

The London School of Economics and Political Science

The Impact of Colonialism on Human Rights Diplomacy:
Britain's Colonial Legacy and the UN Agenda for the
Advancement of Women 1950-1975

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A thesis submitted to the Department of International History
of the London School of Economics and Political Science for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, June 2020.

DECLARATION

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In loving memory of Jo Cox

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am incredibly grateful to my supervisor Joanna Lewis for her fantastic support and enduring faith that I would complete this PhD. She ensured that I never lost momentum and always pushed myself further. Her expertise and positivity have been a guiding light throughout.

I would also like to thank the wider International History community at the London School of Economics. The insightful seminars and workshops with peers, faculty members and visiting scholars, organised by the International History Department have inspired me to conceptualise my research in new ways. The support to travel to conferences, including the Berkshire Women's History Conference, to present papers has also been incredibly helpful. Support to travel to the UN archives and library has also proved invaluable. My fellow PhD students at LSE have also been a wonderful inspiration, and I would like to give particular mention to Eline van Ommen, Grace Carrington and Judith Jacob for all their friendship and support. I look forward to continuing to plot ways to elevate and mainstream gender within historical debate with you all.

I am incredibly grateful to the staff at the UN library in New York for access to key documents and to the UN archives for their support on my research trips. I would also like to thank Lehman College in New York for granting me special access to their Margaret Bruce collection.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband and my parents, and all my friends and family for their support and faith over the years to help me make it to the finish line. Like so many other things in my life, I could not have done this without you all, and I am forever grateful.

ABSTRACT

The years 1950 to 1975 represent a key period at the end of the British Empire as Britain began to transition from post-war colonial reassertion to widescale decolonisation. It also marks a significant period of international diplomacy around human rights and international development at the United Nations (UN). This thesis takes a focus on women's rights to consider the impact both of colonial interests and the process of decolonisation on Britain's foreign policy approach at the UN in this period. As such it establishes Britain's *global* colonial legacy relating to women's rights diplomacy on the UN stage, at the end stage of its Empire. It focuses on the key women's rights conventions and international development policy frameworks debated in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) from 1950 up to the first UN World Conference on Women in 1975. It argues that from 1950 through to 1962, Britain sought to safeguard its colonial interests as part of diplomatic negotiations on three key women's rights conventions: on women's political rights, nationality rights, and marriage rights. Britain sought to limit the development and/or applicability of these standards on the basis of its colonial entanglements. This conservative approach continued as part of Britain's diplomatic engagement with the issue of international development within the CSW in the 1960s, at a time of widespread decolonisation of the British Empire. It was not until 1975, and the first UN Conference on Women, that Britain began to take small steps towards supporting women more explicitly within its development policy positions.

TIMELINE OF KEY CONVENTIONS, FRAMEWORKS AND CONFERENCES

- Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1952
- Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, 1957
- Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, 1962
- Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women, 1970
- UN World Conference on Women, 1975

CONTENTS

Introduction	p11
1. Research context: confronting Britain's colonial legacies in human rights and international development	p11
1.1 The structural denial of human rights within the British Empire	p11
a. The structural denial of human rights through interventions at the UN	p12
b. Action at the UN on international development as a site of analysis for colonial legacies	p14
2. Research focus	p17
2.1 Focus one: Britain's colonial legacy and women's rights conventions and debates at the CSW 1950 – 1962	p18
2.2 Focus two: Britain's colonial legacy and international development policy 1962-1975	p19
3. Analytical framework	p21
3.1 Britain's policy positions	p22
3.2 The CSW as a site of embarrassment for colonial Britain	p23
3.3 The impact of Britain's foreign policy positions	p23
4. Thesis	p24
5. Methodology	p26
6. Early initiatives on women's rights at the UN 1946-1975	p31
7. Colonial diplomacy and the human rights agenda at the UN 1946-1975	p42
8. Britain's colonial legacy on indigenous women's welfare	p51
9. Structure	p59

Chapter 1: The impact of Britain's colonial interests on the first conventions of the CSW in the 1950s	p60
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1. Convention on the Political Rights of Women	p63
1.1 Initial resistance	p63
Table One: The text of the draft convention on 12 February 1951	p66
1.2 Backlash back in Britain	p70
1.3 Final debates	p76
2. Convention on the Nationality of Married Women	p84
Conclusion	p93

Chapter 2: Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages	p96
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1. The emergence of a convention on marriage practices at the CSW	p97
2. Momentum builds for a convention on marriage practices	p101
3. Britain seeks compromise	p105
Table Two: Draft Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages	p108

4. The fight for a territorial application clause.....	p111
Conclusion.....	p120

Chapter 3: Beyond conventions: Britain's response to anti-colonialism in the CSW in the 1950s.....p124

1. Keeping the colonies out of the spotlight.....	p127
2. Refuting evidence and asserting Britain's progressive approach in the colonies.....	p135
3. Soft compliance.....	p143
Conclusion.....	p148

Chapter 4: The conservatism of British policy toward women and international development at the CSW 1965-1970.....p151

1. Early UN technical assistance and women's advancement.....	p153
2. Stand-alone vs integrated programmes.....	p157
3. Questionnaire on the role of women in development.....	p164
4. Funding for women's advancement in development.....	p167
5. National programmes for the advancement of women.....	p172
6. Resisting initiatives for women's advancement in development 1967-1968.....	p175
7. Britain's interest in community development discussions at the CSW 1967-1969.....	p180
8. Britain's conservative approach towards the agreement of the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women 1969-1970.....	p185
Conclusion.....	p191

Chapter 5: Understanding Britain's relationship with women and development at the CSW.....p195

1. The politics of Britain's interest in women in development at the CSW 1966 -1973.....	p196
1.1 UN conventions on women's rights.....	p198
1.2 Development as safer ground.....	p203
1.3 Women's integration within British aid and the British Empire.....	p211
2. Britain's deprioritisation of the CSW and the Trojan horse of women and development 1969-1972.....	p215
3. Britain's CSW seminar and the attempt to dissolve the CSW (1973).....	p225
4. Women fighting back.....	p232
Conclusion.....	p236

Chapter 6: Britain and development at the UN World Conference

on Women, 1975	p240
1. Momentum on women in development	p242
2. British support for the integration of women in development	p246
3. Rural development	p253
4. Supporting the voluntary fund for women's advancement	p258
Conclusion	p263
Conclusion	p266
1. Assessing Britain's global colonial legacy on women's rights	p268
1.1 Britain's policy positions	p268
1.2 The CSW as a site of embarrassment for colonial Britain	p277
1.3 The impact of Britain's foreign policy positions	p284
2. Wider lessons	p287
2.1 The impact and limits of international conventions	p287
2.2 Gender mainstreaming	p291
2.3 The importance of feminist leadership and cooperation	p294
3. The path ahead	p297

INTRODUCTION

1. Research context: confronting Britain's colonial legacies in human rights and international development

1.1 The structural denial of human rights within the British Empire

A concerning nostalgia in support of Britain's imperial past permeates British public narratives in present times. According to this perspective, not only was imperial Britain a powerful international force, but through its Empire, a force for social progress. This viewpoint has its roots in propaganda from the Victorian era; mobilised to sustain support for the Empire within the metropole. This helped popularise the view that Britain should intervene to redeem "backward heathens" through a "civilizing mission"¹ to share its self-professed superiority across the world - the "White Man's Burden".² The reignition of such a narrative today inhibits the British psyche from confronting the truth about its murky colonial past. Around a third of the British public believe that Britain's colonies were better off for being part of an empire.³

Yet in reality, an unequivocal historiography has long uncovered the extent of the violence at the heart of the British Empire. For example, as part of Britain's onslaught in response to the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950s, almost the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million people faced being held in detention camps or "enclosed-villages" at some point during the uprising.⁴

¹ Shirin Rai, *The Gender Politics of Development* (London: Zed Books, 2008), p16.

² I.e. "the myth of heroism and the self-belief of being the chosen ones" see Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-building: War and Welfare in Kenya 1925-52* (Oxford: James Curry, 2000), p272.

³ Robert Booth, "UK More Nostalgic for Empire than other Ex-Colonial Powers", *The Guardian*, 11 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/uk-more-nostalgic-for-empire-than-other-ex-colonial-powers>, (accessed 11 March 2020).

⁴ Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, 2nd Edition (London: The Bodley Head, 2014), px-pxii; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), p313, where he argues "Nowhere in the British empire was confinement ever used as extensively as in colonial Kenya". Anderson argues

Further still, the systematic and brutal violence British officers committed against detainees in the detention camps is now well documented.⁵ Indeed, the British government's destruction of its own records relating to the camps speaks volumes as to the extent of the brutality.⁶ The exposure of such specific cases of imperial Britain's human rights abuses against its colonial subjects adds an undeniable and tangible challenge to today's disturbing imperial nostalgia. Yet, the myth of Britain's benevolence continues to thrive.

In addition to providing clear examples of British brutality, scholarship which focuses on the *structural* denial of human rights by colonial powers is also vital to confronting today's myths around the positive role of Britain during its imperial reign. The work of historians and other social scientists seeking to understand the impact of racially biased laws within the British colonies themselves during the colonial era is critical to understanding the sheer scope and scale of Britain's colonial oppression.

1.2 The structural denial of human rights through interventions at the UN

The emergence of the UN after the Second World War as an international body for codifying international human rights law offers another critical site for analysis of the *structural* denial of human rights by colonial powers. Not only was the human rights agenda very low down on the

that a conservative estimate puts one in four Kikuyu adult males as being imprisoned or detained by the British Colonial administration between 1952 and 1958.

⁵ The most striking example of this was the Hola Camp massacre where 11 detainees were clubbed to death by guards. See Caroline Green, "Hola 'Death Camp' and the Moral Erosion of Empire", MSc Dissertation, London School of Economics, 2008; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p327; Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag* (New York: Henry Hold, 2005), p344-367.

Beyond Hola, British violence in the detention camps was prolific. By 1958 several scandals relating to detention camps had become public knowledge back in Britain (see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp314-322, which states that the vast majority of those incarcerated were never formally convicted in court).

Beyond the deaths in the camps, Caroline Elkins believes that "in late colonial Kenya a murderous campaign to eliminate Kikuyu people" was undertaken which killed potentially hundreds of thousands of people (See Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, pp311-353).

⁶ See "Preface" in Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*.

agenda of Western states at the initiation conferences of the UN, but colonial powers such as Britain were also actively working to undermine the universality of international human rights instruments at the UN in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷ Most crucially, it was the very fact that these rights would theoretically be extended to the colonies which galvanised the resistance of colonial Member States to a universal human rights agenda.⁸ For colonial powers, becoming party to new conventions would not only bind their actions at the domestic level within their metropolitan jurisdiction but, without exemption clauses, would also require extension into the laws of their respective colonial territories.

Indeed as Fabian Klose argues, the spread of fundamental human rights within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served to delegitimise the colonial project, and as such their extension was withheld in colonial possessions.⁹ As such, Britain and other colonial powers fought for colonial issues to remain within their own domestic realm, and not fall under the purview of the United Nations. In the discussions surrounding the establishment of the UN, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared that he would never consent under any circumstances to the UN “thrusting interfering fingers into the very life of the British Empire”.¹⁰ In the early 1950s, European colonial powers argued, on the basis of cultural relativism, that rights were useless to the “primitive” inhabitants of Africa and Asia.¹¹ As such, they stood in strong opposition to

⁷ The two covenants on political and economic rights (Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) also proved to be heavily defined by considerations of colonial extension during the debates of the 1950s.

⁸ Fabian Klose, *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial Violence*, 1st Edition. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p5.

⁹ Ibid, p5; Fabian Klose, “Source of Embarrassment” in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p238.

¹⁰ Paul Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, 3rd Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p176 which notes Robert Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins*, 2 vols, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1949).

¹¹ Even one of the key drafters of the Universal Declaration, the French delegate René Cassin, argued for at least temporary limits on universality relating to the rights of those in the colonies. See Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p145.

delegates from developing countries.¹² The position maintained by the colonial powers was intended to repel any bid to extend human rights into their colonies, “attempting to evade their human rights obligations through a feigned reverence for the traditional culture of indigenous inhabitants”.¹³ Such resistance must also be understood in the context of the suppression of colonial uprisings and radical violence by colonial powers to maintain their rule.¹⁴

1.3 Action at the UN on International development as a site of analysis for colonial legacies

The early years of the UN have provided a critical site for the analysis of the *structural* denial of human rights by colonial powers such as Britain with respect to emerging human rights standards. However, the story does not end here. Examining the UN’s international development efforts in order to understand the part played by colonial powers whose empires were rapidly diminishing by the 1960s can offer important insights as to the impact of colonial legacies on foreign policy positions relating to indigenous populations, even after colonial ties had been severed. International development was becoming increasingly important to Britain as its colonial positioning shifted dramatically between 1950 and 1975.

After the Second World War, Britain had increased its own focus on colonial development as part of a concerted reassertion of metropolitan control or “Second Colonial Occupation”, in an attempt to maintain Britain’s geo-strategic influence.¹⁵ While Britain expanded its colonial development

¹² Ibid, p145.

¹³ Ibid, p114.

¹⁴ Klose, “Source of Embarrassment”, p249.

¹⁵ John Lonsdale, “Introduction”, in *The History of East Africa*, eds. Donald Low and Alison Smith, vol. 3, (Oxford: OUP, 1976), pp1-64. See also Michael Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies 1850-1960* (London: Routledge, 1993)

policy as part of the “Second Colonial Occupation”, this was not the first time which it had been utilised.

The notion of “development” was first employed by colonial powers in the late nineteenth century to justify the expansion of their rule, and used by imperial authorities in the early twentieth century to galvanise support for large-scale economic, political and social transformations¹⁶. By the mid-twentieth century, metropolitan British authorities were intervening on social policies of colonial territories at a significant scale. No longer were colonial administrations given sole responsibility for infrastructure and services financed through local taxes, levies and fees.¹⁷ The very inclusion of welfare in the 1940 Colonial and Development Welfare Act was the result of a hard-fought battle. With Second World War propaganda including a welfare promise in order to maintain loyalties across the empire, and the Labour Party victory in 1945, this spurred the expansion of a more welfare focused sector of colonial administration. The 1942 Beveridge report - which was influential in the founding of the welfare state in Britain – also had an effect on social policy in the colonies, with the appointment of commissions in some territories to review social services and make recommendations for improvement.¹⁸ Yet this remained the “poor branch of colonial government, never anything more than a patch over social distress, particularly that caused by the reluctance to accept the responsibility for the effects of rapid urbanisation” and all too paradoxically occurred alongside a colonial rule which caused suffering for millions of people.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela, “Introduction”, in *The Development Century*, eds. Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp1-17.

¹⁷ James Midgley, “Imperialism, colonialism and social welfare”, in *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy*, eds. James Midgley and David Piachaud (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011), p39.

¹⁸ Ibid, p38.

¹⁹ Joanna Lewis, “The British Empire and world history: welfare imperialism and ‘soft’ power in the rise and fall of colonial rule”, in Midgley et al *Colonialism and Welfare*, p25.

With imperial power on the wane after the Second World War, international development became instrumental to shoring up the interests of colonial powers.²⁰ The “Wind of Change”,²¹ brought decolonisation across Sub-Saharan Africa in the British Empire in the 1960s and gave renewed strategic importance to the issue of international development as a form of influence in the ex-colonies. This was particularly so in the context of Cold War rivalries, which played a significant role in spurring the provision of foreign aid by global powers in the 1950s and 1960s to developing countries as a means of expanding their influence.²²

The UN stepped up its interest in international development debates in the 1960s, as part of the “First Development Decade”, as many colonial territories moved toward independent status and increased demand for development aid within the institution.²³ Moreover, moving through the decade, international development became the primary focus of the UN.²⁴ Other key reforms also took place among the UN’s institutions with the establishment of the World Food Programme (1961), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) (1965) as a merger of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance and the Special Fund for Economic Development.²⁵ With the 1970s marking the start of the Second Development Decade, and an associated International

²⁰ Olav Stokke, *The UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), p5.

²¹ British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s ‘Wind of Change’ speech acknowledged the growing push for independence across Africa, and was delivered in Cape Town at the end of a six-week tour of the continent on 3 February 1960. See Sarah Stockwell and Larry Butler, “Introduction” in *The Wind of Change*, eds. Sarah Stockwell and Larry Butler (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp1-12.

²² Macekura and Manela, *The Development Century*, p2; Stokke, *The UN and Development*, p7; Fukuda Par, “Poverty and Inequality: Challenges in the Era of Globalisation” in *The Adventures of Peace: Dag Hammarskjöld and the Future of the UN*, eds. Sten Ask and Anna Mark-Jungkvis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p224.

²³ Irene Tinker, “The making of a field: Advocates, Practitioners and scholars” in *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, 1st Edition, eds. Nalini Visvanathan et al (London: Zed Books, 1996), p34; Aaron Rietkirk, “In pursuit of development: the United Nations, decolonization and development aid, 1949-1961”, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, 2015, p 11.

In the 1960s, developing countries began to shift the focus of the UN from political and security issues to development issues. See Hilka Puotila, *Engendering the Global Agenda: The story of women and the United Nations* (Geneva: United Nations, 2002), p29.

²⁴ Rietkirk, “In pursuit of development: the United Nations, decolonization and development aid, 1949-1961”, p11.

²⁵ Stokke, *The UN and Development*, pp6-29.

Development Strategy, development assistance from the UN system included a focus on improving public social services, particularly health and education.²⁶ Development assistance also attracted more political attention. A specified target for industrialised countries to provide 0.7 percent of their Gross National Product in overseas development assistance was set by the middle of the decade. Developing countries also used the UN system to demand a New International Economic Order to address the unequal division of power between the global North and South, including the conditions regulating trade and investment.²⁷

Thus as international development became an important strategic priority for Britain in light of its diminishing empire *and* more prominent within debates at the UN, how did its colonial past influence its engagement with the UN development agenda transitioning as a post-colonial player? Did the colonial interests which sought to stem the universalisation of the human rights agenda at the UN have a legacy which served to impact this development agenda? And to what extent were the approaches Britain had adopted in its colonial development policy prior to the Second World War once again promoted within the UN debates? This thesis asks these questions with specific reference to Britain's engagement with the women's rights agenda at the UN between 1950 and 1975.

2. Research focus

The period from 1950 to 1975 represents a critical time in the history of the emergence of the international women's rights agenda.²⁸ The birth of the CSW in 1946 was itself highly significant,

²⁶ See General Assembly Resolution A/RES/2626 (XXV), 24 October 1970, UN Documents.

²⁷ Stokke, *The UN and Development*, pp10-11.

²⁸ The first period of UN history is often referred to as the era of women's formal equality. See Devaki Jain, *Women Development and the UN* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), p30.

representing a space to deliberate and further women's rights within the auspices of the UN. This was more than purely symbolic. In this period, the CSW served as the forum which instigated conventions on women's political rights (1952), nationality rights (1957) and marriage practices (1962).²⁹ It also sought to strengthen the UN's focus on women within its international aid programmes (UN Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women, 1970). The period ended with the first UN-sponsored World Conference on Women in Mexico City (1975). With this flurry of activity in mind, this research has two main foci.

2.1 Focus one: Britain's colonial legacy and women's rights conventions and debates at the CSW 1950 - 1962

This research seeks to further explore the role of British foreign policy at the UN as a site of Britain's *structural* denial of human rights regarding indigenous colonial populations from 1950 to 1975, as the first of two main lines of enquiry. It will examine whether Britain's colonial legacy fostered an interest in limiting the evolution and territorial scope of emerging international women's rights conventions on political rights, nationality rights and marriage practices at the UN with regard to the indigenous women in its colonies.

Particularly in the 1950s, the combination of the rising international women's rights agenda and Britain's drive to contain decolonisation heightened the potential for Britain to try to prevent international progress on women's rights extending to its colonies. A growing body of research is documenting the fallout at the nexus of the human rights agenda and the respective politics of those on either side of the colonial debates at the UN in the 1950s and 1960s. However, a similar body of historical research is urgently needed to understand (i) if and how colonial and anti-

²⁹ Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957), Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage, and Registration of Marriages (1962).

colonial politics also factored into the debates on the emerging women's rights agenda at the CSW in this period and (ii) the strategies colonial powers adopted in response to emerging conventions which related to women's rights both in colonies and newly independent nations. This research asks these questions specifically in relation to Britain's approach to the women's rights agenda at the CSW, in terms of specific conventions and broader narratives in this period.

This research also examines the rebuttals Britain used at the CSW within this period to defend its colonial practice in its efforts to establish a positive colonial reputation internationally. A central contextual factor will include the way in which Cold War hostilities between colonial powers and anti-colonial Member States impacted the debates on the women's rights agenda. With the USSR championing the anti-colonial cause as a form of diplomatic proxy war against the West in this period, and new anti-colonial Member States joining the UN upon independence,³⁰ it is critical to understand how international pressure shaped the statements and positions Britain adopted on women's rights at the CSW in response

2.2 Focus two: Britain's colonial legacy and international development policy 1962 - 1975

As a second line of inquiry, this thesis focuses on Britain's colonial legacy at the CSW between 1950 and 1975 within the rising, parallel debates on international development at the CSW. It will explore whether, and to what extent, Britain's colonial legacy led Britain to limit or champion the rights of indigenous women in its former colonies through its international development policy at the UN in the 1960s and early 1970s. To achieve this, it centres on the first major attempts to mainstream women into the UN's international development efforts: the deliberations for the

³⁰ Shelley Wright, *International Human Rights, Decolonisation and Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2001), p20.

Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women (1970) and the British government's engagement with the first UN Conference on Women in 1975 where international development policy was further discussed. In this regard this thesis aims to offer new insights by understanding Britain's engagement with the UN's emerging aid agenda on women's rights within the context of its legacies in colonial policy. It builds on research documenting the instrumentalisation of indigenous women within British colonial policy from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries to assess the impact of colonial legacies on British policy positions at the CSW.

The temporal overlap of the emerging women's rights conventions at the UN and the debates on the place of women's advancement within emerging UN international development frameworks makes it critical that these two areas are studied in combination. This is particularly the case given the way in which Britain's diplomatic approach to the women's rights conventions at the CSW in the 1950s held the potential not only to reflect its previous colonial legacy but also to *reconstruct and reinforce* a new *global* colonial legacy of post Second World War foreign policy on indigenous women's rights and to project this in the debates on international development which followed in the 1960s.

Moreover, the conceptual overlap of these dual agendas makes the comprehensive consideration of one element dependent on the other. Indeed, the CSW took a holistic vision towards women's lives; addressing conventions and international development policy frameworks together between 1950 and 1975 as a means to fulfilling its remit to promote the status of women.³¹ Just as it is vital to understand the extent to which Britain supported or stymied the rights of indigenous women

³¹ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p30.

in its empire through women's rights conventions, it is also crucial to examine to what extent Britain engaged with UN international development policy frameworks as levers to promote or block measures to support the economic, political and social rights of women across the developing world, including in former colonies. Significantly, it was at the UN Conference on *Human Rights* in Tehran (1968) that the proposal by the CSW for the first UN women and development plan was endorsed.³²

3. Analytical framework

Research exposing the true spirit of Britain's support – or lack thereof – for women's rights at the UN *because* of their colonial implications is particularly crucial in the context of challenging today's enduring Victorian-era myths around Britain's positive colonial role. This must be done, *inter alia*, by asking specifically whether Britain was ever a *global* champion of women's rights in the colonies, when it sought to obstruct the very international legal standards and policy frameworks that had the potential to grant rights to indigenous women across the British Empire, when they emerged at the UN.

Therefore, this research serves as a longitudinal study into the colonial considerations of the British Foreign Office in its relations with the CSW over a 25-year period between 1950 and 1975. The colonial aspects of Britain's engagement at the CSW will be analysed in terms of case studies across this period which span a) the evolution of three international women's rights conventions in 1952, 1957 and 1962, and b) the emerging theme of women's advancement in international development from 1965-1975. In so doing it assesses the nature of Britain's *global* colonial legacy ie the impact

³² At the International Conference the General Assembly endorsed the proposed aims of the unified long-term UN program for the advancement of women in the conference's resolution IX. See Ibid, p65.

of its colonial interests on its approach to women's rights diplomacy at the UN, at the end stage of its Empire.

3.1 Britain's policy positions

It makes this assessment by exploring three key issues: firstly, whether the policy positions Britain adopted at the UN on the conventions and policy frameworks under review were impacted by its colonial interests and policies or recognised (and sought to capitalise on) the process of decolonisation.

With regards to conventions, if colonial powers became party to new conventions this would not only bind their actions at the domestic level within their metropolitan jurisdiction but, without exemption clauses, would also require extension into the laws of their respective colonial territories. From the perspective of the colonial interests of colonial powers, a *best-case* scenario would enable them to become a state party with an exemption clause in place. This would mean avoiding the potential embarrassment of being seen as a laggard on women's rights internationally, while also escaping any obligation to take legislative action on potentially controversial women's rights issues in the colonies. Conversely, the *worst-case* scenario would entail being forced to comply with international legal standards on women's rights which would apply both at home and in the colonies, thus risking having to take radical legislative action (potentially against the wishes of local elites sustaining British indirect rule in colonial territories, themselves keen to preserve the existing social order and conservative attitudes and customs towards women's rights). This thesis assesses the extent to which Britain took conservative positions in this regard, in order to protect its broader colonial interests.

As Britain moved to become a decolonising power in the 1960s, this thesis will explore whether it recognised its potential influence in strengthening the rights of women in its former colonies through the debates in the CSW on the UN aid agenda. Further, the question of whether the legacy of global British colonial policy is continued in this period will be assessed, alongside Britain's previous colonial policy in relation to indigenous women's welfare in the early twentieth century.

3.2 The CSW as a site of embarrassment for colonial Britain

The thesis explores whether these conventions and policy frameworks, and broader debates in the CSW, served as a site of embarrassment for Britain on its colonial record and also the defensive arguments Britain adopted to improve its standing on the UN stage in response. The proxy Cold War attacks at the UN from newly independent states and the USSR, left Britain with few friends or places to hide in the face of anti-colonial attacks at the UN. This thesis assesses the nature of Britain's efforts to mitigate anti-colonial attacks from newly independent states and the USSR in the CSW as international women's rights conventions and international development policy frameworks were developed, as well as within the CSW's wider debates.

3.3 The impact of Britain's foreign policy positions

Thirdly, the thesis examines to what extent and how Britain's colonial considerations and legacies, and the policy positions it adopted in response, impacted the content (ie the substantive provisions or territorial scope) of the conventions that were adopted in the CSW on women's rights. It also reflects on the impact of Britain's actions in relation to the recognition of such conventions once agreed. Given Britain's role as a major international player at the United Nations in this period, a refusal by Britain to become a State Party would have a negative impact on the political momentum

needed for maximising signatories to such conventions. Similarly, this thesis examines how Britain's colonial considerations and legacies, and the policy positions it adopted in response, impacted the content of the international development policy framework on women's advancement developed at the CSW. Fundamentally, it will ask whether Britain's actions limited or championed the evolution of women's rights on the international stage in this period.

4. Thesis

This thesis argues that despite official claims of benevolence towards indigenous women, Britain's colonial interests in the 1950s led it to bolster attempts to limit the evolution, and application, of emerging international women's rights law. This lack of principled support for the international women's rights agenda, linked to an innate colonial conservatism, became institutionalised in the Foreign Office and morphed into Britain stymieing proposed mechanisms to meaningfully advance women's rights internationally and nationally as part of the 1960s development agenda. Britain's obstructiveness took on an even more dangerous turn by the early 1970s, when Britain attempted to dismantle the CSW body within the UN. Thus, far from being a champion for women's rights at the UN in this period, Britain acted as a brake.

Not only did the period 1950 to 1975 mark the emergence of a rich array of women's rights conventions and policy frameworks from within the CSW, it also marked the period of major British decolonisation, from across Asia in the 1950s and Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s. Britain failed to take any of the steps available to it to strengthen the rights of women in its former colonies through the UN aid agenda. Despite claiming that women in development was a policy priority, Britain dismissed proactive attempts to mainstream women's advancement as a priority within UN

aid, in a way which continued the conservatism it had demonstrated at the CSW in the 1950s and early 1960s around women's rights conventions.

Nevertheless, Britain was kept in check. The reputational risk Britain faced at the UN from the USSR was coupled with growing domestic pressure at home to support these emerging conventions and international policy frameworks. Key women in powerful positions - based in the UN secretariat, British women MPs and Ministers, British women delegates to the UN, and women in the civil service in London - were a minority in a patriarchal landscape in both the British political system and the UN. Yet it is thanks to them and to the women working in the periphery of British politics (in the British women's rights movement) that Britain was continually pushed to pursue more progressive policies and finally adopt the emerging international standards from the CSW. These groups of women worked, often in concert, to challenge the British government's position. They prioritised women's advancement as an end in itself; battling against an institutional indifference or hostility to such a goal within the British civil service and political class where the white, male establishment dominated.

Ultimately, it was the collaborative work of powerful women and the British women's rights movement that saved the CSW from near extinction at the British government's hands. It was not until 1975 that Britain began to take small steps towards supporting women's advancement in development at the first UN World Conference on Women with a woman at the helm of the new Ministry for Overseas Development.

In making these arguments, this thesis supplements three historiographical canons which are taken in turn over the next sections. Firstly, this research will shine a light on the political considerations at play, in this case in terms of colonial considerations, to add to the body of scholarship which

documents the journey of early initiatives on women's rights at the UN. Secondly, it supplements the existing historiographical canon on Cold War dynamics of colonial politics at the UN by providing specific case studies on women's rights conventions and policy frameworks. Finally, it builds on research relating to the legacy of British activism and Britain's colonial policy on indigenous women's advancement from the early nineteenth century until the Second World War, by underscoring the place of this legacy within the debates at the UN between 1950 and 1975.

5. Methodology

The emergence of the CSW marked an important space in which women's rights would firmly move into the field of state-based diplomacy. Governments – as delegations to the UN – rather than women's rights organisations, would be put in the position of driving forward the women's rights agenda.³³ In so doing, this intergovernmental process would bring the development of international standards through emerging conventions with the aim of encouraging national governments to take action back home in order to conform to new standards on women's rights (whether as a formal State Party or through international reputational pressure).

However, while governments would now be under pressure to act, the shift toward putting governments in the driving seat of developing women's rights norms meant, as with any intergovernmental process, that state-based political considerations would serve as the thrust for action. The shift carried the risk of politicisation of the women's rights agenda in line with broader geopolitical factors, away from a principled agenda centred on the full realisation of women's

³³ Helen Laville, “‘Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical’? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 23, no.4 (2011), p476.

rights. The role of the women's rights movement would be to keep governments aligned to the women's rights agenda through pressure at the sidelines of the UN and in domestic spheres.

As the early work of the CSW took place within the diplomatic context of colonialism and the Cold War, we must turn to the governmental considerations and dynamics at play. While emerging feminist history has focused on the role of women's rights organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the UN Decade of Women from 1975-1985,³⁴ or the role of particular women delegates in the CSW,³⁵ we must build on this knowledge and move to a full assessment of the role of states at the CSW which sought to challenge or sustain the patriarchal relationship between men and women in society at large. As argued by Helen McCarthy, "relatively little attention has been paid to the role of *state* actors – that is, the politicians, diplomats and ministries of foreign affairs who shaped the responses of individual nation-states to the emerging global women's rights agenda."³⁶ This thesis aspires to help fill this void, asserting that we must analyse the extent to which diplomatic manoeuvrings have impacted on the advancement at the UN of women's rights standards and women-focused development frameworks. It is through such an approach that we can understand the way in which the state-based political factors – in this case colonialism – affected the shape and dynamism of the women's rights agenda. This is not to ignore the role of key women and women's rights organisations, but to understand better the roles they played within these diplomatic processes in influencing foreign policy objectives.

³⁴ Helen McCarthy, "The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year, 1975", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 50, no.4, 2015, pp833-853.

³⁵ Karin Aggerston, "The Gender Turn in Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda", *The International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol.21, no.1 (2018), pp9-28.

³⁶ McCarthy, "The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year, 1975", p835. McCarthy notes that one notable exception to this is Karen Gardiner, *Gender and Foreign Policy in the Clinton Administration* (Colorado: First Form Press, 2013) which offers an historical account of how gender came to be mainstreamed into US policy in the 1990s, with some analysis on the 1970s and 1980s.

As is well known, diplomatic history, as a field of “high politics”, is often unconsciously biased towards understanding the male-dominated debates of male-dominated institutions, with little or no regard for the gender hierarchies being reproduced in the diplomatic outputs which result. It is here also that this thesis seeks to forge a new path of gender and diplomatic research; in which we understand not only the role of women pioneers but also recognise the way in which the geopolitical and domestic objectives of UN Member States and their diplomatic strategies have shaped and affected the speed of the evolution of the UN’s women’s rights and development frameworks. We can also go further in analysing the ways in which diplomatic manoeuvrings have helped or hindered women’s rights being mainstreamed into broader UN human rights and international development policy frameworks.³⁷

Specifically, this research will examine how the diplomatic manoeuvrings of Britain, based on its colonial legacy, influenced the evolution of women’s rights standards and international development policy frameworks at the CSW from 1950 through to the first World Conference on Women. In so doing it will recognise and reflect the key roles of women’s rights organisations in Britain, and British women MPs and ministers, in seeking to influence these policies *for the sake of* the advancement of women. It thus serves as a historical gender policy analysis, with a broad range of actors, but with a central focus on the policies and tactics of the British government.

As such, this thesis brings together the history of empire with the history of international relations and institutions through the lens of the women’s rights agenda at the UN. The methodological approach centres on diplomatic history from the perspective of the British government, taking a

³⁷ As an example of this see Caroline Green, Deepayan Basu Ray, Claire Mortimer and Kate Stone, “Gender-based Violence and the Arms Trade Treaty: Reflections from a campaigning and legal perspective”, *Gender and Development*, Vol. 21, no. 3 (2013), pp551-562.

forensic approach to distilling British Foreign Office (Foreign and Commonwealth Office from 1968) briefings and communications for its delegations to the CSW sessions over the 25-year period under review. Further, given its interest in imperial history, relevant files from the Colonial Office and the Ministry of Overseas Development established in 1964, and latterly Overseas Development Administration (1970-1974), have also been reviewed between 1950 and 1975.³⁸ These British government papers have been sourced at the UK National Archives.³⁹

Additionally, summary records of the annual CSW sessions have been accessed through the UN Dag Hammarskjöld library at UN Headquarters in New York, the British Library in London and online to situate British interventions within the context of the interventions by other Member States of the CSW throughout this period. UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) records have also been consulted where significant CSW resolutions moved to the ECOSOC as the CSW's parent body, as well as relevant records of the UN General Assembly's Third Committee as key conventions moved forward for further deliberation and agreement. By using British government sources as the main focus, but with UN records as a supplementary source, not only are Britain's colonial considerations and legacies appropriately contextualised, but the weakness of a heavy-reliance on summary records has been averted. Indeed, Roland Burke's extensive review of summary records around human rights at the UN has received criticism for its failure to understand broader perspectives or considerations and strategies which lay behind the actions and words of colonial powers at the UN.⁴⁰

³⁸ The Ministry was created during the Labour Government 1964-1970, and incorporated within the Foreign Office under the Conservative Government 1970-1974, renamed as the Overseas Development Administration. It became its own ministry again in 1974 with the election of a Labour Government until 1979. See UK National Archives Catalogue.

