

A “careful study” on public opinion. An exemplary investigation of media monitoring through press clippings collections in the League of Nations’ Information and Mandates Sections

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Abstract

This article seeks to shed some light on institutional monitoring practices employed by the League of Nations during the 1930s. It explores internal reception of external communication on the organisation and its work and asks (and partially answers) what processes and practices were established by the organisation concerning media monitoring and which views and interpretations these practices (re-) produced. For that purpose, it discusses findings from four exemplary hermeneutic case studies conducted on collections of a total of 701 press clippings collected and curated by League organs. To provide a topical focus (and, simultaneously, increase the transdisciplinary value of the presented research) all four collections concern the League of Nations’ project of international control over colonial policy and are accordingly sourced from the archival section files of the organisation’s Mandates Section. The article contextualises the findings concerning the clippings with information derived from the minutes and reports of the League’s experts’ commission on Mandates, the Permanent Mandates Commission.

Keywords

press clippings, cuttings, media monitoring, clippings agencies, League of Nations, interwar media analysis, Mandates, colonial policy

1 Introduction

As the first attempt of an organisation for global governance, the League of Nations expressly relied on institutional interrelations of diplomacy, public relations and journalism: “Publicity”, as League veteran Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer writes, “became an inseparable element of the League’s action. [Its] very existence depended [...] on the degree to which it is backed by an actively interested public opinion” (Ranshofen-Wertheimer, 1945, p. 201; see also Pedersen, 2007, p. 1096). This meant that League communication management not only involved the organisation’s output, but also monitoring the public discourse relating to its work. To that end, the League’s public relations department, the Information Section (LoNIS), created what it described as a “Daily Press Review [...], comprising 35 to 40 typewritten pages, which reproduces newspaper articles or extracts from articles dealing with

the League [...] for internal circulation only”. It furthermore received “from 800 to 3500 [...] cuttings [from newspapers] on League subjects” and “distributed [them] to the Sections concerned, which make a careful study of them” (LoNIS, 1928, p. 62).¹ Research on League communication so far confines itself to looking at the interrelation of outward communication (e.g., Gellrich, Koenen & Averbeck-Lietz, 2020; Lange, 1991; Seidenfaden, 2019; Wilke, 1991) and external perception (Beyersdorf, 2016; Nordenstreng & Seppä, 1986). The present article seeks to complement that approach by shedding some light on the internal perception of media output in the form of institutional monitoring practices. It investigates the internal

1 For additional and more in-depth information on the League of Nations Information Section and its work, see Seidenfaden (2019) as well as the contribution by Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz (2023) in the comprehensive edited volume currently being prepared by Erik Koenen.



handling and, in part, reflection of external communication. As a thematic frame, it looks into press clippings selected and prepared by the League in the context of its internationalised system of colonial administration, the so-called Mandates system, and asks which way they were selected, handled and (re-) produced. The article is based on case studies concerning a specific case (South African policy) and two more general topics (the organisation and potential reform of the Mandates system and so-called “native policy”). Given this consciously chosen, – if, arguably, quite narrow – limitation and the explorative nature of the underlying studies, this article aims at developing a point of departure for a better understanding of and potential future research into historical institutional approaches to media monitoring rather than giving definitive answers.

1.1 Delimitations and historical and institutional context

These delimitations deliver a sample of four collections, that were sufficiently distinctive to allow for a comparative approach, yet similar enough to assume that their contents were submitted to the same institutional practises. All four of these clipping collections originate from the 1930s and are kept among the files of the League Mandates Section in the League of Nations Archives at the UN Library in Geneva. By the early 1930s, the League administration, especially concerning LoNIS, had been reorganised significantly (Kahlert, 2019; Seidenfaden, 2019, pp. 85–86), taking the shape it would essentially keep until its dissolution in 1946. At the same time, bureaucratic processes and personnel constellations established in the early 1920s had had a decade to professionalise (or at least to acculturate themselves to the new institution). This puts the second decade of the League’s active existence at the threshold between the original interwar world order as it was intended in 1919 and the 1945 UN-system still in place today.

The Mandates Section was the central institutional body behind what is usually referred to as the Mandates system: In 1919, articles 22 and 23 of the League Covenant and the Versailles Peace Treaty established this system of quasi-colonial administration,

which concerned the former colonies of the German Empire in Africa and the Pacific and the former Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia (Iraq), Palestine, Alexandretta, Syria and Lebanon. The Covenant described these territories, which remained under foreign administration at the hands of victorious allied powers (the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, France, Belgium and Japan), as “inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world” with the implied perspective that they would one day be released into independence (Treaty of peace with Germany, 1919, p. 56).² The powers administrating mandated territories sent representatives to Geneva twice a year to present and defend its administrative policy before an international commission of experts, the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC). In turn, the PMC delivered a report to the Council, the League’s executive body. The Mandates Section was thus a relevant part of global governance. Due to its special structure, with an expert commission and its reports to the League council, we can assume that its work was thoroughly organised and documented. The Mandates Section therefore seems a fitting choice for the study of administrative practice. Furthermore, the Mandates system takes a special position in the history of international governance discourse, as it represents a point in history in which the colonial world order converged with post-war ideas of decolonisation and development (Anghie, 2005, p. 115; Treaty of peace with Germany, 1919, p. 56). A focus on the Mandates system therefore contributes not only to League communication history but also to the fields of colonial and development history.

The clippings in question were (for the largest part) provided by the Geneva-based agency *Argus Suisse de la Presse*. In its mechanics not unlike today’s Google searches

2 Before the dissolution of the League in 1946, independence had come only for Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The latest former mandated territory to become independent was Namibia in 1990, while the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, formerly under Japanese Mandate, remains an unincorporated territory of the USA to this day.

(albeit relying on a much lower bandwidth), media monitoring in the 1920s and 1930s was at the time most efficiently done through clippings agencies, which scanned the international mass press for previously defined search keywords. Since the late 19th century, these agencies had established themselves as prime service providers even for social scientists such as Ida Wells-Barnett and her pioneering research on racially motivated lynchings in the U.S. (Wells Barnett, 1901) and even offered much more complex and detailed analyses, including, for example, market research and targeted advertising (Popp, 2014).

Having denied an offer by the U.S.-based Luce's Press Clipping Bureau in 1919 (van Alstyne, 1919) the League chose a local solution and a basic service offered by the *Argus Suisse* (LoNIS, 1920). Indeed, personal connexions between the *Argus* and the League seem to have been tight: Based on the handwriting on unrelated files from both the *Argus* and the League archives, at least one employee worked for both institutions at some point of their career. However, as will be shown below, the clippings agency was evidently not the only source of material for the comprehensive clipping collections prepared by LoNIS.

