working lives of women in many occupational sectors throughout the late nineteenth and early-mid twentieth centuries. Studies of the marriage bar tend to be centred around particular occupations, often within specific countries, and there are still significant gaps in our understanding of the range and extent of marriage bars.<sup>2</sup> Given this, there has also been little work on the marriage bar in a transnational context. One exception is the work of Ann Taylor Allen on western European nations in this period. Taylor Allen notes that by the beginning of the 1930s, 'progressive feminists in every country [...] had coalesced around a view of motherhood that was distinctly modern and included [...] the right to combine marriage and motherhood with paid work'.<sup>3</sup> The organisations centred in this article were some of those led by progressive feminists. The discussion here, then, focuses first on how the arguments for married women's right to employment were shaped and reformed specifically in relation to the rhetoric of human rights; the article then examines the transformation of these arguments with the persistence of gender inequality in the workplace after the Second World War and the abandonment of a significant number of marriage bars.

Beyond contributing to the significant literature on international women's organisations by scholars such as Leila Rupp, Karen Offen and Marie Sandell, this article adds to historical understandings of the use of human rights terminology by women's organisations in periods earlier than the final decades of the twentieth century. As Regula Ludi and Katherine Marino have also demonstrated, international women's organisations were using the rhetoric of human rights, or casting feminist struggles alongside human rights campaigns, in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Tracing such a lineage of the use of the language therefore also helps us to challenge the conventional male-dominated and institutional-dominated chronologies of human rights language which has tended to argue that human rights discourse emerged later in the twentieth century. Samuel Moyn has suggested, for example, that the term 'human rights' did not enter common English language usage until the 1940s.<sup>5</sup> However, as will be shown below, women's organisations and their leaders were using it from the late 1920s to reframe arguments against the marriage bar.<sup>6</sup>

## International women's organisations in the interwar years

International women's organising stretched back to the second half of the nineteenth century. The ICW was founded in 1888 as a means to bring together women from different nations in pursuit of suffrage; constituent national associations followed in the intervening years.<sup>7</sup> The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, which would later become the IAWSEC and later still the International Alliance of Women (IAW), was founded in 1904 as a breakaway group from the ICW after disagreements on how to pursue the suffrage campaign.<sup>8</sup> As the desire for international connectedness grew during and after the First World War, so did the number of women's organisations. These included the IFW which was founded in 1919 by American, British and Canadian feminist graduates to bring together 'university women' to foster international alliances, support networks and further opportunities for women with university degrees.<sup>9</sup> The fourth organisation to be considered here, the ODI, was formed in response to disagreements within the IAWSEC about whether legislation specifically protecting women in the workplace should be supported.<sup>10</sup> Given their entangled histories, and the fact that individuals could be, and often were, members of more than one organisation, there were considerable lasting connections between these groups. As their histories and foci suggest, these organisations were dominated by

middle-class, educated women. The marriage bar, as will be discussed, was also an issue which was of particular interest to middle-class women, thus making these organisations an appropriate focus for this article.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the extent of these organisations' 'internationalness' needs to be questioned. All of the organisations considered here were created largely by women from the Anglophone sphere and although, by the 1920s, member nations from outside of Europe were slowly increasing in the ICW, IAWSEC and IFUW, each remained dominated by women from Europe and North America.<sup>12</sup> The organisations tended also to have their conferences in European nations: in the interwar period, the IFUW, the ODI and the IAWSEC held all of their conferences in major (largely western) European cities, with the exception of a 1931 visit by the IFUW to Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>13</sup> This meant the organisations were overwhelmingly white and tended to focus on Euro/North American-centric issues. As a result, the question of married women's right to work was pursued from the vantage point of global north feminists and the experiences of women from elsewhere in the world were rarely considered.

Lacking formal representation at the League of Nations, and granted an advisory role at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) only in 1935 after much campaigning, the organisations essentially acted as pressure groups.<sup>14</sup> This meant passing resolutions to send to various international bodies and national governments, publishing pamphlets and policy documents, generating publicity, as well as feeding into other international initiatives and organisations where they could, either directly or by forming alliances with like-minded organisations. It was also hoped that their status as international organisations would allow these women's organisations leverage for national change in much the same way as Glenda Sluga has identified for other international organisations in the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

## The context of the marriage bar

In the interwar years, the assertion of married women's right to work became crucial as more and more married women workers' rights were rescinded. Married women's right to do paid work was a complex issue on an international level because of how it intersected with legal and employment regulations and how it related to class, 'race' and gender. It emerged as a social question in Anglophone and global north nations at the end of the nineteenth century when it was brought to the fore by the passage of married women's property acts and the provisions these contained for married women to control their own earnings. Furthermore, discussions of married women's right to work coexisted with rising feminist movements, and organisations such as the ICW and the IAWSEC saw absolute equality with men as the key goal (rather than, say, a reshaping of society which would make life and work better and easier for all). This was, therefore, an example of women arguing for liberal equality and defining men's rights as the standard to be reached. Notably, therefore, the issue of married women's right to work was almost exclusively fought on these rhetorical lines rather than, say, the right of all workers to marry. This was partly also because the issue of married women's right to do paid employment emerged from the fight to allow single, often middle-class, women to enter myriad occupations and so the right of married women to stay in them was usually seen as an extension of this.<sup>16</sup> The idea of married women's right to work as a human right was therefore added into the discourses of the women's movement which pushed to see women recognised as liberal, autonomous subjects in the same vein as men, and which existed within a capitalist economy that, increasingly perhaps, defined personal success as career success.

The extent of married women's interwar labour force participation was varied across Europe. In Britain, around 15 *per cent* of the female workforce was married in the years after the First World War, whereas in France, half of the women workers were married. In 1930, the figures for married women in paid employment were 29 *per cent* in Germany, 9 *per cent* in Sweden, around 11 *per cent* in Denmark and 10 *per cent* in the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> In many nations, the marriage bar took the form of a

clause inserted into employment contracts stating that women had to resign when they married, though in the 1930s some countries also passed national legislation banning married women from working, as we will see.