³⁹ Names of officials and dates have been included in footnotes where recorded.

⁴⁰ Jan Eckel, "Human Rights and Decolonization: New Perspectives and Open Questions", in *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, vol.1, no.1 (2010), p120

However, this thesis also goes further, and delves into the CSW secretariat papers accessed at the UN archives in New York, in order to give further contextual understanding of the motivations behind the UN's interest and that of Member States of the CSW in the emerging human rights conventions and international development policy frameworks. Given the key role played by women in power and in the periphery, monographs by Minister for Overseas Development Judith Hart as well as Hart's collection held at the Labour Party Archives in Manchester have been consulted. Papers authored by Margaret Bruce, head of the UN CSW Secretariat from 1963-1973, have also been accessed in addition to her personal collection at Lehman College Library in New York. The records of those UK-based women's rights organisations such as the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance and the British Federation of University Women working to influence the government at the time on CSW proceedings have also been accessed via the British Government files at the UK National Archives.

I believe that this research, like the wider field of feminist history, is critically important. In understanding the failures of the past on British policy on women's rights, we can expose the inaccuracies of modern-day myths around the benevolence of British colonialism, underscore the priorities of the future for the women's rights agenda, and draw key lessons for future feminist campaigns.

This research has faced challenges. While British Government documents have been obtained across the period under consideration, certain records are missing at the National Archives, such as the Foreign Office record series on the CSW for 1952. Certain officials have been named and followed for their pivotal role, particularly in Chapters Five and Six, while others remain anonymous in official correspondence or with a limited biographical record.

Feminist history often requires its researchers to go above and beyond to identify innovative sources to understand the informal “off-stage roles” played by women.⁴¹ This research has overcome this barrier by using official government records with a focus on women’s rights policy, rather than particular women, as its starting point. Yet, women and women’s organisations played a key role and instances of women in powerful formal positions working with women in the peripheries emerge as a key part of the story (see, for example, Chapter Five and the effort to save the CSW in the face of Britain’s campaign for its dissolution). Triangulating accounts of such informal meetings with official records has been crucial to piece together these key conversations. On the other hand, as more women gained power on the political stage over the period under review - as MPs, as civil servants and as Ministers - following the official trail and determining the impact of their lobbying proved much easier, alongside the utilisation of their personal collections and biographies.

6. Early initiatives on women’s rights at the UN 1946-1975

One imperative behind this thesis is to further our understanding of the colonial politics which infused the intergovernmental negotiations within the early UN women’s rights agenda between 1950 and 1975. It serves to supplement the existing body of research which maps the historical journey of international women’s rights instruments, often from an apolitical, institutional perspective, and rather aims to underscore the role of colonial political dynamics in *shaping* the very contours and political weight of these emerging international standards.

⁴¹ See Caroline Green, Gender and International History Conference, London School of Economics, 21 May 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseih/2018/05/21/gender-international-history/> (accessed 25 April 2020).

Historical research by Marilyn Lake, Margaret Galey, Peter Stearns and Susan Pedersen has highlighted the League of Nations as a site of international policy and legal change on women's welfare prior to the establishment of the UN in 1945.⁴² Indeed, the League of Nations served as the first international body through which women's rights petitions could be addressed and gain publicity.⁴³ From the early 1920s, women representatives, often working in the caring professions, used their voice at the League of Nations to campaign for an end to the trafficking in women and children.⁴⁴ The League of Nations' Covenant opened the door for women to serve as delegates and secretariat staff, with about a dozen women among the 250 Assembly delegates at each session. These women were mostly confined to the Committee on Social and General Questions dealing with "women's questions", despite their protests.⁴⁵ Several women also served on the League's Advisory Committees and conferences on trafficking in women, as well as the Expert Committee on the Legal Status of Women.⁴⁶ Carol Miller's historical research evidences the role of feminist activists at the League of Nations in the interwar years, including around a proposed Equal Rights Treaty.⁴⁷ In 1937, the Assembly established a Committee of Experts to conduct a "comprehensive inquiry into the legal status of women in various countries of the world". While this work was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, the expert committee's work offered an important starting point for the CSW.

⁴² Marilyn Lake, "From Self-Determination via Protection to Equality via Non-Discrimination: Defining Women's Rights at the League of Nations and the United Nations" in *Women's Rights and Human Rights*, eds. Patricia Grimshaw, Katie Holmes and Marilyn Lake (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Margaret Galey, "Forerunners in Women's Quest for Partnership" in *Women, Politics and the United Nations*, ed. Anne Winslow (London: Greenwood Press, 1995); Peter Stearns, *Gender in World History*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), p135.

⁴³ Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p135.

⁴⁴ Lake, "From Self-Determination via Protection to Equality via Non-Discrimination: Defining Women's Rights at the League of Nations and the United Nations", p254; Joanna Lewis "Tropical East Ends and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 28 no. 2, (2000), p44.

⁴⁵ Galey, "Forerunners in Women's Quest for Partnership", pp4-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp4-5.

⁴⁷ Carol Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality": interwar feminists and the League of Nations", *Women's History Review*, vol. 3, no.2 (1994), pp219-245.

The League was not the only site of international women's organising prior to the establishment of the UN. Since 1919, the International Federation of Working Women had also been influencing the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to adopt protective measures around women's working conditions and other gender equality measures.⁴⁸ The agreement of the Charter at the founding of the UN itself also proved to be a moment for women's mobilisation. An important body of historical research has uncovered the role of women in raising gender equality issues within the UN Charter.⁴⁹ Just four of the 160 total signatories were women.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, these official women delegates worked successfully with women among the 42 NGOs attending the conference in the margins to ensure that the phrase "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion" was included in the first Article.⁵¹ Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter also call on Member States to take action to eliminate discrimination. This was highly significant, given that only half of UN Member States granted women unrestricted rights to vote and hold office at the time.⁵²

These women delegates and NGO representatives also successfully fought to amend the language in the preamble from "equal rights among men" to "equal rights among men and women."⁵³ The inclusion of this phrase in the Charter was highly significant in supporting a new normative ideal

⁴⁸ Galey, "Forerunners in Women's Quest for Partnership", pp5-6. These measures included the Conventions on Maternity Protection (1919), Night work for Women (1919), Underground Work by Women (1935), the Labour Inspection Recommendation giving equal powers to women inspectors (1923) and the Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery Recommendation on women's inclusion in wage-fixing bodies (1928).

⁴⁹ Ibid, p7. Ana Figuero argues that at the UN's founding conference the Brazilian, Mexican and Dominican Republic delegates, with support from Chile, presented important amendments on the equality of rights for men and women in the Charter. See Ana Figuero, "Three Stages of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women", *United Nations Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (1952), p37.

⁵⁰ The four women representatives included Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic), Bertha Lutz (Brazil), Wu Yi-Fang (China) and Virginia Gildersleeve (United States).

⁵¹ Margaret Galey, "Women Find a Place" in *Women, Politics and the United Nations*, ed. Winslow (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p11; United Nations, "Women Delegates at the UN Charter Conference" in *Women Go Global* United Nations CD Rom 2002; Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p13.

⁵² See UN Charter Articles 55 and 56; Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p14; Margaret Bruce "An Account of United Nations Action to Advance the Status of Women", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 375, Women around the World, (1968), p164.

⁵³ Galey, "Forerunners in Women's Quest for Partnership", p7; Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p7, p13.

of men and women having equal rights. Indeed, until the subsequent Universal Declaration of Human Rights, no international treaty or legal instrument had expressed this in clear terms.⁵⁴ It was some of these key women delegates (although notably not the US or British women delegates) who worked in concert with the International Council of Women, the International Association of University Women, the International Alliance of Women, and Country Women of the World, to successful call for the establishment of the CSW in 1946.⁵⁵

The CSW would come to serve as the new focus of international feminism; picking up where the work of the League of Nations had left off to secure international conventions on women's rights, with a much stronger force as a stand-alone body and the primary UN organ responsible for women's rights. Its creation as a space was critical in the context of the male dominated UN, where diplomacy was viewed as "men's business".⁵⁶ While initially instituted as a sub-commission of the Human Rights Commission, it became a full-fledged commission in 1946. Following the agreement of the UN Charter in 1946, the CSW would come to serve as a key body in influencing the drafting of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, pp21-23; Laville, "Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67", p474. For further reading on the engagement of women on both the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights see Rebecca Adami, *Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁵ Rather the American and British delegates argued against the establishment of a separate sub-commission on the basis that women should not be regarded as needing special treatment. See Helen McCarthy, *Women of the World: The Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp155-156; Irene Tinker, "Introduction" in *Developing Power: How Women Transformed International Development*, eds. Arvonne Fraser and Irene Tinker (New York: City University of New York, 2004), pXVI; Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p90.

⁵⁶ Kristen Timothy, "Equality for Women in the United Nations Secretariat" in *Women, Politics and the United Nations*, ed. Winslow (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p117.

⁵⁷ Like the UN Charter, the UDHR reaffirmed the "equal rights of men and women," and included references to "members of the human family" and "all human beings". See Charter of the United Nations, 26 June 1945, UN Documents.

Beyond collecting information, the CSW's functions included making recommendations to its parent body ECOSOC, and the General Assembly and other UN bodies working in related fields to promote the sex-equality provisions of the UN Charter.⁵⁸ Specifically, it was mandated to prepare recommendations and reports to ECOSOC "on promoting women's rights in the political, economic, civil and social fields" and to make recommendations "on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights".⁵⁹ The UN's involvement in women's rights issues marked the beginning of a historic change, in which domestic matters once thought of as private and highly traditional would come to be openly debated in the global context.⁶⁰ The early phase of the UN's work on women's rights included collecting information via surveys and studies to document the situation of women in many parts of the world including on women's legal rights. In addition, the UN served as an important arena for codifying new principles around women's equality into international law.

Collectively, the historiography on the role of women at the League of Nations and at the UN's very foundation in galvanising action and mainstreaming language on women's rights into the UN's early agreements provides an important institutional background to women's diplomatic history from the early to mid-twentieth century. More so, it provides a rationale for going further to analyse whether political interests around colonialism affected Britain's engagement with the emerging women's rights agenda at the UN in the years that followed. As Helen Laville rightly argues, it was the period *after* the formation of the CSW which actually saw the emergence of a

⁵⁸ ECOSOC is mandated to discuss social, economic and humanitarian issues, and coordinate the work of UN agencies and bodies concerned with those issues. It commissions studies, writes reports and makes policy recommendations to the General Assembly. See Linda Fasulo, *Insider's Guide to the UN* (Yale University press, 2009), p76.

⁵⁹ ECOSOC Resolution 11 (II), 21 June 1946, UN Documents; Laura Reanda, "The Commission on the Status of Women" in *The United Nations and Human Rights*, ed. Philip Alston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp265-272 which references Chair of Commission statement E/CN.6/SR.20, 1948, and ECOSOC Resolution 48(IV), 29 March 1947.

⁶⁰ United Nations Department of Public Information, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1996* (New York: United Nations, 1995), p8.

number of important international treaties such as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957), and the Convention on the Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962). These represent “a significant achievement in the history of women's international rights, reflecting the emerging legitimacy of women's rights as an area of international action” and laid crucial foundations for what is considered today as the most significant international women’s rights convention: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979).⁶¹

Nevertheless, more research is needed to build on this scholarship and analyse British foreign policy to understand the effect of Britain’s colonial interests on its engagement with the international women’s rights agenda during this critical period. We must also ask to what extent Britain’s political calculations and subsequent interactions shaped and influenced the content political weight of the international standards and policy frameworks that emerged. Studies spanning the disciplines of women’s history, political studies and development studies have begun to catalogue the CSW’s achievements in its early years, in areas such as marriage, maternity, nationality, harmful traditional practices and exploitation including trafficking and slavery.⁶² We must go further in interrogating the impact of such political dynamics on the standards and policy frameworks that were agreed.

In recognition of the centrality of the CSW in the global women’s rights agenda, Giuseppina Russo’s study of the CSW provides a rare insight into the interactions of member state delegates

⁶¹ Laville, “‘Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical?’ British Responses to the Commission on the States of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, p474.

⁶² Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p46.

at the CSW from its inception until 1974. Russo attempts to fill the gap in large-scale historical accounts of feminist debates on human rights, as identified by Carola Sachse and Atina Grossman, and “new histories of the UN” through a focus on gender.⁶³ As such she provides the first account looking at the dynamics of the delegates at the CSW: specifically how the CSW itself created and reinforced the category of women’s rights between 1946 and 1975. However, in so doing she takes a global perspective, and this does not include the rich contextual analysis of the political factors, tactics and manoeuvrings of any one national context or delegation in its interactions with the CSW.⁶⁴

Laville’s study of the CSW and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women begins the exploration of the impact of colonial considerations within British foreign policy on women’s rights at the UN. Her study focuses on the role of British women’s associations and political figures in lobbying for a greater say in choosing the British government delegates sent to the CSW, and in calling on the British government to ratify the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in the 1960s. It touches briefly upon some of Britain’s colonial concerns during the development of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women at the CSW.⁶⁵ This signals a most welcome start to what is desperately needed: an in-depth examination into the colonial considerations influencing British foreign policy on the emerging women’s rights conventions at the CSW, particularly in the 1950s and early 1960s before British decolonisation progressed at pace. This thesis will explore this gap and also analyse the impact this had on the shape of the conventions adopted as a result. Additionally, the 1960s saw an increased focus within the CSW on technical

⁶³ Carola Sachse and Atina Grossman, “Human Rights, Utopias, and Gender in Twentieth Century Europe”, *Central European History* 44 (2011), pp1-12; Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, “New histories of the United Nations” *Journal of World History*, vol. 19, no.3, (2008) pp251-274 noted in Giuseppina Russo, “Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975”, PhD Thesis, Binghampton University, 2014.

⁶⁴ Giuseppina Russo, “Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975”.

⁶⁵ Laville, ““Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical”? British Responses to the Commission on the States of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”. Three pages of the article begin to cite Britain’s concerns in relation to the colonies, see pp488-490.

assistance and development as part of a new priority at the UN.⁶⁶ Therefore, this thesis will also address Britain's approach to women's rights in the emerging international development agenda which gained particular prominence at the UN from the 1960s through to International Women's Year in 1975.

Beyond the establishment of UN specialised agencies as a means to promote international development, the UN first considered the issue of technical assistance in 1946.⁶⁷ In 1948, the General Assembly adopted resolution 200 (III) on international development assistance, calling on the UN Secretary-General to organise international teams of experts to advise governments on economic development programmes and support the training of experts from developing countries, including through fellowships.⁶⁸ The UN continued to focus on the technical assistance aspect of development assistance in its early years, establishing the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance in 1949 to assist the governments of developing countries in efforts to "modernise". Modernisers justified the need for technical assistance as the necessary "know-how" to fill knowledge gaps to lay the foundation for future social development and economic growth. At a pledging conference in 1950, Member States pledged a meagre \$20million, which was channelled in part through the UN specialised agencies.⁶⁹ Yet despite its modest size in comparison to bilateral aid programmes at the time, Aaron Rietkirk argues that this flagship programme proved to be the most fully multilateral source of economic aid available to underdeveloped countries

⁶⁶ Leticia Shahani, "The UN, Women and Development : The World Conferences on Women", in *Developing Power*, eds. Arvonne Fraser and Irene Tinker (New York: City University of New York, 2004), p29.

⁶⁷ China and Lebanon proposed the idea of a UN technical assistance programme. See Craig Murphy, *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp51-52.

⁶⁸ The resolution – sponsored by Burma, Chile, Peru and Egypt - included a modest sum for assistance under the Regular Programme for Technical Assistance (UN General Assembly Resolution 200 (III), 4 December 1948, UN Documents). Another resolution was also passed (UN General Assembly Resolution 198 (III), 4 December 1948) which recommended Member States "give further and urgent consideration to the whole problem of economic development of underdeveloped countries in all aspects".

⁶⁹ David Owen, "The United Nations Expanded Program of Technical Assistance – A Multilateral Approach", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no.232, (1959), p28; Macekura et al, *The Development Century*, p37.

during the 1950s.⁷⁰ The primary objective of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance was to strengthen the economics of developing countries through “the development of their industries and agriculture with a view to promoting their economic and political independence”.⁷¹ With Keynesian economics influencing development thinking and its focus on infrastructure investment as a means to sustainable growth, a UN Special Fund also came into operation in 1959. It was designed to finance projects to “provide systematic and sustained assistance in fields essential to the integrated technical, economic and social development of the less-developed countries”.⁷²

The historiography of the UN and development in the 1950s and 1960s offers a rich analysis of the development paradigms beginning with “modernisation” and a belief in the role of cash injections into developing countries to “trickle down” to the poorest.⁷³ By the end of the 1960s, governments had begun to question the effectiveness of modernisation theory, acknowledging the potential for such programmes to actually worsen the situation of the poorest. As such in 1969, the Secretary-General U Thant called for the integration of economic and social goals to achieve development,⁷⁴ as the UN began to shift towards greater focus on social welfare during the Second Development Decade of the 1970s. While the historiography on the UN and development paradigms provides a basis from which to understand the historical context of emerging UN frameworks on women’s rights and international development, it falls short of explicitly examining the nature of international development policy frameworks as they related to women’s rights or

⁷⁰ Aaron Rietkirk, “In pursuit of development: the United Nations, decolonization and development aid, 1949-1961”, p35.

⁷¹ Thomas Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, *Global Governance and the UN* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p174.

⁷² Stokke, *The UN and Development*, pp6-30, p40. The establishment of key UN institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (1945), integration of the International Labour Association into the UN in (1946) and establishment of World Health Organisation (1948) were also significant.

⁷³ For further detail see *ibid*; Rietkirk, “In pursuit of development: the United Nations, decolonization and development aid, 1949-1961”.

⁷⁴ Margaret Snyder, “The politics of women and development” in *Women, Politics and the United Nations*, ed. Winslow (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p96.

the political positions of colonial powers such as Britain in this regard. In order to situate Britain's policy around the women and development frameworks at the CSW in the 1960s and first World Conference on Women, the thesis will draw on the broad scholarship of women and development. This scholarship was written by women as the pioneers of such an approach and by former practitioners working in the UN nations system around or soon after the period under examination such as Margaret Bruce (Head of the UN Secretariat Section on the Status of Women 1963 to 1973), Gloria Scott (Head of UN Social planning unit in 1966 and convenor of regional seminars for the First World Conference on Women) and Margaret Snyder (Founding Director of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women 1978-89). It also draws on the analysis of those working within the international women's movement at the time such as Irene Tinker and Devaki Jain.

In the 1960s, the issue of how to assist women in developing countries became a focus of the CSW's work. This was particularly so as the CSW began to respond to growing evidence that development benefits did not "trickle down" to women, who were also disproportionately affected by poverty.⁷⁵ The UN declaration for the First Development Decade 1961-70 failed to mention women specifically.⁷⁶ However, in 1962 the UN General Assembly instructed the CSW to prepare a report on the role of women in the social and economic plans of member governments.⁷⁷ As such the CSW began to negotiate a proposal for a unified long-term programme to coordinate the various piecemeal development efforts of the UN programming relating to women. The objectives of the proposed programme were adopted in 1968 at the UN's International Human Rights conference in Tehran. In 1970, the programme was launched as the Programme of Concerted

⁷⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Introduction", in *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*; Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, ed. United Nations Department of Public Information, (New York: United Nations, 1996), p45.

⁷⁶ Irene Tinker, "The Making of a Field: Advocates, Practitioners and scholars", p34.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p34.

International Action for the Advancement of Women. This programme aimed to eliminate illiteracy, realise the principle of equal pay for equal work, provide health and maternity protection and increase the number of women participating in public life.

By the early 1970s, feminist development theorists were highlighting that mainstream economic development programmes were in fact reinforcing women's subordination.⁷⁸ With a growing consensus around the need to address the world food situation and population growth, and a growing international feminist movement, the UN system began to see women as key to solving world development challenges. This momentum culminated in the first UN World Conference on Women in 1975.⁷⁹ The conference itself would be a pivotal forum in which to discuss the role of women in development, alongside peace and the eradication of gender discrimination.

This thesis draws on this literature to go further in understanding how and why Britain took certain policy positions with regard to the role of women in development, and how these changed between the 1960s and 1975. This alongside investigating the progress of the women's human rights agenda at the UN, it will also provide a gender and international diplomacy focus to specifically interrogate the way in which Britain specifically interacted with this agenda, and the role of its colonial legacy in doing so.

⁷⁸ Tinker, "Introduction" in *Developing Power*, pxiii.

⁷⁹ Puetilä, *Engendering the Global Agenda*, p29.

7. Colonial diplomacy and the human rights agenda at the UN 1946-1975

The near absence of historical analysis on the role of colonial considerations within the early women's rights diplomacy over the emerging conventions and international development frameworks at the UN between 1950 and 1975 is contrasted with an established historiography on the prevalence of colonial politics surrounding evolution of the international human rights agenda at this time. It is now clear that narratives on the universal nature of human rights were used by a burgeoning group of newly independent Member States as a weapon against Britain and other colonial powers. Nevertheless, more research is needed to understand the extent to which the human rights fault lines around colonialism and anti-colonialism infiltrated and impacted upon the women's rights agenda through the 1950s and 1960s and early 1970s. To do this concretely, in a way which can evidence the motivations and specifics of the positions taken in this regard, this thesis focuses on the diplomatic manoeuvrings of Britain specifically.

While the UN's founding document, the UN Charter, stopped short of explicitly condemning colonialism (it merely referenced the importance of "self-determination and "fundamental freedoms"), the issue was continuously highlighted by the organs of the UN in the period after its inception.⁸⁰ Moreover, despite lacking a distinctive reference to colonialism, the Charter itself gave human rights a prominence as never before.⁸¹ The agreement of the UN Declaration of Human

⁸⁰ David Kay, "The Politics of Decolonization. The new nations and the United Nations Political process", *International Organization*, vol. 21, no. 4, (1967), p786-811.

⁸¹ Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, p186. The UN charter calls for "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and...recognition of the interdependence of the peoples of the world" and for the Trust territories calls for the "progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate", UN Charter, Articles 75, 76 and 86-91. The Charter, in enshrining two diametrically opposed principles of human rights provisions "for all" in Article 1 and the protection of state sovereignty in Article 2 has meant that the subsequent evolution of international human rights has been a struggle between two diametrically opposed principles ever since (Lauren, p189).

Rights in 1948 also provided a reference point for asserting the rights of colonial subjects, with “everyone” entitled to the rights it set forth “without distinction of any kind” including with regard to the “political, jurisdictional, or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing, or under any other limitation of sovereignty”.⁸² Indeed, the title deliberately used the notion “universal” rather than “international” to set the tone of the entire document that rights were natural, equal and - of course - universal.⁸³ Craig Murphy confirms that the UN system provided a range of support to nationalist movements demanding an end to colonialism.⁸⁴ By 1952, the UN General Assembly had played a key role in raising a “global conscience” around the call for decolonisation by passing a resolution which sought to “recognize and promote the realization of the right of self-determination of the peoples of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories”.⁸⁵ While international agencies provided fora for anti-colonial nationalists to speak and demand independence, the UN secretariats also supported the production of reports that “promoted the assumption that colonialism was a holdover of a less progressive past”.⁸⁶

The balance of power at the UN began to shift around 1960 as newly independent states gained membership.⁸⁷ In the latter part of the 1950s, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, Ghana and Guinea joined upon their independence. In 1960, 16 further former colonies gained Member State status. Not only was the number of newly independent states increasing, they were also organising at the global level around anti-colonialism. In 1955, Asian and African activists convened for the

⁸² UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2, General Assembly Resolution 217 A, 10 December 1948, UN Documents. See also Henning Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld: The United Nations and The Decolonisation of Africa* (London: Hurst, 2019), p20.

⁸³ Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, pp221-223. When it came to the final vote of the Declaration, not a single country opposed (48 in favour, 8 abstentions).

⁸⁴ Craig Murphy, *Global Institutions, Marginalization and Development* (London: Routledge, 2005), p96.

⁸⁵ UN General Assembly Resolution 637 (VII), 16 December 1952; Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, p20.

⁸⁶ Murphy, *Global Institutions, Marginalization and Development*, p96.

⁸⁷ This shift, was of course, moderated by those permanent members of the Security Council who continued to hold veto power in that forum.

Bandung Conference in (Indonesia), as a means of coordination against colonial order (this was a forerunner to the Non-Aligned Movement). The conference also sought to develop a common “development” policy, with the communique recognising the “urgency of promoting economic development in the Asian-African region”.⁸⁸ The changing balance of power towards developing countries, and their call for decolonisation, was realised in 1960 with the General Assembly’s Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People.⁸⁹ By 1961, the number of UN states had increased to over 100; double the number which had joined the organisation at its founding conference in 1945.

Useful here is the detailed work of Burke, which focuses on *how* human rights narratives were deployed at the UN, and illuminates the integral linkages made between national rights and individual human rights in the fight for self-determination. His analysis of language used in Third Committee debates demonstrates how the Afro-Asian bloc came to drive forward the narratives of the human rights agenda within the UN in the face of Western racism and apathy into the mid-1960s. He demonstrates that the newly independent former colonies, now sitting as Member States at the UN, relied on the help of the authority of the General Assembly, ECOSOC, the Human Rights Commission, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories to forge progress on human rights.⁹⁰ Additionally, the international human rights discourse and negative reactions to colonial violence within “contested decolonisation” in Kenya and Algeria⁹¹ saw universal human rights narratives become the “armour” of the anticolonial movement at the UN.⁹²

⁸⁸ Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development*, 1st Edition (London: Zed Books, 2002), p81.

⁸⁹ UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) 14 December 1960, UN Documents; Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, p21-22.

⁹⁰ Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, pp35-58

⁹¹ Klose, *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial Violence*, p5.

⁹² Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, p5.

However, the *significance* of the use of the human rights narrative by anti-colonialists creates a fault line within the scholarship surrounding the UN and its associated human rights agenda. Here the debate focuses on definitions. Brian Simpson argues that the “anticolonial movement was not in essence a human rights movement”, because its primary purpose was not that of human rights activism, i.e. to reduce the power of the state over the individual.⁹³ Samuel Moyn, who further asserts that “anti-colonialism wasn’t a human rights movement”, argues that human rights were incorporated into the “master principle of collective self-determination”, where human rights implied colonial liberation and the creation of emancipated nations, as opposed to rights themselves. Indeed, human rights as a concept was vague in the 1940s, and in this way anti-colonialism at the UN has its own distinctive tradition in its utilisation of the “human rights” narrative which differs from its contemporary understanding at individual level.⁹⁴ Moyn argues that the 1970s marked the ideological ascendancy of our understanding of human rights as perceived today, namely as individual rights against the state in response to the interaction of histories on a transnational level *outside* the UN. *Inter alia*, these included the search for a European identity outside the Cold War, the shift towards a more liberal US Foreign Policy in the wake of the Vietnam war, and what Western observers saw as the crisis of the post-colonial state as many

⁹³ Brian Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire: Britain and the Genesis of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p300.

⁹⁴ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia* (London: Belknap Press, 2010), pp4-5, pp84-86.

dictators rose to power.⁹⁵ He concludes that decolonisation's contribution to the cause of human rights itself was a distinctive one which installed sovereignty across the world.⁹⁶

Such interrogation of the meaning of the human rights narrative provides an important nuance in our understanding of the notion of human rights in this period of the UN's early years. And yet Klose and Burke's research demonstrates that, even in this politicised form, human rights narratives- albeit linked to those around self-determination – were present and utilised by anti-colonialists. As Henning Melber remarks, it would have been highly surprising for such human rights narratives *not* to be utilised for “instrumental political ends”⁹⁷ in this new global political forum. Even Mark Mazower, who cautions against a desire to create a false utopian history of the UN in which the UN played an effective role in today's human rights standards, admits that the UN became an anti-colonial forum during the 1950s and 1960s.⁹⁸

A second area of contention within the historiography rests on the significance of the utilisation of human rights narratives at the UN in terms of its *impact vis a vis* its role in furthering decolonisation. Jan Eckel cautions against a ‘grand narrative’ on human rights and its role in the decolonisation process, as human rights were neither highly significant nor completely absent and

⁹⁵ Ibid, pp7-8. On that last point around the rise of dictators within post-colonial regimes, Burke would agree that the early evolution of the international human rights agenda at the UN, driven by the principle of universalism within Third World states in the 1950s and early 1960s, would subsequently be repudiated by African and Asian diplomats with even greater force, making the Third World's role in the expansion of human rights “one of the greatest paradoxes in the history of the organisation.” Burke argues that the abandonment of the commitment to universal human rights was not an inevitable result of decolonisation, but the product of undemocratic human rights regimes, which, just as their colonial predecessors had, invoked arguments of cultural relativism to evade scrutiny on their human rights record and had “begun to resemble the colonial administrators they professed to hate.” Yet this paradox certainly does not rule out the fact that human rights narratives had previously been invoked by such regimes at the UN as part of the anticolonial movement. See Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, p144.

⁹⁶ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, p117.

⁹⁷ Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, p23.

⁹⁸ Mark Mazower, *No enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the UN*, 1st Edition (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp1-10.

rather interpreted and used by different actors in different ways.⁹⁹ Yet Klose argues that the codification of international human rights documents (notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international covenants on human rights) did provide a site for agitation by anti-colonial forces and a source of embarrassment for colonial powers at the UN.¹⁰⁰

Turning attention to the impact of such embarrassment inflicted by the anti-colonial movement on a specific metropole yields a more tangible perspective. In the case of Britain, the Colonial Office was wary of the way in which a focus on human rights within the UN might be used to put British colonialism under the spotlight and interfere with its colonies.¹⁰¹ In this case, Eckel agrees with Klose and Burke that the human rights narrative was used to great effect in the initiatives of African and Asian delegations at the UN, and suggests that international criticism did constitute a factor in the colonial turnabout of the Macmillan government and thus for the British withdrawal from Africa – but from Africa only:

In the British case, indications can be found that in the eyes of policymakers anticolonial criticism did come to affect the international image and the legitimacy of the British position in the world and thus constituted a factor in the decision to end colonial rule.¹⁰²

He qualifies this by stressing that this was the result of a breadth of accusations brought forward by post-colonial states and the Soviet bloc in the General Assembly, the Trusteeship Council, and ECOSOC (with its human rights bodies), discrediting colonial rule as a violation of fundamental rights. Often they stigmatised it as repressive, inhumane, unjust or illegitimate, and not simply on the basis of human rights per se.¹⁰³ Thus, the link between anti-colonialism and human rights

⁹⁹ Eckel, “Human Rights and Decolonization: New Perspectives and Open Questions”, p113.

¹⁰⁰ Klose, “Source of Embarrassment”, p240, 242-243.

¹⁰¹ Laville, “‘Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical?’ British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, p481 which notes Louis Williams, “Public Enemy Number One: The British Empire in the Dock at the United Nations 1957-71”, in *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?*, ed. Martin Lynn (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp186-213; and Brian Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire*.

¹⁰² Eckel, “Human Rights and Decolonization: New Perspectives and Open Questions”, p113.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p128.

narratives at the UN put pressure on Britain to reassess its policy positions, and in this way constituted a key factor in policy formulation.

Clearly, the picture is complex. But these disagreements around the definition and impact of the human rights debates at the UN around decolonisation can be reconciled and better understood through further historical research. These fault lines create a false sense of divergence among historians, where the real issue lies in the fact that two different questions are being postulated. It is clear that human rights language was used by anti-colonialists at the inception of the UN through to the 1970s: the evidence of this is indisputable. Where Moyn and Simpson appear as cynical about the place of anti-colonialism within human rights debates at the UN, such caution derives from their interrogation of the origins of the human rights movement as conceived in present times as individual freedoms. Yet Burke and Klose seek to understand the ways in which the anti-colonial movement utilised the language of human rights at the UN. This latter question is far more significant because it recognises that human rights debates were present at the UN and seeks to understand the ramifications of these in the context of decolonisation. This leads us to question the actions of colonial powers at the UN at the time in the face of anti-colonial criticism when it came to the human rights instruments under debate.

Here specifically, is where this research steps in, with a focus on the foreign policy of Britain in relation to the women's human rights instruments under development at the UN in this critical period. Taking one colonial power as the point of analysis enables this research to escape the criticism made by Mazower, with regard to taking an overly utopian view of the early women's rights frameworks developed at the UN. After all, the UN as an intergovernmental body is only the sum of its parts.

Examining the role of Britain as one of these *parts* – in its policies and its tactics towards the CSW – serves to provide a detailed account of the way in which Britain interacted with women’s rights conventions in the context of anti-colonialism. In so doing it will assess *whether* the CSW served as a site for potential embarrassment for Britain on women’s rights in its colonies and the impact this had on British foreign policy. It will explore how this factored into Britain’s considerations as a colonial power, and how Britain took positions to limit or derail the ambition of the emerging women’s rights instruments at the international level in order to limit the implications of such standards in relation to colonial policy. This research does not seek to comment on the *impact* of Britain’s engagement with the CSW in terms of broader British policies on decolonisation writ large. Rather it seeks to make an assessment as to the extent to which Britain’s colonial considerations played a role in limiting the evolution and territorial scope of women’s legal rights and policy frameworks on the international stage.

While geopolitical factors played in human rights discourses at the UN between 1950 and 1975, as more former colonies joined the organisation, a broad anti-colonial coalition was also promoting international development at the UN in this period.¹⁰⁴ By the mid-1960s, 100 new Member States had joined the original 51.¹⁰⁵ It is here that the historiography on the UN and development sheds further light on the impact of anti-colonial dynamics within the institution’s emerging aid infrastructure. Rietkirk argues that while industrialised countries, particularly the US, provided funding during this period, the Global South deserve much of the credit for focusing the General Assembly to take action in international development. The UN Charter also provided a basis

¹⁰⁴ Craig Murphy, *Global Institutions, Marginalization and Development* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp96-97.

¹⁰⁵ Weiss and Thakur, *Global Governance and the UN*, p156.

committing the UN to promote higher standards of living, full employment, economic progress and development.¹⁰⁶

The historiography on the UN and development is also notable for its exploration of the values and principles guiding the UN's programming in this regard. In particular, the UN's establishment of a technical assistance programme, from its very inception in 1948, was significant for its emphasis on the principle of sovereignty. This was important in a period when aid from bilateral sources was regarded as politicised in the context of the Cold War and colonial influence. Olav Stokke notes that the norms and guidelines for technical assistance were significant because the resolution agreed in 1948 noted that the services rendered to countries "shall be decided by the Government concerned". At the heart of this, Reitkirk argues, in the post war years the UN contended with the challenge of providing development aid to countries that requested assistance yet jealously guarded their newly acquired sovereignty.¹⁰⁷ Under the Expanded Programme for Technical Assistance, the UN only provided assistance upon request of recipient countries. Dag Hammarskjöld, who served as Secretary-General from 1953 until 1961, felt the UN was best placed to provide multilateral aid, as a means to remove aid from the influence of the Cold War powerhouses.¹⁰⁸ He played a key role in ensuring that the UN architecture for technical assistance emphasised the sovereignty of recipient governments as it took shape in the 1950s.¹⁰⁹ Understanding how the issue of sovereignty and technical assistance interplayed with universal values on women's rights within development forms a key component of this research.