1.2 Sources and methodological approach

In the following I will introduce the sources based on which my studies were conducted. The clippings collections will be referred to by their respective archival nomenclature: S.302-1, S.302-2, S.303-1 and S.303-2. The "S" here signifies that they are archived among the "section files", which comprise of the documents used in the day-to-day work of the section in question (in this case the Mandates Section). The initial is followed by the number of the box in which the file is kept (302 and 303 respectively) and the number of the file within that box. Two of the collections are organised around more general issues concerning the Mandates system: S.302-1 focuses on the discussions on possible reforms of the system in the light of international political developments during the 1930s, most prominently the Japanese exit from the League in 1933, which meant that the Japanese administrated "South Seas Mandate"

(including modern-day Palau, the Marshall Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and parts of federated Micronesia) was effectively withdrawn from League control. "S.302-2 Native policy" is concerned with philosophical, (pseudo-)scientific and political perspectives on colonised persons. These collections cover the time period of 1933–1938. The two other collections ("S.303-1 South Africa 1936–juin 1938", and "S.303-2 SWA") are concerned with the more specific matter of the administration of the mandated territory of South West Africa (SWA, modern-day Namibia), which was then under the control of the South African Union (SAU). These collections cover the periods of 1936–1938 and 1935–1937 respectively. I have digitised all four clipping collections, comprising of a total of 701 individual items, by hand in the UN Library reading room in Geneva in March 2019. The collections were at the time only physically available and had, judging by their condition, to a large part hardly been handled by anyone other than library personnel.³ For the purpose of reference and comparison, the studies were also informed by the session minutes and reports of the PMC (1933a, 1933b, 1934a, 1934b, 1935, 1936a, 1936b, 1937a, 1937b, 1938a, 1938b) for the relevant time period. While only a few select meetings during these sessions were held in public, all sessions were recorded in detailed minutes. Edited versions of these protocols were at the time distributed by the League as prints in English and French for public libraries and bookstores worldwide. The studies on which this article is based employed digital English versions of these authorised prints that are in part publicly available from the UN online library, in part provided by the archivists in Geneva.⁴

Following the reflexive methodology framework put forward by Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg (2009), the studies employed hermeneutic analyses of the four clippings

3 The League of Nations Archives have since been professionally digitised and made available online in their entirety (UN, 2023a). This service was not yet available at the time of the research on which this article is based.

4 The material is catalogued, but not fully accessible through the digital League archive (UN, 2023b).

corpora. As its main aim is to develop a point of departure concerning the physical mechanics of discursive construction within the organisation rather than the discourse itself, the article does not reproduce these analyses in full. Instead, it concentrates on predominantly descriptive aspects of the source critical dimension and casts a light on the basis for understanding in the sense of *verstehen* (i. e., the “understanding of underlying meaning, not the explanation of causal connections”, Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 91) of institutional discourse and (discursive) practice. After a purely descriptive appraisal of the sources informed by historical background research, the analytical focus rested on their remnants’ quality, that is as “sources which offer unintended information” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 109). The concerned clippings corpora proved especially rich in that respect as they contained a sizable amount of traces in the form of pencilled annotations and markings. Accordingly, they provided not only a record of the mediated discourses on imperial colonialism manifest in the cut articles themselves, but also of the biographies of the clippings: How and by whom had they been handled, read and studied? It should be noted that these processes can only partially be reconstructed from traces alone; a full(er) reconstruction would doubtlessly require additional complementary sources, which have not been included in the present strict delimitations. However, the findings allow for a preliminary understanding of selection practices and infrastructures within the concerned organs of the League.

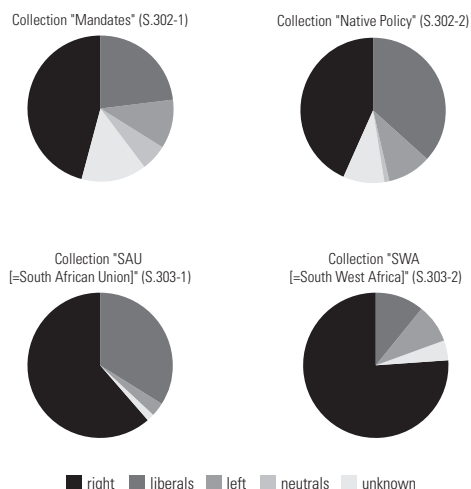
This article reproduces findings relating to eight analytical packages: (I) annotations and markings, (II–V) discourses reflected in the individual collections, (VI) highlighted passages throughout the clippings sample, (VII) clippings forwarded to the PMC and (VIII) PMC session minutes and reports. To not unduly strain the scope of this article, findings from packages II–V and VIII are knit together into a common section, sub-divided only by the topical foci of the collections. For research packages I, VII and VIII, the clippings themselves and the different layers of traces are central. The following short description of the form and general appearance of the clippings in question may help

to better understand how these traces were conceptualised (e.g., Fig. 2). While some other collections in the League Archives simply comprised of stacks of articles, merely cut from newspapers and organised only by their publication dates, most of the items from the four collections studied here were rather more processed. Usually equipped with a slip of paper added by the clippings company, these cuttings were more or less diligently mounted on a sheet of writing paper. To differentiate more thoroughly I here use the term “clipping” to refer to these processed items as found in the files, while the term “cutting” is employed to refer only to the actual newsprint cut from the original publication. Underlined portions of text, ciphers and symbols that are not recognisable as writing I refer to as “markings”. Any instances of written text are referred to as “annotations”. Typically, markings are found on the cutting itself, while annotations are generally left on the mount of the clipping. There are, however, exceptions. Based on the position, the colours used and, for annotations, their content, it can accordingly – with varying degrees of certainty – be deduced by whom and at which point of the individual clipping’s biography these traces were left.

2 General composition of the clippings sample

The full sample of all four clipping collections comprises of 701 items from a variety of national, international and regional publications in six languages. By far the largest portion of the cuttings (435 items) originates from English language publications, followed with quite an interval by French (113 items) and German (106 items) language publications. All three languages were spoken by representatives on the PMC and were of some relevance in the mandatory and colonial context, considering that Germany was the former ruler of most of the mandated territories, while Britain and France ruled over the two most prominent colonial empires at the time. This applies, to some extent, also for the Netherlands (19 cuttings are from Dutch publications). Italy, which also had a seat on the PMC, stands for 22 of the analysed items.