Married women's paid work of course varied by social class. On the one hand, working-class women were often perceived as being more likely to need to work after marriage, though it was also true that working-class wives did not necessarily aspire to do paid work given both the poor pay and arduous nature of most working-class jobs and the gendered expectation that wives would be chief homemakers and carers. At the same time, working-class women were somewhat less likely to be in an employment type that required resignation on marriage and were instead more likely to be employed in more casual work which, because of its structure and implicit precarious nature, generally also had no such resignation requirements. Marriage bars were initially most common in white-collar public sector employment and in teaching and so were therefore more likely to be a feature of middle-class employment.<sup>18</sup>

Marriage bars got their perceived legitimacy from the fact that in many 'western' societies, and in those colonised by 'western' nations, society was structured on assumptions that a married woman's chief role was as housewife and mother and a husband's was as main breadwinner.<sup>19</sup> Thus, clauses restricting married women's paid work in employment contracts, or even informal expectations that married women would leave the workplace, often did not raise eyebrows because it was what society at large had been socialised to expect. Alongside this, trade unions were often ambivalent about fighting for the married woman worker. Again, whilst there was clearly some variance across national context and specific industries, many trade unions saw women's work as less important than men's and it therefore followed that many saw the right of married women to work as not an issue of human rights or even as workers' rights because it was something specific to women, about whom they were generally less concerned. Some trade unions were actively hostile to married women because they saw them as competing with men and/or as ensuring that more than one income went into each home, which of course ran contrary to the male breadwinner model.<sup>20</sup>

Expectations around women's roles in society were also encapsulated in a further set of legislative practices or campaigns in this period. The interwar years were marked by support for protective legislation among some trade unions and some women's and/or feminist associations. The basis for this legislation was that women were perceived as physiologically weaker than men and in need of protection particularly because of their reproductive capacity and the presumption of motherhood.<sup>21</sup> The implicit emphasis of this legislation was that women had to be categorised differently from men and that women's 'real work' was as wife, mother and childrearer. The assertion of married women's right to work, then, was a decisive argument pushing back against at least one of these assumptions – that is that married women's first and foremost, or only, identity was as a wife. Importantly, most women's organisations who were in favour of protective legislation also recognised that married women should at least be given the freedom to choose whether or not to work; essentially, they recognised wifehood and motherhood as two separate states and did not automatically conflate the two. The ICW, for example, was in support of protective legislation for pregnant women and new mothers and favoured banning nightwork, but also campaigned against the marriage bar.<sup>22</sup> The ODI was distinctive for its staunchly anti-protective legislation position; it saw any restrictions that applied to women only – as opposed to all workers – as preventing their progress in the workplace.<sup>23</sup>

## Using the language of human rights: campaigns against the marriage bar in the late 1920s and 1930s

As has been documented by a number of historians, the backlash against married women's employment was at its strongest throughout the 1930s.<sup>24</sup> In the context of the rapidly deepening economic depression, married women's paid work started to be discussed as a real problem by those hostile to it and to be discussed by women's organisations with increasing alarm at the hostility. The

rhetoric of human rights was never, of course, the only argument used to defend married women's right to work, and the individual organisations considered here used it to differing extents over this period. Given how the membership and bureaucracy of these organisations worked, too, and the wider shared cultures in which they operated, each would have been aware of what their counterparts were doing. It is likely, therefore, that they picked up this rhetoric from each other and also from other campaigning organisations, though the hands of individual, direct influence are often more difficult to trace.

The analysis here examines the minutes, resolutions, position papers and official publications of these organisations in order to consider the deliberate public framing of the arguments for married women's right to work. From tracking the usage of the term 'human rights' and its linguistic near-equivalents across these records, it appears that the ODI was the first adopter of this language and also the organisation which used it most consistently. The influence of Chrystal Macmillan – a lawyer, founder of the British organisation the Open Door Council in 1926 and later the ODI – may be detectable here.<sup>25</sup> In April 1927, Macmillan argued in relation to the Married Women (Employment) Bill that was making its way through the UK Parliament that 'the question of a married woman's right to work was in every way as important as her right to own property. The right to work was an inalienable human right'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, when the ODI was founded by Macmillan and Elizabeth Abbott (a former suffragist and secretary of IWSA/ IAWSEC and editor of its newspaper *Jus Suffragii* until the late 1920s), its charter stated that the 'aim of feminism is that a woman should enjoy the same human rights as a man in all spheres of life' and asserted the 'ordinary human right to engage in paid work'.<sup>27</sup> Macmillan served as President of the ODI from its founding until her death in 1937.

At the ODI conference in Prague in 1933 it was reported that the preceding year's 'main difficulties had been those with regard to the attacks made on the work of married women'.<sup>28</sup> Reports of the conference noted that Macmillan discussed the married woman's right to work as 'a right everywhere recognised as one which distinguishes the freeman from the slave', and elsewhere at the conference the issue was referred to as 'the tyranny of imposing celibacy on the woman wage-earner'.<sup>29</sup> A Married Woman Earner's Charter was discussed and agreed to. During the discussion, Thyra von Beetzen-Ostman from Finland, an honorary secretary of the organisation from 1931 to 1936, argued that 'the right of the woman earner to marry is self-evident if only she is regarded as a human being' and Frantiska Plaminkova of Czechoslovakia argued it was 'inhuman, unpractical [sic] and illogical' to ask married women to give up work.<sup>30</sup> The Charter itself referred to wives' employment as 'the private rights of another' and argued that forcing wives to exist 'without the common human right of protecting herself by selling her labour for gain' was in fact servitude.<sup>31</sup>

In 1935, the ODI's statement to the ILO more forcefully adopted the language of human rights. It began by noting something that had been pointed out by women's organisations since the nineteenth century and which would continue to have resonance throughout the rest of the twentieth century: that 'the status and rights of the man are taken as the human normal; the status and rights of the woman are always lower', though it did also concede via a footnote that in some countries, racial discrimination also affected men's rights. The statement went on to make the case for the need for equal rights, and explicitly outlined what equal rights meant in practice, all while placing this firmly in the context of human rights. For example, it pointed out that 'there is no country in which, in her capacity as a worker seeking to sell her labour for gain, the woman is not denied by reason of sex or marriage or childbirth some of the normal human rights enjoyed by the male worker'.<sup>32</sup> Later in the statement, it argued that '[n]othing but good can result from recognising in legislation that a woman is a human being, and from giving her in her capacity as a worker for pay equality of status and of rights with the man'. On marriage specifically, the ODI argued that '[m]arriage is not a reason for depriving a woman of any human right. Marriage is not a reason for curtailing her right to earn. To refuse to employ a married woman is to deny the woman earner's right to marriage. It is, moreover, a denial of her common humanity'.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, at the 1935 ODI meeting in Copenhagen, there were several discussions which related to the married woman worker and the organisation's outrage was clear. It referred to practices of