¹⁰⁶ UN Charter Chapter IX, Article 55, UN Documents.

¹⁰⁷ Aaron Reitkirk, "In pursuit of development: the United Nations, decolonization and development aid, 1949-1961", p11.

¹⁰⁸ Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, p55 which cites Peter Heller, *The United Nations under Dag Hammarskjöld* (London: Scarecrow, 2001).

¹⁰⁹ Stokke, *The UN and Development*, p79, p103; UN General Assembly Resolution 1219 (XII), 14 December 1947, UN Documents.

8. Britain's colonial legacy on indigenous women's welfare

If we are to fully appreciate *the extent to which* Britain's colonial considerations and legacy influenced its approach and policy positions relating to women's human rights and international development frameworks at the CSW from 1950 to 1975 and the UN World Conference on Women, we must understand Britain's prior approach to indigenous women's welfare under colonial rule. For this reason, a third and final canon of historiography is utilised to understand the nature of British colonialism in relation to indigenous women's welfare, from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

A growing body of scholarship in the past 20 years has developed more critical analytical perspectives on the relationship between the history of Western European and British feminisms and the history of racism and imperialism.¹¹⁰ Colony-focused British humanitarian campaigns since the early nineteenth century, such as those to abolish the slave trade and end *sati* (widow burning) in India, aimed to save the lives or improve the welfare of British colonial subjects. But in successfully gaining British government support, they also lent a soft legitimacy to the British imperial project.

Improving indigenous women's welfare and the realisation of their rights was never the starting point, nor a driver behind, the British Empire. International power, trading access and direct economic rewards outweighed any humanitarian or value-based rationale for colonial rule. Yet, a

¹¹⁰ See Nupur Chaudhuri, and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns*, 1st Edition, (London: Routledge, 1992); Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women writers and colonial slavery* (London: Routledge, 1992); Antoinette Burton, 'History is now: feminist theory and the production of historical feminism', *Women's History Review*, vol. 1 (1992), pp 25-38; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

moral case for Britain's empire was utilised by both government and non-government actors. This case was grounded within the notion that it was white people of European descent who knew how to "treat" women in contrast to the savage treatment of women by indigenous men, with the position of women used as an index to measure civilisation in those societies.¹¹¹ In this way the status of relations between men and women was used to project a generalised state of degeneration in societies themselves.¹¹² As such, Phillipa Levine argues that the British public believed that colonial women led "a miserable, brutal and wretched existence in the shadow of their menfolk, who thought nothing of bartering women's bodies as commodities," whether selling daughters into prostitution, mutilating them or even killing them at birth – or subjecting their wives to polygamous marital arrangements and condemnation in widowhood.¹¹³ It was this perceived failure of colonised men to do right by women which, for many in Britain, justified the need for British governance.¹¹⁴ Shirin Rai argues that the colonial project endorsed the rescue of women in the colonies from men in their communities by an external authority which had "both the force of state power and the legitimizing power of a modernist discourse".¹¹⁵ Antoinette Burton's work documenting "imperial feminism" whereby British liberal feminists promoted their own right to vote in the imperial Parliament through claiming a role as social reformers, is also of particular note.¹¹⁶

Clare Midgley's research on *Feminism and Empire* provided a ground-breaking insight into the emerging British women's feminist movement in the early nineteenth century and the way these

¹¹¹ Philippa Levine, *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp6-7; see also essays by Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Gender and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century" and Catherine Hall "Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century" in that volume.

¹¹² Rai, *The Gender Politics of Development*, p17-18. Rai argues that while colonized men from Aryan races such as Afghans and Sikhs were routinely categorised as "martial" or aggressive, African men were depicted as in a state of barbarism and savagery, and East Asian men were feminised as weak; all were presented as brutal towards women.

¹¹³ Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), p158.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p158.

¹¹⁵ Rai, *The Gender Politics of Development*, p18.

¹¹⁶ See Burton, *Burdens of History*; Antoinette Burton, "The Feminist Quest for Identity: British imperial suffragism and "global sisterhood", 1900-1915', in *Journal of Women's History*, vol.3 (1991), pp46-81.

women perceived Britain and its imperial role as a “force of progress and modernity”. The campaigns against slavery and *sati* would become the first political targets of British women suffrage campaigners. These early roots of women’s activism in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intertwined with a belief that the imperial force of the British empire was best placed to rid the colonies of abuses against women. Such engagement by middle-class British women for the betterment of ‘other’ women in colonised lands also shaped a sense of themselves as modern women who inhabited the most progressive and civilised country in the world. In this way, early British feminism served to bolster the imperial project and the racism inherent within it.¹¹⁷

The campaign against *sati* was a key site for emerging missionary activity. It was through this missionary movement that the early British women’s movement adopted an evangelical, missionary frame based on imperialism. This “white women’s burden”, in seeking to speak on behalf of the “other” women was captured under a maternalistic concern. But rather than standing in solidarity with indigenous women to improve their standing and voice in society, white middle-class women attempted to position all white Christians as superior to the heathen or black slave.¹¹⁸ Ladies’ associations – attached to missionary societies – began an emotional appeal to British women through evangelical literature and fundraising campaigns for female education in India.¹¹⁹

The campaign against *sati* was also targeted towards politicians. During the 1820s, a huge proportion of parliamentary time was taken up with debate on public petitions. As such, a total of 15 separate groups of women sent anti-*sati* petitions to Parliament between February 1829 and

¹¹⁷ Clare Midgely, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain 1790-1865* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp50-91.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p9; Antoinette Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol.13, no.4 (1990), pp295-308.

¹¹⁹ Midgely, *Feminism and Empire*, p65-91.

April 1830.¹²⁰ This idea of women petitioning the British Parliament was incredibly contentious at the time; with no right to vote, a social context which supported a ‘separate spheres’ system whereby women had no place in the public sphere, and no precedent for women’s collective political voice, it represented a dramatic advance in women’s activism. As such the male leadership of both anti-*sati* and anti-slavery campaigns did not encourage female signatories to general petitions, but rather advocated for separate women’s petitions.¹²¹ Nevertheless it marked one of the early instances of women’s collective action in Britain through parliamentary petitions, to be followed by the much more extensive petitioning by women against colonial slavery between 1830 and 1833.¹²²

The frame of the anti-*sati* movement used “the awful state of female society...dooming the female, to be burned alive” as a justification for imperial rule over India: positioning British rule – and in fact British men – not as coercive and violent, but committed to “saving” indigenous women.¹²³ This early British women’s movement championed empire, and the patriarchy behind it, making their plea to “powerful men to extend their paternal protection to colonized women”.¹²⁴ Such discourses did not seek to challenge British imperialism or the unequal position of women in relation to men. Given women’s petitioning of the British Parliament was so contentious at the time, this frame served an instrumental purpose which resonated within the call for British imperialism. Such an approach was successful in achieving its campaign goal: *Sati* was successfully outlawed by Britain between 1829 and 1830, and the Emancipation Act passed in 1833.¹²⁵ But this

¹²⁰ Ibid, pp81-85. Midgely notes that the number of signatories to each petition is uncertain but one at least contained 300-400 signatures.

¹²¹ Midgely, *Feminism and Empire*, p81.

¹²² Ibid, p65, p83.

¹²³ Ibid, p74 which notes Baptist Missionary William Ward, *Farewell Letters to a Few Friends in Britain and America, on Returning to Bengal in 1821* (London: Black, Kingsbury, Oarbury, and Allen, 1821).

¹²⁴ Ibid, p83, pp88-89.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p86.

came at the cost of reinforcing racist norms around white supremacy in colonial matters relating to indigenous women.

Moving into the twentieth century, the interest of British feminists and British officials in indigenous women's welfare extended beyond *sati*. Child marriage became an issue of renewed debate in Britain in the 1880s, with opposition from Indian nationalists to government intervention on what they deemed to be a private matter and religious issue.¹²⁶ Joanna Lewis argues that since the late nineteenth century, social welfare policies in areas such as health, education, famine and epidemics relief had become part of the colonial state building project. This also included a focus on harmful traditional practices such as the enslavement of women and children and prostitution.¹²⁷

This growing interest in women's welfare at the turn of the twentieth century coincided with a changing missionary landscape within the empire. By 1900, the majority of missionaries working worldwide were women; something quite unique in the context of otherwise male-dominated wider British imperial institutions.¹²⁸ The historiography of women and empire also reveals the ways in which British colonial social welfare policies began to target women in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s and 1930s, European and American missionaries and some colonial officials found the practice of female circumcision "barbaric" and "mutilating". These reactions were supported by feminist leaders and the British Parliament, in calling for firm measures against such customs.¹²⁹ Other harmful practices such as trafficking of women and the neglect of education of

¹²⁶ Susan Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing: Eleanor Rathbone and the Refugees* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), p45.

¹²⁷ Joanna Lewis, "Colonialism and Welfare" in *Colonialism and welfare: social policy and the British imperial legacy*, eds. James Midgley and David Piachaud (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011), p24.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Prevost, *The Communion of Women: Missions and Gender in Colonial Africa and the British Metropole* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp2-8.

¹²⁹ Peter Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p141.

girls also attracted greater attention in this period, as the rise of professional women working in social welfare across the empire gave rise to an increase in campaigns against such gender injustices.¹³⁰

Legal changes to the extension of the franchise to women in 1918 (later extended to include women over the age of 21 in 1928) also brought women as MPs to Westminster for the first time. Women's presence in parliament brought a new opportunity to campaign for indigenous women's welfare at the political heart of the British metropole. One of the first women MPs Eleanor Rathbone, engaged in child marriage issues in India,¹³¹ in 1927, arguing that this was one of the major reasons for her becoming an MP in the first place. In 1929 she joined forces with Katherine Steward MP to highlight the issue of female circumcision in Kenya¹³²

By the 1920s, the Colonial Office became more proactive in its approach to colonial development generally. The passage of the Colonial Development Act in 1929 was the first of its kind to commit the British state and British taxpayers to support overseas development. While initially focusing on economic development (particularly transport and communications infrastructure), the notion of "development" widened to incorporate social welfare during the 1930s.¹³³ Lewis demonstrates

¹³⁰ Lewis, "Colonialism and Welfare", p24.

¹³¹ Rathbone's interest was sparked following the publication of *Mother India*. The publication, with its negative portrayal of Indian women, provoked deep controversy in India, with protest meetings across the country. Singh argues that the book – "ostensibly an exposé on the condition of women in India on child marriage and various political ills" – relied on the construct of "manly Englishman" as the liberator of helpless Indian women as a crucial element in defence of imperial rule. See Mrinalini Sinha, "Locating the Indian Woman" in *Feminists Revision History* ed. Ann-Louise Shapiro (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994). Rathbone, who used her parliamentary role to push for a commission to provide information on the status of Indian women and two conferences in London on 'Women in India', was met with criticism from Indian activists who opposed the idea of British women arranging a conference on "Indian social evils". See Dhanvanti Ramu Rau, *An Inheritance: The memories of Dhanvanti Ramu Rau* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp138-9. Seemingly in recognition of the need not to present herself as *the* voice of Indian women, Rathbone took more of a background role in lobbying the Round Table Conferences on India's future governance arrangements from 1930-1932 in her campaign to the conference on the status and welfare of Indian women. See Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing*, p51.

¹³² Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing*, p45.

¹³³ Michael Jennings, "'A Very Real War': Popular Participation in Development in Tanzania During the 1950s and 1960s", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 40, no.1 (2007), pp73-74.

that in the 1920s the Colonial Office also began a proactive interest in women within social policy, recognising their “transformatory potential”. The concept of “the African woman” as utilised by civil servants was a new weapon: able to convert tribal tradition, while also being the modern wife to serve as “educated mates” for their menfolk, and with the potential to become qualified care givers to address high infant mortality rates and other issues relating to hygiene. It was felt that through the expansion of educational opportunities for women, they would in turn “soften the process of transition into modernity” in the colonies writ large.¹³⁴

This focus on women by the Colonial Office intersected with the growing number of elite British women campaigning on issues of women’s welfare in the colonies, leading to a broader shift in the feminisation of social welfare policy within the Colonial Office. When more women in the health and welfare professions began working in the empire, further evidence trickled in from the field on the impact of the “female factor in educating other women and in securing long-term social progress”.¹³⁵ With a rising interest from British professional women working in the empire, British women MPs and the Colonial Office itself, the treatment of African women was becoming an issue for government.¹³⁶ The growing interest of the League of Nations in the treatment and living standards of women in mandated territories, including discussion of the traffic in women and children, also spurred highly educated, liberal women activists in Britain to criticise the government for failing to outlaw practices such as forced marriage, bride price, violence against women and polygamy. Rathbone, who regularly attended the League of Nations, took questions of child marriage to the government, forcing the Colonial Office to outline actions it had taken.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Joanna Lewis, “‘Tropical East Ends’ and the Second World War: some contradictions in Colonial Office welfare initiatives”, p44.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p48.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p47.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p47.

Yet underlying this emerging interest from the Colonial Office in indigenous women lay a long-standing tension whereby customary laws were traditionally left untouched in order to avoid anti-colonial resistance. Some of the most bitter opposition to British rule in India came from nationalists when the colonial state tried to reshape familial relations on the age of consent to marriage and around *sati*.¹³⁸

This historiography of colonial legacies, from early British feminist campaigns through to social welfare policies in the early to mid-twentieth century, provides an important basis to understanding the extent to which colonial considerations impacted British policies at the CSW between 1950 and 1975. This colonial legacy recognised a role for women: women were recognised as agents of change by the Colonial Office itself, forced into the purview of the British government through the activities of the League of Nations and activists and women MPs such as Rathbone. But this recognition was limited. Women were instrumentalised by the Colonial Office as a means to wider social reform in the colonies.¹³⁹ And the interests of women activists – while focused on women – came from a humanitarian perspective rather than a more structural concern to elevate the voices and rights of indigenous women in solidarity. Further, while many Western feminists such as Rathbone writing in colonial times recognised global patriarchy, Shirin Rai argues that “their particularistic, intimate narratives of the lives of women under traditional cultures were...often co-opted by imperialist media to reinforce the message of the ‘civilising mission’ that was the ‘white man’s burden’”.¹⁴⁰ Both approaches failed to challenge the status quo of the colonial model or the patriarchy within it.

¹³⁸ Ria, *The Gender Politics of Development*, p25.

¹³⁹ Lewis, “‘Tropical East Ends’ and the Second World War: some contradictions in Colonial Office welfare initiatives”, pp44-46.

¹⁴⁰ Rai, *The Gender Politics of Development*, p17.

This research will explore the extent to which this colonial legacy, which instrumentalised indigenous women's rights, was reflected in British policy at the CSW between 1950 and 1975, particularly as the UN moved to consider the issue of women's advancement within the discourse on aid in the 1960s.

9. Structure

The first part of this research focuses on deliberations about international women's rights conventions at the CSW in the 1950s and early 1960s as they related to British colonialism. Chapter One assesses how Britain's colonial interests affected its engagement on the Conventions on the Political Rights of Women and Convention on the Nationality of Married Women. This is complemented in Chapter Two with a similar examination into Britain's interventions on the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages. Chapter Three then looks at the broader ways in which Britain's colonial interests affected its participation at the CSW in the 1950s.

The second part of this research explores the extent to which British policy sought to champion the rights of indigenous women living within Britain's former colonies and other developing countries as part of the international development proposals at the CSW in the 1960s. This is reviewed in detail in Chapter Four, before further exploring the motivations behind Britain's interest in international development in Chapter Five, alongside Britain's interests in the CSW as a whole. Chapter Six concludes the period under review with a focus on Britain's engagement at the World Conference on Women in 1975, and its relationship with women and development.

CHAPTER 1: THE IMPACT OF BRITAIN'S COLONIAL INTERESTS ON THE FIRST CONVENTIONS OF THE CSW IN THE 1950S

At the national level, the early twentieth century saw significant advances in the movement for women's political rights. New Zealand became the first country to extend the vote to women in 1893, with Australia, Finland and Norway following suit by the outbreak of the First World War. Further granting of rights in Europe, South America, Asia and Central America continued apace, with Britain extending the vote to women over 30 in 1918, and to all women in 1928.¹⁴¹ Newly independent from the British Empire, the states of Pakistan and India granted women the right to vote in 1947 and 1950 respectively. The 1950s would prove an important decade for women's rights at the international level - including political rights, economic rights (particularly in terms of equal pay for equal work), legal rights around nationality in marriage, and basic education.¹⁴²

The UN's agenda on the political rights of women began in earnest after the establishment of the CSW. A resolution adopted by the General Assembly in December 1946 recommended that all Member States which had not already done so adopt measures to fulfil the purposes and aims of the Charter by granting women the same political rights as men.¹⁴³ At the first session of the CSW in 1947 the CSW recommended to the ECOSOC – its parent body - that governments assist the Secretariat by annually completing a questionnaire on the legal status and treatment of women,

¹⁴¹ United Nations, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary* (New York: United Nations, 1995), pp1-5. Accessed in the Margaret Bruce collection, Lehman College, New York.

¹⁴² Ibid, pp18-23.

¹⁴³ United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*, p77 which notes A/RES/56(I) 11 December 1946.

beginning with the subject of women's rights in public law. This built on a study which had been agreed by the League of Nations in 1937 but was subsequently abandoned with the outbreak of the Second World War.¹⁴⁴ This first report of the CSW in 1947 revealed a lack of political rights for women and unequal access to education.

However, the CSW went further than collecting information. Inspired by the 1948 regional Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women, the CSW debated the need for a convention on the political rights of women. This was subsequently agreed in the UN General Assembly in 1952.¹⁴⁵ It would become the "first instrument of international law aimed at the granting and the protection of women's rights on a world-wide basis", making the provisions for equal rights of men and women in the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights the object of an international treaty, in the sphere of women's political rights.¹⁴⁶ Alongside the negotiations for a convention on political rights of women, a call emerged for a convention on the nationality rights of women who otherwise were often made stateless by marrying an alien or who acquired a double nationality. Such complications in nationality came to a head at the point of divorce where difficulties arose over the question as to the nationality status of the woman.¹⁴⁷ After deliberations within the CSW for several years, the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women was finally adopted in 1957.¹⁴⁸ Unlike the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, this covered private matters (marriage) as well as public matters (nationality).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ United Nations, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary*, pp1-5.

¹⁴⁵ Convention on the Political Rights of Women, A/RES/640(VII), adopted 20 December 1952, UN Documents.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p1.

¹⁴⁷ CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.67, UN Documents.

¹⁴⁸ Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, A/RES/1040(XI), adopted 29 January 1957, UN Documents.

¹⁴⁹ Russo, "Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975", p96.

This chapter will examine and compare the tactics Britain employed with each of these conventions at the CSW in the 1950s, and in relation to their transmission to higher UN organs, given the implications of new international legal frameworks relating to the potential expansion of women's rights in the colonies. It covers multiple governments of varying political parties, with Britain governed by Labour until October 1951 and replaced by successive Conservative governments led by Churchill (1951-1955), Eden (1955-1957) and Macmillan (1957 – 1963).

This chapter uses the three-point analytical framework set out in the *Introduction*. Specifically, it assesses the extent to which Britain's policy positions were impacted by its colonial interests by exploring whether Britain sought to limit the existence and scope of these two UN women's rights legal frameworks in relation to colonial policy considerations. It draws on Laville's initial review of Britain's colonial interests with regard to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, in order to look much more deeply at British government correspondence on this convention as well as the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women.

This chapter will also assess whether the British Government felt that the debates at the CSW around these two conventions provided a site of embarrassment in respect of colonialism, building on Laville's assertion that the British government was wary of the CSW¹⁵⁰. Laville outlines that as early as the second session of the CSW, Britain remarked on the determination of the USSR to use the Commission as a propaganda forum.¹⁵¹ As with the overspill of Cold War politics into UN human rights debates, Russo argues that the politics of women's rights overlapped with these dynamics in the 1950s.¹⁵² This chapter provides detailed examination of this question by exploring

¹⁵⁰ Laville, "Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67", p475.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p480.

¹⁵² Russo, "Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975", pp92-93.

the language Britain used to defend its policy positions in relation to these two conventions, in the face of Britain's Cold War rivalry with the USSR and its allies (the Soviet bloc) and rising anticolonialism from developing countries, as well as domestic pressure from women's rights organisations.

Finally, it will explore the impact of Britain's policy positions *vis a vis* its colonial interests on the territorial scope and political momentum of these conventions. Specifically, it will explore the extent to which Britain was able to derail, slow or adapt these conventions in order to meet its colonial interests.

2. Convention on the Political Rights of Women

2.1 Initial resistance

At the 1950 CSW session, Mexico put forward a resolution calling for a convention on the political rights of women, arguing that this would “constitute the best means of implementing the principles of equality laid down in the Charter of the United Nations”, and calling on the ECOSOC to prepare a draft. Mexico was supported by Lebanon, Turkey, with Venezuela urging the CSW to at least begin preliminary work on the subject.¹⁵³ The idea of a convention on the nationality of married women was also pursued at the 1950 CSW session, with the CSW adopting a resolution requesting ECOSOC to take appropriate measures to ensure the drafting of a convention.¹⁵⁴ Mexico used the adoption of this latter resolution to make its case for a convention on the political rights of women.

¹⁵³ Lebanese delegate (Jurdak-Khoury), Turkish delegate (Pektas), and Venezuelan delegate (Urdaneta), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71, UN Documents.

¹⁵⁴ Mexican delegate (Castillo-Ledon), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.67; CSW Resolution for CSW Session 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/L.6. Both UN Documents.

However, not all governments agreed with Mexico that such a convention would “encourage the Governments which had not yet done so to recognize the equality of women in the sphere of politics”.¹⁵⁵ The US argued that the Commission’s method of circulating an annual memorandum to members of the UN “had proved both effective and advantageous” and that, unlike the question of the nationality of married women, the question of the political rights of women was best resolved at the national – not international – level.¹⁵⁶ India argued that the issue of political rights of women should be taken up by the Human rights Commission for inclusion in the international covenants on human rights. Greece doubted the effectiveness of a convention, citing difficulties with ratification.¹⁵⁷

The UK delegate, Mary Sutherland, (who also served as Chief Women’s Officer for the Labour Party)¹⁵⁸ was similarly negative. She added that it was for women of countries which had not yet been granted rights to fight for them, “and not wait for the Commission to solve their problems for them”.¹⁵⁹ Echoing the view of the US that the ideas of a convention on the nationality of married women and on the political rights of women were not on the same plane, she argued that a convention on political rights would be unlikely to hasten the emancipation of women in countries where they did not possess the right to vote.¹⁶⁰ Sutherland also aligned with the US in her preference for the continuation of the CSW’s current methods on the subject; namely the publication of an annual progress report.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Mexican delegate (Castillo-Ledon), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71, UN Documents.

¹⁵⁶ US delegate (Goldman), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71, UN Documents.

¹⁵⁷ Indian delegate (Sen), Greek delegate (Tsaldaris), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71, UN Documents.

¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes and Siân Reynolds, *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p349.

¹⁵⁹ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.67, UN Documents.

¹⁶⁰ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71, UN Documents.

¹⁶¹ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.67, UN Documents.

In the end, at the 1950 session, the CSW voted in favour of requesting ECOSOC to ask the Secretary-General to prepare a draft convention for submission to the next annual session of the CSW in 1951, following an amendment by Austria to Mexico's resolution.¹⁶² At the 1950 ECOSOC session, the US, Danish, Australian, Pakistani and Chilean delegates resisted the idea of a convention, with many arguing that propaganda, educational measures and annual studies were more practical methods of achieving equal political rights.¹⁶³ The UK delegate to ECOSOC (John Fearnley) who further supported these arguments, used the opposition to note that the general feeling was in the opposite direction to that of the CSW and that a "draft convention would not be a practical proposition". In support of the Chilean representative, he argued that "only those governments which had already granted political rights to women would accede to such a draft convention. It would therefore seem to serve rather a jejune purpose". However, as the CSW resolution was internal, ECOSOC delegates were not voting on it. As such, the UK delegate requested a resolution drawing the attention of the CSW to the opinions expressed in ECOSOC, which was adopted unanimously.¹⁶⁴

In February 1951 the Secretary-General circulated a draft text with three articles ahead of the 1951 CSW session.¹⁶⁵ This maintained that a convention would help enfranchise women who had not yet won the right to vote and would prevent the disenfranchisement of those who already held the

¹⁶² CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71-79, UN Documents; Memorandum of the Secretary General, 'Draft Convention on the Political Rights of Women', 12 February 1951, 1734/6, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives; Report of the fourth session of the Commission of the Status of Women, 8-19 May 1950, E/1712, para 25, UN Documents.

¹⁶³ US delegate (Kotschnig), Danish delegate (Friis), Australian delegate (Ballard), Pakistani delegate (Brohi), Chilean delegate (Bernstein), ECOSOC Summary Records, Fifth Session, 1950, E/AC.7/SR.132, UN Documents.

¹⁶⁴ UK delegate (Fearnley), ECOSOC Summary Records, Fifth Session, 1950, E/AC.7/SR.132, UN Documents.

¹⁶⁵ This text postponed the drafting of articles on implementation and the final and formal articles of the convention until such provisions had been drafted for the forthcoming draft International Covenant on Human Rights. Memorandum of the Secretary-General, titled "Draft Convention on the Political Rights of Women", 12 February 1951, 1734/6, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

right to vote.¹⁶⁶ The draft convention was, as such, notably short, with a preamble that referenced the principle of the equal rights of men and women from the UN Charter and the recognition that:

every person has the right to take part in the government of his country and has the right to equal access to public service in his country and desiring to equalize the status of men and women in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights, in accordance with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁶⁷

While domestic movements for women's political rights were originally focused on voting rights, this later broadened to the right to hold office, both elective and appointed. Similarly, the draft convention included three, short operative articles designed to ensure women's equal rights to vote in all elections, to be elected or appointed to public office, or to exercise public functions. This third area would ensure women equal rights to the legislative, executive and judicial functions of government, including for example, serving on juries.¹⁶⁸ (see Table One).

Table One: The text of the draft convention on 12 February 1951

Article 1: Women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on the same conditions as men,

Article 2: Women shall be qualified to be elected or appointed to public office on the same conditions as men,

Article 3: Women shall be qualified to exercise all public functions of every nature on the same conditions as men

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary*, pp1-30.

Back in Britain, internal correspondence within the Foreign Office's UN (Economic and Social) Department, which coordinated Britain's foreign policy at the CSW, reveals major concerns that the implications of the wide drafting would likely be "unacceptable" to the Colonial Office. In addition, other domestic concerns, such as women's exclusion from the House of Lords, unequal terms of employment of women in the Foreign Service (including upon marriage) and that the government had not yet introduced equal pay into the civil service, were also recognised.¹⁶⁹ Sutherland was therefore instructed to continue resistance to a convention in the CSW, "expressing her fullest sympathy with the objective while explaining, in as kindly a way as possible, an opinion that this is not the way to do it." She was instructed to ask questions about the meaning of the draft and suggest that the secretariat redraft and recirculate for comments by governments.¹⁷⁰ It is therefore clear that by 1951 Britain was seeking to complicate the draft resolution because of the considerations it anticipated in terms of its colonial role, in addition to other domestic considerations.

This lack of enthusiasm for the convention aligned with the British government's general lack of enthusiasm for the CSW in this period. The British delegate to the UN in 1953 Evelyn Emmet,¹⁷¹ described Britain's approach to the CSW as "lacklustre" given that the civil service tended to be very conservative on women's matters.¹⁷² At the CSW session in 1951, Sutherland made her case against the convention, claiming that it served no purpose since "a convention was not needed in those countries which had already granted or were about to grant political rights to women , and

¹⁶⁹ Laville, "Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67", p489. The Home Office also noted the Stock Exchange and Foreign Office officials also internally noted a lack of clarity of meaning of terms such as 'qualified', 'public office' and 'public administration'.

¹⁷⁰ Foreign Office correspondence, February 1951, 1734/6, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

¹⁷¹ Emmet was a member of the Conservative Women's National Advisory Committee at this time. She later became a conservative MP in 1955 until 1965 when she was granted a life peerage.

¹⁷² Laville, "Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67", p480 which notes League of Nations Union (LNU) Papers, London School of Economics Library, Minutes of a Meeting of the Women's Advisory Council, 26 February 1953, 5/74.

it would be of little value in those countries which had so far refused to consider granting such rights.”¹⁷³ But despite British threats to abstain in the vote on any text of such a convention, Britain had become isolated in its opposition. The US had now come around to supporting the draft convention, and France, despite its colonial considerations, argued that a convention would be “constructive” and “desirable”.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, the Netherlands and Australia supported the convention, despite having territorial interests.¹⁷⁵ Greece and India had also started supporting the convention, with the latter stressing the lack of women’s political rights in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, two new champions emerged at the CSW session in 1951.¹⁷⁷ The Dominican Republic, while recognising that conventions were only binding if governments ratified them, stressed the moral pressure the convention would give women to induce their governments to do so.¹⁷⁸ The delegate from Haiti supported the idea of a convention by arguing that its own provisions on women’s political rights were largely the result of “international pressures”.¹⁷⁹

As such, the CSW agreed the draft text of the convention to go to ECOSOC to open the Convention on the Political Rights of Women for signature as one of the most important achievements of its 1951 session: a “tool for women’s organisations fighting for the franchise and against discrimination directed against women in public affairs”.¹⁸⁰ The resolution was adopted by

¹⁷³ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.83, UN Documents.

¹⁷⁴ US delegate (Goldman) and French delegate (Lefaucheux), CSW Summary records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.83, UN Documents.

¹⁷⁵ Australian delegate (Daly) and delegate for the Netherlands (Peletier), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.84, UN Documents. Rowley argues that in general Australia’s Non-Self-Governing Territory of Papua led it to adopt similar political positions to other colonial powers. See Charles Rowley, “The United Nations, Colonialism and Australia”, *Australian Outlook*, vol.7, no.2, (2008), p120.

¹⁷⁶ Greek delegate (Tsaldaris), Indian delegate (Sen), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.84, UN Documents.

¹⁷⁷ The Dominican Republic sat on the CSW for the first time in 1951. While Haiti had previously sat on the CSW in 1949, it was not part of the 1950 session.

¹⁷⁸ Delegate for the Dominican Republic (Bernadino), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.84, UN Documents.

¹⁷⁹ Haitian delegate (Guery), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.85, UN Documents.

¹⁸⁰ Commission on the Status of Women Fifth Session, Round up’, UN Press Release SOC/1201 14 May 1951, 1734/63, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

12 votes in favour, none against, with Britain abstaining alongside the USSR and Poland. While Britain felt it needed to make clear its reason for lack of support, ie that a convention would serve little value, the USSR also sought to declare progressive grounds for doing so. Their case was that ECOSOC should rather go further and take up a resolution “to take immediate steps with a view to securing actual full equality of rights for women in public life.”¹⁸¹ Dismissing a convention as merely the granting of rights, the USSR delegate argued that it was only by adopting *concrete* measures that the equality of rights for women could be secured.¹⁸² Indeed, despite taking a similar position on the convention at the CSW session, the USSR also took the opportunity to attack colonial powers, stressing that “in a number of countries women have not yet been granted political and other rights and that the situation was particularly unsatisfactory in Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories.”¹⁸³ Thus the USSR sought to maximise opportunities to put pressure on Britain’s colonial record.

Britain also abstained on a resolution on the issue of equal pay at the 1951 CSW session ahead of an anticipated convention or recommendation on equal remuneration at the ILO later that summer (indeed such a convention was adopted in June 1951).¹⁸⁴ The issue of equal pay followed a collaborative study between the CSW and the ILO in the late 1940s, building on the provisions of article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which specified that “everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work”, and a subsequent approval of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value by ECOSOC in 1948.¹⁸⁵ The resolution on the issue of equal pay adopted at the 1951 CSW session requested ECOSOC to urge member states “which are not Members of the ILO also to take measures as may be required to give the

¹⁸¹ USSR Delegate (Popova), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.84, UN Documents.

¹⁸² USSR delegate (Popova), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.97, UN Documents.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ ILO, Equal Remuneration Convention (no. 100), 29 June 1951.

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*, p19.

principle of equal pay for equal work.” Britain was, once again, in the company of the USSR and Poland in abstaining on the resolution, which passed with 12 votes in favour.¹⁸⁶

1.2 Backlash back in Britain

This double abstention by Britain produced a heated domestic response. A number of protest letters aimed at the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs were sent by a range of British women’s rights organisations including the British Federation of University Women (BFUW), the Married Women’s Association and the Women’s Liberal Foundation during May and June 1951. The indignation expressed in the letters is clear: the BFUW “deplored” the actions of Britain “in company with the USSR and Poland”, which had failed to support the draft convention “designed to guarantee equal political rights of women with men to vote in elections and to exercise public functions.”¹⁸⁷ In response, the Foreign Office stressed that publishing information on the political rights guaranteed in different countries and educating the public on such matters “was more effective than to prepare a Convention”. Similarly, it side-stepped criticisms for failing to support the equal pay resolution by affirming the government’s acceptance of the principle of equal pay, but that “financial difficulties in the post-war years” made this impossible to implement.¹⁸⁸

The strong backlash from British-based women’s rights organisations over Britain’s actions at the CSW session intensified over the summer of 1951, with separate branches of the BFUW writing to the Foreign Secretary on the issue of Britain’s abstentions on the draft convention and the

¹⁸⁶ “Commission on the Status of Women Fifth Session, Round up”, UN Press Release, 14 May 1951, 1734/63, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from President of the British Federation of University Women (Muriel Bond) to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 29 May 1951, 1734/60, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

¹⁸⁸ Letters from and to the President of the British Federation of University Women and Foreign Office (Scopes), May 29 and 8 June 1951, File 1734/60; letter from Foreign Office (Scopes) sent to Married Women’s Association, 13 June 1951, 1734/64; letter from the Women’s Liberal Federation to the Prime Minister, 7 June 1951, 1734/66, all in FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

resolution on equal pay. They included the Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham, and North-Western branches, much to the annoyance of unsympathetic Foreign Office officials who internally remarked on the “suffragette tactics” of the organisation for their barrage of letters.¹⁸⁹ The BFUW also reached out to MPs to enlist their support in advocating that the government change its position on these issues. One such champion was opposition MP Irene Ward (Conservative), who wrote to the Foreign Secretary noting “the action of the United Kingdom Government seems completely out of tune with our commitments and our desires.”¹⁹⁰ The Minister of State at the Foreign Office personally drafted the response to Irene Ward, sent from the Secretary of State Herbert Morrison, including a detailed explanation of the government’s position, reaffirming that the education of public opinion “was the only procedure likely to have practical effect.”¹⁹¹ It continued that “a Convention of this type was not needed in those countries which had granted, or were about to grant, political rights and would be of little value in relation to those countries which refused to do so,” claiming that there was a frequent problem of UN bodies attempting to “promote desirable aims by methods which we think wholly unsuitable and unrealistic” in an attempt to avoid being perceived as a laggard on this issue. Rather, education – it deemed – was the answer.¹⁹² The response also noted that the implementation of the convention would be dependent on the completion of the Covenant on Human Rights, which was still only in draft form. It was therefore an important issue for the government since it would be in the final and formal clauses that a territorial application clause exempting the colonies would be included.