Figure 1: Proportions of clippings from media by their political background in each of the four analysed collections



Other languages spoken by PMC members, specifically Spanish, Portuguese, Norwegian and Japanese, are not represented in the sample. Two of the cuttings are from English-language Japanese dailies, and one item is a type-written French translation from the Spanish language newspaper *El Día* of Montevideo. Finally, there are six clippings in Afrikaans, from the Windhoek-based *De Suidwes Afrikaner*.

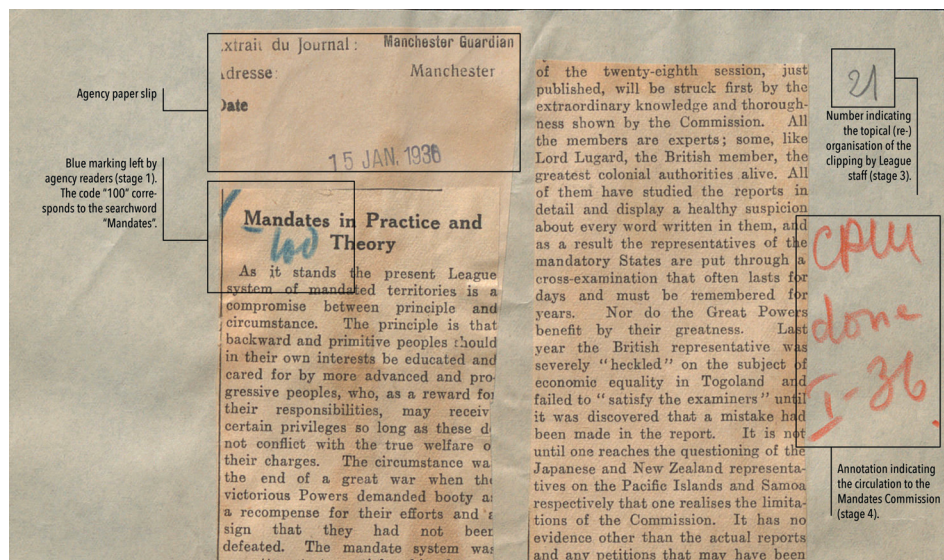
Agencies like the Argus Suisse prided themselves to cover a wide range of the global media sphere – and, as noted, there are in fact cuttings from (English-language) Japanese and Indian publications. In terms of geography, unsurprisingly, the European political centres still stand for the paramount portion of the items in the collections. In fact, cuttings from only two publications, the conservative *Times* and the left-wing liberal *Manchester Guardian*, together make up over half of S302-2 (98 of 185 clippings) and S.303-1 (116 of 229 clippings). A large number of the cuttings from the *Times* and the *Guardian* are letters to the editor, which means that they cover a comparatively wide range of views beyond those supported by the editorial staff. If this was a motivation behind their preferential treatment, however, remains unclear.

It is noticeable that, despite the strong presence of the (at the time) left-leaning liberal *Guardian*, all four collections have a certain bias to the political right (Fig. 1). This is especially pronounced in the two collections on topics pertaining to the administration of South West Africa, S.303-1 and S.303-2. In both cases, conservative and moderate to extreme right-wing publications together stand for well over half of the clippings. Similarly, items originating from publications here classified as liberal make up a sizable portion in all four collections, specifically in collections S.302-2 ("Native policy") and S.303-1 (on South African administrative policies). This is in part a direct result of the disproportionately large number of cuttings from the *Times* and the *Guardian*, which bolster the numbers for what are here classified as conservative and liberal cuttings respectively. It remains unclear at this point what causes this political skew. It could be the result of the sampling as practiced by the agency (and potential additional clippings providers), or of later reductions of the sample performed by League organs. Of course, it is also possible that the issues selected for during the sampling process were simply more prevalent in certain publications than others. Finally, as is common with historical sources, we cannot preclude the possibility that part of the material has simply been lost, distorting the sample. It should also be noted that the samples are necessarily skewed towards the political right where they contain articles from German media organisations, which with the notable exceptions of the *Jüdische Rundschau* and the exiled *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, were at the time under more or less direct control by the Nazi government and therefore summarily classed as right-wing to extreme right publications. The political skew in the sample will be further discussed in the topical analyses below.

3 Reconstruction of practices in clipping selection and handling

After even a superficial study of the traces left on the clippings it becomes apparent that they represent several stages in the handling of the items. From the different symbols, no-

Figure 2: Exemplary clipping from the collection S.302-01 “Press Clippings Mandates 1933–1938”



tes and markings scribbled on the pages at least four such stages can be identified, each leaving its distinctive traces on the source material:

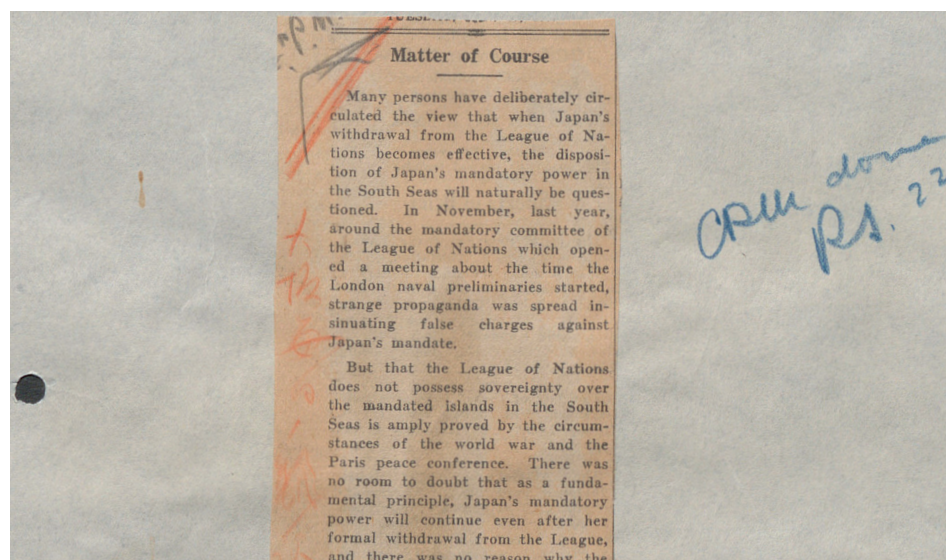
1. The original selection of the articles by Argus Suisse readers,
2. the preliminary organisation of the cuttings by Argus Suisse,
3. the curation processing of the collections by League officials,
4. the reproduction and circulation of clippings by League officials.