'treating women not as human beings and ends in themselves but as pawns to be moved in the interest of others' and declared that 'the right to work is the right to live'.<sup>34</sup> Its resolution specifically about the married woman worker was, by this point, short and pointed, making reference to its previous pronouncement on the subject: it said that the ODI 'reiterates its demand that marriage shall not be a ground for depriving a woman of the right to engage in paid work on the same terms as a man or an unmarried woman'.<sup>35</sup> Read in the context of the wider proceedings, which strongly made the argument for women's humanity, the wider human rights resonances were clear. The British Open Door Council, a constituent member of the ODI, put the same statement more pithily in 1938, arguing that '[w]ere the married woman considered as a person, a distinct human being, with the rights, liberties, responsibilities and duties of other adult human beings, marriage would be looked on as merely incidental'.<sup>36</sup>

By the mid-1930s, the situation with regard to married women's paid work was grave and the wider-spread use of the language of human rights became more evident in international women's organisations' resolutions, correspondence and other printed matter. The Nazi takeover in Germany, coupled with rising right-wing governments elsewhere in Europe, provided tangible evidence that governments could pass – and were indeed passing – legislation that restricted married women's paid work (and sometimes also single women's paid work).<sup>37</sup> At the 1934 IFUW Council meeting in Budapest, a special open meeting was convened under the title 'The Anti-Feminist Reaction'. The IFUW had been issuing statements against the marriage bar since the late 1920s and arguing for wives' equal rights to work.<sup>38</sup> The 1934 meeting considered evidence from Belgium, Yugoslavia, Poland, the Netherlands, Hungary and Sweden and passed the following resolution:

... The International Federation of University Women strongly deprecates the tendency increasingly evident in the majority of countries by new regulations to debar women from careers for which they are well qualified, whether on grounds of sex or marriage. It considers that such regulations are inimical to the family which is itself the foundation of society; and desires to affirm its profound conviction that it is only by permitting and encouraging women to play a full and responsible part in the intellectual life of their country that the civilisation and the prosperity of future generations may be developed on a sound basis of general understanding and enlightenment.<sup>39</sup>

The resolution, therefore, was couched in terms of fairness and equality but also in terms of asserting that if (married) women were deprived of the opportunity to follow the life course they desired, this would be at the detriment of society. When they sent the resolution to the ILO, the IFUW went further. They pointed out that restricting women's work 'is not the road to a more civilised world, but a return to primitive conditions' and urged 'every effort' to be made '[n]ot only on economic grounds, but also and even more emphatically on the ground of the common human right to develop natural capacity to the utmost and to use special training in directions where it can be of the fullest service'.<sup>40</sup> Here, the rhetoric of human rights was being used to signal not only women's rights but the fact that if women were allowed, through education, to become the best and fullest version of themselves, they would be able to give back to their communities.

In 1935, an ILO report did not explicitly endorse married women's right to do paid work which angered the majority of international women's organisations.<sup>41</sup> At the April 1935 IAWSEC conference in Istanbul, the organisation passed a resolution on the right of married women to work, couching it in the language of equality and having the same rights as men.<sup>42</sup> It also directed a petition to the International Labour Conference at Geneva, which pointed out that the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions had argued, amongst other things, for the 'regulation of married women's employment which would facilitate the return of mothers to their homes'.<sup>43</sup> The IAWSEC petition pointed out that 'the essential rights of human personality are the same for a woman as for a man and are the same whether she is married or unmarried' and 'that to deny a woman's right to earn because of marriage is to deny her one of the essential rights of human personality'.<sup>44</sup> The phrase

'essential rights of human personality' was clearly circling near the idea of 'human rights'. In some ways, it was perhaps intending to reach further, into the psychology of individuals and the make-up of human beings. In its communications to the ILO Status of Women Committee, whilst using the word 'equality' liberally elsewhere in the document, the IAWSEC deplored the tendency to 'interfere with [the] elementary human right' for women to earn whilst married.<sup>45</sup> At the IAWSEC study meeting in 1937, the resolution passed regarding women's work spoke of women's 'imprescriptable [sic] right' to the same facilities and opportunities as men.<sup>46</sup>

In 1939, the IAWSEC met in Copenhagen and agreed a programme of work which included the rights of the married woman worker. At the outset of the printed resolutions, the organisation's principles were reaffirmed. This essentially took the form of re-explaining feminism, remarking that '[e]very feminist plan of work should [...] be a plan of work in defence of human values'.<sup>47</sup> They used, again, the idea of the 'sacredness of human personality' which 'has always been the keystone of the woman's movement, which rebelled against an imposed standard of faith, behaviour and economic status'.<sup>48</sup> They were continuing to adopt the language of, or adjacent to, human rights – as Offen has also detected – although the IAWSEC rather over-reached with their stated concerns and focus of feminism when they claimed that feminist organisations had also worked for 'equality of [...] race and creed' when there was little tangible evidence of that by the 1930s.<sup>49</sup> The right of married women to work cropped up in two separate resolutions – one on the legal status of women and the other, more obliquely, in the employment of women in the public services.<sup>50</sup> With the earlier statement of principles couched in the language of human rights, the resolution on women's legal status talked of civil equality. The resolution on women's public service employment pointed out that where any woman's right to undertake paid work was restricted this 'violates women's fundamental rights as individuals and citizens'.<sup>51</sup> Strikingly, at the ODI's 1938 meeting in Cambridge, the terms 'civil rights' and 'equal civil rights' for women had been used throughout the resolutions too, suggesting the inclusion of another lexicon in equality campaigning.<sup>52</sup>

The ICW used the language of human rights the least of organisations considered here and appears to have been the last of these organisations to move towards it. As several scholars have noted, the ICW and some of its constituent organisations were more cautious and less radical and it may be that the same characteristics carried over into the organisation's framing of their arguments on the marriage bar issue.<sup>53</sup> The term 'human rights' was not used in their main conference proceedings in the interwar years and we perhaps see some of the hesitancy in using human rights language directly at the Dominions Conference of the ICW in Johannesburg in 1936. Giving her opening address to the conference, the dowager Lady Nunburnholme demonstrated how '[f]reedom of choice of work is denied to the great majority of women' and in closing, she used the language of women's personhood or common humanity with men: '[a]ll that we are asking is that women should be treated, in all parts of the world, as adult human beings'.<sup>54</sup> Later Bertha Solomon argued that '[t]he real objective of feminism is women's equality with men in every single sphere—political, social and economic, and it must be followed up if there is to be a liberal, warfree world'.<sup>55</sup> Solomon was followed by Ethel Tawse Jollie, who argued that '[w]omen can only come to their own in a State which recognises the rights of individuals'.<sup>56</sup> Her remarks continued the oscillation between conceptualisations of equal rights, the rights of the individual and human rights. The proceedings record her views that:

In fighting this battle it appears unnecessary to label oneself 'Feminist'. It is Humanism and not Feminism which should inspire our claim to an equal share in deciding the future of our race.<sup>57</sup>

Humanism was a strand of thought that had emerged in international women's organisations in the late 1920s in part as a response to the questions of 'old' and 'new' feminism and the perennial question of whether or not women should work with men to try to achieve their goals. The term was meant to symbolise fighting for the whole human race rather than 'just' feminist aims. As Rupp notes, much of the discussion hinged on whether humanism encompassed feminism, or subsumed it, and whether,

by being a humanist, one could continue to combine this with feminism. Rupp observes that whilst the ‘redefinition of “feminism” as leading to humanism represented a response not just to the world situation but also to the taint of antimale sentiment that clung to feminism’, nevertheless many international female campaigners still identified on some level with feminism.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it is clear that the other three international women’s organisations discussed here saw humanism and human rights language as different entities and were using human rights rhetoric strategically alongside feminism and equal rights language. For Tawse Jollie and other members of the ICW, humanism was a less direct and less ‘confrontational’ alternative to feminism; for the other organisations, using human rights language in amongst equality language was another strand to their feminist campaigning.

Furthermore, we can see the deployment of human rights language to hide feminist arguments when we look at the 1933 writings of the campaigner and researcher Marguerite Thibert. She was not making a ‘humanist’ argument in the way that Tawse Jollie of the ICW would in 1936 but was also not using human rights language *in addition to* the language of feminism. Instead, her position was clearly closer to those of the IFUW, the IAWSEC and the ODI but she used the language of human rights without that of feminism to disguise otherwise feminist arguments. In 1933, Thibert published a two-part article in the *International Labour Review*, the journal of the International Labour Office.<sup>59</sup> In it, she specifically examined married women’s paid work and directly addressed the often-used contention that it caused male unemployment. She gave this argument short shrift, building as full a picture as possible with available data, as well as pointing out the flaws in some of the data and the instances in which disingenuous commentators had tried to use this to support their scapegoating agenda. By the second part of the article in particular, Thibert was making a number of feminist arguments, though not labelling them as such. In the opening paragraphs to part two, she also argued that ‘the right to work, to earn one’s livelihood by one’s own activity’ should be ‘recognised as a fundamental right of every human being’.<sup>60</sup>

Thibert was a significant figure. She was a member of several international women’s organisations, including the IFUW, and from the late 1920s she had been employed as a researcher at the ILO. Like a number of her interwar feminist counterparts, she also supported protective legislation. By later in 1933, she would lead the newly-appointed ILO Correspondence Committee on Women’s Work to which the organisations considered here contributed after a long campaign to have input into the ILO’s policy.<sup>61</sup> Her 1933 publication was significant for its detailed outlining of feminist viewpoints without them being presented as such, and because she too drew on the language of human rights.

## The second world war and afterwards: evolving rhetoric

For a number of combatant democracies, the Second World War changed the discussions around married women’s participation in paid work. Many wives in many nations undertook paid work as part of the war effort and whilst this did not always change the views of individual societies or governments for the long term, it did at least show that married women could indeed manage to combine paid work with the other gendered expectations of being a wife – especially given the right support – and that there did not need to be such stringent rules barring married women from paid employment. More particularly, the experience of war also highlighted that married women’s paid work was not an issue when governments and employers decided it did not need to be.<sup>62</sup>

The rhetoric of human rights was also evident in some of the ongoing tussles between women and employers. In Britain, when the abolition of the marriage bar for women civil servants was being debated by a Treasury committee in 1946, the president of the National Association of Women Civil Servants (NAWCS), Miss M. E. Faulkner referred to the marriage bar as ‘[a]n interference with the fundamental human right to choose one’s own mode of living and manner of earning a livelihood’.<sup>63</sup> Given the links between the NAWCS and several of these international organisations, it is likely that this phrasing was a conscious echo of the interwar discourse.<sup>64</sup>



The abolition of formal marriage bars in a fairly considerable number of nations in the years after the war did not mean, of course, that informal expectations of women's resignation on marriage did not exist and did not have an impact. In post-war debates about the future of society and women's roles in 'western' nations, questions surrounding married women's place in the workforce were discussed vociferously.<sup>65</sup> The organisations under consideration here were at the forefront of this.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, when she retired from the Presidency of the IAW, as the IAWSEC was now known, Margery Corbett Ashby wrote in her farewell address that

[o]ur greatest problem in the field of feminist work seems to be [...] that of the married woman. How can the community make it possible for her to give the small child individual love and care, run the home, and still be free to take up outside work, have leisure for citizenship, companionship and recreation?<sup>67</sup>

Although the IAW and the other organisations considered here continued to campaign against the marriage bars still in existence, the parameters of the discussion essentially shifted from asserting married women's right to work to the practicalities of how married women could best balance paid work with housewifery and often childcare too. This shift was exemplified to the greatest extent in the work of the IFUW which began a comprehensive investigation of the issue and essentially funded the preliminary work for what would become Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein's *Women's Two Roles*, first published in 1956.<sup>68</sup> For the organisations considered here, then, 'equality' for married women workers in relation to men was about equal access to training and promotions, with no differentiation in workplace practices between married women and other workers. There was much discussion of the need to educate men and the wider community – both about the fact that married women did in fact belong in the workplace, and to a lesser extent that men might help with household burdens. Although they welcomed part-time work as a way for wives to negotiate the double-burden of paid work and household/caring duties, international women's organisations also became increasingly wary of it as they feared it might become something used to segregate and compartmentalise married women employees.<sup>69</sup>

The women's associations under consideration here welcomed the UN's Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The ODI minutes recorded their 'rejoice [...] at the fact that for the first time in history an official document of world-wide significance is based on the unequivocal recognition of the woman as a human being' and noted, with some optimism, that this 'should progressively bring about full equality as between man and woman and will in time raise both the economic status of women as well as that of the worker in general'.<sup>70</sup> It noted further that any restrictions on women's paid work deprived them of 'a fundamental [sic] human right' and 'of equal status with men'.<sup>71</sup> Other international women's organisations similarly expressed support for the Declaration and used it as a reference point for their resolutions and programmes of work. The IAW used this as an opportunity to reassert the longer-standing connections between the feminist struggle and the struggle for human rights.<sup>72</sup>