¹⁸⁹ Internal Foreign Office correspondence, 1734/77, FO 371/95871; Letter from Liverpool branch of the British Federation of University Women (Mary King) to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 14 June 1951, 1734/68, FO371/95870; letter from Birmingham and Midlands Association of University Women (Smith) to Minister of Foreign Affairs 4 July 1951, 1734/74, FO 371/95871; Letter from Leeds Association of University Women to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 30 June 1951, 1734/75, FO 371/95871 and 1734/76; letter from the North-Western Association of the British Federation of University Women (Margaret Dobson), 4 July 1951, 1734/77, FO371/95871. All accessed in UK National Archives.

¹⁹⁰ Letter from Irene Ward MP to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 12 June 1951, 1734/71, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

¹⁹¹ Letter from the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison) to Irene Ward MP, 12 June 1951, 1734/71, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Despite the government's attempts to respond to critics by emphasising education as the key lever for progress, grassroots feminist organisations continued their campaign for Britain to support the draft convention. The Leeds Association of the BFUW also adopted the tactic of enlisting parliamentary support from both major political parties by writing to the Leeds-based MPs, Donald Kaberry (Conservative), Charles Pannell (Labour) and Alice Bacon (Labour), the latter of whom then also approached the Foreign Office for a response. The Sheffield Association of the BFUW followed suit, sending letters to Sheffield-based MPs Richard Winterbottom (Labour) and Peter Roberts (Conservative), who similarly approached the Foreign Office for a response.¹⁹³ On 11 July 1951, George Porter, one of the government's own Labour MPs from Leeds Central, tabled a parliamentary question to the Labour Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs asking "what instructions were given to British Government delegates" at the CSW session that year, noting that "our delegates were in the position of voting against extending to women in other countries...the right to vote and the right to take part in public affairs [and] as a result of these instructions our delegates found themselves in a minority, accompanied only the representatives of Russia and Poland." The Minister of State at the Foreign Office (Kenneth Younger) had to reply that the British representative had taken issue with the "method of pursuing the aims of improving the political rights of women in various countries", where she felt a convention would not prove useful.¹⁹⁴ Combined NGO activism and parliamentary pressure had brought the issue to the top of government.

¹⁹³ Letters from Alice Bacon to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 10 July 1951, 1734/83, FO 371 95871; letters from Richard Winterbottom, 22 July 1951, and Major Peter Roberts, 23 July 1951, to the Foreign Secretary (Morrison), 1734/90 and 1734/91, FO371/95872. All in UK National Archives.

¹⁹⁴ Parliamentary Question, 11 July 1951, accessed in 1734/77, FO 371/95871, UK National Archives.

Crucially, as a result of this lobby effort, officials in the Foreign Office began to reconsider Britain's position ahead of the ECOSOC session that summer, questioning whether to once again abstain on the resolutions at ECOSOC relating to the draft Convention on the Political Rights of Women and equal pay, noting that "[i]n view of the public interest expressed on these topics, we should perhaps seek confirmation from high authority for our voting policy on them." Seemingly unnerved by the high level of protest from British women's rights organisations and the increasing involvement of British MPs, one Foreign Office official noted that while Britain's "arguments against such a Convention are practical and sound...it seems to me that there will be no difficulty in our accepting Articles 1 and 2 of the draft Convention set out... Moreover Miss Sutherland has informed me that all the other members of the Commission felt that the adoption of a Convention might offer some advantage...to the progress in backward countries of political rights for women."¹⁹⁵

While Britain felt its arguments against the convention were "practical and sound", the reopening of British policy demonstrated that the debate on the convention was causing the British government a degree of pressure at the domestic level. Crucially, the Foreign Office went as far as asking key departments, including the Colonial Office, "whether we should give some latitude in the brief to the United Kingdom delegation on this subject" and reverse Britain's position, rather than continuing the line of opposing the convention through abstention.¹⁹⁶ However, the Colonial Office responded by refusing to give any scope to the idea of supporting the convention in its current form without the guarantee of a territorial application clause, thus affirming Britain's

¹⁹⁵ Internal Correspondence Foreign Office, US1734/72, FO 371/95870, 1951, UK National Archives. Article 3 would have potential ramifications on the question of the right of peeresses in their own right to sit in the House of Lords.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

obstructive stance on the draft Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which was sustained due to its own concerns as a colonial power:

we should reiterate that without a colonial application article the United Kingdom would be unable to sign any Convention on the rights of women unless and until all the territories for whose international relations His Majesty's Government are responsible had agreed to its extension to them. While it is our policy to work towards the ends expressed in the draft, it is unreal to think that their achievement would be immediate in all the Colonies and if he is given any latitude, our delegate would have to bear this in mind.¹⁹⁷

Thus the backlash from British women's organisations had opened the window for a change in tactic by the British government around its potential support for the convention. Yet significantly, Britain's colonial concerns blocked any such reconsideration. It is clear that by 1951 Britain was indeed seeking to limit the application of the potential convention – and that this was the overriding concern Britain attached to the convention as a whole. This also shows that Britain regarded its colonial interests as more important than the fear that this would provide a site of embarrassment around its colonial record.

The idea of attaching a territorial application clause was not unique to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Rather it was part of a broader effort by colonial powers – particularly Britain – to constrain the colonial implications of UN human rights agreements in the colonies. The 1950 draft covenant on human rights had initially included a draft clause to exclude colonial territories from the legal reach of the covenant (defended by colonial powers such as Britain, France and Belgium). But this was defeated by the Member States fighting colonialism who argued that the clause would not mean freedom for colonial people to choose human rights but the freedom of the administering power to deny them.¹⁹⁸ However, while there may have been a desire

¹⁹⁷ Letter from Colonial Office (E. Burr) to Foreign Office (E. Howard), 20 July, 1951, 1734/85, FO 371/95871, UK National Archives.

¹⁹⁸ Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, p120.

to push for a territorial application clause across human rights instruments – including women’s rights instruments – in order to bolster Britain’s campaign for the concept of territorial application clauses within UN legal instruments, the response from the Colonial Office shows that the idea of extending women’s formal political rights was presented to the Foreign Office by the Colonial Office as being *unrealistic* as a directive in the colonies.

As the issue moved to the ECOSOC session in August 1951, protest letters on Britain’s failure to support the draft Convention on the Political Rights of Women (as well as the resolution on equal pay) continued to pour into the Foreign Office. The Leeds Association of the BFUW continued to “bombard ministers and members of parliament”, alongside protest letters to the Foreign Office from regional branches of the BFUW and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and the National Council of Women.¹⁹⁹ They stressed that, while it was important to undertake educational and propaganda efforts to further the political rights of women, there was no reason to pursue this at the expense of supporting a convention; indeed “a Convention would supplement the education and propaganda stressed by the British delegate.”²⁰⁰ Within the flurry of letters received by the Foreign Office, only one organisation, Catholic-based St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance, wrote in to support the position of the British Government on the draft convention, seemingly resistant to supporting equal status for women on this issue.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Letter from Richard Winterbottom MP to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 22 July 1951, 1734/90; Letter from Major Roberts MP to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 23 July 1951, 1734/91. Both in folder FO 371/95871, UK National Archives.

See also letter from Sheffield Association of University Women to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 17 July 1951, 1734/81; Letter from Manchester, Salford and District Branch of the Association of University Women to Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 15 July 1951, 1734/82; Correspondence between the Chancellor’s Private Secretary and the Foreign Office July 1951, 1734/80; all in folder FO 371/95872, UK National Archives.

²⁰⁰ Letter from National Council of Women to the Foreign Secretary (Herbert Morrison), 10 August 1951, 1734/98, FO 371/95872, UK National Archives.

²⁰¹ Letter from St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance Minister of State (Kenneth Younger), 15 October 1951, 1734/107, FO 371/95873, UK National Archives.

1.3 Final debates

At the 1951 ECOSOC session itself, the resolution from the 1951 CSW session urging the ECOSOC to open the Convention on the Political Rights of Women for signature gave rise to a lengthy discussion.²⁰² A number of ECOSOC members now endorsed the idea that a convention would hasten the extension of political rights to women in all countries, including former opponents from the previous ECOSOC, Pakistan and Chile.²⁰³ Chile went as far as noting the importance of the UN acting on this issue in order to bring its “moral authority to bear”.²⁰⁴ But, in response to calls by the US for the draft convention to be circulated to governments, a resolution was passed which asked the Secretary-General to circulate the text of the convention to Member States for comments and suggestions “as to the best manner of giving effect to the principles underlying it” by 1 January 1952 for consideration at the subsequent CSW session.²⁰⁵ Britain felt able to support this formulation of the resolution which in effect gave Member States the opportunity to criticise both the idea of the convention and the text within it. This idea of circulation to governments was in fact the same tactic Britain had tried to achieve at the CSW session earlier that year.²⁰⁶

When the draft text was subsequently circulated to member state governments for comment, the Colonial Office instructed the Foreign Office to stress that the convention was unacceptable in its draft form since “the present text would be quite unacceptable in many of the Colonies.”²⁰⁷ It

²⁰² Draft Resolution B for ECOSOC, Report of the Commission on the Status of Women, 30 April-15 May 1951, E/1997, UN Documents.

²⁰³ United Nations, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary*, p8.

²⁰⁴ Chilean delegate (Figueroa), ECOSOC Summary Records, Sixth Session, 1951, E/AC.7/SR.19, UN Documents.

²⁰⁵ Telegram UK Permanent Mission in Geneva to Foreign Office, circa August 1951, 1734/96, FO371/95872, UK National Archives. This resolution was eventually amended and sponsored by Pakistan. See ECOSOC Summary Records, Sixth Session, 1951, E/AC.7/SR.192-194, UN Documents.

²⁰⁶ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.97, UN Documents.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Colonial Office (E. Burr) to Foreign Office (E. Howard), 20 October 1951 on the decisions of ECOSOC relating to the Report of the Commission on the Status of Women, 1734/109, FO371/95873, UK National Archives.

claimed that although the general aim of colonial policy was to “emancipate the women of these territories so that they can play their full part in public life at all levels”, the colonies “are very deeply founded in native law and custom and the social structure of the territories concerned – particularly in Africa – especially those territories where Muslims are predominant or exist in considerable numbers.”²⁰⁸ While officials understood that tactically some form of qualification of all three articles by some such phrase as “except where religion or custom is to the contrary” would “remove most of our difficulties (though we should still have to refer to territories before we could say that it would remove all)”, they argued this “would also remove most of the meaning of the convention.” So for that reason they conceded that “[s]ince there is no colonial application article, this means that His Majesty’s Government would be unable to become a party to the Convention.”²⁰⁹ Thus once again Britain’s colonial considerations played the leading factor in Britain’s policy position relating to the convention: now as one in which if the convention were to pass with no territorial application clause, Britain would not be a party at all.

Again, the Colonial Office reasserted its own ideology on the realisation of women’s political rights, arguing that these would not be achieved “overnight by the imposition of laws from above”, but by a gradual change in public opinion. Beyond prescribing education as the policy solution for social development on women’s rights, they also stressed that “[p]recipitate attempts to hurry up the process could lead to a break-down of the social order.” Driven by the desire to maintain stability in the delicate politics of colonialism, the Colonial Office therefore asked the Foreign Office to respond to the Secretary-General’s draft by again emphasising education as *the* key lever, namely that a convention was the wrong method of tackling the problem, and to underline the fact that too rapid an action in this – and other – spheres was likely to produce results quite the

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

reverse of those desired.²¹⁰ Therefore, not only did Britain's colonial considerations prove the leading factor in its unwillingness to sign the convention, but also in its efforts to undermine the development of the convention generally. As a conservative colonial power, it sought to resist change through legal means, relying instead on education, which it deemed both more effective and less disruptive to its colonial model.

The 1952 CSW session considered the responses from Member State governments to the draft convention.²¹¹ The US, alongside China, Iceland, Indonesia, Turkey, Cuba and the Philippines, all confirmed their support or ability to comply with the convention. Canada and Britain confirmed their positions against the convention, both favouring education.²¹² The formal UK response placed the need to focus on "education and enlightenment" on local custom, arguing that this was not for lack of British support for the principle of equal political rights for women:

there are countries in which the position and rights of women are bound up with local custom and tradition, and in these countries the recognition and the effective exercise of political rights by women involve changes in the social structure. His Majesty's Government does not consider that a Convention would be any substitute for the work of education and social change which is required to secure the general recognition throughout the world of the political rights of women. Nor, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, would the existence of a Convention, which could do no more than put upon record what is already known, namely, a list of those states where the principle of equality in political rights between women and men is fully accepted, be of any appreciable effect in assisting this work, or in inducing those states which have not yet accepted this principle to pass legislation giving effect to it.²¹³

Another colonial power, Belgium, echoed Britain's resistance to gradual alignment "in view of local conditions and the stage of development of the indigenous populations of the Congo and

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ In the discussion, the three articles in the draft convention setting out women's right to vote, to participate in legislative and elective bodies, and to hold public office were reaffirmed, save a substitution that these be realised "on equal terms with men", rather than the "on the same conditions with men". See final resolution in Report of the Commission on the Status of Women, 1951, E/2101, UN Documents.

²¹² Responses from Member State governments to the draft convention presented in Documents for the CSW session 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/184, UN Documents.

²¹³ Ibid.

Ruanda-Urundi”.²¹⁴ France, unlike Britain, did not threaten that it would be unable to accede to the convention, but rather made clear that it would be obliged to make reservations concerning certain French territories on ascension.²¹⁵

Turning to the other side of the debate, the USSR pushed for the specific inclusion of a positive clause, explicitly providing for colonial extension at the 1952 CSW session. This move was part of a broader campaign by the Soviet bloc in relation to international instruments at the UN. For example, in the debates around the draft international covenants on human rights in 1950 the USSR pushed for a clause extending the Covenant to all dependent territories of state parties.²¹⁶ Without such a clause in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the USSR delegate (supported by Byelorussia and Poland) argued that “signatory States would be able to consider themselves legally entitled to continue to deny political rights to women in such territories”,²¹⁷ in which it had earlier argued “gross injustices prevailed”.²¹⁸ However, they were unable to galvanise support for the insertion of such a provision from other members of the commission. With no explicit territorial application clause including or excluding the colonies, the 1952 CSW session passed a resolution to ECOSOC recommending the transmission of the draft convention to the General Assembly. It was passed by 13 votes to none with three abstentions.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Yuen-Li Liang “Notes on Legal Questions Concerning the United Nations”, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 45, no.1 (1951), pp120-121 which notes UN Docs A/1622 and A/P.V317.

²¹⁷ USSR delegate (Popova), Byelorussian delegate (Novikova) and Polish delegate (Kalinowska), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.104, UN Documents.

²¹⁸ USSR Delegate (Popova), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.97, UN Documents.

²¹⁹ CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.102-107, UN Documents. The UK delegate was not present at the vote but later noted to the CSW that she would have abstained. See UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.122, UN Documents.

As the draft Convention moved through ECOSOC and to the Third Committee of the General Assembly (the arm responsible for social, humanitarian and cultural affairs)²²⁰ in 1952, the delegates from El Salvador, Yugoslavia, and the Dominican Republic argued that the convention might serve as a stimulus to states which had not yet granted political rights to women.²²¹ As Burke argues, women advocates were the most outspoken, with Afnan (Iraq), Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan (Pakistan) and Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic) all defending the convention and its importance for those outside the West.²²²

Yet Britain continued to resist the idea of a convention as the British delegate (Evelyn Emmet) warned that “customs could not be radically changed overnight without damaging the body politic,” and that “a convention was not a good substitute for a process of social education”.²²³ The British delegate argued that demanding political rights was the “product of angry, militant women demanding political power” rather than “an offer of true companionship to address difficult matters together” while also stating that Britain abstained from voting in support of the convention to date since it did not want to “obstruct or oppose the objectives of the convention”.²²⁴ Russo and Lavelle assert that in this way, Britain presented the hybrid combination of supporting women without supporting feminist action.²²⁵ As such, Russo argues that “Commissioners from the colonial powers supported both progressive gender equality and oppressive racial inequality”.²²⁶

²²⁰ Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, p219.

²²¹ United Nations, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary*, p10-11.

²²² Ibid, p125.

²²³ UK delegate (Emmet), Summary Records of the Third Committee, 15 December 1952, A/C.3/SR.478, UN Documents.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Russo, “Universalism, Difference and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975”, pp83-84; Summary Records of the Third Committee, 15 December 1952, A/C.3/SR.478, UN Documents.

²²⁶ Ibid, p89.

To Britain's delight, a territorial application clause effectively excluding colonies, sponsored by the Indian delegation, made it through the Third Committee of the General Assembly.²²⁷ But the rotation of colonial powers was brought into question during the session and this clause came under attack, notably by Afghanistan, Iraq and Yugoslavia, who attempted to pass an opposing clause explicitly calling for extension to colonies. The Indian proposal was further attacked by the Philippines, arguing that "the provisions of any convention or any covenant on human rights should be equally applicable to dependent territories."²²⁸ The delegate for Chile argued against a territorial application clause on the basis that this "would enable discriminatory distinctions to be drawn between one territory and another".²²⁹ The Iraqi delegate specifically attacked Britain's attempts to make the case for the need for a clause exempting its colonies, arguing that it "could not...feel sympathy for the technical administrative difficulties to which the United Kingdom representative had drawn attention, for it knew that if the United Kingdom could not ratify a convention in the name of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, it nevertheless had the power to declare war in their name."²³⁰ Britain's fight for the clause did therefore prove a site for embarrassment through to the debates of the UN Third Committee. Yet British policy on the need for a territorial application clause held firm.

²²⁷ The amendment was adopted by 28 votes to 17, with 6 abstentions. UK delegate (Emmet), Summary records of the Third Committee, 15 December 1952, A/C.3/SR.480, UN Documents.

In favour: Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Peru, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, India, Israel.

Against: Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, USSR, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq.

Abstaining: Yemen, Argentina, Bolivia, Burma, Chile, Guatemala.

²²⁸ Philippines representative (Reyes), Summary Records of the Third Committee, 16 December 1952, A/C.3/SR.479, UN Documents.

²²⁹ Chilean delegate (Yoacham), Summary Records of the Third Committee, 16 December 1952, A/C.3/SR.479, UN Documents.

²³⁰ Iraqi delegate (Afnan), Summary Records of the Third Committee, 16 December 1952, A/C.3/SR.479, UN Documents.

Yet Britain's victory on the clause would be short lived. Much to Britain's disappointment the finalised convention was passed in the General Assembly without the inclusion of a territorial application clause.²³¹ While it felt compelled to vote in favour of the convention – which was adopted without a dissenting vote²³² – it adopted its final line of defence: to not become a State Party. Foreign Office officials argued that it “contains a number of provisions affecting e.g. equal pay, some branches of the Civil Service and the House of Lords which make it impossible for the United Kingdom to implement it at present” and stressed that it “contains no Colonial application cause [which would make it] automatically applicable to the colonies, where many discriminatory practices exist...impossible to sweep away at one stroke.”²³³ Therefore, once again, Britain's colonial concerns played a key role in shaping Britain's policy towards the convention.

While the reopening of British policy around the Convention in 1951 demonstrated that the debate was causing the British government a degree of pressure and thus embarrassment on a domestic level, this wasn't enough to cause a change of tack. Similarly, Britain continued to call for a territorial application clause through to the debates in the Third Committee, despite arguments made by opponents that such colonial discrimination was unwarranted. When the clause failed to make it through the General Assembly, Britain had felt emboldened to announce its refusal to become a signatory, resisting in large part on the absence of a territorial application clause.

Unfortunately, Britain's refusal to become a State Party also failed to support the overall political momentum behind the convention. Not only was this not extended to Britain or the British colonies – but as an international instrument – Britain's decision to withhold its signature until

²³¹ A territorial application clause was agreed in the Third Committee debates of the General Assembly but failed to be adopted in the General Assembly Plenary.

²³² Ibid, p125.

²³³ Draft Briefing for UK Delegate to the CSW, 10 March 1953, 1734/44, FO 371/107135, UK National Archives.

1967 also diminished the political pressure for other Member States to accede to the international convention. Not all colonial powers took such a staunch position. France utilised the reservations process of the convention to sign with reservations, excepting those of its colonial territories which invoked certain “religious customs and traditions” which would impede their alignment to the convention’s provisions.²³⁴

While Britain’s idea – with French support – to attach a territorial application clause to the convention was not unique, and in fact part of a broader effort to constrain the colonial implications of UN human rights agreements in the colonies, it is clear that Britain’s attempts to derail and limit and then refuse to sign the Convention on the Political Rights of Women were primarily driven by the Colonial Office’s rejection of the principle of signing colonial territories up to equal political rights for women. By 1957, the absence of a territorial application clause in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women was openly acknowledged as an obstacle by the UK delegate at that year’s CSW session²³⁵, and in the British Parliament as the “main obstacle”²³⁶ to its signature, while the Colonial Office began consultations possible acceptance of the convention.²³⁷

Fortunately, despite Britain’s unwillingness to become a State Party for 15 years, international norms around women’s equal political rights did progress. Indeed, as stated by Margaret Bruce, Head of the UN Secretariat Section on the Status of Women from 1963 to 1973, almost all of the

²³⁴ United Nations, *Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary*. See also Laville, “Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, pp489-490 which argues that Britain felt reservations should only be used against individual articles of the convention, not to limit the application by a general exclusion of dependent territories from the scope of the convention.

²³⁵ UK Delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.235, UN Documents.

²³⁶ Parliamentary Question 25 March 1957, UNS 17314/30, FO 371/129972, UK National Archives.

²³⁷ Letter from Colonial Office (E. Burr) to Foreign Office (M. Errock), 13 June 1957, UNS 17314/62 C, FO 371/129974, UK National Archives.

nations which became independent in the wake of decolonisation in the mid twentieth century granted women the right to vote and to stand for election on equal terms with men.²³⁸

2. Convention on the Nationality of Married Women

The issue of a territorial application clause came back into the spotlight again for Britain in the next major women's rights convention under discussion at the UN: the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women. This provides the focus of the second part of this chapter.

Women's rights relating to nationality in marriage had been a major focus of the CSW from 1947. Questionnaire and survey data from various governments gathered for Secretary-General reports revealed discrimination against women was often a consequence of conflicts between laws of nationality, domicile, marriage and divorce. Most countries' nationality laws assumed women should take up their husband's nationality upon marriage. The CSW found that as a result of conflicting laws in many countries, a woman who married a man of a different nationality could find herself deprived of her own nationality without her consent, and in some cases stateless in the event of divorce.²³⁹ At the CSW Session in 1950 a resolution was passed requesting ECOSOC to take appropriate measures to ensure the drafting of a convention.²⁴⁰ While ECOSOC had referred the matter to the International Law Commission, which subsequently rejected the request to draft

²³⁸ Bruce, "An Account of United Nations Action to Advance the Status of Women", pp166-167; Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p13.

²³⁹ United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*, p19-20. See also Bruce, "An Account on United Nations Action to Advance the Status of Women", p169 which highlights that women risked becoming stateless because of different principles applied under the laws of different countries, and often suffered disabilities with respect to important personal rights. The Convention, agreed in 1957, aims to eliminate the automatic effect of marriage on the nationality of the woman. Bruce outlines that under the convention States Parties agree that "neither the celebration nor the dissolution of a marriage between one of its nationals and an alien, nor the change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically affect the nationality of the wife"; and that "neither the voluntary acquisition of the nationality of another State nor the renunciation of its nationality by one of its nationals shall prevent the retention of its nationality by the wife of such national".

²⁴⁰ Documents for the CSW session 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/L.5; CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.67. Both UN Documents.

a convention, Cuba took an initial treaty forward to the CSW session in 1953.²⁴¹ Britain initially pushed back on the draft convention, supporting the International Law Commission opinion against a separate draft convention on the nationality of married women.²⁴²

As an initial draft Convention on the Nationality of Married Persons emerged with Cuba at the pen, the principle of complete equality between the sexes faced opposition from many countries, including Britain, which rejected the call to grant the same privileges to men as to women in this matter.²⁴³ This was subsequently revised as the draft Convention on the Nationality of Married Women for the 1954 CSW session. Reeling from the lack of inclusion of a territorial application clause in the final text of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Britain wanted such a clause to be incorporated into the draft convention at the very outset. The UK tabled an amendment to add a territorial application clause into the resolution on the draft convention at the 1954 session.²⁴⁴ The UK delegate (Patrick Attlee) made clear in the CSW session that this was necessary to relieve the British government from assuming the obligations of the convention on behalf of all the dependent and Trust territories, thus making it possible to “become a party at an earlier date while consultation with the governments of the territories was proceeding”.²⁴⁵ France argued that while a territorial clause was not of interest to them, since all citizens in overseas territories had equal rights to French nationality, it would have no objection in supporting the clause.²⁴⁶ With an agreement that Britain’s amendment would be transmitted to ECOSOC as an annex to the draft convention, Britain voted in favour of the resolution, explaining its vote by

²⁴¹ Cuban delegate (Manas), CSW Summary Records 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/SR.124 – SR.125, UN Documents.

²⁴² British delegate (Warde), CSW Summary records 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/SR.125, UN Documents.

²⁴³ Draft Briefing for the UK delegate to the 1955 ECOSOC, amended 29 June 1955, 1739/49, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

²⁴⁴ Letter from UK Delegation to the UN to Foreign Office 25 March 1954, 17312/51, FO 371/112482, UK National Archives; Documents for the CSW session 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/L.123, UN Documents.

²⁴⁵ UK delegate (Attlee), CSW Summary Records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.159, UN Documents.

²⁴⁶ French delegate (Lefauchaux), CSW Summary Records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.159, UN Documents.

stating that it did not believe a convention was “really appropriate” but that it was “anxious to cooperate with the majority of the Commission.”²⁴⁷ Indeed at the ECOSOC session in 1954, the UK delegate (Gerald Meade) expressed his hope that other governments would “favourably consider the United Kingdom amendments around territorial application”.²⁴⁸

Following ECOSOC’s approval in 1954, the draft was then circulated to governments for their comments.²⁴⁹ At the CSW session in April 1955, the convention was discussed once again. In the session, the British delegate to the CSW, Lucile Sayers, (a conservative appointee under the Conservative government) explained the (now slightly tweaked) proposed territorial clause. She explained that, “[n]o doubt my distinguished colleagues are aware that there is only one citizenship for all citizens of the United Kingdom and colonies, and in respect of this Her Majesty’s government in the United Kingdom is naturally conversant with the legal position and can accept obligations without further consultation,” in line with the British Nationality Act of 1948. Rather than the *colonies* preventing Britain’s theoretical signature of the draft convention, the problem lay with the category of “other territories which have their own citizenship”, such as Southern Rhodesia and the Kingdom of Tonga, for which the United Kingdom government was responsible in their international relations.²⁵⁰

There began a war of words with the USSR, which attacked the clause, citing the Commission on Human Rights’ rejection of a similar attempt by Belgium to insert a territorial application clause in

²⁴⁷ Telegram from UK Delegation to the UN to Foreign Office, 5 April 1954, 17312/66, FO 371/112482, UK National Archives; The Cuban draft was accepted in the resolution to ECOSOC by 14 votes to none with 3 abstentions, CSW summary records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.159, UN Documents.

²⁴⁸ UK Delegate (Meade), ECOSOC Summary records, Ninth Session, 1954, E/AC.7/SR.277, UN Documents.

²⁴⁹ ECOSOC Summary Records, Ninth Session, 1954, E/AC.7/SR.279, UN Documents.

²⁵⁰ Speech by UK delegate (Sayers) at CSW session, 23 March 1955, UNS1739/24, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

the draft covenant on human rights.²⁵¹ The British delegate responded that it was precisely in order to enable the extension of the convention to territories “for whose international relations the United Kingdom Government was responsible” but “who had their own nationality laws”, if they so wished, that Britain had proposed its amendment.²⁵² Despite tense exchanges with the USSR, Byelorussia and Poland, Britain felt it had landed the victorious blow, with the Soviet bloc “eventually inveigled into arguing for it, since they stressed the need for these territories to be properly consulted.”²⁵³ As with the previous CSW session, there was no vote on the proposed amendment itself, much to the relief of the British who aired their fears of “unintelligent opposition... for no stated reason” from Indonesia and Argentina.²⁵⁴ Britain did note, however, that Yugoslavia would likely have abstained or voted for the amendment, “understanding fully the essential difference between this convention and such instruments as the Human Rights covenants.”²⁵⁵

In the absence of a vote on the proposed amendment, the CSW resolution at the 1955 session recommended to ECOSOC that the General Assembly adopt a convention embodying the preamble and three substantive articles of the Cuban draft as amended by the commission, and that the final articles should be left to a higher body and transmitted as an annex to the resolution (including Britain’s proposed territorial article).²⁵⁶ Britain supported the resolution, hoping that this approach would lead the inclusion of the article once in debates of the higher organs of the UN. ECOSOC duly recommended that the General Assembly adopt a draft convention on the

²⁵¹ USSR delegate (Fomina), CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.191, UN Documents.

²⁵² UK Delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.191, UN Documents.

²⁵³ Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office on the 14 March -1 April 1955 CSW session, despatched 6 April 1955, 1739/27, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ UK briefing for the delegate to the 1955 ECOSOC, 1739/49, FO371/117563, UK National Archives.

nationality of married women, in its 1955 resolution, transmitting the draft text for General Assembly consideration.²⁵⁷

Once the draft convention reached the Third Committee of the General Assembly, Britain was successful in moving the discussion on the final articles (and thus the question of the territorial article) into the Sixth Committee, where the Foreign Office felt it stood its best chance of adequate drafting.²⁵⁸ However, Britain was unable to win its argument for the clause. Rather, the UK Mission to the UN in New York (UK Mission in New York) argued that the entire discussion on final articles was shut down in the face of delegates who either did not care to engage in the draft convention, or who mounted explicit opposition. Indeed, the USSR felt they had been “tricked” by Britain into referring the final Articles to the Sixth Committee in order to secure an easier passage for the “colonial clause.”²⁵⁹

As a result of such tension, colonial powers came under attack when the debate on the final articles moved back to the Third Committee of the General Assembly in December 1956 and the contentious issue of a territorial article continued. This time a number of amendments for territorial application were proposed. One was put forward by Belgium, which wanted a territorial application clause that permitted a contracting metropolitan state to notify the Secretary-General which of its dependent territories the convention would apply to. France and Belgium were notably keen to stress the role of metropolitan powers in promoting the progressive development of non-self-governing peoples and the fact that it would be detrimental to the wide acceptance of the

²⁵⁷ UK report of ECOSOC session from UK delegation to FO, telegram August 5 1955, UNS1739/55, FO371/117563, UK National Archives; ECOSOC Summary Records, Tenth Session, 1955, E/AC.7/SR.333, UN Documents.

²⁵⁸ Draft brief for UK Delegate to General Assembly, no date (circa September 1955), 1739/60, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

²⁵⁹ Telegram from UK delegation in New York to Foreign Office on the Sixth Committee Session, 21 December 1955, UNS 1739/72, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

convention if metropolitan states were unable to become parties to it. This was opposed by other Member States on the grounds that it left the question of when a dependent territory was ready to receive the benefit of the convention to the discretion of the metropolitan state. Even a compromise text, proposed by Chile, Mexico and Peru (which led the UK to drop its own amendment on a territorial article), calling for necessary measures to be taken to apply the convention in all territories and a report within one year from the date of signature on the application of the convention in all territories, failed to get through the Third Committee. Despite claims that the text did not provide for any discretion in the contracting metropolitan state to withhold the application of the convention from its territories, but “merely limited the obligation to what the metropolitan State could constitutionally assume”,²⁶⁰ Czechoslovakia argued that there could be “no compromise with the evil of colonialism”.²⁶¹ Saudi Arabia argued that a “restrictive clause was out of place in a convention which should be universal in application”, while Tunisia and Uruguay argued such a clause would “perpetuate colonial practice” and the “continuation of colonialism.”²⁶² Such critique on the issue of universality served as an attack on a tiered approach to human rights principles in different countries. This was particularly so in the words of the Greek delegate who argued that “[i]f some delegations wished to use the Third Committee as a battleground on which to win a colonialist victory, they would be choosing the wrong field”.²⁶³ Burma argued that the inclusion of such a territorial application clause would mean that the “United Nations would be countenancing the violation of human rights in the dependent territories.” Rather, they advocated a different solution: “If the colonial Powers were sincerely concerned for the welfare of those territories, they should not propose such a clause but should encourage the political development of the dependent territories, so as to enable them to take their

²⁶⁰ The proposal was rejected by 32 votes to 28, with 10 abstentions. See Third Committee of the General Assembly Record 11th Session, Agenda Item 33m 17 December 1956, A/3462, UN Documents.

²⁶¹ Czechoslovakian delegate (Pudlak), Third Committee, 6 December 1956, A/C.3/SR.702, UN Documents.

²⁶² Delegates for Saudi Arabia (Baroody) and Tunisia (Messadi), Third Committee, 5 December 1956, A/C.3/SR.701, Delegate for Uruguay (Brena), Third Committee, 6 December 1956, A/C.3/SR.702. All UN Documents.

²⁶³ Greek delegate (Eustathiades), Third Committee, 6 December 1956, A/C.3/SR.702, UN Documents.

place in the United Nations and sign the Convention for themselves.”²⁶⁴ Haiti, Bulgaria, Syria, Greece, Indonesia and Afghanistan also spoke out against the compromise proposal within the debate.²⁶⁵

But while such attacks may have undermined Britain’s international reputation within UN debates around the convention, it continued with its strategy. Therefore, it was much to the surprise of British delegates that they were able to successfully include a territorial clause during the General Assembly plenary debate in which the final convention was adopted in January 1957. Such a shift in the political support for a territorial article came down to a successful intervention by Britain in the final debate in which the UK delegate Katherine Elliot²⁶⁶ used the call for a territorial application clause as an argument in support of *greater* self-rule. Within her intervention, she stated that such an article was necessary because dependent territories were being advanced towards self-government and conventions such as this could not therefore be applied to them without consulting them and securing their consent. Elliot argued further that “such an article was in no way discriminatory against dependent territories; it simply recognised that the metropolitan power had no right to impose its decisions on territories which had an independent choice in the field in question,” appealing to all delegations to “search their consciences and serve the interest of women throughout the dependent territories by voting for the amendment.”

Britain’s success came from the appeal of this argument, which reached beyond the usual suspects of other administering powers. As with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Indian delegate supported the amendment, in what the British delegation described as a “very

²⁶⁴ Burmese delegate (Thwin), Third Committee, 6 December 1956, A/C.3/SR.702, UN Documents.

²⁶⁵ Third Committee, 5 December 1956, A/C.3/SR.701, UN Documents.