The first layer of these markings is made during the selection process in the clipping agency. They comprise of a shorthand note referring to the keyword according to which the original article has been selected and blue or red demarcations of the geometrical boundaries of the articles, along which the paper is cut.⁵ In the example shown in Fig. 2, these markings are in blue pencil; the keyword is “Mandates”, apparently corresponding to the agency-internal numeral code “100” (or sometimes “M100”). Including synonyms and translations, for the four collections

analysed, three such search phrases have been reliably identified: “League of Nations”, “Mandate(s)”, and the rather less obvious phrase “Forced Marriage(s)”. Further markings suggest that there may have been more such terms and phrases, but it has so far not proven possible to discern whether these specific markings were left during the selection process at the agency or at a later stage. Variations in the cyphers used by the agency to code article categories furthermore suggest that there were several more specific topics on which League-related articles were collected and preliminarily organised by the agency before being sent on to the League. An additional trace left on this stage is typically the paper slip giving the name and date of the publication. As in the example shown in Fig. 2, this slip is often partially cut, sometimes missing completely. This suggests that LoNIS, rather than the agency, handled the mounting and final preparation of the clipping (LoNIS, 1928, p. 62).

A large part of the collection on “Native policy” (S.302-2) is marked with the Letter “N” in pencil identical to that used for the respective boundary-markings, suggesting that the League officials, once they had received the cuttings, largely adopted the topical organisation undertaken by the agency. In the

⁵ Popp (2014) describes the practicalities of clippings preparation within the agency.

Figure 3: Cutting from the *Osaka Mainichi*, 15 January 1935 (collection S.302-1)

other collections, inconsistencies in similar markings suggest that they were rearranged at some point. A considerable source of potential noise in this respect are traces and potential reductions of the collections resulting from the reorganisations of the archive since 1946. Although the collections have theoretically been accessible to researchers and the interested public for many years, it seems unlikely that the clippings have passed through too many hands since 1946, as the thin and brittle newsprint is still in mint condition in most cases.

The co-existence of very specific topical collections and large files concerning hundreds of cuttings on “various” or “diverse” issues suggests, however, that large portions of the raw material collected were reorganised. Likely this process was part of the “careful study” by the Mandates Section (LoNIS, 1928, p. 62). Such reorganisation can be identified by a pencilled number signifying the collection to which the clipping belongs (even if it remains unclear whether the according markings were actually made at this stage of the clippings’ handling).⁶ The numbers 21

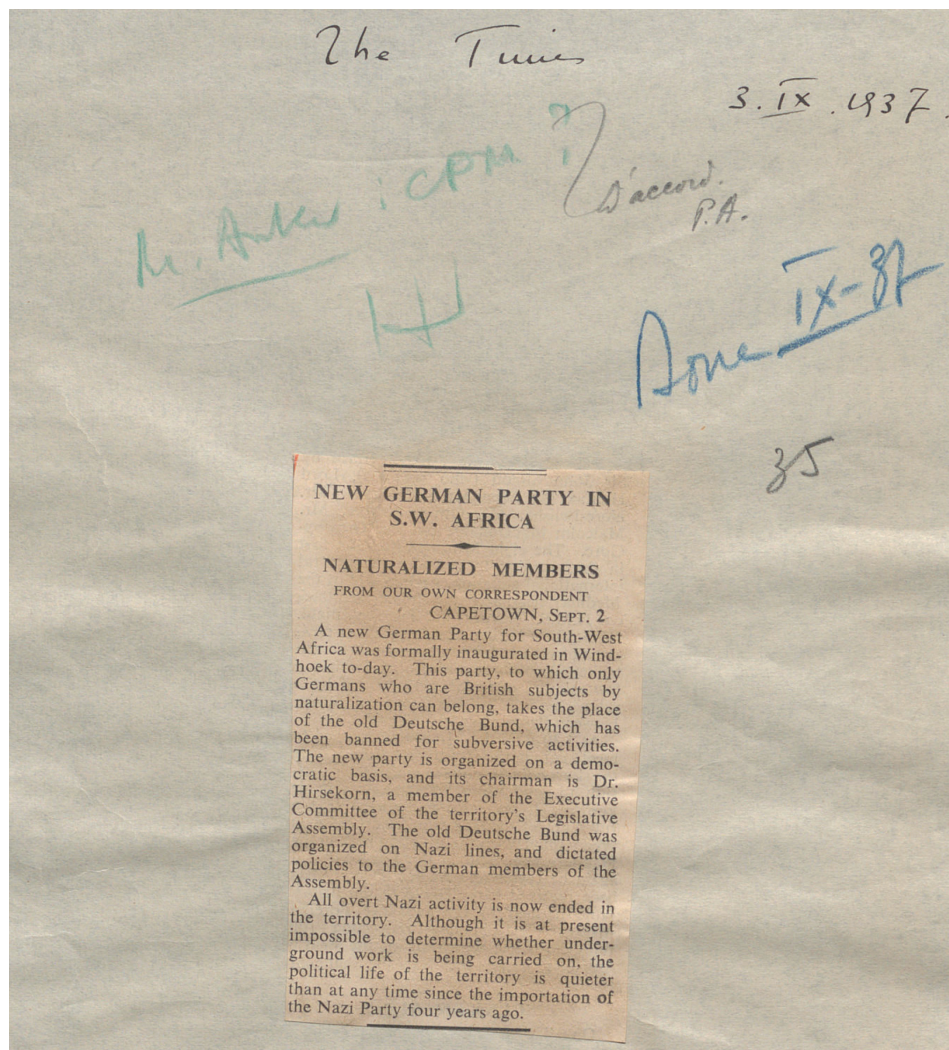
and 35 (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 4) correspond to the respective focus of the collection and can be identified on collections from other contexts that are concerned with similar issues. The many markings in different colours on some of the clippings suggest that they were reorganised at several occasions. Most of these processes are very hard – perhaps impossible – to reconstruct, though studies on other collections and other material from the archive may render additional information. Also, the handling of some items seems at times to have been somewhat clumsy. For example, on a clipping from the *Osaka Mainichi* dated to January 1935, the publication’s title is noted down in Japanese (大阪毎日新聞), with an added question mark (Fig. 3). This suggests that it was likely handled by the Tokyo bureau of the Information Section and that its original publication context had temporarily been lost before it was forwarded to Geneva.