As time went on, however, references to the Declaration became more about highlighting the lack of progress and the continuing inequalities. In 1952, the ODI passed a series of resolutions restating its long-term positions, including about the right of married women to work. It grounded these resolutions by reference to the UN Charter and Declaration, arguing for example that restrictions on women's work were a contravention of article 23 of the Declaration. As a catch-all it 'call[ed] upon all governments, all employers and all workers to ensure that women are not debarred from what the United Nations has agreed is a Human Right [that is to work]'.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, at the 1951 ICW meeting, the record of the meeting was set out in relation to the UN Charter and Declaration of Human Rights and the minutes detail at length the ways in which the organisation welcomed both documents and all that they promised. However, in their discussions around both women's employment rights and rights in marriage, the phrasing was all around the concept of ensuring equality for women.<sup>74</sup>

In effect, then, the limitations of the Declaration – and of now using the term ‘human rights’ itself – were evident. The women’s organisations found themselves effectively having to point out that declaring the existence of human rights did not automatically render men’s and women’s positions in society equal and so they had to move towards using other terms to make evident the differing situations of men and women. Terms such as ‘unequal’ and ‘inequality’ remained common, and the term ‘discrimination’ became widely used to denote the ways that employers, governments and societies actively drew a distinction between – in this case – married women and others, leaving married women in a detrimental position.

In outlining its programme from 1949 to 1952, the IAW deployed the language of anti-discrimination, explaining that it would ‘continue to [...] support national and international measures to remove discriminations against members of the human family’ and noting that one of their objectives was ‘economic and social equality and educational opportunities without discrimination of sex or race’.<sup>75</sup> In 1952, it talked of the ‘need [...] to make the economic position of women secure by undertaking a thorough investigation of all circumstances which led to discrimination against women so that [...] measures could be taken to abolish these discriminations’.<sup>76</sup> It also talked of the need to have the Declaration ‘implemented in action’ so that it did not ‘exist exclusively on paper’.<sup>77</sup> Such language became increasingly common for the ODI and the IFUW, too. By 1960, the ODI, which, as we have seen, had earlier been the most vociferous in its use of human rights terminology was also using the term ‘discrimination’.<sup>78</sup> In 1963, the IFUW called for further enquiries into the ‘legal discrimination married women face’.<sup>79</sup> This move towards the use of the term was mirrored by the Commission on the Status of Women, formed by the UN in 1946 and on which the four organisations considered here were represented, amongst many others. The emergence of this language also prefigures the Declaration on Discrimination against Women and eventually the Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, though it is outside of the scope of this paper to consider this fully.<sup>80</sup>

It seems very likely, then, that after the adoption and formalisation of the concept of human rights by the UN, the framing widely adopted in the interwar years was no longer seen as sufficiently powerful or useful to be the central rhetoric in relation to married women’s right to paid work. If human rights as a concept was now recognised by the UN Declaration, asserting that married women’s ability to choose whether to undertake paid work was a human right perhaps did not have the power it once had: organisations pushing for recognition that there remained underlying issues for wives in the workplace had to pivot to other language to make the point. In many ways, this plays out the misgivings that a number of feminists and women’s organisations had when Eleanor Roosevelt and other Anglo-American representatives, in particular, argued that there was no explicit need to spell out women’s rights as part of human rights or to have a separate UN Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>81</sup> Asserting the same-ness and equality of all via human rights language and making no reference to gender meant there was no space to assert that women were in fact still disadvantaged by all kinds of overt and structural discrimination.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusions

In the interwar years, international women’s organisations adopted the language of human rights to help reframe their arguments against the marriage bar. Recognising this, alongside the work of scholars who have identified use of human rights language by women’s organisations in other contexts, helps us to appreciate the extent of the adoption of this rhetoric by international women’s organisations in the interwar years and thereby what they were trying to do in their campaigns. Purposefully arguing that something was a human right was an attempt to emphasise women’s humanity and that their desires were not fringe, or special interests, or easily dismissed as ‘just’ feminist campaigning. When ‘human rights’ became a default international language, though not a reality, the terms of the rhetoric had to change.

The Second World War changed the specifics of the campaign and argument about married women's right to paid employment. In the post-war years, it was not so much about challenging marriage bars – though remaining ones certainly were challenged – but about asserting the need for wives to have equal employment conditions and opportunities. Still, with the formal adoption of human rights as a 'standard' by the UN, the women's organisations studied here were among the first groups to realise that an assertion that all humans had the same rights did not mean that that had actually happened. Thus, assertions about the need for equality continued and the phrasing about discrimination came into being; discrimination as a phrase highlighted that although 'human rights' suggested equality, certain groups – such as married women – were prevented from having that equality.

As a whole, this article contributes further to historiography on the interconnections between the ideas of women's rights and human rights, arguing that new ways to articulate women's disadvantage – in this case in the workplace – had to be found once the concept of human rights became mainstream. Furthermore, this article serves as a case study of how the campaigning language and rhetoric shifted in relation to one particular issue in the middle third of the twentieth century. It highlights, therefore, the perseverance and persistence required to continue articulating an issue, and the need to adapt as conditions – the effects of war, the creation of new international institutions and policies – shifted.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> There is a considerable literature on perceptions of feminism in this period and how women's organisations navigated this. See, for example, Cairtóna Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists: The Boundary Negotiated Between Citizenship and Feminism by Mainstream Women's Organisations in England, 1928–39', *Women's History Review* 9 (2000), pp. 411–29; Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980); Margaret Hobbs, 'Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers during the Great Depression', in W. Mitchison et. al. (eds), *Canadian Women: A Reader* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1996); Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 277–310.