²⁶⁶ For further biographical information see Tam Dalyell, Obituary: Baroness Elliot of Harwood, *The Independent*, 5 January 1994, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-baroness-elliott-of-harwood-corrected-1404758.html> (Accessed May 2020).

helpful speech, recalling the Indian Delegation's part in connection [sic] with the similar clause in the Slavery Conference in Geneva, and arguing that those who did not support the amendment were in effect urging that the measure of self-government already accorded to dependent territories should be withheld in this instance."²⁶⁷ The British delegation were also supported by the Pakistani delegate who argued that "women of dependent territories were equally entitled to protection of the Convention and the amendment was a means of holding metropolitan governments responsible for its application to them".²⁶⁸

Triumphant with the inclusion of a territorial application clause by a margin of just seven votes, the Foreign Office moved to sign the convention on the opening day,²⁶⁹ and in response to a Parliamentary Question back in Britain via former UN delegate-turned-MP Evelyn Emmet (Conservative), the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs signalled Britain's intent to sign the convention as a means of positive publicity towards British women's rights organisations.²⁷⁰ At the CSW session in 1957 Britain boasted that it had already signed the convention (alongside 11 other Member States) and urged other countries which had not yet signed to do so "as soon as possible".²⁷¹

It was in fact Britain's capacity to make the case for, and win, a territorial application clause which meant it was willing to sign up to the convention. Britain's interest never lay in championing this convention for the role it would play globally in strengthening women's rights, as it made clear in

²⁶⁷ Indian delegate (Menon) noted in a telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office on the General Assembly plenary debate for the draft Convention on Nationality of Married Women, 3 February 1957, 17314/4, FO 371/129972, UK National Archives.

²⁶⁸ Pakistani delegate (Chaudhuri) noted in *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ Letter to UK Mission in New York from Foreign Office, 1 February 1957, UNS 17314/5, FO 371/129972, UK National Archives.

²⁷⁰ Parliamentary Question, 17 February 1957, UNS 17315/5, FO371/129972, UK National Archives.

²⁷¹ UK Delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.240, UN Documents.

1953 when it deemed the drafting of such a legal instrument unnecessary. Britain's complex manoeuvring and narrative in calling for a limiting territorial clause to reward administering powers for *granting* greater self-rule demonstrates that what was nominally an international legal instrument on women's nationality rights became subsumed by the British government by the politics of anti-colonialism and precedent over territorial clauses for human rights instruments. In this instance Britain won the battle, and sought to bolster its reputation as a progressive colonial power, with the matter only arising because it *had* granted greater self-rule. While the colonies were uniform within the British metropole, it was those with a greater degree of self-government which now had legal systems which necessitated Britain's signature to the convention to not be binding upon them. However, the continued resistance from the Soviet bloc and other anti-colonial Member States signalled that the war over precedent on the issue of the application of "colonial" clauses in human rights instruments was far from over. And arguably, in making its case in such progressive terms, Britain was now destined to be a victim of its own success, bolstering the case for the acceleration of provisions for greater self-government in the colonies.

While that war over territorial application clauses would continue to be waged, its inclusion in this case would give the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women greater support from colonial powers – and by extension their Non-Self-Governing dependent territories (and those self-governing territories that did decide to sign) – than the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, even if its universal application was now limited on paper. Britain immediately signed the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, with the territorial application clause included. Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Tonga and Brunei were excluded from the obligations of the Convention until they gave their assent between 1958 and 1962.²⁷²

²⁷² See United Nations Treaty Collection, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetailsIII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVI-2&chapter=16&Temp=mtdsg3&clang=en, (accessed May 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter sought to understand the ways in which Britain's policy positions around the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women were impacted by its colonial interests. This chapter has shown that during the 1950s, Britain's colonial concerns played a significant role in its policy approach to both conventions.

On the Convention on the Political Rights of women, Britain's proactive conservatism led Britain to argue at the CSW sessions, and at subsequent meetings at the CSW parent body – ECOSOC – against its development entirely. Britain sought to stymie the proposal in favour of educational action instead. This resistance came with a heavy hand from the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, with the former refusing to give any scope to the idea of supporting the convention without the guarantee of a territorial application clause. Britain's unwillingness to outwardly challenge social norms and customs in the colonies through legal means was rooted in a fear of disruption to its colonial model.

When it came to the development of the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, beginning in 1954, British law on this issue was already uniform across the colonies. Rather than fearing having to develop legislation on women's rights that would cause upset in the colonies (as in the case of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women), it was actually a small category of more autonomous colonies and dominions that had acquired a degree of self-government for internal matters that caused a constitutional discomfort for Britain, and which led to the demand for a more specific "territorial clause" to cover these specific forms of dependent territories. It was

Britain's argument that such a clause provided for greater self-rule which helped secure its agreement in the General Assembly plenary debate.

This chapter has also assessed the ways in which the British government felt pressure both from domestic groups back in Britain, and at the CSW itself, with regard to its positions on the development of the conventions on the Political Rights of Women and on the Nationality of Married Women as a potential site of embarrassment. Britain's lack of support for the Convention on the Political Rights of Women at the CSW led to fierce, vocal criticism from domestic women's organisations in Britain, and their allies in parliament. While forcing Foreign Office officials to reopen Britain's policy position, the subsequent refusal by the Colonial Office to give any scope to the convention without the guarantee of a territorial application clause, shows that any embarrassment the British government felt weighed less than the continued pursuit of its policy aims. The issue of the territorial application clause also provoked attacks on Britain and other colonial powers at the UN. Yet Britain continued to call for a territorial application clause in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women through the debates in the Third Committee, *despite* arguments made by opponents that such colonial discrimination was unwarranted. Similarly, while the Third Committee debates on the territorial application clause for the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women led to criticisms towards colonial powers that this flouted the principle of universality, Britain continued its campaign unabated.

Finally, this chapter has explored the impact of Britain's policy positions on the conventions as adopted by the UN. Britain failed in its attempt to limit the territorial scope of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women to the discretion of colonial powers. But while its territorial scope remained broad, Britain's refusal to become a signatory to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in from 1952 until 1967 failed to support the political momentum behind the

convention itself. Not all colonial powers took such a staunch position. France utilised the reservations process of the Convention to sign with reservations, excepting those of its colonial territories which felt unable to align. Conversely Britain's role in leading the charge on a territorial application clause in the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women immediately limited the territorial scope of the convention with regard to colonial powers. Yet it meant that Britain and other colonial powers could easily sign the convention, adding political strength to it. Indeed, Britain immediately signed the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, with the territorial application clause included, and a handful of its territories were excluded from the obligations of the Convention until they gave their assent between 1958 and 1962.

CHAPTER 2: CONVENTION ON CONSENT TO MARRIAGE, MINIMUM AGE FOR MARRIAGE AND REGISTRATION OF MARRIAGES

Wasting no time after the agreement of the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women in 1957, the CSW began debating the idea of a possible convention or resolution on marriage practices the following year. This resulted in a resolution to ECOSOC inviting the Secretary-General to prepare a draft convention. The convention, agreed in 1962, covered three key areas around consent, age and registration (Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages).²⁷³

This chapter will examine and compare the tactics Britain, still under a Conservative Government,²⁷⁴ employed in discussions on the convention on marriage practices at the CSW, and in its transmission to higher UN organs, given the potential implications of this additional international legal framework relating to the potential expansion of women's rights in the colonies. Again, it will specifically assess the extent to which Britain's policy positions were impacted by its colonial interests by exploring whether Britain sought to limit the evolution and territorial scope of this third convention. It reflects on Britain's policy position on this convention in comparison to the conventions explored in Chapter One in order to make an assessment as to whether Britain

²⁷³ The Convention was opened for signature pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1763 (XVII), 7 November 1962, UN Documents.

²⁷⁴ Britain was led by a Conservative government (Macmillan) for the period under review of this chapter which runs from the late 1950s to 1962.

was systematically attempting to deny the extension of women's rights to indigenous women in its colonies in the 1950s and early 1960s.

It will also assess whether Britain felt that the debates at the CSW around the convention on marriage practices provided a site of embarrassment around colonialism by exploring the language Britain used to defend its policy positions in the face of Britain's Cold War rivalry with the USSR, anti-colonialism from developing countries, as well as domestic pressure from women's rights organisations.

Finally, it will explore the impact of Britain's policy positions *vis a vis* its colonial interests on the territorial scope and political weight of this third convention. Specifically, it will explore the extent to which Britain was able to derail, slow or adapt this convention in order to meet its colonial interests.

4. The emergence of a convention on marriage practices at the CSW

The question of a draft convention and recommendation on marriage was highlighted at a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in August 1956. The Conference recommended that ECOSOC “consider the appropriateness of a study on the question of marriage with the object of drawing attention to the desirability of free consent of both parties and of the establishment of a minimum age for marriage, preferably of no less than fourteen years”.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Conference of Plenipotentiaries, E/CONF.24/22, noted in Documents for the CSW session 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/295, UN Documents.

At the CSW session in 1957, the French delegate called for a convention on child marriage, alongside a joint resolution made with Cuba calling on ECOSOC to request “Governments of all countries or territories to take the necessary steps to introduce a system of compulsory registration of marriages”. As with the early action on women’s political rights at the CSW, Britain appeared poised to disrupt the potential of a convention. Affirming its scepticism about action on the issue from the outset, the British delegate (Sayers) called for the wording “introduce a system” to be replaced with “encourage a system”, arguing that some countries might consider the latter implied an obligation which they were unwilling to assume.²⁷⁶ The resolution with Britain’s amendment was accepted by 15 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.²⁷⁷

The following year, in 1958, a report prepared by the Secretary-General on consent to marriage and age for marriage was presented to the CSW. The idea of a convention was once again promoted by France as a “pressing necessity”.²⁷⁸ Czechoslovakia and the USSR also agreed, and expressively put colonial powers under pressure. The Czechoslovakian delegate pressed particularly on the need for administering states of Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories to take action around consent and age for marriage, while the USSR stated that “...every Member State responsible for a Non-Self-Governing Territory should institute in that territory legislation which was in accordance with human rights”.²⁷⁹

Britain was primed and ready to respond. It used the debate to try to push its familiar preference for education over legislation as a means for change. As with the debates on the Convention on

²⁷⁶ UK delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.252, UN Documents.

²⁷⁷ Ibid; Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 18 March-5 April 1957, E/2968, UN Documents.

²⁷⁸ French Delegate (Lefaucheux), CSW Summary Records 17 March – 3 April 1958, E/CN.6/SR.264, UN Documents.

²⁷⁹ Delegates for Czechoslovakia (Leflerova) and USSR (Ershova), CSW Summary Records 17 March – 3 April 1958, E/CN.6/SR.265, UN Documents.

the Political rights of Women, the British delegate, Ruth Tomlinson, argued that “education and the co-operation of increasingly enlightened people in moulding public opinion could well lead to desirable changes in social behaviour”. It was wise and more effective so the argument went, though it took more time, “to give education priority over legislation, so as to ensure that public opinion was sufficiently well prepared to provide a firm basis for permanent progress”.²⁸⁰ Tomlinson also went further, insisting that child marriage was not necessarily a bad thing according to accounts of certain officials in Non-Self-Governing territories:

Child marriage is an institution which is locally not so repellent as might be thought; it is often the outcome of a wealthy man’s desire to provide a good education for the girl who would really become his wife when she reached marriageable age.²⁸¹

Finally, Britain used the debate to state the need for a territorial application clause in any potential convention, noting that such a clause had enabled Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories to sign on to the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery.²⁸²

Child marriage was certainly prevalent in the colonies at the time. For example, in Tanganyika a person of Asian or African descent could marry a girl under 12 years of age in accordance with tribal religious custom.²⁸³ In Sierra Leone there was no local legislation fixing a minimum age for marriage.²⁸⁴ The British authority in the South Cameroons region of Nigeria, in response to a survey request sent by the UN Secretary-General in 1959 on consent to marriage, minimum age for marriage and registration of marriages, noted that “There are no religious practices which

²⁸⁰ UK Delegate (Tomlinson), CSW Summary records 17 March – 3 April 1958, E/CN.6/SR.265, UN Documents.

²⁸¹ UK Delegate (Tomlinson), CSW Summary records 17 March – 3 April 1958, E/CN.6/SR.264, UN Documents.

²⁸² UK Delegate (Tomlinson), CSW Summary records 17 March – 3 April 1958, E/CN.6/SR.265, UN Documents.

²⁸³ Reply from Tanganyika to Secretary-General’s questionnaire on consent to marriage, minimum age of marriage and registration of marriages, 1 September 1959, UNS 17314/68, FO 371/145423, UK National Archives.

²⁸⁴ Reply from Sierra Leone to Secretary-General’s questionnaire on consent to marriage, minimum age of marriage and registration of marriages, 1 September 1959, UNS 17314/69, FO 371/145423, UK National Archives.

prescribe a minimum age at which marriage can take place. In most areas, a valid marriage, as opposed to a betrothal, is consummated without delay, and there are strong views on the approximate age of capacity to consummate. In this respect, public opinion stands in place of, and is more effective than legal restriction”.²⁸⁵ Through this response, Britain once again attempted to discourage legislative action at the CSW.

During this period, Britain’s general resistance to conventions as a means to further women’s rights in the colonies and its fear of perceived disruptions to local social customs also persisted on other matters. The National Council of Women were lobbying the Foreign Office, calling for action on the issue of equal guardianship of infants. An official from the Foreign Office wrote to the Home Office on the matter noting that the CSW had previously adopted a draft resolution for ECOSOC recommending that Member States take measures to ensure equality between parents in the exercise of rights and duties of their children: “More that this I don’t think they can do; a Convention would be of little use, certainly as far as Her Majesty’s Government is concerned in view of the problems of tribal customs in some of our overseas territories”.²⁸⁶ In addition, the Colonial Office comments for the brief to the UK delegate for the 1961 CSW session included a warning on a recent report of the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities. This had highlighted a resolution made at the Second Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations interested in the Eradication of Discrimination calling for legislative action. Specifically, that resolution had declared it “essential nowadays to enact laws everywhere actually guaranteeing [women] equality”. The Colonial Office remarked:

We hope that the commission will not do anything about this resolution, but in case it is discussed, we suggest that a paragraph should be included in the brief saying that in the view of H.M.G. legislative action is not the most effective way of overcoming inequalities

²⁸⁵ Reply from Nigeria to Secretary-General’s questionnaire on consent to marriage, minimum age of marriage and registration of marriages, 1 September 1959, UNS 17314/70, FO 371/145423, UK National Archives.

²⁸⁶ Letter from FO (Dugdale) to Home Office (J. Ollett), 26 August 1959, UNS17314/54, FO 371/145422, UK National Archives.

in the status of women in under-developed countries and that the breaking down of the long-standing social customs which give rise to such inequalities is more likely to be achieved by a process of education which in turn leads to the emergence of an enlightened public opinion. This is however necessarily a gradual process. We should not of course wish the Representative to support a resolution echoing the sentiments of the Conference resolution.²⁸⁷

Such resistance to conventions was thus in line with the pushback from Britain to the idea of a convention on marriage practices. Britain sought to temper enthusiasm at the 1959 CSW session, arguing for language to suggest only that such an instrument “may” be appropriate.²⁸⁸

2. Momentum builds for a convention on marriage practices

Moving to the CSW session in 1960, the UK repeated its opposition to a convention, favouring instead a recommendation. Britain rehashed its argument that education was more appropriate than legislative measures, arguing that “educational preparation would be needed before the convention and recommendation could be put into effect”.²⁸⁹ It argued that rather than rushing to agree these drafts, they should be circulated to governments for comment. However, while able to draw on the support of Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Greece, China and Pakistan against the immediate adoption of a convention, the groundswell of opinion within the CSW centred on agreeing a text for the convention and recommendation there and then at the session.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Colonial Office comments to Foreign Office (Key) on brief for 15th session of CSW, 3 March 1961, UNS17314/17, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

²⁸⁸ A resolution proposed by France, Greece, Israel, and Sweden requesting the Secretary-General prepare a convention on marriage practices was specifically softened by Britain to include the language that such instrument “may” be desirable by the UK. See resolutions for the CSW Session 9-27 March 1959: E/CN.6/SR.291; E/CN.6/L.261; E/CN.6/L.261; E/CN.6/L.261.Rev1. All UN Documents.

²⁸⁹ UK delegate (Tomlinson), CSW Summary Records 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/CN.6/SR.320-321, UN Documents.

²⁹⁰ Delegates for Canada (Quart), Japan (Tanino), the Netherlands (Schouwenaar-Franssen), Greece (Mantzoulinos), China (Yeh) and Pakistan (Tazeen Faridi), CSW Summary Records 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/CN.6/SR.321 – 322, UN Documents.

For members pushing for the text of the convention to be agreed, the dynamics of decolonisation were invoked as a key reason for this time pressure, even by some colonial powers. The French delegate argued that it was the very point that in countries which were about to become independent that “prompt action on the draft convention might benefit millions of young girls and women who urgently needed help”. She continued:

in countries which were newly independent or about to achieve their independence, the time was ripe for action. The Governments in the former French African territories, for instance, were on the whole favourable to the idea of a convention...and should be given the opportunity to include its provisions in their new legislation. If the Commission did not act, they might assume that the matter was unimportant and turn their attention elsewhere.²⁹¹

Similarly the USSR delegate stressed that “In the newly emerging States international norms were often taken as a model for domestic legislation”, and that conventions, rather than recommendations, had “contributed greatly to more general acceptance of the principles embodied in those instruments”.²⁹² Such arguments put the spotlight on Britain’s status as a colonial power, and demanded action on the basis of its duty as a *decolonising* power. Britain’s interventions in the debate as to the “many improvements” which had taken place with regard to child marriage in the colonies failed to meet the challenge laid down in these critiques of the need for a convention immediately, in order to capitalise on the shift towards independence from colonial powers. In this way, the debates on the convention created the stage for a potential site of embarrassment for Britain as a colonial power, with its benevolence called into question as a result of its lack of support for speedy agreement of a convention.

²⁹¹ French delegate (Lefauchaux), CSW Summary Records 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/CN.6/SR.321, UN Documents.

²⁹² USSR delegate (Korshunova), CSW Summary Records 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/CN.6/SR.321, UN Documents.

Other members of the CSW were also keen to press ahead with a convention, including Israel, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Poland. The draft text was adopted in the session by 10 votes to none with eight abstentions.²⁹³ A minimum age of 15 was included within the draft convention.²⁹⁴ And despite the calls for colonial powers to act quickly to capitalise on those former colonies now becoming independent countries, Britain alongside Canada, Netherlands, Pakistan and the US, attempted to amend the proposed recommendation to urge Governments to merely “consider” the question of the minimum age for marriage, rather than set a minimum. This was rejected by the CSW in favour of a draft recommendation which did in fact specify a minimum age for marriage at 15. While unsuccessful at the CSW, this episode demonstrates that Britain did not feel the heat of this call to act to ensure women’s rights in the transition of its colonies to independence.²⁹⁵

However, Britain did find success in slowing the progression of the draft convention and draft resolution at the ECOSOC in 1960. The ECOSOC accepted a joint resolution by the UK, Japan and the US, which argued that consultation with Member States would result in a wider measure of agreement both in the CSW and later in ECOSOC.²⁹⁶ As such it decided not to consider the texts of the instruments but invited governments to submit observations firstly, on the question of whether a draft convention, draft recommendation, or both should be prepared, and secondly, on the provisions of the drafts drawn up by the CSW.²⁹⁷ Continuing to frustrate the process of

²⁹³ Delegates for Israel (Shoham-Haron), Cuba (Casuso Morin), Argentina (Baldasare de Kurrels), Columbia (Cardona de Salonia), Mexico (Lavelle Urbina), Poland (Dembinksa) and Greece (Mantzoulinos), CSW Summary Records 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/CN.6/SR.321 – 323, UN Documents.

²⁹⁴ Resolution (III)A, Report of the Commission of the Status of Women 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/3350, UN Documents.

²⁹⁵ CSW Summary records 28 March – 14 April 1960, E/CN.6/SR.235, UN Documents.

²⁹⁶ Joint draft resolution E/AC.7/L.370 ECOSOC documents 1960; US delegate (Finger) ECOSOC Summary Records, Fifteenth Session, 1960, E/AC.7/SR.427, UN Documents.

²⁹⁷ UN Report to ECOSOC on the 1961 session of the Commission on the Status of Women, E/3464, UN Documents.

developing a convention at the ECOSOC session, the UK delegate (Samuel Hoare) argued that there was a “strong argument” in favour of a recommendation rather than a further convention.²⁹⁸

In preparation for the CSW session in 1961 which was set to debate the issue once more, the UK branch of the St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance wrote to the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, calling for a convention on the age for marriage, consent to marriage and registration of marriage “with or without” an additional recommendation.²⁹⁹ Specifically, it stated that “there should be laid down a universal minimum age for marriage for boys and girls” of 16, as prior to this they cannot be “psychologically or spiritually ready for marriage, nor have sufficient maturity of judgement; and partly because there are still some countries where young girls are a source of financial gain to their parents or tribe, and are liable to pressure which they are too young and too helpless to resist.” They added that consent of parents is not sufficient without that of the girl herself “given personally, orally, and in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage”³⁰⁰

However, Britain remained sceptical of a convention which attempted to prescribe a rigid minimum age for marriage. While expressing sympathy with “the desire to achieve an improvement in the status of women” officials argued that the draft convention current wording, which attempted “to prescribe a rigid minimum age” might in fact, “only serve to inhibit

²⁹⁸ UK delegate (Hoare) ECOSOC Summary Records, Fifteenth Session, 1960, E/AC.7/SR.427, UN Documents. The delegates for Bulgaria (Bahnev) and USSR (Lobanov) abstained in the vote on the basis that this additional process would unnecessarily delay the adoption of the draft convention and recommendation.

²⁹⁹ Letter from St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance to Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (D. Ormsby-Gore), 24 February 1961, UNS17314/10, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives. The Alliance, formerly the Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society, included a strong focus on international work at the UN. See Catalogue of the National Archives, available at <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/085bfd46-381e-4d34-b3e3-ae5e77708240> (accessed May 2020).

³⁰⁰ Ibid: statement of the Status of Women in Private Law for submission to the CSW session, 21 February 1961, as part of ibid (letter from St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance to Minister of State for Foreign Affairs).

ratification”.³⁰¹ As such, the Foreign Office cited “climatic conditions” to justify deference to local opinion on the matter:

Moreover, the differences in social progress achieved in different countries and in climatic conditions in different parts of the world mean that, for the time being at least, local opinion as to the suitable minimum ages must inevitably vary considerably...The wide diversity in conditions and customs also makes it impracticable to lay down in detail how consent to marriage should be secured and registration of marriage effected...³⁰²

For these reasons, the Foreign Office stated that it would be “premature to adopt the convention along the lines of the present draft and that the draft as it stands would not have the results which are expected of it” but that if it were to become more “flexible”, Britain would be prepared to support it.³⁰³ Once again Britain was seemingly *unwilling* to challenge local customs through law as had been the case with the convention on the political rights of women, as an ineffectual method. But further still, the reference to “climatic conditions” suggested that international legal standards inappropriate in and of themselves; and that differences in climate justified a cultural relativism in which no international standard need be sort. The pressure from women’s organisations back home was clearly provoking lines of defence, but not enough embarrassment for Britain to change track in its policy objectives to limit the strength of the convention given its potential relevance for its colonies.

3. Britain seeks compromise

Internally, the Colonial Office confirmed this negative appraisal of the idea of a convention, commenting on the brief for the UK delegate for the 1961 CSW session that “...in view of the vote at the Commission’s last session on whether a convention on marriage practices should be

³⁰¹ Letter from Foreign Office to St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance (F. Bally), 21 March 1961, UNS17314/10, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Letter from Foreign Office to St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance (F. Bally), 21 March 1961, UNS17314/10, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

adopted, we are not optimistic about the prospects of the Commission now agreeing to drop the idea”.³⁰⁴ Fearing its eventual development, Foreign Office officials wanted to be clear that Britain’s position was that it could not ratify a convention until all the dependent territories were ready to accept it – thus requiring a territorial application clause.

However, Britain’s new delegate to the CSW – Joan Vickers – a Conservative British MP, was keen to find a compromise on the convention. Vickers had previously travelled in India, Africa and South East Asia, was a member of the Council for the European Union of Women, member of the Anti-Slavery Society and Secretary of the East and Central Africa Committee in the House of Commons.³⁰⁵ The CSW Foreign Office desk officer noted ahead of the 1961 CSW session, “Miss Vickers....is unhappy about H.M.G’s line and feels that there is a majority in the Commission in favour of a Convention”, pointing out that she felt that “H.M.G. will appear in an unfavourable light by abstaining and give the impression of dragging their feet.”³⁰⁶ As such officials prepared a number of arguments supporting a loose convention with an opt-in option for its colonies:

1. The Convention need not legislate in detail in view of the diversity of practices but would simply find [sic] Governments to take action which would be suitable in their own territories.
2. The Slavery Convention deals with the practice of slavery and cannot effectively be evoked on the question of marriage, which is sufficiently important of itself to merit a Convention.
3. There should be no difficulty about including a territorial application clause.
4. A Convention, even if loosely drafted, has more impact than a Recommendation.
5. It is too soon to say whether in fact there is a majority in favour of a Convention or a Recommendation. In any case those favouring a Recommendation at present would probably support a Convention if it was worded in loose enough terms.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Colonial Office (Titchener) comments to Foreign Office (Key) on brief for 1961 session of CSW, 3 March 1961, UNS17314/17, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³⁰⁵ Foreign Office Minute about UK Representative to CSW (Joan Vickers), 20 Feb 1961, UNS17314/20, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³⁰⁶ Minute by Foreign Office (Key), 9 March 1961, UNS17314/19, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

Despite the UK delegate's protests, the delegate brief instructed her to not support the adoption of the current draft with the age minimum listed at 15. It pointed to cases such as Cambodia and Chile where the minimum age of 15 proposed in the draft convention conflicted with national legislation. It also noted that age limits can vary within the same country, including in the British dependent territories where the minimum ages of marriage frequently vary between different religious communities within the same territories. More specifically, many of the British colonies would not confirm with the provision. "In only 11 out of 34 territories on which information is available are minimum ages for all citizens equal to or higher than that proposed in the draft convention."³⁰⁸

Yet, Vickers' lobbying efforts did bear some fruit, as she managed to gain agreement from the Colonial Office for the idea of a convention requiring governments to specify a minimum age without imposing a specific standardisation of what this would be. In a departure from Britain's previous position that progress on this issue "cannot be effected at one stroke" and "only by a process of education",³⁰⁹ her stance had caused a rethink in the Colonial Office as to whether to allow the UK representative to support a watered down convention.³¹⁰ Her delegate brief for the CSW session gave her additional leeway on the matter, stating that "the time may perhaps be appropriate for a convention requiring Governments to specify minimum age(s) of marriage; such a convention would not attempt to impose standardisation but would leave Governments free to take account of local religious and social customs in deciding upon suitable minimum age(s) for their territories". Thus Vickers was instructed to "enquire what other Delegations think about the usefulness of this approach".³¹¹ "Under pressure" from Vickers,³¹² the Colonial Office

³⁰⁸ Draft brief for UK CSW delegate to the 1961 session, UNS17314/19, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³⁰⁹ Annex H to *ibid.*

³¹⁰ Internal Foreign Office minute (Key), 9 March 1961, UNS17314/19, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³¹¹ Draft brief for UK CSW delegate to the 1961 session, UNS17314/19, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³¹² Internal Foreign Office minute (Key), 31 October 1961, UNS17314/78, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

granted her discretion to table amendments to articles I and II as listed in Table Two “if they seem likely to command support among other delegations” (the latter article almost identical to that suggested by St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance).³¹³

Table Two: Draft Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages

Article I “State parties to this convention shall, where necessary, take legislative action to specify minimum ages(s) of marriage. No marriage shall be entered into by any person under this age except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age for serious reasons in the interest of the intending spouses”

Article II “No marriage shall be entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage and of such witnesses as may be prescribed by law”

However, even if such wording was achieved, the delegate brief spelt out that Britain’s final attitude would be determined by whether the convention as a whole included a satisfactory territorial application clause in the final clauses. The brief stated that the delegate should state this on record, even if the drafting of these final clauses was taken up by another body such as ECOSOC.³¹⁴

Thus while Britain remained committed to its policy position around the inclusion of a territorial application clause, the political pressure within the CSW had impacted Vickers and had empowered her to seek a compromise from the Colonial Office for loose wording around the age for marriage, so long as this was not standardised in the convention. Therefore, to some degree the convention had become a potential site of embarrassment, and Colonial Office accepted the

³¹³ Draft brief for UK CSW delegate to the 1961 session, UNS17314/19, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

need for a compromise on wording around legislation for marriage, now included as a provision to be decided at national level. In this way, Britain's vulnerability around its international reputation coupled with a CSW representative who acted as an advocate for the CSW's work proved a winning combination for shifting British conservatism.

At the 1961 CSW session itself, there were differing views on the question of a minimum age specification. Some governments rejected the idea of a minimum age of 15 included in the draft as this conflicted with provisions of their municipal law or for the sake of reaching a general agreement on the convention (those not pushing for a minimum age in the recommendation included Argentina, Mexico, France, Finland, Philippines, Australia, Netherlands and Greece).³¹⁵ In addition, some of the statements from women's rights organisations³¹⁶ pointed to the inherent difficulty of fixing a minimum age for marriage which would be accepted by a large majority of governments, and suggested that the convention should include a general principle to include a minimum age for marriage within Member States' own legal provisions as per Britain's compromise proposal.³¹⁷

Yet there were also strong advocates for firmer action by the CSW on marriage practices, including the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Poland.³¹⁸ Those in favour pointed to the regional seminar on women's participation in public life in Addis Ababa in 1960, where one of the conclusions adopted was the need to take action in order to establish a minimum age for marriage, the requirement of

³¹⁵ Delegates for Argentina (Stabile), Mexico (Lavalle Urbina), France (Lefauchaux), Finland (Sipilä), Philippines (Benitz), Australia (Norris), the Netherlands (de Vink) and Greece (Manzoulinos), CSW Summary Records 13-30 March 1961, E/CN.6/SR.341-343, UN Documents.

³¹⁶ Statement by World Union on Catholic Women's Organizations, CSW Summary Records 13-30 March 1961, E/CN.6/SR.343, UN Documents.

³¹⁷ Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 13-30 March 1961, E/3464, UN Documents.

³¹⁸ Delegates for USSR (Korshunova), Czechoslovakia (Leflerova), and Poland (Dembinska), CSW Summary Records 13-30 March 1961, E/CN.6/SR.341-343, UN Documents.

free consent to marriage and compulsory registration of marriage.³¹⁹ The USSR argued that the inclusion of a specific minimum was necessary to ensure that a convention was effective.³²⁰

Vickers, empowered to forge allies on the idea of a convention requiring governments to specify a minimum age without a specific standardisation, took action to persuade the co-sponsors (Argentina, France, Greece, Israel and Mexico) of the resolution on this issue at the session, and to separate the convention and recommendation into two separate resolutions, acting as a co-sponsor on the former. The Colonial Office's redraft of Articles I and II of the three article convention were adopted almost verbatim,³²¹ and the CSW finally adopted a resolution on a convention with no minimum age requirement, and a separate draft Recommendation which included a minimum age of 15 at the session.³²² The position of the CSW in accepting the divergence between the two texts was that the recommendation "could be used as a desirable minimum standard by Governments when determining a suitable age for marriage".³²³

Following the session, the Foreign Office wrote to St Joan's Social and Political Alliance on the issue of a minimum age requirement, arguing that at the 1961 session, as well as the 1960 session, "there was little insistence on a minimum age and general realization that in fact it was impracticable to include one in a Convention."³²⁴ The Alliance response expressed their regret that no legal minimum age for marriage was specified in the Convention, but on the whole

³¹⁹ Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 13-30 March 1961, E/3464, UN Documents.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Internal Foreign Office Minutes (G.Marshall), 4 October 1961, UNS17314/69, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

³²² Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 13-30 March 1961, E/3464, UN Documents.

³²³ Draft Recommendation on "Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage and Registration of Marriages", Memorandum" by the Secretary-General, 27 August 1963, A/5483, accessed in UNS17311/52, FO 371/172746, UK National Archives.

³²⁴ Letter to St Joan's Social and Political Alliance (F. Barry) from Foreign Office, 7 April 1961, UNS17314/21, FO 371/161039, UK National Archives.

welcomed the Convention and “...is gratified that, in the event, the United Kingdom delegate took the initiative in sponsoring this Convention”.³²⁵ They further welcomed that the draft recommendation “lays down the age of fifteen years as a minimum legal age of marriage, though we should have preferred sixteen, and trusts that this will set a standard that will be universally followed and indeed outstripped.”³²⁶ They again emphasised that “free and fair consent” is the most important element of the convention, and that this “cannot be given except by boys and girls of an age mature enough to realize fully what they are doing”.³²⁷ The National Council for Women were, in contrast, far more glowing in their praise, congratulating Britain for moving away from its earlier position that “a Draft Convention on marriage would be inappropriate because of different tribal and religious customs” and congratulated Vickers personally for “her brilliant work in Geneva which led to the adoption of both the Draft Recommendation and the Draft Convention”.³²⁸ Thus even among women’s rights organisations in Britain, opinion was split as to whether Britain had done the right thing in its compromise, which served to protect against the imposition of an internationally specified minimum age for marriage in its colonies.

4. The fight for a territorial application clause

Britain now appeared as a champion of the convention – as a co-sponsor at CSW, recommending its transmission to the ECOSOC, and then latterly championing transmission of the text of the draft convention to the General Assembly in July 1961.³²⁹ Yet this new-found enthusiasm for the convention would be short-lived as Britain came to realise in the autumn of 1961 that the very

³²⁵ Letter from St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance (F.Barry) to Under-Secretary of state at Foreign Office, 2 May 1961, UNS17314/38, FO 371/161039, UK National Archives.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Letter from National Council of Women of Great Britain (C. Gimpel), 1 May 1961, UNS17314/36, FO 371/161039, UK National Archives.