Although it was the main supplier of cuttings, only about half of the items across all four collections can safely be said to have

seems most likely that they were added at the suggested point in the process, as there is no other obvious marking or note that would identify the topical context of the respective clipping.

⁶ While these numbers could have been left at a later instance, for example during some sort of reorganisation of the archived material, it

Figure 4: Notes on a clipping from the Times, 3 September 1937 (collection S.303-2)



Note: Annotations in chronological order: messages containing signatures of section director Edouard de Haller (left, originally in green pencil) and Paul Anker (middle, originally in grey pencil) and the confirmation by the clerical employee (lower right, originally in blue pencil).

been provided by the Argus Suisse. This can be derived from either the typical paper slip or notes pertaining to the keyword in the blue or red pencil used by the agency's readers. A large portion of other clippings also contain markings designating the boundaries of the respective article and have accordingly been sourced, if not from the Argus, at least under circumstances similar to those in the agency's reading rooms. But there are also items that clearly came from sources other than an

agency: A handful of items contain notes or markings that suggest that they were sent in individually; others are what appears to be type-written extracts and summaries taken from League-internal press reviews. S.302-1 even contains an excerpt from the minutes from a 1934 session of the British Commons; and S.302-2 includes the full 25th volume of the German colonial journal *Der Ring*, identified by a stamp to be a "gift by the German Colonial Association".

The collections were clearly not exclusively kept for later reference, but also actively passed along between League officials and the experts on the PMC. There are markings or annotations on a fair portion of the clippings, that document their handling and circulation in that manner. In the example depicted in Figure 2, we can see that the concerned clipping was transcribed and circulated in January 1936 to the PMC (here identified by the French abbreviation CPM for *commission permanente des mandats*). In most cases, the markings are much subtler, taking the form of small tick marks in different colours, in others, they contain shorthand signatures. Most of those seem to belong to clerical staff tasked with preparing copies or, perhaps, translations of the documents in question. However, higher ranking staff have also left traces on the material. League official Edouard de Haller, especially, documented his consultation of 45 of the clippings by signing them with his shorthand “Hr.” and at times pencilled direct requests on the items, directing his staff to prepare copies and circulate the material to specific individuals. De Haller, a Swiss civil servant, had become a member of the Mandates Section in 1932 and rose to the post of director in 1935. However, his signature starts to appear on items from early August 1934 onwards. Also, his notes, like the example in Figure 4, seem more like suggestions than instructions. This implies that his consultation of the clippings was not so much connected to his rank but more likely to his expertise or possibly to his personal interest. In the example, he clearly relies on his subordinate Peter Anker’s opinion as to whether the clipping in question should be included in the PMC-briefing. Anker, a former secretary with the Norwegian foreign office, predates de Haller as a member of the Mandates Section by a few months, but formally soon became his inferior. It has been shown in other contexts, that the formal structures and hierarchies were not always strictly adhered to by staff in the secretariat’s subsections (Gellrich, Koenen & Averbeck-Lietz, 2020; Seidenfaden, 2019, pp. 49–51); this, perhaps, is another such example. Apart from de Haller and Anker, there are three more signatures that appear more

frequently on the clippings; however, none of those have so far been identified.

222 items across the sample contain markings or annotations that document some form of consultation or circulation, including 62 pencilled highlights in the text (other than agency search phrases) and 71 annotations in the margins. Only in 28 of these cases do markings unmistakably document circulation specifically to the PMC. While these circulated documents do come from all four collections, three quarters of the items are from the topical collection on South West Africa (S.303-2). This makes sense, considering the small size of S.303-1 (which only covers two years). S.302-2 and especially in S.302-1 are concerned with rather more general, conceptual issues, which makes these collections more relevant to the administrative institutions of the League itself and the international, rather than to the experts on the PMC.

4 Content

The majority of markings that highlight text passages in the clippings are clearly left by (or for) organisational units other than the PMC: They mostly deal with general matters of organisation, law or administration. The criteria by which clippings were selected for PMC briefings remain unclear from the study of the articles themselves. Topical items as well as articles which deal with the PMC or its members directly are at times forwarded to the concerned parties. However, there is no clear pattern as to when (and, if so, why) they were (not). Those that were sent on are oftentimes likely selected for the purpose of information, but they do also tend to contradict the positions taken by the experts during PMC sessions. In fact, despite its underlying racism and general pro-imperial positions, the PMC puts quite some weight on issues that (within the bounds of a racist paternalist frame of reference) may even seem comparatively progressive, for example the protection of the natural environment (e.g., PMC 1933b, p. 131) and the preservation of “the sound and valuable features of the native culture and customs” (PMC 1934a, p. 151). The latter notion is also occasionally present in the clippings. However, none of these clippings are

among those forwarded to the PMC. Overall, it may be said that, considering the restrictions of the 1930s zeitgeist, positions taken by PMC members tend to be more progressive than those propagated by most of the newspaper articles included in the clipping collections. This is, perhaps, less surprising considering the collections' overall right-wing bias.

The following gives a short overview over the discourse as represented in the respective clipping collections and the issues that seemed to be of interest to the institutional organs.

4.1 To own or not to own – collection S.302-1

On the organisational level, a number of articles from collection S.302-1 on “Mandates” give voice to different interpretations of the authority over the mandated territories, which some see held by the victorious allies of World War I and others by the League. At times (though not frequently) the journalists condemn colonial exploitation though this seems politically rather than ethically motivated. Notable is also the opinion that the status of the international Mandate (as opposed to that of European colony) should be expanded to all colonised regions. This finds support in a number of other clippings, especially from the left-wing liberal *Manchester Guardian*. It also seems to chime well with the institutional position: An otherwise unmarked cutting from S.302-1, an article originally published in an unknown U.S. newspaper in April 1937, had evidently been cut and sent in personally by a League veteran and former Assistant Director of the Information Section, Arthur Sweetser. In an accompanying note, he addresses Edouard de Haller personally, expressing that he considers decolonisation “good” and largely synonymous with “development” in the spirit of the League Covenant. Sweetser further seems to expect that de Haller shares this position (Fig. 5). The article in question itself, however, does not as expressly argue for decolonisation but rather for the internationalisation of colonial administration. Notably, while it does cite the notion of development, the author seems to think of the abolition of colonial empires as a means to an end (specifically, that of preventing conflict driven by

colonial envy) rather than an end in itself. Sweetser, on the other hand, takes a clear normative position, favourably evaluating the decolonisation of the Philippines, Haiti and San Domingo.