<sup>2</sup> On Britain, see for example Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Helen Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900–55* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). On the USA, see, amongst others, Maurine Weiner Greenwald, 'Working-Class Feminism and the Family Wage Ideal: The Seattle Debate on Married Women's Right to Work, 1914–1920', *Journal of American History* 76 (1989), pp. 118–49; Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*; David M Donahue, 'Rhode Island's Last Holdout: Tenure and Married Women Teachers at the Brink of the Women's Movement', *History of Education Quarterly* 42 (2002), pp. 50–74. On Ireland, see Jennifer Redmond and Judith Harford, '"One Man, "One Job": The Marriage Ban and the Employment of Women Teachers in Irish Primary Schools', *Paedagogica Historica* 46 (2010), pp. 639–54. On Russia, see 'The Vestal Virgins of St Petersburg: Schoolteachers and the 1897 Marriage Ban', *The Russian Review* 50 (1991), pp. 163–82.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890–1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Significant work emerged in the 1990s on international women's networks and their importance. See, in particular, Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Offen, *European Feminisms*; Ellen Carol DuBois, 'The IWSA/IAWSEC in the Age of the League of Nations', in Thomas

- Dublin and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds), *Women and Social Movements International* (Alexandria: Alexander Street Press, 2012). Other recent work includes Marie Sandell, 'Regional versus International: Women's Activism and Organisational Spaces in the Inter-War Period', *The International History Review* 33 (2011), pp. 607–25; James Keating, "'Woman as Wife, "Mother, and Home-Maker": Equal Rights International and Australian Feminists' Interwar Advocacy for Mothers' Economic Rights', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 47 (2022), pp. 957–85. For Ludi's discussion on the language of human rights, see Regula Ludi, 'Setting New Standards: International Feminism and the League of Nations' Inquiry into the Status of Women', *Journal of Women's History* 31 (2019), pp. 12–36 and for Marino's see Katherine Marino, 'From Women's Rights to Human Rights: The Influence of Pan-American Feminism on the United Nations', in Rebecca Adami and Dan Plesch (eds), *Women and the UN: A New History of Women's International Human Rights* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 1–2.
- <sup>5</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 44–49.
- <sup>6</sup> There is also an instance of the idea of human rights being used in Britain in 1921 to argue for the abolition of the marriage bar. At a meeting in London to protest the sacking of several female cleaners in the Borough of St Pancras because they were married, Helena Normanton, the feminist, writer and first female barrister to practise in England and Wales, argued that '[t]he right to marry was the most elementary of human rights'. See *The Vote*, 'Married Women's Right to Work: Protest Against Dismissals', 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1921, p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 15; Anne Cova, 'The National Councils of Women in France, Italy and Portugal: Comparisons and Entanglements, 1888–1939', in Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönplugg (eds), *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), p. 61. See also the recent work on the origins and early years of the ICW: Ann Taylor Allen and Anne Cova, 'Introduction: Transnational Women's Activism', *Women's History Review* [early online publication, 2022]; Pat Thane, "'Well-Bred and Conventional Ladies": The National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland/Northern Ireland', *Women's History Review* [early online publication, 2022]; Johanna Annola and Pirjo Markkola, 'Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg and the International Council of Women: The Finish feminist's International Success and National Adversity, 1888–1911', *Women's History Review* [early online publication, 2022]; Anne Cova, 'Women, Religion and Associativism: The Aristocratic Origins of the National Council of Italian Woman, 1903–1908', *Women's History Review* [early online publication, 2022]; Sandra Blasco Lisa, 'The International Council of Women in Spain During the First Third of the Twentieth Century: Reception, Influence and Exchanges', *Women's History Review* [early online publication, 2022]; Isidora Grubački and Irena Selišnik, 'The National Women's Alliance in Interwar Yugoslavia: Between Feminist Reform and Institutional Social Politics', *Women's History Review* [early online publication, 2022].
- <sup>8</sup> Leila J Rupp and Verta Taylor, 'Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth-Century Feminism' *Signs* 24 (1999), pp. 363–86.
- <sup>9</sup> On the history of the IFUW, see Joyce Goodman, 'International Citizenship and the International Federation of University Women Before 1939', *History of Education* 40 (2011), pp. 701–21; Christine von Oertzen, 'Whose World? Internationalism, Nationalism and the Struggle over the "Language Question" in the International Federation of University Women, 1919–1932', *Contemporary European History* 25 (2016), pp. 275–90.
- <sup>10</sup> Compared with the other organisations considered here, there is less of a historiography of the ODI. See, however, Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, pp. 140–42 for an account of its formation.
- <sup>11</sup> It should be noted here, too, that there were other international or transnational women's organisations in this period which were active in other regions outside of Europe/North America/Australasia. See, for example, Marie Sandell, 'Regional versus International: Women's Activism and Organisational Spaces in the Inter-War Period' *The International History Review* 33 (2011), pp. 607–25; Megan Threlkeld, *Pan American Women: US Internationalists and Revolutionary Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Katherine M. Marino, 'Marta Vergara, Popular-Front Pan-American Feminism and the Transnational Struggle for Working Women's Rights in the 1930s', *Gender & History* 26 (2014), pp. 642–60; Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- <sup>12</sup> For a breakdown of when individual member nations joined the ICW and the IAWSEC, see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, pp. 16–18. For the IFUW, see Atria, Amsterdam, IFUW Archives, Folders 129–130, minutes of meetings. For the ODI, see their various published conference proceedings available via Thomas Dublin and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds), *Women and Social Movements International*, Alexander Street Press database.
- <sup>13</sup> It is worth noting, for example, that it was 1971 before the majority of members on the IFUW's Committee on the Legal and Economic Status of Women were not from Europe, the US or Canada. See also Sandell, 'Regional versus International'; Leila J. Rupp, 'Challenging Imperialism in International Women's Organisations, 1888–1945', *NWSA Journal* 8 (1996), pp. 8–27.
- <sup>14</sup> Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 51. Françoise Thébaud, 'Difficult Inroads, Unexpected Results: The Correspondence Committee on Women's Work in the 1930s', in Eileen Boris et al. (eds), *Women's ILO: Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards, and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 50–71. Nora Natchkova and Céline Schoeni, 'The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks: The Challenges of a Protective Policy (1919–1934)', in Sandrine Knott et al. (eds), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70* (ILO, 2012), esp. p. 57; Marieke Louis, 'Women's Representation at the ILO: a Hundred Years of Marginalization', in Boris et al. (eds), *Women's ILO*, pp. 202–24; Susan Zimmermann, 'Equality of Women's Economic Status? A Major Bone of Contention in the International Gender Politics Emerging During the Interwar Period', *The International History Review* 41 (2019), pp. 200–27.