³²⁹ UK Mission in Geneva to Foreign Office, Report of the Economic and social council debate item 16: Report on the Status of Women Commission, 27 July 1961, UNS17314/60, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives; UK Delegate (Hoare) recommended the draft text be submitted to the General Assembly without further discussion other than noting it was in favour of adopting a convention. ECOSOC Summary Records, Sixteenth Session, 1961, E/AC.7/SR.339-440, UN Documents.

draft it had co-sponsored included elements that were incompatible with British law.³³⁰ This realisation came after an Assistant Legal Advisor was called upon to review the brief for the General Assembly session which was due to discuss the draft convention. The advisor raised a number of concerns on substantive clauses “the chief objection being that one of them might limit the power of the British courts to recognise the validity of certain marriages celebrated under local law in a foreign country.”³³¹ Of particular note was the scenario that Britain did not want to be precluded from recognising marriages contracted in the dependent territories where the minimum age was lower than in the UK.³³² Subsequently, Britain engaged in a botched attempt to amend the text of the draft convention through tabling amendments on the two main Articles, both of which were defeated in the General Assembly Third Committee deliberations, leading Britain to abstain on the convention when a vote was taken in October 1961. Patrick Dean, the British Permanent Representative to the UN, lambasted the Foreign Office for failing to study the text of the convention at an earlier stage, with the sudden change in the British position making him “seem incompetent” and arousing suspicions “around our real motives”.³³³

The loss of political capital over drafting concerns was all the more poignant, given that the discussion on final clauses around a territorial application clause was still to come. Despite the removal of a minimum age requirement from the convention, the question of a territorial application clause remained a deep concern for Britain. The changing membership of the UN owing to greatly increased membership from former colonies, and damaging narratives around colonialism at the UN at that time, were perceived by Britain as harmful to galvanising support for

³³⁰ Internal Foreign Office Minutes (G. Marshall), 4 October 1961, UNS17314/69, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

³³¹ Internal Foreign Office Minute (Key), 31 October 1961, UNS17314/78, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

³³² Cabinet Office Briefing for General Assembly Session 16, Agenda Item 9 on the Draft Convention and Draft Recommendation on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage and the Registration of Marriages. UNS17314/77, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

³³³ Letter from UK Mission in New York, Permanent Representative (Patrick Dean), 13 October, UNS17314/78, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

the clause.³³⁴ Dean argued that “with its greatly increased membership from Africa, and the Americas” support did not seem as solid on this matter as it had been in the past,³³⁵ with the Britain’s chances on the matter “bound to be reduced as long as delegations expect that we will not sign the convention anyway”.³³⁶ Dean further stated that the UK Mission in New York had a “very difficult job...with a whole lot of potentially damaging issues, such as colonialism” as well as the unfolding crises in Angola and Katanga, urging that “we really do need the maximum goodwill”.³³⁷ This concern seemed real; Poland had tabled an amendment to the preamble in the October session of the Third Committee referring to the obligation of states administering Non-Self-Governing territories to regulate conditions covering marriages “until their achievement of independence”, in addition to a Latin American suggestion to reference the 1960 UN Declaration on Colonialism, although neither prevailed.³³⁸

Beyond merely venting its frustration at the way the Foreign Office had handled the matter, the UK Mission in New York also sought a change in approach based on the political intent behind the convention and support for women’s rights in the colonies. Indeed, Dean argued that the basic principles of the draft convention were “entirely in accordance with our own policy and traditions and which most African members of the Assembly believe to be of basic importance to their social development”. He further urged that Britain “should give more weight to the political aspects of Conventions such as this and not approach them purely from a legal point of view”.³³⁹

³³⁴ Letter from UK Mission in New York to the Foreign Office, 12 October 1961, UNS17314/74, FO 371/161041, UK National Archives.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Letter from UK Mission in New York (Permanent Representative Patrick Dean), 13 October, UNS17314/78, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

³³⁸ Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples 1514 (XV), Report on Debate of the General Assembly 16th session by UK Mission in New York to the Foreign Office, 11 October 1961, UNS17314/76, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

³³⁹ Letter from UK Mission in New York (Permanent Representative Patrick Dean), 13 October, UNS17314/78, FO 371/161040, UK National Archives.

This pressure from the UK Mission in New York catalysed a rethink back in the Foreign Office, where legal advisors agreed that a statement of interpretation would suffice for Britain to sign the convention.³⁴⁰ Britain's focus now returned to the issue of including a territorial application clause. It turned to the US to keep reference to a territorial application clause within its general proposal on final provisions for the convention.³⁴¹ Britain was at pains to make it clear to the General Assembly Third Committee that the absence of such a clause would make it "impossible to...become a party until every one of our dependent territories is in a position to accept the obligations imposed by the Convention."³⁴² While Britain had initially hoped that the US delegation would find some African co-sponsors, the USSR delegation pressured the US to drop the territorial application clause at the end of 1961,³⁴³ and the US in turn urged Britain to drop the clause. By August 1962 Britain was still unclear what the Americans would decide on the issue of the territorial application clause, and started to think through "alternative courses of action" to ensure its inclusion.³⁴⁴ The Cold War battle over the territorial application clause was thus not one in which Britain had many remaining allies in the West.

When Britain came to propose a territorial application clause in the Third Committee debate on the draft convention in October 1962, it stressed the same argument of enabling greater self-autonomy:

³⁴⁰ Draft submission by Foreign Office (J. Tahourdin), November 30, UNS17314/84, FO 371/161042; Telegram from Foreign Office to UK Mission in New York, 11 December 1961, UNS17314/91, FO 371/161042. All UK National Archives.

³⁴¹ Telegram from UK Mission in New York (Patrick Dean) to Foreign Office, 3 November 1961, UNS17314/86, FO 371/161942, UK National Archives.

³⁴² Draft brief for the UN General Assembly Seventeenth session on the draft convention and draft recommendation on marriage practices, September 1962, UNS17314/69, FO 371/166941, UK National Archives.

³⁴³ Telegram from UK Mission in New York (Patrick Dean) to Foreign Office, 9 December 1961, UNS17314/91, FO 371/161942, UK National Archives.

³⁴⁴ Letter from Foreign Office (J. Campbell) to UK Mission in New York (H. Attlee), August 21 1962, UNS17314/61 FO 371/166941, UK National Archives.

A territorial application clause, far from being contrary to the provisions of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, was very much in the spirit of that Declaration, since it contributed to the growth of self-government and progress towards independence of the territories concerned.³⁴⁵

But the clause was defeated by 53 votes to 23 with 7 abstentions.³⁴⁶ Most newly independent developing countries voted against the clause.³⁴⁷ This loss was bound up in colonial politics: the UK Mission in New York reported back to Foreign Office that this loss was taken on “emotional grounds” given the “current debate on Southern Rhodesia”, noting that the Latin Americans “in particular appear to have accepted the Soviet line that a vote in favour of a territorial application clause would be a vote in favour of perpetuating colonialism”.³⁴⁸ Indeed, the records of the Third Committee debate confirm that Romania argued it would be “anachronistic ... only two years after the adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples (resolution 1514 (XV))” for the UN to agree an international convention containing “colonial clauses”.³⁴⁹ The USSR, which now argued against even a positive territorial application clause to ensure colonial extension as had been their position in the 1950s, argued that any wording referencing colonies risked, “legalizing the continued existence of colonial

³⁴⁵ UK delegate (Glover), Third Committee Summary Record, 5 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1143, UN Documents.

³⁴⁶ Report of the Third Committee, 31 October 1962, A/5273 accessed in S-0445-0138-14574, UN Archives.

³⁴⁷ In favour: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Ethiopia, Malaya, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, UK, USA.

Against: Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chile, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Leopoldville), Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Dahomey, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Syria, Tanganyika, Togo, Tunisia, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, USSR, United Arab Republic, Upper Volta, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia.

Abstaining: Burma, Ceylon, Chad, China, Madagascar, Pakistan, Panama.

³⁴⁸ Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office, 8 October 1962. The Soviet Union also argued in the 1961 General Assembly session that colonialism needed an “immediate cut-off date” as opposed to gradual transition, UNS17314/73 FO 371/166941, UK National Archives.

³⁴⁹ Romanian Delegate (Ionascu), Third Committee Summary Record, 3 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1140, UN Documents.

rule for an indefinite time”.³⁵⁰ The USSR delegate focused her critique firmly on Britain (which attempted to defend the clause in the session), arguing that:

In reality, the aim of the United Kingdom was to prevent the liquidation of colonialism, which had been provided for in the General Assembly's Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples (resolution 1514 (XV), and to induce the Committee to countenance the existence of a universally condemned regime... If the United Kingdom had no intention of implementing the Declaration and granting independence to its territories, it would have been better for its representatives to say so without beating about the bush³⁵¹

The critiques of the clause went even further. Byelorussia likened Britain's insistence on such a clause in order to become a party to blackmail.³⁵² Chile issued a threat to colonial powers “that in the months and years to come they would be subjected to increasing pressure, both in the General Assembly and outside the United Nations” on the issue of self-determination, and would refuse the territorial application clause on these grounds.³⁵³ Yugoslavia, Indonesia, Tunisia, Mali, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Hungary, United Arab Republic (UAR), Tanganyika, Ghana, India the Upper Volta and Guatemala all strongly rebuked the inclusion of a territorial application clause in the debate.³⁵⁴ However, a handful of Member States including Australia, New Zealand, France, Italy, Ireland, Denmark, Ethiopia and Liberia, Turkey, Thailand, Japan, The Netherlands, and The Federation of Malaya supported the idea of a territorial application clause in the debate. Some wanted the inclusion of wording noting that this was only necessary temporarily until the “achievement of independence”.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁰ USSR Delegate (Nikolaeva), Third Committee Summary Record, 5 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1143, UN Documents.

³⁵¹ USSR Delegate (Nikolaeva), Third Committee Summary Record, 5 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1144, UN Documents.

³⁵² Byelorussian delegate (Skurko), 5 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1143-1144, UN Documents.

³⁵³ Chilean delegate (Diaz Sasanueva), Third Committee Summary Record, 5 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1144, UN Documents.

³⁵⁴ Third Committee Summary Record, 5 October 1962, A/C.3/SR.1143 and A/C.3/SR.1144, UN Documents.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

In response, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office called for a lobby effort at capital level for one final attempt at including the article in the final General Assembly plenary session.³⁵⁶ This lobby effort was launched on three fronts. UK embassies instructed to reach out to 15 states which had voted against the article in the Third Committee,³⁵⁷ to four governments which had abstained on this issue,³⁵⁸ and to seven governments who were absent during the debate.³⁵⁹ Learning from its success in the campaign for a territorial application clause in the Convention on the Nationality of Married women (see Chapter One), Britain deployed the same line of argument – that such a clause would be progressive in giving colonies *more autonomy* as to whether to become party. Yet this time, the argument faced a rising anticolonial groundswell at the UN. UK embassies in Brazil, Burma and Tanzania reported their targets were unlikely to break from the anti-colonial Afro-Asian bloc.³⁶⁰ Similarly, the Libyan delegation had a general directive to vote with the Arab States, and where they were divided, to vote with the Afro-Asians, and argued that this was not a case for doing otherwise since marriage practices were regulated by Sharia Law.³⁶¹

In the final vote on the convention, the UK Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Joseph Godber) addressed the General Assembly. He stressed progress in UK colonial policy, in “bringing forward dependent countries to independence” citing the three former British colonies which had joined the UN since the beginning of the present UN Session.³⁶² He highlighted the UK’s transmission of information on economic, social and cultural affairs in its colonial territories to the UN and

³⁵⁶Draft submission to Foreign Office (A.D. Wilson), 10 October 1962, UNS17314/73 FO 371/166941, UK National Archives.

³⁵⁷ Ghana, Brazil, Israel, Tanganyika, Libya, Mexico, Chile, The Philippines, Iran, Uruguay, Nigeria, India, The Congo, Syria and Lebanon. See telegram to capitals on the draft convention on marriage practices, UNS17314/74, FO 371/166941, circa October 1962, UK National Archives.

³⁵⁸ Burma, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Madagascar. See *ibid*.

³⁵⁹ Cyprus, Luxembourg, South Africa, Greece, Sierra Leone, Iceland and Burundi. See *ibid*.

³⁶⁰ Telegram to Foreign Office from British High Commission in Tanzania (T.D. Leary), 13 October 1962, UNS17314/75, FO 371/166941, UK National Archives.

³⁶¹ Telegram from British High Commission Tripoli to Foreign Office, 26 October 1962, UNS17314/78, FO 371/166941, UK National Archives.

³⁶² UK delegate and Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Joseph Godber), General Assembly 1166th Plenary meeting, 7 November 1962, A/P.V.1166, UN Documents.

noted that “Recently we have also given a full account of political progress” despite the UN Charter not demanding this before finally stressing the necessity of the article to ensure the principles of self-autonomy of its colonial territories:

It would be contrary to all our aims and principles, both the aims of those responsible for the administration of these territories and contrary to the principles proclaimed by the opponents of the vestiges of the colonial system, to impose this or any other Convention without the fullest consultation with the appropriate legislative and administrative authorities of the territories.³⁶³

In this way, Britain claimed that the absence of the Article would, in light of its inability to become a state party, deprive millions of men and women of the opportunity to benefit from this Convention. Godber further argued that while some delegations have argued a territorial application clause was contrary to the principles of the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, it is in fact “very much in the spirit of that resolution, since in each case it recognises and sets the seal upon complete self-government in yet another sphere, and marks the mile-stones of progress towards the complete independence of the territories concerned”.³⁶⁴ He finished by expressing his “earnest desire...to become party to this Convention ourselves, and to extend it as widely as possible throughout our territories”.³⁶⁵

Britain was defeated on the territorial application clause in the final vote from 27 in favour to 75 against with six abstentions.³⁶⁶ Not only did Britain lose the vote, but the final General Assembly debate opened Britain to criticism on its colonial record. Among its opponents, Romania pointed to the colonial character of the clause, while the USSR, backed by Indonesia and Czechoslovakia, argued that the clause would legalise and perpetuate the colonial system. The USSR further argued

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ General Assembly 1167th Plenary meeting, 8 November 1962, A/P.V.1167, UN Documents.

that Britain should settle its problem on this issue by liberating all its colonial people before the convention entered into force. With more newly independent countries joining the UN, this criticism went beyond the Soviet bloc, as the UK delegation had feared. The Ghanaian delegate pointed to “latent” colonialism and the way in which colonial powers were seeking to destroy the soul and culture of indigenous peoples by ideological impositions and decried colonialism as a state of oppression of one country by another. The Ghanaian delegate, as well the delegates for Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and Iraq, further insisted that the Declaration Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples made it unsuitable for territorial application clauses to be included in conventions and thus that the answer to this issue was immediate independence. Nigeria argued that the UK amendment was contrary to the principle of universality, a term used in the other human rights debates at the UN by anti-colonialist proponents to link human rights issues with those relating to self-determination.³⁶⁷

The convention passed by 92 votes to zero with seven abstentions. Britain voted in favour of the adoption of the convention (alongside an explanation of vote which regretted the omission of a suitable territorial application clause).³⁶⁸ But while it had voted in favour, just as with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 10 years earlier, Britain had pushed for a territorial application clause and refused to become a signatory without it. Once again, in doing so it failed to support the political momentum behind the convention generally. It also meant Britain was under no obligation to roll out the convention in its remaining colonies. As a point of comparison, as with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, France signed the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages when it opened

³⁶⁷ Delegates for Romania (Ionascu), USSR (Nikolaeva), Indonesia (Idris), Czechoslovakia (Leflerova), Ghana (Dadzie), Upper Volta (Ouedcaogo), Iraq (Yasseen), and Nigeria (Adebo), General Assembly 1166th and 1167th Plenary meetings, 7-8 November 1962, A/P.V.1166 and A/P.V.1167, UN Documents.

³⁶⁸ General Assembly 1167th Plenary meeting, 8 November 1962, A/P.V.1167, UN Documents.

for signature in 1962; this time making no exemptions for its colonies. However, it should also be noted, that it would be another half decade before France ratified the convention.³⁶⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the extent to which Britain's policy positions around the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages were impacted by colonial interests in relation to the three-point analytical framework set out in the *Introduction*.

As with the conventions on the political rights of women and nationality of married women, Britain's colonial concerns played a significant role in its policy approach to the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. Calling for a similar approach to social change as in earlier debates, Britain stressed the importance of education over legislation when the idea of a convention on issues of marriage was pushed within the CSW in 1958. The British delegate went further, even declaring that child marriage was not so repellent as thought, when matched with a "wealthy man's desire to provide a good education for a girl". As with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Britain attempted to slow the pace of the new convention's development by calling for it to be circulated to governments – and found success when ECOSOC agreed to do so despite the passage of a draft convention through the CSW. Yet differences also emerged in Britain's approach. Unlike its approach to the development of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women a decade earlier, Britain did engage in the development of the convention itself, specifically around the issue of age and did vote in favour of the convention in the final debate (after weakening that provision).

³⁶⁹ For further information see United Nations Treaty Collection, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVI-3&chapter=16&lang=en#EndDec (accessed May 2020).

This chapter has also assessed and exposed the ways in which the British government felt pressure both from domestic groups back in Britain, and in the CSW itself, around its colonial record with regard to the development of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. Britain was put under pressure in the 1960 session by the Soviet bloc and fellow colonial power France, to take early action on agreeing a convention in order to embed women's rights into the legislation of newly independent and soon-to-be independent nations. Further the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance attempted to put pressure on Britain back home, calling on the Foreign Office to commit to a universal minimum age, to which the Foreign Office responded that it was not appropriate in light of differing "climatic conditions".

Supported by this domestic activism and broader pressure at the CSW, it was the British CSW delegate (Vickers) who caused a shift in British policy so as to avoid a perception of the UK dragging its heels. Her intervention did prompt a rethink in policy within the Colonial Office and as such it agreed to permit language on age of marriage within the convention, so long as it was down to governments themselves to determine that age, and not a standardised age specified in the convention. In this respect, the debates at the CSW on the convention were indeed a potential site of embarrassment, as recognised by Britain in agreeing to the shift in policy. But in not agreeing to an international standard, that shift should not be overstated.

While Britain played a more active role in the initial drafting of this convention than the convention on women's political rights in order to leverage a more acceptable text, as with both earlier conventions of the 1950s, it called for the inclusion of a territorial application clause. Where it failed in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, against a growing number of anti-colonial

opponents, it undertook a last-ditch lobby attempt with 26 governments to try and reinsert the clause. Britain tried to invoke the same argument used in the debates around the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, that such a clause provided for greater autonomy in the colonies in marking a “mile-stone” in the progress “towards the complete independence” of the colonies. This time, however, Britain was overwhelmingly defeated with critics from across the Soviet bloc and former colonies in Africa.

Finally, this chapter has explored the impact of Britain’s policy positions on the substantive content of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages as adopted by the UN in 1962. In seeking to find a compromise on a minimum age for marriage, Britain played a significant role in building support for language in the convention which required state parties to take legislative measures to establish a minimum age. But in so doing, it removed a reference to a standardised minimum age (15) from the draft convention, which remained only in the recommendation adopted in 1965.

Furthermore, as with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Britain failed in its attempt to limit the territorial scope of the convention to the discretion of colonial powers. Again, as with the former convention, Britain’s refusal to become a signatory to the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages meant that both it and its remaining colonies in the British Empire were not bound by it. In contrast, France signed the convention when it opened for signature in 1962, making no exemptions for its colonies. Britain’s refusal to sign failed to support the overall political momentum the global adoption convention. Further, as argued in the CSW debates by France and the USSR, this convention came into force at a time of mass global decolonization in 1964. New international conventions had a new

audience, and the behaviour of influential global players such as Britain at the UN was therefore of key importance as a means of persuasion to amass new signatories.

Despite this, the passage of a recommendation on marriage practices in 1965, with a reference to 15 years as a minimum age for marriage, provided an additional – although much weaker – means to establish a non-binding international norm around the minimum age for marriage across the world. And Britain would now face ever more growing criticism in the CSW.

CHAPTER 3: BEYOND CONVENTIONS: BRITAIN'S RESPONSE TO ANTI- COLONIALISM IN THE CSW IN THE 1950S

This chapter examines the extent to which Britain's colonial interests affected its participation at the CSW in the 1950s, beyond the development of the conventions on the political rights of women and nationality of married women (which are explored in Chapter One) and the discussions around a convention on marriage practices (Chapter Two) which began in that decade. Outside of the development of these conventions, it explores the tactics Britain employed to seek to demonstrate its benevolence in its colonial practice through the debates at the CSW. It focuses on the ways in which Britain sought to defend itself and enhance its colonial reputation throughout the decade, across both Labour (until October 1951) and then successive Conservative governments. It provides important evidence for the second question in the analytical framework of this research outlined in the *Introduction* – ie whether the broader debates in the CSW served as a site of embarrassment for Britain on its colonial record - by exploring the defensive arguments Britain adopted around its role as a colonial power at the CSW to improve its international standing.

From the start through to the end of the decade, it is clear that the CSW, like many other commissions and the committees within the UN, provided a stage for anti-colonial assaults on colonial powers.³⁷⁰ Within CSW debates on women's political rights, harmful practices, equal pay

³⁷⁰ For broader UN debates see Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, pp35-58

and education charges against colonial powers were levelled throughout the 1950s. Such attacks were primarily led by the Soviet bloc, evidenced as early as 1951, with notably tense exchanges between the Soviet bloc and Britain by the middle of the decade. However, at times developing countries also supported attacks on colonial powers, although with a softer timbre.

Throughout the 1950s, the issue of the political rights of women attracted the majority of anti-colonial attacks in the CSW, culminating in the Colonial Office sarcastically describing the agenda item on the political rights of women as “our old friend” to the Foreign Office in its preparations for the 1959 session.³⁷¹ Britain faced attacks from anti-colonial factions on the specific conditions of women’s status in the colonies, on the evidence presented to the CSW each year on Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories and for other special reports, and on its reluctance to sign the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Such attitudes and responses merit a chapter on their own, both due to their extent, and in order to understand the nature of the arguments Britain invoked.

In response to such attacks, Britain adopted three main lines of defence, seeking to demonstrate the benevolence of its colonial practice as a means to maintain its reputation. Firstly, it argued that the colonies should not be considered in a special category, and that the problems relating to women’s advancement were not a consequence of the political status of the countries in question. Secondly, it argued that so-called evidence presented within anti-colonial attacks was inaccurate, and that in fact evidence pointed to progress in the colonies. Finally, it argued that its colonies were slowly moving towards compliance with the principles of new conventions, in reality if not in law. This chapter firstly explores in detail these lines of defence in the context of debates on

³⁷¹ Letter from Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 28 January 1959, 17314/3, FO 371/ 145419, UK National Archives.

political rights, before seeing how such lines of attack were replicated in respect to other agenda items relating to harmful practices, equal pay, and education.

The issue of harmful practices in the colonies attracted criticism of colonial powers within this period. It was not only significant as a key issue within the CSW during the 1950s, but also in Britain. In May and June of 1951, the then Labour Secretary of State for the Colonies, James Griffiths, had faced criticism from the Women's Freedom League and the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance around the government's failure to act on issues relating to the selling of daughters and consent to marriage; especially since, with regard to the latter, other colonial powers such as France and Belgium and the self-governing territories of Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa "have so far advanced the status of African women in their territories as to require the freedom of consent for a valid marriage."³⁷² Campaigns against harmful practices in the colonies were not new, but had surfaced since the 1920s, when European and American missionaries and some colonial officials, who called the practice of female circumcision "barbaric" and "mutilating", were supported by feminist leaders and the British Parliament, who called for firm measures against such customs.³⁷³ Contrastingly, many colonial administrators wanted to avoid stirring things up and many politicians used anti-circumcision campaigns as a way to attack feminism more broadly.³⁷⁴ Lack of equal pay and education also proved conducive to anti-colonial attacks within the CSW in this period, although in a far more limited manner. The ILO convention on equal pay (Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for

³⁷² Letter from St Joan's Social and Political Alliance to Secretary of State for the Colonies (James Griffiths), May 31st 1951, CO 859/229/7, UK National Archives.

³⁷³ Stearns, *Gender in World History*, p141.

³⁷⁴ Lynn Thomas, "'Ngaitana' (I will circumcise myself): the gender and generational politics of the 1956 ban on clitoridectomy in Meru, Kenya", in *Gendered colonialisms in African History*, eds. Tessie Lui, Jean Quaratert and Nancy Hunt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

Work of Equal Value) provided a hook for such criticisms as did UNESCO reporting on progress in girls' education which covered progress in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories.

1. Keeping the colonies out of the spotlight

The CSW debates around the Convention on the Political Rights of Women were utilised by the USSR to argue that “gross injustices prevailed” for women in the colonies with respect to voting rights (See Chapter One). But in addition to laying general charges against British colonies, the Soviet bloc also attempted to introduce resolutions which drew specific attention to women's political rights in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories during the 1950s. In response, Britain consistently tried to block such wording, stressing the line that problems were not peculiar to Non-Self-Governing territories.

At the start of the decade, the USSR proposed a draft resolution which noted that “the situation as regards granting political rights to women is particularly unsatisfactory in Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories”.³⁷⁵ In response the British delegate, Sutherland, argued that in many cases the position of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories was “more favourable” than in many sovereign states.³⁷⁶ Similarly in 1952, Sutherland argued that “The status of women was not determined by the political status of the Territories, but by the history, traditions, customs and level of economic development in the areas where they lived”.³⁷⁷ Keen to prove that political status was not the root cause of gender inequality, she argued that “the position of women in these territories compared favourably with that of women in neighbouring independent countries”.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Draft resolution for the CSW session 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/L.30, UN Documents.

³⁷⁶ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.84, UN Documents.

³⁷⁷ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.177, UN Documents.

³⁷⁸ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.83-84, UN Documents.

Behind the scenes, Britain grew increasingly nervous about the risk of such anti-colonial attacks during the agenda item on political rights of women on women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories at the CSW. The 1953 CSW delegate brief provided clear guidance to the British delegate on how to most effectively counter charges that the conditions in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories “are ‘ipso facto’ worse than elsewhere, or attempts to treat problems which are universal as existing only in dependent territories”, stressing that “[a] policy of apparent acceptance of such manoeuvres would probably be exploited by our enemies to the full”.³⁷⁹ It made this point in the context of a much wider anti-colonial campaign already at pace in other UN organs beyond the CSW. As such, this strategy to counter Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories being treated in isolation was part of a broader British rebuttal.³⁸⁰ Further, the delegate brief noted that the general attitude of the UK delegation on such topics should be that of willingness to consider any constructive proposals which might assist Britain in dealing with the problems facing it in Non-Self-Governing and Trust territories, coupled with rejection of the thesis that such problems are peculiar to dependent territories or arise because of their dependent status.³⁸¹

Such nervousness on Britain’s part was well-founded. Cuba and the Dominican Republic proposed a draft resolution on political rights in 1953 noting that in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories “in particular” there has been “little or no progress in the development of political rights of women”.³⁸² Reporting back from the 1953 CSW session, the British delegation noted that “[a]n anti-colonial pressure group made several attempts to provoke a separate discussion, and presumably recommendations, upon the status of women in non-self-governing and trust

³⁷⁹ Colonial Office correspondence (E. West) to the Foreign Office (H. Attlee), 4 March 1953, 1734/39, FO 371/107134, UK National Archives.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Draft resolution for CSW session 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/L.100, UN Documents.

territories. These attempts were foiled at the 7th session...but will certainly be renewed in 1954.”³⁸³ According to the British delegation, the Chairman (Dominican Republic) and the Cuban member, assisted by the Soviet bloc, “did their best to initiate a separate discussion on the political rights of women in non-self-governing territories on the ground that these women were in a worse position than any other” noting the “discriminatory resolution” tabled by Cuba and the Dominican Republic.³⁸⁴ In response to the mounting pressure within the CSW, Britain supported by France and New Zealand, objected strongly in private and in resolutions debated at the CSW. The British delegate argued that the original text had “drawn a distinction between Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories on the one hand, and other territories on the other, which her delegation could not accept”.³⁸⁵ Britain’s push back paid off. It was, “with the threat of disharmony in the Commission too much for the Chairman, and after a lot of argument”, that the sponsors accepted a British amendment making the resolution under discussion on political rights apply to all areas of the world (including Trust and Non-Self Governing territories).³⁸⁶

While Britain had kept reference to colonies out of a resolution in 1953, it noted the following year that “the ‘anti-colonials’ have not abandoned their thesis that non-self-governing territories are in a special category”, that administering powers cannot invoke Article two (7) of the charter on non-interference of the UN in domestic jurisdiction of Member States, and are “continually trying” to establish the rights of the UN to enquire into the affairs of Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories in resolutions.³⁸⁷ Indeed, Yugoslavia used its appointment to the CSW in

³⁸³ UK Delegation (H. Overton) notes from CSW session sent to Foreign Office (A. Goodman), 15 June 1953, 1737/98, FO 371/107135, UK National Archives.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ UK delegate (Warde), CSW Summary records 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/SR.136, UN Documents.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Draft Resolution for CSW session 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/L.100/Rev.1, UN Documents.

³⁸⁷ Notes for the draft brief for UK Delegate to CSW, 17 February 1955, 1739/11, FO 371/ 117562, UK National Archives.

1954 to argue that further efforts should be made to obtain more detailed information from administering authorities.³⁸⁸

Anti-colonial allies within the CSW again focused on explicit reference to colonies at the CSW in 1955, but this time by amending a draft resolution on women's political rights proposed by Australia and Sweden. The original draft resolution called for NGOs in consultative status with the UN to provide information on their methods, techniques and activities directed towards advancing women's political rights "particularly in countries where women do not yet vote or have only recently been granted political rights".³⁸⁹ Yugoslavia, supported by the delegates from Byelorussia, Poland and the USSR, called for the explicit reference to "including in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories" where the preambular paragraph referred to countries where women do not yet have the right to vote. They were supported by Indonesia which argued that the programme of work adopted by the CSW at its session in 1954 "gave high priority to the status of women both in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories" thus justifying the amendment. Britain, along with France, argued that such an amendment was discriminatory and unjustified. The British delegate (Sayers) argued that such reference was "discriminatory" and "drew unnecessary attention to the Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories while making no reference to conditions in certain sovereign states" while the French delegate affirmed "it was wrong to single out the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories for attention in a resolution dealing with political rights of women".³⁹⁰ As a compromise, the final resolution adopted unanimously by the CSW noted "areas" where women do not have the right to vote, which the USSR, Poland and

³⁸⁸ Yugoslavia (Mitrovic), CSW Summary Records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.152, UN Documents.

³⁸⁹ Draft Resolution for CSW Session 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/L.155, UN Documents.

³⁹⁰ Delegates from Yugoslavia (Mitrovic), Indonesia (Roesad) Byelorussia (Novikova), USSR (Fomina), UK (Sayers), France (Lefauchaux), Australia (Daly) in CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.181, UN Documents.

Byelorussia said they would support on the understanding that ‘areas’ meant “all countries, including Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories”.³⁹¹

There was no let-up for Britain as the anti-colonial campaign in the CSW continued. Again, in 1957, Poland, supported by USSR, Byelorussian and Polish delegates, unsuccessfully tried to separate out the issue of the political rights of women in non-self-governing territories by proposing a special study.³⁹² The USSR argued that the debates in the General Assembly had shown that “more information was needed on the status of women in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories”.³⁹³ Yet, without sufficient support Poland withdrew the resolution.³⁹⁴

Thus throughout the 1950s Britain (and to varying degrees, its other colonial allies) sought to rebuff attempts from by the USSR, Poland, Byelorussia Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Yugoslavia and Indonesia to isolate the colonies for special consideration or study within resolutions.

Furthermore, the issue of harmful traditional practices, including around marriage practices, also attracted anti-colonial attacks. For example at the CSW session in 1954, Iran and Haiti sponsored a draft resolution on adopting measures to ensure the freedom to choose a spouse and bride price. The preamble called specific attention to the status of women in “many areas of the world including certain Trust and Non-self-Governing territories” and the operative paragraphs of the

³⁹¹ Delegates for USSR (Fomina), Indonesia (Roesad), Byelorussia (Novikova) and Poland (Dembinska) in CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.184; Draft resolution for CSW session 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/L.155/Rev.1, UN Documents.

³⁹² Draft Resolution for CSW session 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/L.209; Polish delegate (Dembinska) Byelorussian (Novikova), USSR delegate (Spiridonova) CSW summary records 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.235, UN Documents.

³⁹³ USSR delegate (Spiridonova), CSW summary records 18 March – 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.235, UN Documents.

³⁹⁴ SR.244 Polish delegate (Dembinska), CSW Summary Records 18 March-5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.244; Draft resolutions for CSW session 18 March – 5 April 1957, L.209 and L.209/Rev.1. All UN Documents.

resolution called for action by states administering Trust and Non-Self Governing territories. The UK delegate (known by her husband's name John Warde) argued that she would abstain on the grounds that many administering authorities "were taking measures towards improving the position of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories".³⁹⁵ Yet the resolution passed easily, despite Britain's objections.³⁹⁶ Following a protest letter from the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance back in the UK on Britain's abstention, the Foreign Office stated that action on customs and practices is best achieved through education, which should be "given the backing of law as soon as public opinion is ready to accept legislation on each particular problem."³⁹⁷

Britain also tried to block attempts by the Soviet bloc to pass resolutions on equal pay which drew special attention to the colonies. Criticising the lack of a positive territorial application clause providing for explicit extension to colonies in the 1951 ILO convention on equal pay, Poland, the USSR and Byelorussia began the decade by drawing attention to the need to extend the convention to the colonies,³⁹⁸ where women were being "ruthlessly exploited" and "almost entirely denied their economic rights".³⁹⁹ The Soviet bloc attempted to introduce draft resolutions explicitly extending the principle of equal pay for equal work into colonies.⁴⁰⁰ In 1951 Poland and the USSR introduced a resolution which called for Member States to take "concrete steps necessary" to implement the principle of equal pay for equal work in "Non-Self-governing and Trust Territories"

³⁹⁵ UK delegate (Warde) also cited that the Economic and Social Council item on slavery covered this issue already. See CSW session 22 March – 9 April 1954 E/CN.6/SR.167, UN Documents.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. The Draft Resolution passed as amended by 14 votes to 1, with 3 abstentions. Final wording in resolution H Report of the Commission of the Status of Women 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/2571; Draft resolution for CSW session 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/L.134.Rev1, UN Documents.

³⁹⁷ Letter from St Joan's Social and Political Alliance to the Minister of State (Selwyn), 16 June 1954, and response to Letter to St Joan's Social and Political Alliance (Barry) from Foreign Office (S. Lloyd), 1 July 1954, 17312/103, FO371/112484, UK National Archives.

³⁹⁸ Polish delegate (Dembinska), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.25, UN Documents.

³⁹⁹ Polish delegate (Kalinowska) and Byelorussian delegate (Novikova), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.111-113, UN Documents.

⁴⁰⁰ Press Release UN Department of Public Information on CSW 1 May 1951, 1734/70, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives; Draft Resolution for CSW session 22 March – 9 April 1954 E/CN.6/L.125, UN Documents.

but lost the vote by 11 votes to two with two abstentions.⁴⁰¹ In 1954 a draft resolution sponsored by Byelorussia similarly recommended that governments (and this time NGOs) “encourage activities...directed towards the practical application of the principle of equal pay for equal work...including in the Trust and Non-Self Governing Countries”.⁴⁰² This was more successful, and passed with 13 votes in favour despite Britain’s vote against.⁴⁰³

The Soviet bloc also utilised the debate on economic opportunities for women in 1955 to draw attention to the low wages of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories, including via a draft resolution to “Encourage such action as will secure for women, in the economic field, equal rights with men in all countries, including in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories”.⁴⁰⁴ Poland argued that:

In the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories the working conditions of women were highly unsatisfactory and women were subject to many forms of discrimination. That situation could not be attributed solely to tradition and prejudice; when social conditions in a community were improved and the people were given access to education, the position of women also improved. Unfortunately the Administering Authorities made no attempt to create conditions in which the status of women could be raised.⁴⁰⁵

The British delegate (Sayers) objected to the “sweeping statements on conditions in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories”, again returning to the British argument that such Territories faced the same problems as sovereign states and thus should not be treated separately.⁴⁰⁶ But the resolution was passed at the CSW, and was transmitted to ECOSOC where it caused further

⁴⁰¹ CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.96; Draft Resolution CSW session 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/L.50. Both UN Documents.