However, among the highlighted passages are also those voicing opposition to this idea. One such passage is from the *Natal Witness* (19 September 1935), which describes the PMC session as “unnecessary interference”, another, from the aforementioned *Oska Mainichi*-article of 15 January 1935, states that Japan, after its League exit, would no longer have to adhere to League obligations. Passages discussing challenges posed or presented by Japan are highlighted especially often. The future of the Northern Pacific Mandate under Japanese administration threatened by annexation was evidently seen to be of paramount importance by the League officials – not least since it showed the limitations of global governance.

Interestingly, Italy's conflict with the League seems to have played a subordinate role here. The country's colonial ambitions culminated in 1935 in a war of aggression against Ethiopia, a course clearly at odds with the spirit of the Mandate as well as the greater pacifist project of the League. Although it was not a mandatory power itself, Italy certainly had an elevated position in the Mandates system as, like Japan, it held one of the five seats on the League council and its delegate, marquis Alberto Theodoli, served as president of the PMC. Still, while this issue is discussed in the clippings comparably frequently, none of the concerning articles show any traces suggesting exceptional attention among the staff or the PMC.

4.2 Stuck in the past – collection S.302-2

Notably, the clippings from collection S.302-2, entitled “Native policy” refer to a great number of colonised territories and do not restrict themselves to the Mandates. Thus, the collection seemingly aims to give contextual information rather than help in the discussion of specific issues on the ground. Central issues treated throughout this collection on “Native policy” are the illicit import and production of alcohol, unfair treatment of colonised workers, human trafficking, especially trade in children and, prominently,

polygyny in African colonies. Four clippings that represent a thematic cross section of this collection are documented to have been forwarded to the PMC. While these clippings cover a wide political and topical spectrum, they all share a set of racist assumptions of African inferiority. This is independent of the political stripes of the respective publication. Even articles from hard-left publications, such as the Marxist *Presse Coloniale*, which criticise systemic discrimination and argue for better inclusion and rights of colonised persons, stick to an overall civilisationist, pro-colonial stance deriving from the racist notion of “backward races”. The reports of the PMC reproduce this discourse linguistically in using terms like “immaturity” (e.g., PMC

1934a, p. 149), at once infantilising colonised persons and biologising their assumed underdevelopment. Infantilisation is also an element in the oft-cited context of illicit smuggling and distilling of alcohol. Ideas about alcohol and sobriety, of course, have to be seen in their historical context, in which alcoholism is frequently cast as social problem in need of state regulation and as connected, among other aspects, to the feminist struggle (Dannenbaum, 1981). In the clippings as well as the reports, alcohol has a special place as a dangerous vice from which the “natives”, like children, have to be protected at any price (e.g., Manchester Guardian, 22 October 1935; PMC 1937a, p. 192).

Figure 5: Press cutting and accompanying note sent in by Arthur Sweetser in 1937 (collection S.302-1)

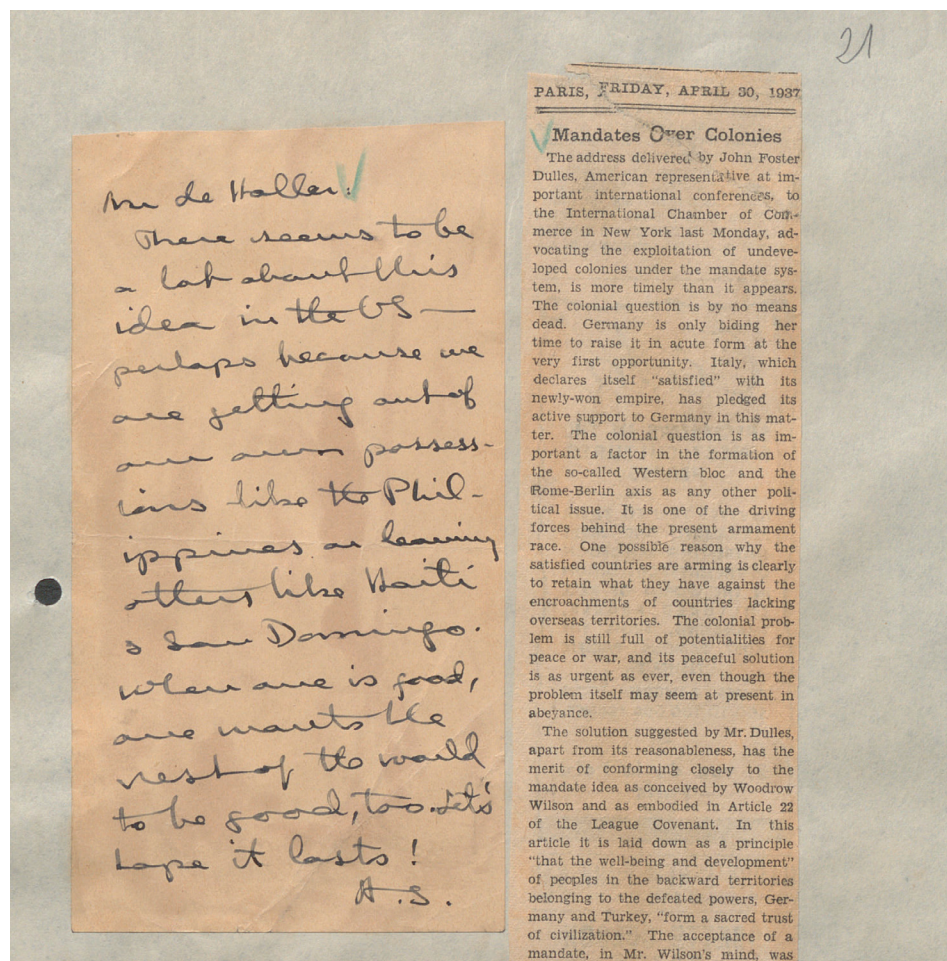
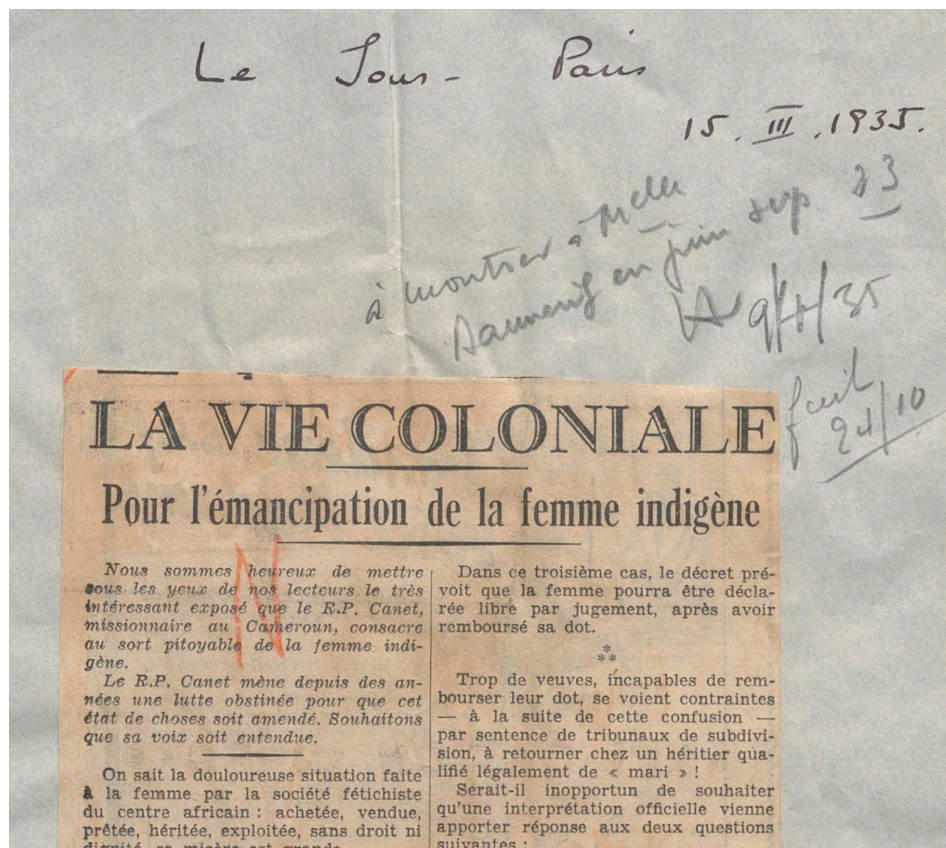