- <sup>15</sup> Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, p. 26.
- <sup>16</sup> Interestingly, in the Swedish context, Taylor Allen remarks that it became clear to women's organisations that society was more pro-natal than it was pro-feminist, and so it used the opposite argument in the 1930s – i.e. that workers had the right to marry and (therefore) have children. Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, p. 157.
- <sup>17</sup> Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, p. 141.
- <sup>18</sup> Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics*; Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation*; Murphy, *Behind the Wireless*; Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*; Donahue, 'Rhode Island's Last Holdout: Tenure and Married Women Teachers at the Brink of the Women's Movement'; Redmond and Harford, "'One Man, "One Job": The Marriage Ban and the Employment of Women Teachers in Irish Primary Schools'; Christine Ruane, 'The Vestal Virgins of St Petersburg: Schoolteachers and the 1897 Marriage Ban'; Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).
- <sup>19</sup> For discussions of this in the western European context, see Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, pp. 63–85 and pp. 137–59.
- <sup>20</sup> For more on these issues, see, amongst others, Sarah Boston *Women and the Trade Unions* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980); Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, pp. 130–33; Laura Savelli, 'The Female Staff in the PTT International between Trade Unionism and Feminism from the Early Twentieth Century to the Interwar Period' in Eloisa Betti et al. (eds), *Women, Work and Activism: Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022), p. 69.
- <sup>21</sup> For discussions of this, see, amongst others, Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, pp. 63–85 and Susan Zimmermann, 'Equality of Women's Economic Status? A Major Bone of Contention in the International Gender Politics Emerging During the Interwar Period', *The International History Review* 41 (2019), pp. 200–27.
- <sup>22</sup> Anne Cova, 'The National Councils of Women in France, Italy and Portugal', p. 60.
- <sup>23</sup> See, for example, ODI, *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference, Christiansborg Castle, Copenhagen, August 19<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>, 1935* and Thebaud, 'Difficult Inroads, Unexpected Results', pp. 54–55; Nora Natchkova and Céline Schoeni, 'The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks: The Challenges of a Protective Policy (1919–1934)', in Sandrine Knott et al. (eds), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70* (ILO, 2012), p. 56.
- <sup>24</sup> See, for example, Hobbs, 'Equality and Difference'; Sarah Boston, *Women and the Trade Unions*; Taylor Allen; Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*.
- <sup>25</sup> For more on Macmillan, see Michelle Staff, 'Women's Rights on the World Stage: Feminism and Internationalism in the Life of Chrystal Macmillan', *Journal of Women's History* 32 (2020), pp. 38–63 and Helen Kay and Rose Pipes, 'Chrystal Macmillan, Scottish Campaigner for Women's Equality Through Law Reform', *Women's History Review* 29 (2020), pp. 716–36.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Vote*, 'Married Women's Right to Work', 8 April 1927, p. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Cairtfrona Beaumont, 'Abbott [née Lamond], Wilhelmina Hay [Elizabeth] (1884–1957)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.111937> Published online 8 September 2022; As quoted in Ludi, 'Setting New Standards', p. 17.
- <sup>28</sup> Open Door Council, *Open Door Council Eighth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, p. 14.
- <sup>29</sup> *Open Door Council Eighth Annual Report*, pp. 14–15.
- <sup>30</sup> For brief biographical information on Thyra von Beetzen-Ostman, see the League of Nations Search Engine at <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/1395> (accessed 6 January 2023). See also the paper von Beetzen-Ostman delivered at the ODI Summer School in 1932: Thyra von Beetzen-Ostman, 'La Mere Salariée', Ecole d'Eté de l'Internationale de la Porte Ouverte à Mlada Boleslav, Tchécoslovaquie, du 31 juillet au 4 août 1932, available at <https://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/84323> (accessed 10 January 2023).
- <sup>31</sup> Open Door International, *Third Meeting*, p. 26; pp. 38–39.
- <sup>32</sup> ILO, *Nationality and Status of Women: Statements Presented by International Women's Organisations*, Official No. A.19.1935.V., statement by Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker, p. 41.
- <sup>33</sup> ILO, *Nationality and Status of Women*: Official No. A.19.1935.V., statement by Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker, p. 42.
- <sup>34</sup> ODI, *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference, Christiansborg Castle, Copenhagen, August 19<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>, 1935*, pp. 56–57.
- <sup>35</sup> ODI, *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference, Christiansborg Castle, Copenhagen, August 19<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>, 1935*, pp. 56–57.
- <sup>36</sup> Open Door Council, *The Married Woman: Is She a Person?*, second edition (London: Open Door Council, 1938), p. 11.
- <sup>37</sup> By 1934, according to a survey by the IFUW, restrictions of some kind or another on married women's paid work were in place in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, the USA, Yugoslavia and Germany. Countries which had no formal restrictions but where there was evidence of it being harder for married women to find paid work included Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Hungary, Latvia and Switzerland. IFUW Archives, Folder 270, 'The Status and Employment of Women Intellectual Workers', 'Report presented to the Tenth Session of the Committee of Representatives of International Students Organisations, Geneva, April 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>, 1935 by the International Federation of University Women'. See also Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, and Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*.

- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, IFUW archives, Folder 129, Minutes of the 12<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in Madrid, 18<sup>th</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup> September 1928.
- <sup>39</sup> IFUW Archives, minutes of the nineteenth council meeting, Budapest, 1934, 'The Anti-Feminist Reaction'.
- <sup>40</sup> ILO, *Nationality and Status of Women: Statements Presented by International Women's Organisations*, Official No. A.19.1935.V., statement by the International Federation of University Women, pp. 39–40. Note that the IFUW used almost identical language in the report sent to the International Students Organisations the same year. See IFUW Archives, 'Report presented to the Tenth Session of the Committee of Representatives of International Students Organisations, Geneva, 10–11 April 1935 by the International Federation of University Women', p. 1.
- <sup>41</sup> Zimmermann, 'Equality of Women's Economic Status?'
- <sup>42</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Twelfth Congress, Istanbul, 18–24 April, 1935*, p. 18.
- <sup>43</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Twelfth Congress*, p. 26.
- <sup>44</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Twelfth Congress*, p. 27.
- <sup>45</sup> ILO, Status of Women, *Communications Received from Governments Since September 1936*, no.A.14.1937.V., p. 37.
- <sup>46</sup> Alliance internationale pour le suffrage et l'action civique et politique des femmes [IAWSEC], *Report de la Conférence Internationale d'Etudes*, 1 March 1937, p. 56. 'Imprescriptable' may have been a mistranslation from the French 'imprescriptible'.
- <sup>47</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Thirteenth Conference, Copenhagen, 1939*, p. 9.
- <sup>48</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Thirteenth Conference*, p. 8.
- <sup>49</sup> Offen, *European Feminisms*, p. 374; IAWSEC, *Report of the Thirteenth Conference*, p. 8.
- <sup>50</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Thirteenth Conference*, pp. 12–15.
- <sup>51</sup> IAWSEC, *Report of the Thirteenth Conference*, p. 15.
- <sup>52</sup> Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker, *Report of the Fifth Conference in Cambridge, 25<sup>th</sup>–29<sup>th</sup> July, 1938*, pp. 50–53.
- <sup>53</sup> See, for example, Natchkova and Schoeni, 'The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks', p. 50. Cova, 'The National Councils of Women in France, Italy and Portugal'.
- <sup>54</sup> ICW, *Report of the Dominions Conference, 1936*, p. 7.; ICW, *Report of the Dominions Conference, 1936*, p. 6.
- <sup>55</sup> ICW, *Report of the Dominions Conference, 1936*, p. 9.
- <sup>56</sup> Tawse Jollie was an interesting figure in the context of this activism. As Ethel Cook and later Colquhoun, she had had a career in the anti-suffrage movement and in Edwardian Conservative politics in Britain before moving with her husband to Rhodesia. She became the first female parliamentarian in that nation. For further discussion of her life, career and beliefs, see Donal Lowry, "'White Woman's Country': Ethel Tawse Jollie and the Making of White Rhodesia", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23 (1997), pp. 259–81.
- <sup>57</sup> *Report of the Dominions Conference, 1936*, p. 11.
- <sup>58</sup> Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, pp. 133–35. See also Offen, *European Feminisms*, pp. 369–75.
- <sup>59</sup> Marguerite Thibert, 'The Economic Depression and the Employment of Women: I', *International Labour Review* XXVII (1933), pp. 443–70; Marguerite Thibert, 'The Economic Depression and the Employment of Women: II', *International Labour Review* XXVII (1933), pp. 620–30.
- <sup>60</sup> Thibert, 'The Economic Depression and the Employment of Women: II', p. 621.
- <sup>61</sup> For more on the correspondence committee, see Françoise Thébaud, 'Difficult Inroads, Unexpected Results' and Natchkova and Schoeni, 'The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks'. See also Françoise Thébaud, 'What is a Transnational Life? Some thoughts about Marguerite Thibert's career and life (1886–1982)', in Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönplflug (eds), *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), pp. 162–83.
- <sup>62</sup> For discussions on the removal of the marriage bar, or discussions by governments about the 'feasibility' of doing this, see: Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation*, pp. 205–08; Helen Glew 'Regulating Marriage: Gender, the Public Service, the Second World War, and Reconstruction in Britain and Canada', in Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers (eds), *Gender and the Second World War: Lessons of War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 88–100. On the West German context in the 1950s, see Christine von Oertzen, *The Pleasure of a Surplus Income: Part-Time Work, Gender Politics and Social Change in West Germany, 1955–1969* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007). On Canada, see Jennifer A Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939–1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
- <sup>63</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 'Women Civil Servants Stake Claims. End to Marriage Bar, Equal Rights with Men', 13 May 1946, p. 4.
- <sup>64</sup> For an account of the NAWCS, their links and their feminism, see Helen Glew, '[A] Stronger Position as Women Alone': Women's Associations in the Civil Service and British Feminism, 1900–1959', *Women's History Review* 30 (2021), pp. 669–87.
- <sup>65</sup> The literature here is vast. Recent contributions include Sarah Fishman, *From Vichy to the Sexual Revolution: Gender and Family Life in Postwar France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Kirsten Swinth, *Feminism's Forgotten Fight: The Unfinished Struggle for Work and Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) and Lyndsey Jenkins, 'The Voice of the True British Housewife: The Politics of Housewifery at Labour's Women's Conferences, 1945–1959', *Women's History Review* (forthcoming).
- <sup>66</sup> See, for example, IAWSEC, *Report of the Fourteenth Conference, Interlaken, 1946*, pp. 14–16.

- <sup>67</sup> Margery Corbett Ashby, 'Farewell Address', IAW Congress, 1946, p. 9.
- <sup>68</sup> Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1956). See also Yvonne Hirdman (trans. Linda Schenk), *Alva Myrdal: The Passionate Mind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) and Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, pp. 156–57. For more on the IFUW's survey, see IFUW archives, Folder 130. In 1960, the ICW convened several sub-groups to consider the theme of 'woman and family in a changing world'. See ICW, *Report of the Triennial Council Meeting*, Istanbul, 1960, pp. 181–87.
- <sup>69</sup> See, for example, IFUW minutes. 47<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting, 7th, 8th, 9th and 11th September 1964, Kiffisia, Greece and IAW, *Report of the Sixteenth Congress*, 1955, p. 49.
- <sup>70</sup> Open Door International, *Report of the Sixth Conference*, Brussels, 1948, p. 68.
- <sup>71</sup> ODI, *Report of the Sixth Conference*, p. 69.
- <sup>72</sup> IAW, *Report of the Fifteenth Congress*, 1949, pp. 35–36.
- <sup>73</sup> ODI, *Report of the Eighth Conference, Held in Copenhagen August 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> 1952*, pp. 41, 43.
- <sup>74</sup> *Resolutions Adopted by the International Council of Women at its Triennial Meeting, Athens, March/April 1951*, pp. 1–4.
- <sup>75</sup> IAW, *Report of the Fifteenth Congress*, 1949, p. 51.
- <sup>76</sup> IAW, *Report of the Sixteenth Congress*, 1952, p. 48.
- <sup>77</sup> IAW, *Report of the Sixteenth Congress*, 1952, p. 48.
- <sup>78</sup> ODI, *Its Object, Its Policy, Its Work* (1963), Resolutions passed at 1960 conference, p. 21.
- <sup>79</sup> IFUW minutes, 33<sup>rd</sup> Council meeting, Bedford College, London, 5th–6th August 1963.
- <sup>80</sup> See, for example, records of the Commission meetings: UN, E/CN.175/REV.1, *Commission on the Status of Women: Report of the Fifth Session*, 1951; E/CN.6/313, *Commission on the Status of Women: Report of the Eleventh Session*, 1957; E/CN.6/383, *Commission on the Status of Women: Report of the Fifteenth Session*, 1961; E/CN.6/454, *Commission on the Status of Women: Report of the Nineteenth Session*, 1966.
- <sup>81</sup> See, amongst others, Marino, 'From Women's Rights to Human Rights', p. 11; Rebecca Adami, 'International welfare feminism: CSWS Navigating Cold War Tensions 1949', in Adami and Plesch (eds), *Women and the UN*, pp. 55–70.
- <sup>82</sup> A similar point was recognised by scholars examining the UN in the 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Charlotte Bunch, 'Women's Rights as Human Rights: Towards a Revision of Human Rights', *Human Rights Quarterly* 12 (1990), pp. 486–98.

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