⁴⁰² Draft Resolution for CSW session 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/L.125, UN Documents.

⁴⁰³ The vote was passed by 13 votes to 4, with 1 abstention. See CSW summary records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.158, UN Documents.

⁴⁰⁴ Byelorussian delegate CSW summary record 1955, E/AN.6/SR.197; draft resolution for CSW session 14 March - 1 April 1955, sponsored by Byelorussia, E/CN.6/L.179. Both UN Documents.

⁴⁰⁵ Polish delegate (Dembinska), CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.199, UN Documents.

⁴⁰⁶ UK delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.199, UN Documents.

discussion at its 1955 session.⁴⁰⁷ Australia argued that it was not advisable to include a reference to Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories in a draft resolution which had general application to all countries and territories.⁴⁰⁸

Therefore, while the issue of political rights proved a constant battleground on the question of a specific focus on Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories throughout the 1950s, Britain also fought attempts for a specific focus on these territories through resolutions on marriage practices, equal pay and education. As with its arguments around political rights, it urged education instead of legislative reform and continued to argue that territories faced the same problems as sovereign states and thus should not be treated separately. Indeed, Britain also sought to argue that economic factors were the main explanatory factor of progress on women's rights, rather than the political status of the country with regards to self-government. For example, in 1952 Sutherland argued that the educational situation of Non-Self-Governing territories – as with sovereign states in the same areas - “reflected their poverty”. She presented this argument in light of an attack from the Polish delegate who argued that evidence presented to a UNESCO sub-committee on girls' access to education had revealed a “wide discrepancy” between the literacy of boys and girls in Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories”.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 14 March -1 April 1955, E/2727; CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.201. Both UN Documents.

⁴⁰⁸ Australian delegate (Rogers), ECOSOC Summary records, Eleventh Session, 1955, E/AC.7/SR.334, UN Documents.

⁴⁰⁹ Polish delegate (Kalinowska), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.109, UN Documents.

2. Refuting evidence and asserting Britain's progressive approach in the colonies

Many anti-colonial attacks were framed around the evidence presented to the CSW on the position of women in the colonies. The agenda item on political rights and its accompanying Secretary-General's progress reports provided an annual basis for the Soviet bloc to critique colonial powers around the rights of indigenous women. Here, it was the agreement by the CSW in 1949 that invited the Secretary-General to submit progress reports on the status of women in Trust and Non-Self-governing territories that opened up a liability for attacks on colonial powers.⁴¹⁰ Karen Knop argues that these annual reports became the CSW's main source of information on these territories and the basis for resolutions.⁴¹¹

In 1951, the USSR argued that the information contained in these progress reports showed that women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories were "deprived of their rights and subjected to very hard conditions of life under colonies policies which allowed of no social and cultural developments". In addition to pointing to poor conditions in French territories, it noted that "In Cameroons under United Kingdom administration 80 per cent of the population was illiterate".⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ See Documents prepared for CSW session 24 March - 5 April 1952, "Information concerning the status of women in Trust territories", E/CN.6/182, UN Documents. which states that "At its third session, the Commission on the status of women adopted a resolution concerning information on the status of women in Trust Territories inviting the Secretary-General "to transmit to it at each session any pertinent information contained in the annual reports made by the Administering Authorities to the General Assembly under the procedures established pursuant to Article 88 of the Charter. The Commission on the Status of Women at its fourth session adopted a resolution inviting the Secretary-General to include in his annual reports pertinent information on the political rights of women in Trust Territories drawn from the annual reports of the Administering Authorities."; and Documents prepared for CSW session 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/183, UN Documents. "Information concerning the status of women in non-self-governing territories" which states that "At its third session the Commission on the status of women invited the Secretary-General to transmit to it at each session any information which may be communicated to him by the Governments of Non-Self-Governing Territories concerning the status of women in these territories".

⁴¹¹ Karen Knop, *Diversity and Self-Determination in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp344-355.

⁴¹² USSR delegate (Popova), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.117, UN Documents.

The Byelorussian delegate supported this attack on Britain (alongside further criticism of French rule in Algeria):

The political rights of the indigenous population in Nigeria were virtually non-existent...That single example which could be repeated from other protectorates revealed the true nature of British rule, which even resulted in women being deprived on minimum rights over their own person in some territories.⁴¹³

Repeating the attack in 1953, the USSR delegate noted that despite the CSW receiving little information on the status of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories “that information showed women enjoyed no political rights”.⁴¹⁴ In fact the USSR used this agenda item, and associated progress reports, to launch a wide ranging attack on the deprivation of other rights of indigenous women:

there was no doubt that the Administering Authorities were exploiting the situation, keeping women in a state of ignorance and poverty which suited their own purposes. True, those powers were constantly recommending equality between men and women in all territories without exception, but their recommendations were mere window-dressing and, in order to conceal the true objectives of their policy, they took shelter behind the alleged need to respect local traditions and customs which, they contended, would preclude the rapid emancipation of women in the territories concerned⁴¹⁵

Such hard-hitting accusations were significant not just in their ferocity, but in exposing the way in which British policy failed to truly value and promote women’s rights in its colonies within the context of indirect rule.

Similarly, in 1954 Byelorussia argued, based on information presented to the CSW in a memorandum by the Secretary-General, that the status of women in dependent territories was particularly unfavourable, that all documents available to the UN showed that the Administering

⁴¹³ Byelorussian delegate (Novikova), CSW Summary Records 24 March - 5 April 1952, E/CN.6/SR.117, UN Documents.

⁴¹⁴ USSR delegate (Popova), CSW Summary Records 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/SR.134, UN Documents.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

Authorities took no action to improve the status of women, and that the visiting mission to the British Trust territory of Tanganyika had found that women were barred from traditional political activity and office and had few educational opportunities.⁴¹⁶ The criticisms against Britain were getting deeper and sharper.

The number of critics was also growing. Indonesia, on joining the CSW in 1955, joined in providing an anti-colonial critique of women's political rights. It urged the CSW to "give careful attention to the status of women in the fifty-eight Non-Self-Governing Territories where some 60 million women should enjoy full political rights". The USSR delegate agreed, adding that "Administering Powers continued to justify their refusal to countenance political equality for women on the grounds that custom was opposed to it and the women themselves did not want it".⁴¹⁷

In light of these attacks, Britain continually prepared its delegates in the latter part of the decade, including its delegate for 1955, Sayers, to "expose the inaccuracy" of information on the conditions in particular British non-self-governing territories and to "remind" the CSW that such questions were "outside its competence."⁴¹⁸ At the 1955 session Sayers argued that the documents before the CSW showed that women in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories "sometimes enjoyed more extensive rights....than in certain sovereign countries" and that "Administering Authorities were promoting the progressive development of free political institutions". Moreover, she linked this argument with Britain's approach of avoiding special emphasis, noting that *because*

⁴¹⁶ Byelorussian delegate (Novikova), CSW summary records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.151-152, UN Documents.

⁴¹⁷ Indonesian delegate (Roesad) and USSR delegate (Fomina), CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.177, UN Documents.

⁴¹⁸ Notes for the draft brief for UK Delegate to CSW, 17 February 1955, 1739/11, FO 371/117562, UK National Archives.

of this progressive approach in territories there was “no reason for placing them in a special category”.⁴¹⁹

The 1956 CSW session was notable for what the UK delegation remarked was a “very heated” exchange with the Soviet bloc over the status of women in colonial territories. The USSR argued that women in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories “were in virtual slavery” while Byelorussia noted that the information supplied by the Secretary-General on Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories “showed that little progress had been made in the preceding year” and that women, as well as men “were still largely deprived of political rights, or else their rights were so circumscribed as to constitute a mockery”.⁴²⁰ The attack included a particular focus on Britain, noting:

In the British colony of Kenya every African of twenty-one or over was granted political rights, but that provision was so hedged about with stipulations concerning education, income, military service etc as to make it virtually inoperative. Similarly, in the Cameroons under British administration, all taxpayers were entitled to vote but, as women in practice paid no taxes, they were unable to vote.⁴²¹

Poland continued the attack, arguing that “certain representatives in defending colonialism, appeared to have forgotten about the position of women. Women in the colonies were not only not equal to men but were exploited by men and by the colonizers” and that the Secretary-General’s documents gave “no evidence of any planning for the advancement of women in the Non-Self-Governing territories.” The British delegate standing in for Sayers, named James Wardrop (well-seasoned in UN debates from the mission in Geneva), launched a highly-charged

⁴¹⁹ UK delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 14 March -1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.178, UN Documents.

⁴²⁰ USSR delegate (Spiridonova), Belyoriisan delegate (Novikova), CSW Summary Records 12-29 March 1956, E/CN.6/SR.207-208, UN Documents.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

rebuttal. He accused the USSR of using the CSW as a “megaphone for propaganda”⁴²² using “scraps of unfavourable information about the Western countries, taken from their context, sewn together as a patchwork quilt and backed by a picture in garish colours of the paradise-like conditions in the Soviet Union and the so-called ‘popular democracies’”⁴²³ Wardrop used the opportunity to not only rebuff attempts to treat the colonies as a separate category, but also to stress the way in which Britain was promoting progress in the colonies:

His Government’s avowed intention, which it was not going to abandon, was to prepare the peoples of those trust territories for self-government, but as the Belgian representative had pointed out, the process must be gradual and the United Kingdom Government did not propose to endanger that process by undue haste, however hard-pressed it might be even by well-intentioned people with less experience and knowledge of the problems involved. His country was not complacent and was fully aware of how much remained to be done, but steady progress was being made which would become apparent over a period of years, and conditions in certain Territories compared not unfavourably with those existing in some sovereign states⁴²⁴

Such strong, angry exchanges demonstrated Britain’s unease at the challenges to its colonial record at the CSW, and its continued campaign to appear as progressive on the UN stage.

Heading to the end of the decade at the 1959 CSW session, the issue of a proposed plebiscite in Northern British Cameroons on the question of whether to join Nigeria or defer the decision to another time in the future came to a head at the CSW. With women due to be excluded from voting, the UK Mission in New York noted that several members including Cuba, Sweden and the Soviet bloc, were using the CSW as a pressure group to change this position. The Polish delegate expressed dissatisfaction, noting that it was surprising that a plebiscite to be held under UN

⁴²² Telegram from UK Delegation to UN in Geneva (J.Wardrop) to Foreign Office, 15 March 1956, 17314/19, FO 371/123799, UK National Archives.

⁴²³ UK delegate (Wardrop), CSW Summary Records 12-29 March 1956, E/CN.6/SR.208, UN Documents.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

supervision was going to ignore the principle of equality between the sexes.⁴²⁵ The Colonial Office had written to the Foreign Office on the matter ahead of the CSW session, stressing that the members of the Consultative Committee at Mubi in Northern Cameroons did not necessarily envisage that the vote would never be extended to women, but that this was something time would resolve, adding “a view which in the present circumstances seems well-founded, as least in regard to the Moslem women”, shifting blame for lack of compliance to Islamic practices rather than British rule.⁴²⁶ This was stressed by the UK delegate in the session, who blamed the local population – rather than colonial practice - for the exclusion of women from the plebiscite:

The United Kingdom was strongly in favour of political rights for women, and in the South Cameroons, for instance, women had the right to vote. But in the Northern Cameroons, efforts had proved fruitless because of local customs and the strong opposition on the part of the political leaders...the problem would probably be resolved with the passage of time, and they did not necessarily envisage that the vote would never be extended to women⁴²⁷

Therefore, throughout the 1950s, Britain had to systematically defend itself against charges of poor colonial practice around women’s political rights within the CSW, seeking to expose what it felt were inaccuracies levelled against women’s advancement in the colonies and arguing that administering authorities were promoting the progressive development of women’s political rights.

As with the defence of Britain’s performance on women’s political rights in the colonies, Britain also attempted to counter negative examples of harmful practices in the colonies with assertions of its best intentions, when timing would allow. Britain’s defence once again focused on portraying what it argued was a well-intentioned positive influence in colonies. But it couched this benevolence as limited by indigenous resistance: it was local customs – not British rule – which it

⁴²⁵ Polish delegate (Dembinska), CSW Summary Records 9-27 March 1959, E/CN.6/SR.287-288, UN Documents.

⁴²⁶ Draft brief for CSW delegate CSW 13th session, UNS17314/20, FO 371/145420; Letter from Colonial Office to Foreign Office on comments on the CSW 13th session agenda, 20 February 1959, UNS17314/12, FO 371/145419. Both UK National Archives.

⁴²⁷ UK delegate (Tomlinson), CSW Summary Records 9-27 March 1959, E/CN.6/SR.288, UN Documents.

argued led to the continuation of these practices. The 1953 delegate brief stated that the “United Kingdom recognises that vestiges of such practices still exist in a few territories under United Kingdom administration but that the United Kingdom is firmly determined to eradicate them at the earliest possible moment and is taking energetic steps to that end.” As such, as with its defence against the need for a convention on the political rights of women which had passed the year before (see Chapter One), and the argument it would use to slow the initial interest in a convention on marriage practices at the end of the decade (see Chapter Two), the UK delegate was instructed to stress the efficacy of education rather than legislation:

whilst very active efforts have been and are being made in those territories where it occurs in which Her Majesty’s Government has any standing, to combat it by the only effective means – education. Legislation tends to harden adherence to this type of superstition, the resolutions are ineffective.⁴²⁸

Indeed, in the debates around education and equal pay, Britain similarly adopted the line that indigenous resistance was the block on progress, and as recognised by Russo, utilised the language of imperial feminism by describing women in the dependent territories as needing to be rescued.⁴²⁹ As Russo argues, the British and French delegates often claimed colonialism was working for women, while also supporting their argument by claiming that the metropole needed to reform its colonies where customs were not conducive to women’s rights. She argues that this point was particularly important for Britain given the nature of British indirect colonial rule.⁴³⁰ In 1951 Sutherland stated that the British government wanted to develop education as early as possible, but that “the main obstacle to progress in education for girls arose from the local traditions of the people themselves”.⁴³¹ This line of argument particularly focused around the *speed* of progress, as

⁴²⁸ Briefing for British CSW Delegate, 10 March 1953, 1734/44, FO 371/107134, UK National Archives.

⁴²⁹ Russo, “Universalism, Difference and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975”, pp61-62.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, p63.

⁴³¹ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.93, UN Documents.

a strategy to separate Britain's self-stated agreement with the principle of progress from the reality of implementation.

In light of further criticism from the Soviet bloc at the CSW in 1955, Britain made a more determined attempt to set an image as a benevolent colonial power. The British delegate, Sayers, claimed that her government was "very proud of the very great efforts it was making to improve the level of education in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories", noting that, "considerable progress had been made".⁴³² Again, in 1957, Sayers attempted to argue that the status of education in the colonies should be "in step with economic and social progress" and thus educational advancement might not always "be as rapid as might be wished". She also stressed the role of local prejudices and traditions noting that "Public opinion could play a decisive role in that respect".⁴³³

This line of defence was steadfastly disputed by the Soviet bloc throughout the 1950s. Instead its representatives argued that the administering authorities "tended to encourage discrimination against women on the pretext that they did not wish to interfere with established customs",⁴³⁴ and that women in Non-Self-Governing Territories continued to be deprived of their rights and subjected to "slavery, polygamy and cases in which the mother had not rights over her children", deploring that "eight years after signing the Charter, the colonial powers had still done nothing to remedy the situation".⁴³⁵

⁴³² Delegates for UK (Sayers), Byelorussia (Novikova) and USSR (Fomina), CSW Summary Records 14 March - 1 April 1955, E/CN.6/SR.193-194, UN Documents.

⁴³³ UK delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 18 March - 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.234, UN Documents.

⁴³⁴ USSR (Fomina), CSW Summary Records 18 March - 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.186, UN Documents.

⁴³⁵ Poland (Wasilkowska), CSW Summary records 16 March - 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/SR.128, UN Documents.

Nevertheless, the attacks on colonial powers should not be overstated: they varied in intensity, with the sessions in 1954 and 1955 described by the UK Mission in New York as being notably harmonious – the former session marked by a “growing realisation by a number of more backward states of their own vulnerability”⁴³⁶ and the latter harmonious “in spite”⁴³⁷ of anti-colonial champions. Although the attacks continued throughout the 1950s, the UK delegation felt that tensions were abated “mainly because the administering powers only allowed themselves to be drawn where the available documentation enabled us to stamp heavily on the anti-colonials.”⁴³⁸ Therefore, throughout the decade Britain had to prepare to defend itself systematically against charges of poor colonial practice around women’s political rights within the CSW, taking action to “expose inaccuracies” and assert that administering authorities were promoting the progressive development of women’s rights. But through the arguments around harmful practices, including child marriage, equal pay, and education, British delegates argued consistently that Britain’s progressive approach was limited only by the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies. It was the colonies themselves, Britain argued, which thus determined the speed at which women’s advancement could be achieved.

3. Soft compliance

Finally, the third tactic Britain adopted in the 1950s at the CSW to protect its reputation in the face of anti-colonial attacks centred specifically on soft compliance with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

⁴³⁶ Notes for the draft brief for UK Delegate to CSW, circa Feb 1955, 1739/11, FO 371/117562, UK National Archives.

⁴³⁷ Letter from UK Delegation to the UN (H. Attlee) to Foreign Office (E. Warner), 2 April 1955, 1739/29, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

⁴³⁸ Letter from UK Delegation to the UN to Foreign Office, 2 April 1955, 1739/29, FO 371/117563, UK National Archives.

After the agreement of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952, and despite Britain's concern that it was applicable across colonial territories, the Soviet bloc continued to point to the absence of a positive provision for territorial application, arguing that this would serve to continue to suppress women in these contexts. In 1953, the Byelorussian delegate argued that the absence of an explicit clause for colonial extension "enabled the Administering powers to continue to deprive the women of those Territories of the most elementary rights". Simultaneously, Poland felt it "anomalous that a Commission, dedicated to the abolition of discrimination, should have adopted a Convention which discriminated against the most oppressed category of women".⁴³⁹ Similarly, the Polish delegate stated in 1954 that "The situation in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories was...unsatisfactory and no steps had been taken to improve matters there despite repeated criticisms voiced by the Commission..." and that for this reason the "absence of any provision in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women concerning the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories was a serious defect".⁴⁴⁰

On the other hand, Britain continued to berate the same convention for a lack of explicit exclusion of the colonies. In 1956 the UK delegate (Wardrop) argued that Britain would not sign the convention given the absence of a territorial application clause since "inequalities could not be swept away at a stroke of the pen".⁴⁴¹ Through to the end of the decade, Britain cemented its position at the CSW sessions that it would not become a signatory to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women until all its territories could comply. The draft brief for the British delegate to the 1959 session highlighted this point through a statement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies on 23 January 1958, with the familiar mantra that "...in matters

⁴³⁹ Byelorussian delegate (Noikova) and Polish delegate (Wasilkowska), CSW summary records 16 March – 3 April 1953, E/CN.6/SR.133, UN Documents.

⁴⁴⁰ Polish delegate (Dembinska), CSW summary records 22 March – 9 April 1954, E/CN.6/SR.150, UN Documents.

⁴⁴¹ UK delegate (Wardrop), CSW Summary Records 12-29 March 1956, E/CN.6/ SR.208, UN Documents.

affecting the application of international obligations to non-metropolitan territories, it is Her Majesty's Government's general policy to consult each territory in advance of any decision affecting it".⁴⁴² Australia similarly argued that while the absence of a territorial application clause meant they were unable to sign the convention, it was the policy of the government to establish the principles of the convention in its territories "as soon as possible".⁴⁴³

Thus neither side, it appeared, was happy with the final text of the convention which lacked a provision calling either for the explicit inclusion of colonies (as preferred by the Soviet bloc) or for the specific exclusion of colonies (as per Britain). Yet, what is particularly significant is that despite Britain's reluctance to sign the convention, this did *not* amount to Britain side-lining the convention. Rather, in 1957 and 1958 circulars had been sent to the colonies to assess the extent to which they complied with the convention.⁴⁴⁴ As such, at the 1957 session the British delegate (Sayers) argued that while the absence of a territorial application clause meant that it was unable to sign the convention, the British government was consulting with the authorities in various dependent territories to ascertain whether they would consent to its application. She maintained that while this would take some time, "the fact that it had been initiated was indicative of her Government's great interest in the Convention".⁴⁴⁵

By the 1958 session, Britain was able to report back to the CSW on its initial consultations with its colonies and territories around the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, affirming that 11 of them could accept it. Importantly, it used this as a means to supplement its arguments that

⁴⁴² Draft brief for CSW delegate CSW 13th session, UNS17314/20, FO 371/145420, UK National Archives.

⁴⁴³ Australian delegate (Gibson) CSW Summary Records 18 March-5 April 1957, E/CN.6 SR.233, UN Documents.

⁴⁴⁴ Letter from CO (E. Burr) to FO (A. Dugdale) on comments on the CSW agenda for 1959, 20 February 1959, UNS17314/13, FO 371/145419, UK National Archives.

⁴⁴⁵ UK Delegate (Sayers), CSW Summary Records 18 March - 5 April 1957, E/CN.6/SR.235, UN Documents.

increased compliance by the colonies had been achieved not through a legal stick, but through the power of educative action:

In other words, some progress had been made but the United Kingdom delegation was firmly convinced that it was mainly education – whether political, general or fundamental – that could bring home to women the need to acquire political rights. In many territories the men themselves were only just beginning to enjoy such rights.⁴⁴⁶

But while Britain continued to resist legislative action on women's political rights in the colonies, it was through this process of consultation with the colonies that the Colonial Office was keen to champion the progress which *had* been made towards compliance in the colonies at the annual CSW sessions. The UK Delegate briefing for the 1959 session highlighted that following enquiries made in the colonies, 15 territories could now accept the convention; 12 could accept Articles I and II but not III; three territories could not accept Articles I and II; five could not accept any article and six had not sufficiently developed institutions for the convention to apply to them.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ UK Delegate (Tomlinson), CSW Summary Records 17 March – 3 April 1958, E/CN.6/SR.259, UN Documents.

⁴⁴⁷ Draft brief for CSW delegate CSW 13th session, UNS17314/20, FO 371/145420, UK National Archives. The brief noted that:

15 territories could accept the Convention: Montserrat, Grenada, St Kitts, Virgin Islands, British Honduras, Tanganyika, Gambia, Sarawak, Mauritius, Jamaica Turks Islands and the Cayman Islands (subject to the introduction of the new constitutions now under consideration), Trinidad, Antigua and St. Lucia.

12 territories could accept Articles I and II but not Article III: Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malta, Bermuda, Dominica, St Vincent, Barbados, British Guiana, Seychelles, Falkland Islands, Tonga. Two common reasons are the absence of equal pay and the non-eligibility of women for jury service. There are also marriage bars or other measures of discrimination in branches of the Civil Service.

3 territories could not accept Article I (or articles I and II): "In Nigeria there are no votes for women in the Northern Region. Sierra Leone has different qualifications for male and female electors. In Kenya there is no vote for Arab women and different qualifications for African men and women".

5 territories could not accept any Article: "In Zanzibar women have no vote, are ineligible for election and there is no equal pay. In the Bahamas women have no vote, may not sit in the legislature and are not eligible for jury service. In Uganda women are excluded from voting in elections for the Lukiko and certain District Councils and there is no prospect of African opinion accepting their appointment to important public offices. In Aden women may not vote in legislative Council elections and in other respects their position is closely affected by Muslim practices (the Purdah system is still fairly rigid). In Fiji women are ineligible to vote and to be elected. Neither may they do jury service or act as court assessors and there is no equal pay for certain categories of public servants".

The Colonial Office was also keen to highlight the recent elections in South Cameroons where women were not only entitled to vote and stand for election but where “...a woman is sitting as a special Member to represent the interests of women”.⁴⁴⁸

Thus throughout the 1950s, Britain recognised that while reiterating its legal reluctance to sign the treaty, it needed to show as great a compliance as possible as part of its efforts to improve its colonial reputation at the UN. And further, despite Britain’s attempts to disrupt the passage of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women on the basis that conventions would hold no value if governments could not become party (see Chapter One), its own practice of seeking to demonstrate de facto compliance across as many colonies as possible demonstrated that the mere existence of international instruments can hold political power to encourage compliance, even if this could not be enforced.

Nevertheless, this rising international pressure felt by the Foreign Office on the international stage cannot be said to have reached all the British colonies. The Governor’s responses to the Foreign Office’s circulars in 1957 and 1958 on the Convention on the Political Rights of Women also highlight that they held a large degree of discretion in indicating to London when or if the time was *appropriate* for progress on this issue. The Governor of Fiji remarked on the issue of women’s right to vote that “...the time has now come for an advance in this direction and I shall make a point of sounding responsible opinion on the matter as opportunity occurs. I will inform you of the result in due course”.⁴⁴⁹ The Resident Commissioner of Swaziland noted, less optimistically,

6 territories (North Borneo, New Hebrides, Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Solomon Islands, Somaliland Protectorate, St Helena) “have not sufficiently developed institutions for the Convention to apply to them although there is no ^{actual} legal objection”.

⁴⁴⁸ Letter from Colonial Office (E. Burr) to Foreign Office (A. Dugdale), on comments on the CSW session agenda, 20 Feb 1959, UNS17314/13, FO 371/145419, UK National Archives.

⁴⁴⁹ Savingram from Governor of Fiji to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, January 1959, UNS1732/2, FO 371/145417, UK National Archives.

that introducing the franchise for women “is something for the future” but that the principles in the convention are acceptable.⁴⁵⁰ The High Commissioner of Brunei, while loathe to press for a change in attitude on the articles under the convention since objections had been expressed on religious grounds, did recognise the relevance of the ongoing constitutional discussions in London in determining further action.⁴⁵¹

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Britain faced attacks from anti-colonial factions on the specific conditions of women’s status in the colonies, on political rights, harmful practices, equal pay and education. Britain sought to demonstrate a benevolence in its colonial practice. It provides important evidence for the second question in the analytical framework of this thesis, by exploring the defensive arguments Britain adopted around its role as a colonial power at the CSW to improve its international standing. It finds that the defensive arguments Britain adopted confirm that Britain did feel the CSW served as a site of embarrassment in its colonial role. And further, in undertaking such defence it failed to allow the CSW to take action in support of women in the colonies.

Throughout the 1950s Britain (and to varying degrees, its other colonial allies) sought to rebuff various attempts by the USSR, Poland, Byelorussia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, Iran and Haiti to separate out the colonies for special consideration or study within resolutions. Britain sought to block such focus, arguing that the colonies should not be considered in a special category, and that the problems relating to women’s advancement were not a consequence of the political status of the countries in question. While the issue of political rights

⁴⁵⁰ Savingram from resident commissioner of Swaziland to deputy high Commissioner in Pretoria, 26 November 1958, UNS17314/11, FO 371/145419, UK National Archives.

⁴⁵¹ Savingram from the High Commissioner of Brunei to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 April 1959, UNS 17314/11, FO 371/145419, UK National Archives.

proved a consistent battleground on the question of a specific focus on Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories throughout the 1950s, Britain also fought attempts for a specific focus on these territories through resolutions on marriage practices, equal pay and education. As with its arguments around political rights, it urged education over legislative reform and continued to argue that its territories faced the same problems as sovereign states and thus should not be treated separately.

Secondly, the USSR, Poland, Byelorussia and Indonesia used reports to the CSW on the status of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories and other evidence to criticise colonial powers and Britain explicitly. Britain's second line of defence was to argue that so-called evidence presented within anti-colonial attacks was inaccurate, and rather that evidence pointed to progress in the colonies. Throughout the 1950s Britain had to systematically prepare to defend itself against charges of poor colonial practice around women's political rights within the CSW, taking action to expose what it felt were inaccuracies and assert that administering authorities were promoting the progressive development of women's rights. But through the arguments around harmful practices, including child marriage, equal pay and education, it argued that Britain's progressive approach was limited by the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies. It was the colonies themselves, Britain argued, which thus determined the speed at which women's advancement could be achieved.

Thirdly, despite its protests that the Convention on the Political Rights of Women did not include a colonial exception, Britain also felt a pressure to demonstrate soft compliance. In the latter part of the decade it argued that many of its colonies were in fact complying with the convention's provisions, which had the unintended effect of bolstering the value and political weight of a convention it had previously deemed unnecessary. Its own practice of seeking to demonstrate de

facto compliance across as many colonies as possible demonstrated that the mere existence of international instruments can hold political power to encourage compliance, even if this could not be enforced.

CHAPTER 4: THE CONSERVATISM OF BRITISH POLICY TOWARD WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE CSW 1965-1970

By the 1960s, a growing consensus began to form in the CSW that beyond the codification of women's rights in law, wider action was needed on the advancement of women within a broader social and economic context. This coincided with a widescale shift in the UN itself in the 1960s as its membership of developing countries dramatically expanded. The emergence of newly independent nations catalysed an increased focus on development aid assistance. In addition, an emerging recognition that women were disproportionately impacted by poverty in the 1960s moved issues of international development assistance, community development and family planning into the purview of the CSW.⁴⁵²

This chapter focuses on the first question in the analytical framework outlined in the *Introduction* to assess the extent to which British policy sought to champion the rights of indigenous women living within its former colonies and other developing countries within international development proposals at the CSW in the 1960s. It also speaks to the third question in the analytical framework by exploring the impact of Britain's position on the very approach adopted. Specifically, it will analyse Britain's responses to the call for a UN unified programme for the advancement of women (later to become the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women) which was mooted by the General Assembly in 1962, and associated questions of

⁴⁵² United Nations, *The UN and the Advancement of women*, pp26-27.

funding. Further, and relating to this programme, it will examine Britain's position around the idea of developing *national* programmes for women's advancement in the mid-1960s. It will then explore how Britain's positions developed in the late 1960s through to the 1970s, including the thematic discussion on "community development" throughout the mid-to late-1960s. Finally, it compares these positions to the instrumental approach evidenced in British colonial policy on indigenous women from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, and the conservatism of British foreign policy on indigenous women at the CSW in the 1950s to early 1960s. While Britain was led by a Conservative Government until 1964, for the majority of the period under review in this chapter, Britain was led by a Labour Government (1964-1970).

The wider historical context is hugely significant. These proposals to further women's advancement through development came at a time when Britain's empire was diminishing and international development was assuming a newly elevated form of influence in former colonies. Yet far from utilising this agenda to encourage newly independent developing countries to promote women's rights, Britain sought to stymie proposals for reform. While Britain declared "women and development" as a stated policy priority for its engagement with the CSW, in the mid-1960s, its conservative positions made it a laggard on the issue. Its reluctance to support a stand-alone UN programme or stand-alone national programmes for women's advancement left little scope to support the initiatives on the table at the CSW. Thus, from the mid to late 1960s, Britain was a constant drag on attempts to engender institutional reforms for women's advancement at the UN, and at national levels. And by the end of the decade it even began to question the need for a UN unified programme for the advancement of women at all.

1. Early UN technical assistance and women's advancement

Starting in the late 1940s, the idea of development assistance began to attract attention within the fledgling UN. In December 1948, the General Assembly adopted two resolutions on international development assistance. Under Resolution 200 (III), co-sponsored by Burma, Chile, Egypt and Peru, the General Assembly appropriated the necessary funds for the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the specialized agencies to, *inter alia*, provide teams of experts to advise governments at their request. The resolution also set out a key principle of sovereignty, that technical assistance should be “designed to meet the needs of the country concerned” and be provided “in the form which that country desires”. In this way, recipient countries were to be in full control of the requests for assistance and the kind of assistance rendered.⁴⁵³

The focus on international development at the UN was, however, most significantly accelerated through US President Harry Truman's speech to the UN in 1949. In this he set out the need for a vast UN programme on development, coordinating its own specialized agencies in developing countries, as a means to foster greater global stability.⁴⁵⁴ Truman argued that the US should share its advanced scientific and technological “techniques” to help less economically developed nations improve the living conditions of their people.⁴⁵⁵ The influence of the Marshall Plan – the major recovery package from the US to Europe in the wake of World War Two - had spurred the approach.⁴⁵⁶ Here, the model of economic development used in the Marshall Plan was believed to be transferable to newly independent countries in Africa and Asia.⁴⁵⁷ As such, aid was conceived

⁴⁵³ Stokke, *The UN and Development*, p46-48.

⁴⁵⁴ Thomas Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij and Richard Jolly, *UN Voices: The struggle for Development and Social Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p187.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p202.

⁴⁵⁶ For further reading on the Marshall Plan see Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Alan Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Katherine Burke, “The Marshall Plan: Filling in Some of the Blanks”, *Contemporary European History*, vol.10, no.2 (2001).

⁴⁵⁷ Tinker, “Introduction”, in *Developing Power*, pxiii.

as key to filling the gaps in capital and knowledge in order to boost developing country economies for “modernisation”. Therefore, the UN focused on the technical assistance aspect of development assistance in its early years, establishing the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance in 1949 to assisting the governments of developing countries in efforts to “modernise”. Rietkirk argues that this flagship programme proved to be the most fully multilateral source of economic aid available to underdeveloped countries during the 1950s.⁴⁵⁸ With Keynesian economics influencing development thinking and its focus on infrastructure investment as a means to sustainable growth, a UN Special Fund also came into operation in 1959, designed to finance projects to “provide systematic and sustained assistance in fields essential to the integrated technical, economic and social development of the less-developed countries”.⁴⁵⁹ Women were hardly mentioned within these models, and if pressed, development economists merely noted that women and children were subsumed under the category of the “household”.⁴⁶⁰

Meanwhile, by the early 1960s, the concerns of newly independent countries joining the UN forged a consensus around a new emphasis on development-related issues.⁴⁶¹ These developing countries preferred the multilateral aid on offer from the UN and its specialised agencies as opposed to bilateral aid which they deemed to come with more “strings attached”.⁴⁶²

While donors in the 1960s continued to support and promote the theory that external investment would lead to economic development that would “trickle down” to the poorest, the launch of the

⁴⁵⁸ Rietkirk, “In pursuit of development: the United Nations, decolonization and development aid, 1949-1961”, p17.

⁴⁵⁹ Stokke, *The UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation*, pp6-30, 40. The establishment of key UN institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (1945), integration of the International Labour Organization into the UN (1946) and establishment of World Health Organisation (1948) were also significant (see p6).

⁴⁶⁰ Tinker, “Introduction”, in *Developing Power*, pxiv.

⁴⁶¹ Reanda, “The Commission on the Status of Women”, p280.

⁴⁶² Amy Sayward, “International Institutions”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p384 which notes Craig Murphy, *The United Nations Development Programme a Better way*.

first development decade at the UN in 1961 also brought donors a new focus of donors on agricultural technologies, on slowing down the birth rate and promoting literacy and health, and on reducing hunger.⁴⁶³ But the declaration for the First Development Decade failed to specifically mention women.⁴⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the assumption that a “development for all” approach would be sufficient for women’s advancement continued to resonate. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) argued that its programme of work in improving the health of all peoples in all countries meant that “Women have benefitted particularly from these activities though general disease control programmes, the establishment and strengthening of public health services and especially maternal and child health programmes”.⁴⁶⁵

However, while the gendered impacts of UN development programmes and agencies continued to go largely unrecognised or to be overstated, the UN organs – including the CSW - began to respond to a growing evidence base that development benefits did not “trickle down” to women disproportionately affected by poverty.⁴⁶⁶ In July 1960, ECOSOC requested the Secretary-General to prepare reports on UN assistance for the advancement of women in developing countries. The General Assembly resolution later that year invited the CSW and ECOSOC to pursue their efforts in advancing the status of women in developing countries and to take appropriate measures that would lead to special assistance by the UN and its specialised agencies.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶³ Tinker, “Introduction”, in *Developing Power*, pxiv; See also Thomas Weiss et al, *UN Voices: The struggle for Development and Social Justice*.