Figure 6: Clipping from *Le Jour*, 15 March 1935, on “The emancipation of the indigenous woman”, shown to Valentine Dannevig, the Norwegian (and only female) member of the PMC (collection S.302-2).)



A further topic is the “condition of women” (e.g., PMC 1934b, p. 204), which appears frequently throughout S.302-2. Notably it is mostly employed in the context of alleged polygyny, misogyny, sexualisation and sexism among colonised persons, a frame that is also expressed in the choice of “forced marriages” as an agency search word for the selection of the original articles. It is also present in a forwarded clipping from the *Temps* as well as one from *Le Jour*, which had evidently been “shown” to the Norwegian member Valentine Dannevig in April 1935 (Fig. 6). Another frequent issue, albeit unrelated, which is especially interesting from the perspective of media history, is the use of film as an educative medium. The topic also features in a *Times*-cuttings forwarded to the PMC in

May 1935 and is not uncommon, especially in other cuttings from that paper, as well as the PMC reports (e.g., PMC 1933b, p. 133). This illustrates the pronounced interest of the League Secretariat in modern technologies in public communication.⁷

Looking further at the PMC reports, there are also cases of clear disparities between the discourses common in the clippings and the commission’s positions. One such case is the question of “economic equality” (e.g., PMC 1935, p. 228), meaning equal access to the market and raw materials of the Mandated territory, a concept hardly represented in

⁷ For more on the League’s interest in and ambivalent relation to film, see also van Dijk’s (2023) contribution in this Thematic Section.

the studied sample (though it may of course play a larger role in other collections). To the PMC, the Mandates were accordingly still framed as a matter of economic opportunity at least as much as a humanitarian obligation, a motif that is otherwise typical for press clippings from far-right publications. Apparent is also the matter of insurrection and conflict in mandated territories. While many articles, notwithstanding political affiliation, treat uprisings among colonised inhabitants neutrally or even with sympathy it is clearly condemned by the PMC (e.g., PMC 1934b_EN, p. 207).

4.3 White natives and the brown menace – collections S.303-1 and S.303-2 SWA

As has been noted above, the two collections “S.303-1 South Africa 1936–juin 1938” and “S.303-2 SWA” that deal with the specific case of South African policy towards so-called South West Africa under its mandate seem to have been deemed of greater relevance to the work of the PMC than the collections dealing with more general topics. Twenty-nine of the items from these two collections have been forwarded to the PMC (as compared to only two from S.302-1 and four from S.302-2). As far as can be derived from the minutes, however, only one of these clippings, an article from the *Times* of 16 September 1935, is explicitly referred to by a member of the commission (the Belgian Pierre Orts, PMC 1936a, p. 127). The article deals with anti-Semitic transgressions by Germans in South West Africa.

In fact, it is remarkable how large a role the German minority and the Nazi movement in the South West African territory plays throughout the selection. Fourteen of the forwarded clippings (and 96 in the two collections overall) discuss *this* issue rather than questions of “development” or colonial policy. Radical settlers and the German minority, as the territory’s former colonial masters, seem to have been especially interested in the issue of a possible annexation of the territory by its mandatory power, the South African Union. This could partially explain the collections’ strong bias towards right-wing media. The focus also clearly reflects the League’s increasing alertness concerning the political situation in Germany. Markings in

several of the clippings show that anti-Jewish sentiments among the German minority in South West Africa were of special interest to the Geneva officials. It cannot be discerned beyond a doubt, whether these markings were left by agency readers or during later consultations of the items; it is therefore possible that “anti-Judaism” and related terms functioned as agency search words. In the context of Germans in the territory, it is furthermore interesting that the clippings frequently frame them as “natives” in much the same way as the black indigenous population of the territory. Notably, where indigenous Africans are referred to (in these two clippings corpora especially) they are usually portrayed as obstacles to civilisational progress. The rights of these “natives” are only referred to in a single article published by the exiled left-wing *Deutsche Volkszeitung*,⁸ and in this case fulfils the rather instrumental function to stress the inhumanity of the Nazi ideology. As opposed to collections S.302-1 and S.302-2, the term (and concepts relating to) “development” only ever appears in the sense or context of economic growth.

5 Discussion and conclusion

It seems evident that League officials, in accordance with the central role that communication and the “the public” played in the Covenant of the League, saw international media reporting as an important and central factor in their daily work. Though it may remain debatable just how methodical the handling and monitoring of the clippings was performed, there were clearly dedicated functionaries within the administrative staff (in the case at hand at least two of them have been identified, Edouard de Haller and Peter Anker) that handled the clippings once they were prepared. But it is unclear whether that was their official job and what exactly their routines were.

Returning to the question of the internal perception of public opinion and routines

⁸ The article, published 14 February 1937, notably cites what is today known as the 1904 genocide against the Herero at the hands of the German imperial so-called “Schutztruppe”.

related to it, it is little surprising (but worth mentioning) that the work of the League and the PMC (or its individual members) are commented on in a large portion of the reporting, even outside collection S.302-1 (which is directly concerned with the actors involved in Mandatory administration). It does stand to reason that the public view on the institution and its work was among the motives for the monitoring effort, even if it is clearly not the main focus in the present sample. Further, where clippings were forwarded to the PMC, they were not always about the issues central to the discussions at their sessions or, indeed, their main task of mandatory development, but also contained feedback on their work. It is a distinct possibility that the collections were also seen as a source of factual information, since in a few cases single experts were consulted on specific clippings as if they were to either be alerted to their content or asked for their opinion on the item in question. The collections' main function, however, clearly remained to record the opinions and interpretations of colonial policy and Mandatory administration abound in the public sphere. As we know from Popp (2014) and contemporary sources (e.g., Burelle, 1905), clippings agencies had already begun to develop rigorous approaches to media analysis. Whether League officials adapted these methodologies remains unclear based on the present sources. Their professional focus, after all, lay on the theories of propaganda and PR that were just developing. Once more, LONIS section files, that recorded the section's day-to-day work (and that are only partially preserved) may yet hold answers to those questions. It further remains unclear based on which criteria exactly the collections of the clippings were curated once they arrived at the League. Their political bias suggests that they were not representative of the full spectrum of public opinion. While it seems evident that the Geneva community was alert to the dynamics and destructive potential of German politics in the 1930s, this focus cannot on its own explain the skew: Even purging the sample of German articles, clippings from right-wing publications still make up the largest share of each of the four collections. Also, arguably, the future of German colonial ambitions and Nazism may reasonably be ex-

pected to have been at least as relevant to the left-wing press as to its liberal and right-wing counterparts. From the PMC session minutes and reports, it is evident that the commission was aware of progressive voices criticising racism and colonialism as well as conservative ones preaching the insurmountability of racial hierarchy. It itself encouraged education and "progress", yet stuck to a pseudo-biological racist worldview. Depending on how and by whom the collections were consulted within the League framework, their political bias has the potential effect of dampening surprisingly progressive positions like that taken by Arthur Sweetser in his 1937 note to de Haller (Fig. 5).

The bias of the collections towards European publications is less surprising. The choice of the languages represented, as alluded to above, makes sense considering the regions concerned and the languages spoken among League officials and PMC experts. In fact, the inclusion of clippings from (anglo- and francophone) Indian, Japanese and Vietnamese publications hints at the global scope of the monitoring exercise (even if it cannot conclusively be determined whether these items were collected by regional League staff or collaborators, or by the agency). Despite this, there is still a lingual and cultural bias to be discerned, especially considering the collection on "native policy", S.302-2, where more than three quarters of the items originate from British, and francophone French and Belgian publications, demonstrating whose colonial policies were seen as most relevant.

Finally, it should be stressed, that the studied collections are only four of a total of 240 clippings collections kept for the Mandates Section alone – which in turn is only one of 10 League sections active during the 1930s. To my knowledge these collections have so far not been part of any systematic study. From this it should be clear that the case studies summarised here really cannot render more than a very tentative first glimpse into the issue, giving but hints as to which media voices and issues were acknowledged by the first institutional organisation in global governance and which were or were not deemed especially relevant. Furthermore, it demonstrates that press analytics, as far as

clippings collections were concerned, served multiple purposes (which, however, remain partially unidentified). Political biases manifest in the selected material beg the question what the criteria were for the selection and if those that undertook it were aware of their gatekeeping function. To that end it may be worthwhile for future research to both concentrate on additional clippings collections, as well as historical files documenting internal communication of relevant League organs. Both types of sources are held in the Geneva archive. Given the similarities and continuities between structures and practices of the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN), comparative analyses between the two institutions might also contribute to a more holistic understanding of media analytics as well as its role in the discursive construction of North-South development. The Mandates system factually ceased to exist during the Second World War and was afterwards replaced by the UN Trusteeship Programme. Most (but not all) of the territories formerly under Mandate have today achieved full formal independence from foreign nations, with Namibia (formerly known as South West Africa) being the most recent country to do so in 1990. But the notion of institutionally organised North-South development certainly persists. The UN, as the League's successor organisation, acts as a central forum for the global discourse on this endeavour through organs such as its Development Programme (UNDP) or the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). Although the UN, like the League, has a common News Monitoring Unit (UN, 2018a), its organs, like those of the League, do not seem to be a compulsory common strategy on the handling of mediated public discourse. The UNDP, for example, has its own Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy (BERA). Yet, BERA clearly does not handle media analytics (UN, 2018b) but instead employs "a media monitoring company to monitor, assess and evaluate the coverage of UNDP in the media" (Obrien, 2016). Recent reports by the UN DESA and the UNDP illustrate that the (free) press is recognised both as a value in itself and an instrument in sustainable development (e.g., UN, 2020; UNDP, 2019), and that the presence of devel-

opment issues in the world press is implicitly acknowledged (UN, 2020, p. 25). Possible interactions between media discourses and institutional policy, like back in the times of the League, are not further reflected upon. The question remains, how and by whom the according monitoring and analysis are actually undertaken. It has not been the central aim of the research presented here to dive deeply into UN practices, but their investigation certainly seems worthwhile before this background.

While the League and its infrastructure has been replaced (or, it could be argued, adapted) by the UN system, the major commercial players of its time remain the same today: Robert Luce's clippings agency, chided by the League in 1920, has merged with its erstwhile main competitor Burrelle's (Burrelles, 2021) and, at the time of writing, continues to provide services described as "Highly Targeted Media Outreach", "Comprehensive Monitoring" and "Analysis" (Burrelles, 2022). The League's agency of choice, the Argus Suisse de la Presse, has since been rebranded Argus Data Insights, and is based no longer in Geneva but in Zurich and Berlin. It, too, has not much changed its core business in the past hundred years, describing its main services as "Media News", "Media Analytics", "Media Engagement" and "Media Services" (Argus Data Insights, 2022) – concepts, by the way, that seem rather fluid, considering that this description has changed since 2020, where the same range of services was described with the terms "media review" and "media analysis" (Argus Data Insights, 2020). Of course, for both agencies, traditional print media as a data source have for the largest part been replaced by online sources.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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