⁴⁶⁴ Tinker, “The making of a field: Advocates, Practitioners and scholars”, p34; UN General Assembly Resolution 1710 (XVI) 19 December 1961, UN Documents.

⁴⁶⁵ Letter from WHO to Director of Human Rights at UN Secretariat (John Humphrey), 4 October 1961, S-0045-0127-14218, UN Archives.

⁴⁶⁶ See Tinker, Introduction, in *Developing Power*; Boutros-Gali, “Introduction”, in *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*; Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p45.

⁴⁶⁷ ECOSOC Resolution 771 H (XXX), 25 July 1960; General Assembly Resolution 1509 (XV), 12 December 1960. Both UN Documents.

According to Margaret Bruce, who served as Head of the UN Secretariat Section on the Status of Women from 1963 to 1973, the CSW had always held to the position that the technical assistance programmes of the entire UN family “could be used to greater advantage to benefit the advancement of women”.⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, in 1962, the CSW considered the question of *how* to further the advancement of women in developing countries with the preliminary report by the Secretary-General on UN Assistance for the Advancement of Women in front of them. The UN Secretariat highlighted to members of the CSW at the 1962 session that the report showed that “while many programmes were of indirect benefit to women as part of the population of a country, there were few which were solely or even mainly intended for them”.⁴⁶⁹

This debate resulted in a resolution to ECOSOC calling on Member States and members of the specialised UN agencies to make “full use of the services already available under the United Nations programmes”, for the purpose of advancing the status of women in developing countries including under the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance. Significantly, ECOSOC agreed this language, which for the first time encouraged Member States and UN agencies to make full use of technical assistance available, by requesting the services of experts, promoting attendance at seminars and taking advantage of fellowships and scholarships. Further, as per language agreed at the CSW that year, ECOSOC requested that the Secretary-General direct his attention to the needs of women in developing countries when planning the various UN programmes of assistance. ECOSOC also “invited” the specialised agencies, including the ILO, FAO, UNESCO, WHO and UNICEF, to strengthen and expand their programmes designed to meet the needs of women and seek new methods to achieve this purpose.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Margaret Bruce, “An Account of United Nations Action to Advance the Status of Women”, p173.

⁴⁶⁹ Head of UN Status of Women Section (Grinbery-Vinaver), CSW Summary Record 19 March – 6 April 1962, E/CN.6/SR.378, UN Documents.

⁴⁷⁰ ECOSOC Resolution 884 E (XXXIV), 16 July 1962, UN Documents; interview with Margaret Snyder in *UN Voices: The struggle for Development and Social Justice*, eds. Thomas Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij and

The General Assembly welcomed this resolution later in 1962 and focused on part of the preambular language of the ECOSOC resolution which deemed it “now appropriate” to develop and coordinate the various programmes of the UN and specialised agencies to advance the status of women. As such, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to study the possibility of providing and developing new resources, specifically aimed at “the initiation and implementation of a unified long-term United Nations programme for the advancement of women”. It also called for the Secretary-General to study the possibility of expanding the assistance for seminars and fellowships for the advancement of women as part of the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights.⁴⁷¹ These studies thus marked a step-change in the engagement of the UN on the issue of women in development, and were significant given the previous assumption by many governments and NGOs that economic and social development would be sufficient to bring about desired changes for women.⁴⁷²

2. Stand-alone vs integrated programmes

The difficult question of whether to focus on mainstreaming within institutions or creating specific bodies to protect women’s rights has been a critical issue for feminism as far back as the eighteenth century, and remained a central challenge in feminist thought.⁴⁷³ This dilemma was at the heart of the debate on the CSW debate on the UN unified programme for the advancement of women.

Richard Jolly, *UN Voices: The struggle for Development and Social Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p246; Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 19 March – 6 April 1962, Resolution VI, E/3606/REV.1, UN Documents.

⁴⁷¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 1777 (XVII), 7 December 1962, UN Documents; Brief for the CSW session 1-20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁴⁷² Tinker, “The making of a field: Advocates, Practitioners and scholars”, p34.

⁴⁷³ See Sari Kouvo, *Making Just Rights? Mainstreaming Women’s Human Rights and a Gender Perspective* (Uppsala: Lustu Forlag, 2004), p104.

In line with the General Assembly resolution initiating the Secretary-General's study on the possibility of a unified long-term programme, Member States wrote to the Secretary-General with their opinions on whether such programme would be best served as (a) a separate programme for the advancement of women or (b) within the framework of existing technical assistance and advisory services programmes.

A stand-alone programme arguably held the potential for more profile; more coherence to a hitherto dispersed set of programmes; and more scope for generating additional, dedicated financial and staff resources. In the written submissions to the Secretary-General in 1963, a number of Member States called for a separate UN programme for women's advancement. The USSR argued that a separate programme was necessary because "it would attract greater attention and could be better organised".⁴⁷⁴ The Ukraine noted that an independent programme was necessary to ensure the "necessary material and organisation resources may be devoted to it".⁴⁷⁵ Austria and Israel argued that the current UN programmes were ill-suited for women's advancement, and that the best way to correct this would be through a separate programme.⁴⁷⁶ In acknowledgement of prevailing power dynamics, Israel also noted that "most women in developing countries are not in a position to avail themselves" of UN programmes.⁴⁷⁷ Argentina stressed that the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights justified the need for a separate programme.⁴⁷⁸

On the other hand, mainstreaming women's advancement into existing UN architecture offered breadth and an opportunity to shift the UN system as a whole, but it also risked perpetuating the

⁴⁷⁴ Letter from USSR Delegation to the Secretary-General, 29 October 1963, S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

⁴⁷⁵ Letter from Ukrainian Delegation to the UN Secretary-General, 29 November 1963, S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

⁴⁷⁶ Letter from Austrian Mission to the Secretary-General, 4 November 1963; Letter from Israeli Mission to UN Secretary-General, 7 January 1964, both in S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

⁴⁷⁷ Letter from Israeli Mission to the Secretary-General, 7 January 1964, S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

⁴⁷⁸ Letter from Argentinian Mission the Secretary-General, 29 November 1963, S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

status quo whereby women's advancement in development programming received little attention or vision. Significantly, some delegations were alert to this problem while supporting a mainstreaming approach as a whole. The Danish submission to the Secretary-General noted that while it preferred the option of integration, it would be "desirable to consider the possibilities of making this framework of existing programmes a somewhat greater effort for the advancement of women so as to ensure their full participation in the process of economic and social development".⁴⁷⁹ The Swedish submission noted that while it favoured an integrated programme, efforts of the specialised agencies to date have been "limited" and evaluations had shown "limited influence on the general attitude towards the so called question of the status of women".⁴⁸⁰ As with Israel (which favoured a stand-alone programme) the Swedes argued that "women do not have the same possibilities as men to avail themselves of what is offered on equal conditions, because their initial position is considerably inferior".⁴⁸¹ The Canadian submission also recognised that while it was desirable for the UN unified programme for the advancement of women to be an "integral part of existing technical assistance" that may well require the "assignment of additional qualified staff to this area of work within the Secretariat",⁴⁸² while Hungary agreed that it would be necessary for the UN to devote a larger portion of its budget for the execution of the programme.⁴⁸³

In contrast – and unsurprisingly - such caveats to the preference for an integrated programme, to reorient the focus or budget of existing UN programmes towards women's advancement, were absent from Britain's position. Britain highlighted only the importance of coordination. In its

⁴⁷⁹ Letter from Danish government to the Secretary-General, 30 September 1963, S-0045-0127-14218, UN Archives.

⁴⁸⁰ Letter from Swedish Government to the Secretary-General, 31 October 1963, S-0045-0127-14218, UN Archives.

⁴⁸¹ UN Secretary-General's Preliminary Report on UN Assistance for the Advancement of women prepared for CSW Session 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/435/Add.1, UN Documents.

⁴⁸² Letter from Canadian Mission to the Secretary-General, 10 October 1963, S-0045-0127-14218, UN Archives.

⁴⁸³ Secretary-General's Preliminary Report on UN Assistance for the Advancement of women prepared for CSW Session 1965 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/435/Add.1, UN Documents.

response in 1963, at this point under a Conservative government, Britain argued that the creation of a separate programme would be “wasteful”:

Rather what is needed is a more regular pattern of consultation and exchange of information between existing Agencies, and between those Agencies and the non-governmental organisations which are contributing increasingly to such development through training, scholarships and opportunities, study visits, publications and through providing facilities for women from rapidly developing countries to participate in conferences and seminars.⁴⁸⁴

Britain further argued that the CSW had already considered at its session in 1962 that there were sufficient facilities and programmes available to provide the assistance needed to further advance the status of women, with many members underlying the need for “co-ordination of the activities of the Specialized Agencies and UNICEF to avoid duplication”.⁴⁸⁵ In making its case, the British submission pointed to UNICEF programmes and “its work is such as to assist, on a very broad front, in improving the lot of women in the developing countries”. It stressed that the “ILO is deeply involved in questions concerning the status of women” and that FAO assistance on “home economics and nutritional education...is of particular benefit to women”. Further, it advanced that UNESCO has been “fairly active in this matter”, (referencing the recent Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education in 1962) and that a “number of reports have been prepared on the access of girls and women to education”. Given the UK’s view that much was already underway within the work of the UN specialised agencies with regards to women, it confidently argued that regular “Inter-Agency consultations” would prove the best to determine the scope and content of long-term planning.⁴⁸⁶

With the aforementioned Secretary-General’s study completed and the set of government positions presented to the 1965 CSW session, the question of UN assistance for the advancement

⁴⁸⁴ Letter from UK Government to the Secretary-General, 16 September 1963, S-0045-0127-14279, UN Archives.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Letter from UK Government to the Secretary-General, 16 September 1963, S-0045-0127-14279, UN Archives.

of women was once again on the agenda. Despite a change in Government in 1964 to the Labour Party, Britain continued to argue that any programme for the advancement of women should be developed *within* existing frameworks as an integrated part of existing technical assistance and advisory services programmes and not as a separate programme. In defending this position, the UK delegate brief for the 1965 session drew attention to submissions in 1962 to the Secretary-General which formed the basis for his study. These had made the political case that had been a majority view, as 16 states, alongside the ILO and WHO, “specially endorse the idea of a programme within the existing framework”.⁴⁸⁷ This was diligently highlighted by the UK delegate (Margaret McKay) at the session.⁴⁸⁸ In this way, Britain was certainly in line with the majority opinion of governments that an integrated programme would be preferable. At the CSW session in 1965 the UAR, Finland, and the Philippines further stressed their preference for an integrated programme.⁴⁸⁹ But as in its submission to the Secretary-General’s report, Britain failed to draw the broader caveats to improved integration (ie to reorient the focus or budget of existing UN programmes) in its interventions at the CSW session. Its genuine desire for integration was thus questionable.

Furthermore, the idea that the two options of a stand-alone or integrated UN unified programme for the advancement of women were mutually exclusive was false, given that a commitment could be made for both a stand-alone programme and more effective mainstreaming across existing UN architecture. Indeed the submission by Afghanistan to the Secretary-General in 1962 noted that a programme for the advancement of women could be part of existing UN programmes if there was

⁴⁸⁷ Final Brief for the CSW session 1 - 20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁴⁸⁸ UK delegate (McKay), CSW Summary Records 1- 20 March 1965, E/CN.6/SR.419, UN Documents.

⁴⁸⁹ Delegates for UAR (Hussein), Finish delegate (Sipilä), and the Philippines (Benitez), CSW Summary Records 1 - 20 March 1965, E/CN.6/SR.419, UN Documents.

adequate coordination, and the question of an independent body for the advancement of women could also be considered - albeit at a later stage.⁴⁹⁰

NGOs were also invited to make submissions to the Secretary-General's report, and it was here that two of the major international women's rights organisations of the period – the International Council of Women (ICW) and International Federation of University Women (IFUW) – called for both a separate *and* integrated programme.⁴⁹¹ The ICW argued that both a stand-alone *and* integrated programme would be necessary for the advancement of women in developing countries in addition to more earmarked resources for long-term programmes for the advancement of women.⁴⁹² Britain's point on improved co-ordination need not have ruled out an additional stand-alone programme, particularly given the points raised by the IFUW, that the current system led to women's interests being side-lined.⁴⁹³ Moreover, legal scholar Laura Reanda, who has reviewed the experience of the CSW from 1949 to the early 1990s, argues that both strategies are needed “in order to deal with a problem as deep-rooted and complex” as gender inequality:

There is a crying need both for taking women fully into account in all global policy-making, and for gender-specific programmes to redress existing situations of discrimination.⁴⁹⁴

Indeed such a twin-track approach of integration alongside stand-alone programming is widely accepted as the best means to achieve gender equality within the development sector today.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ Letter from Mission of Afghanistan to the Secretary-General, 27 August 1962, S-0045-0127-14218, UN Archives.

⁴⁹¹ Both these organisations had branches in Britain.

⁴⁹² Final Brief for the CSW session 1 - 20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁴⁹³ UN Secretary-General's Preliminary Report on UN Assistance for the Advancement of women prepared for CSW Session 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/435/Add.1, UN Documents.

⁴⁹⁴ Reanda, “The Commission on the Status of Women”, pp302-303.

⁴⁹⁵ Caroline Sweetman, “Introduction”, *Gender and Development*, vol.20, no.3 (2012), p396.

Importantly, Britain's position to integrate the proposed UN programme within exiting UN programmes was not promulgated from a perspective of maximum impact for women's advancement. Rather, it was rooted in a broader ideology around the autonomy of Member States in determining their own development priorities. The UK delegate's brief noted that the delegation should take care "to emphasise simultaneously the importance we attach to the advancement of women in the developing countries and our belief that international technical assistance funds should be used to promote this cause only if it is the wish of individual developing countries that their share should be spent in this way".⁴⁹⁶ Such defence had a powerful resonance in an era of newfound independence for former colonies. Ghana argued at the 1965 CSW session that it welcomed technical assistance for its seven-year development plan "provided no strings were attached, for its hard-won freedom must be jealously guarded".⁴⁹⁷

As such, Britain deliberately sought to appear supportive of women's advancement in the development field and the idea of an international programme, while blocking proposals intended to aid a structural shift within the UN system toward this end. As with its previous arguments to limit the application of international women's rights frameworks in the British colonies in the 1950s, Britain again made its points about state autonomy on development priorities under the guise of national sovereignty. Significantly, this contrasted with the approaches of other governments making the case for integration of efficacy. The Australian government argued that it would be better to integrate a programme on the advancement of women since a stand-alone programme risked accelerating women's advancement "to such an extent that the community would not be able to adjust to the rapid changes" imposed upon it.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Final Brief for the CSW session 1 - 20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁴⁹⁷ Ghanaian delegate (Jiagge), CSW Summary Records 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/SR.419, UN Documents.

⁴⁹⁸ Letter from Australian Mission to the Secretary-General, 10 January 1964, S-0045-0127-14218, UN Archives.

3. Questionnaire on the role of women in development

By the mid 1960s, under the new Labour Government, Britain started to nominally take more interest in the question of women in development at the CSW. Between the 1965 and 1966 CSW sessions, Britain reviewed its policy towards the CSW generally. It concluded that historically there had been “too exclusive attention to the questions of civil and political rights” within the CSW and that it could “profitably devote more of its time to economic and social questions”.⁴⁹⁹ In this vein, Britain argued specifically that it would further be more “in tune with the trend of United Nations activity” for the CSW to focus on the “role of women in development”. Rather than a total departure, Britain argued that this would require a change of emphasis to elevate the items on the agenda connected with the “role of women in development and economic and social life in general” to the forefront on the CSW’s work.⁵⁰⁰ One such light-touch area, as identified within the UK delegate brief, was to encourage more seminars on the role of women in economic and social fields under the programme on Advisory Services in the Field of Human Rights.⁵⁰¹ The advisory services programme had been utilised by the CSW throughout the 1950s and 1960s to collaborate with women’s rights organisations on issues such as women’s participation in public life.⁵⁰²

Yet while it appeared that the issue of women in development seemed to be on the cusp of gaining a new champion at the CSW, with British policy calling for a shift in gear at the CSW towards women in development in this period, in reality, Britain continued to oppose the idea of a stand-

⁴⁹⁹ Brief for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, IOC (66) 18, compiled 17 Feb 1966, UN S17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Russo, “Universalism, Difference and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1946-1975”, p112.

alone UN programme for the advancement of women. For example, UK delegate brief for the CSW in 1966 recognised that the question of a unified long-term programme would be “one of the most important items on the Commission’s agenda for the next few years” in which Britain wished “to make a full and positive contribution”. But Britain also wanted to ensure that the programme was “put on the right lines from the beginning”.⁵⁰³ Those “right lines” remained as before: that the UN unified programme for the advancement of women should be developed within the existing technical and advisory services programmes and that the amount spent on technical assistance on women in development “must depend upon the degree of importance which the developing countries attach to projects of interest to women, in comparison with that which they attach to other technical assistance projects”.⁵⁰⁴ Thus, far from championing efforts to reinforce or elevate the emphasis on women’s advancement within UN development programmes, Britain merely sought to reinforce the notion that it was for developing countries to decide if this was a priority in relation to other development needs.

As such, rather than promoting the idea of a stand-alone programme on women’s advancement, or ways to reorientate a focus on women’s advancement within existing UN architecture, Britain chose to ensure a less radical approach was adopted by supporting the idea of a questionnaire to address the lack of information on women in development. The idea of a questionnaire had earlier been set out in the Secretary-General’s preliminary report in 1965.⁵⁰⁵ The brief for the UK delegate at the 1966 CSW session noted that Britain had “earlier considered whether we should table a resolution in the Commission calling for a questionnaire on this subject and future sessions”, and that the Secretary-General’s study provided the context in which to propose this. Indeed, the

⁵⁰³ Addendum, Final Brief for 1966 CSW Session IOC (66), 17 February, 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Secretary-General’s Preliminary Report on UN Assistance for the Advancement of women prepared for CSW Session 1 - 20 March 1965, E/CN.6/435/Add.1, UN Documents.

Secretary-General had suggested that governments might be invited to “submit reports on the needs and problems of women in relation to economic and social development, and on the extent to which women are playing a part in this field and benefitting from the measures already taken” for a study by the CSW.⁵⁰⁶

It was in this vein of further research that the 1966 UK delegate brief stated that the main objective of Britain’s draft resolution was to ascertain the views of governments on the “specific spheres of national activity to which women can best contribute, the areas of the economy in which their services are most needed, the problems encountered in this field and possible ways of surmounting these problems”. As such, it urged that the delegation should stress that this would serve to provide the basic information for the UN unified programme for the advancement of women. Secondly, the delegation was to stress that the questionnaire would “encourage” countries in receipt of technical assistance “to consider the role of women in development and facilitate decisions on the priority to be accorded for projects of interest to women” in requesting technical assistance from UNDP.⁵⁰⁷ In this way, Britain deemed the act of filling in a questionnaire was the way to solve the low number of requests for technical assistance programmes for the advancement of women. This was in keeping with the precedent of the CSW, which had sought from its first meetings to obtain information on the status of women through questionnaires, research and assessments.⁵⁰⁸ Yet in reality, this fell short of any concrete support for women’s advancement within international development.

⁵⁰⁶ Secretary-General report for the CSW Session 21 February – 11 March 1966, titled “UN Assistance for the Advancement of Women”, E/CN.6/450/Add.2, UN Documents; Letter from UK Mission in New York with draft report from UNSG, 17311/8, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives; Addendum, Final Brief for 1966 CSW Session IOC (66), 17 February, 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵⁰⁷ Addendum, Final Brief for 1966 CSW Session IOC (66), 17 February, 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵⁰⁸ Russo, “Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission the Status of Women, 1946-1975”, p71.

This conservative position on the method of achieving gender mainstreaming in the UN's development assistance work (ie a questionnaire as opposed to a stand-alone programme or boosts to an integrated approach), continued the *global* colonial legacy of conservatism on women's rights Britain had already shown at the CSW around the conventions on women's political rights and marriage practices (see Chapters One and Two). Further, Britain also utilised instrumentalist language around women's advancement, echoing Britain's instrumental approach to women's welfare as part of its colonial policy in the early twentieth century. Specifically, Britain's proposed resolution for the questionnaire on the "role of women in development" failed to champion a women's rights approach: this was not about looking at how development programmes furthered women's rights but about the role women could "play in economic and social development of their countries" and an assessment of how they can "best contribute" to spheres of national activity. As such Britain's choice of language diminished women's place in the development agenda, with the advancement of national development – rather than women's rights - as the end goal.

4. Funding for women's advancement in development

Funding marked another area in which Britain would again demonstrate its conservatism around women in development during the CSW discussions. The Secretary-General's 1965 preliminary study of UN assistance for the advancement of women not only asked whether a UN unified programme for the advancement of women should be stand-alone or integrated, but also the possibility of providing "new resources" for such a programme. It noted that while the regular programmes of technical assistance and advisory services were financed under the regular budget of the UN, the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (which became UNDP in 1965)

relied on voluntary contributions from governments.⁵⁰⁹ Funds-in-trust programmes offered another route by which governments or NGOs could deposit funds with the UN to be earmarked for a specific project.⁵¹⁰

Britain's call for a UN unified programme for the advancement of women to be integrated within existing UN architecture was intertwined with a resistance to the suggestion of additional funds for assistance activities for women. In its submission to the Secretary-General's report in 1962, Britain argued against the idea of resources being earmarked for women's advancement either from the regular UN budget or via voluntary contributions to the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance:

In relation to the United Nations technical assistance activities, 'New Resources', can only be in the form of additional contributions to the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, or perhaps UNICEF, and Her Majesty's Government would be opposed to any earmarking of a part of the contributions to these funds for this or any other specific purpose. There can be no question of an increased appropriation from the regular budget of the United Nations for this purpose.⁵¹¹

As the Foreign Office further developed its position, it reached out to the newly created Ministry of Overseas Development in 1966, where civil servant advisors agreed that there "should not be a separate voluntary fund for the advancement of women but that governments should submit their requests for assistance for women as part of their general development programmes".⁵¹² The UK held this view despite the Secretary-General's report highlighting that governments requesting assistance under the UN technical cooperation programmes are "frequently forced to make a most

⁵⁰⁹ UN Secretary-General's Preliminary Report on UN Assistance for the Advancement of women prepared for CSW Session 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/435/Add.1, UN Documents.

⁵¹⁰ Pamphlet on "Resources Available to Member States for the Advancement of Women", (circa 1966 following request of the CSW at its session in 1965), S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

⁵¹¹ Letter from UK Government to the Secretary-General, 16 September 1963, S-0045-0127-14279, UN Archives.

⁵¹² Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer) to Foreign Office (A. Coles), 15 Feb 1966, UNS17311/8, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

difficult choice among priorities” resulting in the needs of women being overlooked and women’s contribution to economic and social development ignored.⁵¹³ Indeed, UNESCO noted that where resources are scarce, and competition becomes an important factor, “authorities often have to make a heart-rending choice between the various projects for which they desire assistance. In the ensuing competition, activities of interest to women are often the losers”.⁵¹⁴

However, while Britain was against the idea of voluntary contributions in general at the UN, official policy softened to the extent that the delegation was instructed that it could vote in favour of a resolution around this point if that seemed to be the general wish, without giving an indication that Britain would contribute, “since we have no funds available”.⁵¹⁵ Thus, Britain’s proclaimed prioritisation of women’s role in development was not something that it felt it needed to resource.

Britain’s reluctance to commit resources for women’s advancement in international development was once again evidenced when it tabled the resolution for the questionnaire at the 1966 CSW session. Britain had rallied the support of a number of co-sponsors, including Finland, France, Guinea, Hungary, Iran, Japan, Philippines, UAR, and even the USSR. The support of these co-sponsors had been agreed on the basis that in seeking the views of governments and NGOs on the role which women can play in economic and social development, the questionnaire should also seek their views on the kinds of assistance required to surmount the problems facing women in this regard.⁵¹⁶ Far from this wording demonstrating Britain’s interest in effective aid interventions,

⁵¹³ Secretary-General report, “UN Assistance for the Advancement of Women”, prepared for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/450/Add.2, UN Documents.

⁵¹⁴ Pamphlet on ‘Resources Available to Member States for the Advancement of Women’, (circa 1966 following request of the CSW at its session in 1965), S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

⁵¹⁵ Addendum, Final Brief for 1966 CSW Session IOC (66), 17 February, 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵¹⁶ Draft Resolution for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, “Requests the Secretary-General...to communicate to governments and non-governmental organizations in consultative status a questionnaire seeking their views on the role which women can play in the economic and social development of their countries, the

the UK delegation noted internally that they had agreed to add this point on assistance in order to avoid more “obnoxious” wording being voted through by developing countries.⁵¹⁷ This revealing language signifies the lack of motivation behind Britain’s interest in women’s advancement in international development and the way in which the UK Mission in New York perceived the threat of having to put resources into this agenda.

Nevertheless, by now developing countries held enough power to put pressure on potential donor countries like Britain. This was demonstrated at the 1966 CSW session as Ghana pushed the idea of establishing a special fund-in-trust arrangement or fund with earmarked resources for the advancement of women, and the need for loans to help recipient governments to meet counterpart costs of UN technical assistance.⁵¹⁸ A draft resolution for ECOSOC was agreed to this end which asked the Secretary-General to initiate preliminary studies on the possibility of a fund and a scheme of loans to governments to assist national programmes for the advancement of women.⁵¹⁹ Interestingly, where Britain felt it needed to stop the idea of a stand-alone programme, its resistance to a stand-alone voluntary fund was much softer. This is not surprising since under a voluntary fund Britain would not be forced to contribute resources.⁵²⁰ The UK delegate (Tessa Solesby) did play a role, however, in inserting language that these studies would be “preliminary” noting that “it would be premature at that stage, to ask the Secretary-General to make a detailed

degrees of priority which should be given to the contribution of women to the various areas of national economic and social development, the problems encountered in those areas, possible ways of surmounting them, and the kind of assistance they might require in doing this”, E/CN.6/L.472, UN Documents.

⁵¹⁷ UK Delegate report of the 19th session of the CSW session 21 February – 11 March, compiled 4 April 1966 by UK alternate Tessa Solesby, US17311/34, FO 371/189952, UK National Archives.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid; Summary Records of the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/SR.450, UN Documents.

⁵¹⁹ Letter from Foreign Office (A. Coles) to Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer), 3 May 1966, US17311/37, FO 371/189952, UK National Archives.

⁵²⁰ For more on financing see Pamphlet on ‘Resources Available to Member States for the Advancement of Women’, (circa 1966 following request of the CSW at its session in 1965), S-0045-0127-14219, UN Archives.

study of the possibility of establishing a voluntary fund, since the information provided by seminars and by replies from Governments to questionnaires would not be available until 1967”.⁵²¹

Therefore, while the UK had determined that its policy priority at the CSW in the mid-1960s would promote a focus on the “role of women in development”, it did so in very limited ways. Britain’s position was to argue against a stand-alone UN programme for women’s advancement. Rather it sought to rely on mainstreaming women’s advancement into UN programming and general requests from governments for technical assistance, arguing that a questionnaire was necessary before any programme could be considered and also that this would be a sufficient tool to nudge the requesting governments to consider this as a priority issue. As such, Britain’s resistance to enhancing UN architecture to incentivise countries to promote women’s advancement through the UN’s technical assistance programme held the potential to do more to mainstream women *out* of development programmes, than mainstream them *into* development programmes. Similar to the arguments of sovereignty Britain had invoked in order to justify why it would not sign its colonies up to conventions on women’s rights without their consent, Britain again sought to defer to the priorities of countries requesting assistance, to determine if women’s advancement would be an area of technical support. While Britain did not take such an oppositional line to the establishment of a voluntary fund, it was clear that it was not something it wished to promote or would contribute to. With such weak enthusiasm for promoting gender within UN development mechanisms, Britain would also show little interest in the idea of the CSW promoting gender equality at national level.

⁵²¹ UK delegate (Solesby who acted as an alternate to McKay), CSW Summary Records 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/SR.458, UN Documents.

5. National programmes for the advancement of women

The question of a potential UN unified programme for the advancement of women and associated fund at the UN was accompanied by the question of national level programmes for the advancement of women. The Secretary-General's 1966 study on UN assistance for the advancement of women noted that in many countries, precise information was lacking regarding the needs and problems of women in relation to the objectives set forth in UN instruments and with regard to the relationship of these needs and problems to national development. Consequently, in addition to a UN unified programme for the advancement of women, the Secretary-General suggested that it might be helpful to also "encourage Governments, where appropriate, to develop an approach to national planning for women dynamically related to the social and economic needs of societies".⁵²² Going a step further, the Secretary-General suggested that "...each Member State might be invited to formulate, if possible before the end of 1967, its own long-term programme for the advancement of women in countries and territories under its jurisdiction".⁵²³ It is important to recognise that the value of national plans went beyond encouraging members of the UN to think through how to promote women's advancement nationally. The Secretary-General argued that such national plans would help to determine the scope of the unified programme for the advancement of women and the types of assistance required within the UN system if resources were available.⁵²⁴

The question of developing a national long-term programme held potential relevance for British policy objectives on three fronts in 1966. Firstly, as a domestic framework for women's advancement both in the UK and throughout the remainder of its much-diminished empire.

⁵²² Secretary-General report, 'UN Assistance for the Advancement of Women', prepared for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/450/Add.2, UN Documents.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

Secondly, as a way of supporting newly emerging independent countries to promote women's rights as a national priority. Finally, as a means to support the refinement of the scope of the unified programme for women's advancement at the UN level.

The majority of the Foreign Office's early analysis centred on the issue of a domestic framework, and the risks this posed for Britain's compliance on a domestic basis. While the UK delegate brief for the 1966 session noted that Britain was still developing its policy position on the idea of national women's programmes, Edith Mercer, an official specialising in education at the Ministry of Overseas Development, flagged the potential of the initiative in the advancement of women in developing countries. Specifically, she highlighted to the Foreign Office that such initiative, if considered within the framework of national economic and social development, could encourage the "adequate deployment" of women in developing countries, noting that "Only in this way will the subject [of women's advancement] achieve reality"⁵²⁵, thus nodding to women's advancement as a legitimate objective.

But with Britain's position on national programmes still under review as the CSW convened for its session in 1966, Britain proposed idea of a questionnaire on the UN unified programme for the advancement of women offered a convenient means to stall. The UK delegate was to argue that the proposed questionnaire, in line with the Secretary-General's suggestion to explore needs and

⁵²⁵ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer) to FO (A. Coles), 15 Feb 1966, UNS17311/8, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

problems of women in relation to economic and social development⁵²⁶, would also be useful for the formulation of national programmes for women's advancement.⁵²⁷

As such, the resolution which Britain proposed at the session on a questionnaire had been drafted to “*invite* Member Governments to consider the desirability of formulating” long-term plans for the advancement of women. It was on this issue that Ghana, one of Britain's co-sponsors, demanded stronger language to *establish* long term plans. The delegate representing Ghana argued that in fact, countries could refuse to respond to the invitation to establish such national programmes if they were not necessary – but that for developing countries, this was highly important:

the unified long-term programme was to be initiated in 1968, it was important for countries to begin to draw up their own long-term programmes as soon as possible. Although the need for such programme varied from one country to another...it was essential to lose as little time as possible, particularly in the developing countries⁵²⁸

At the 1966 CSW session, Ghana withdrew as a co-sponsor of Britain's resolution in order to formally propose this amendment, which was eventually passed by the CSW, significantly with Britain abstaining. The draft resolution on the questionnaire and the call on governments to establish national long-term programmes for the advancement of women was then adopted unanimously,⁵²⁹ and agreed at the ECOSOC later that year.⁵³⁰ Once again, Britain had sought a more conservative position around compelling governments to produce such plans, but this

⁵²⁶ UN Secretary-General, “Preliminary Report on UN Assistance for the Advancement of women” prepared for CSW Session 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/435/Add.1, UN Documents; Addendum, Final Brief for 1966 CSW Session IOC (66), 17 February, 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵²⁷ Addendum, Final Brief for 1966 CSW Session IOC (66), 17 February 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵²⁸ Ghanaian delegate (Jiagge), CSW Summary Records 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/SR.457, UN Documents.

⁵²⁹ UK Delegate report of the CSW 21 February – 11 March 1966, compiled 4 April by UK alternate Tessa Solesby 1966, US17311/34, FO 371/189952, UK National Archives.

⁵³⁰ ECOSOC Resolution 1133 (XLI), 26 July 1966, accessed in UNS 17311/640, FO 371/189953, UK National Archives.

conservatism was defeated by Ghana's more proactive position. Britain, however, would continue its conservative approach on the question of a UN programme in the years to follow.

6. Resisting initiatives for women's advancement in development 1967-1968

In line with its conservative approach to UN reform on women's rights in development from the mid-1960s, Britain continued to prioritise the questionnaire at the 1967 CSW session "on the role which women can play in the economic and social development of their countries" (agreed at the previous year's session), as *the* means of moving forward. As such it urged other Member States to support the importance of the questionnaire in their statements.⁵³¹ The UK delegate (Lena Jeger) told delegates that she believed the questionnaire would draw governments' "attention to the need to widen the role of women in economic and social development."⁵³²

The CSW returned in 1967 to the issue of national long-term programmes for the advancement of women. A draft resolution for ECOSOC, sponsored by China, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, Netherlands and the US, situated these national programmes "within the context of overall national development plans".⁵³³ In the briefing for the ECOSOC session later that year, the Foreign Office noted its dissatisfaction. This was because of a perceived risk that such wording could lend support to the general idea of stand-alone programmes for women's advancement:

Our provisional view is that a separate programme for the advancement of women is not needed and that the task of promoting women's interests should be regarded as part and parcel of the promotion of interests of the community as a whole.⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ Report of Commission on the Status of Women 13 Feb – March 6 1967, compiled by Barbara Richards, UK Mission in New York, FCO 61/259, UK National Archives.

⁵³² UK delegate (Jeger), CSW Summary Records 13 Feb – March 6 1967, E/CN.6/SR.486, UN Documents.

⁵³³ Final UK briefing for 42nd ECOSOC session, 1 May 1967, FCO 61/259, UK National Archives.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

Thus much like Britain's resistance to a stand-alone programme at the UN level on women's advancement, its position began to harden around national programmes to ensure that efforts to promote the advancement of women would merely be *part of* wider national programmes. Far from interpreting this as an opportunity to encourage developing countries to establish stand-alone plans which would clearly prioritise women's interests, and provide examples for UN technical assistance under the UN unified programme for the advancement of women, they were once again seeking to mainstream this issue instead.⁵³⁵

Furthermore, it was within the context of this draft resolution which called for the establishment of national long-term plans for the advancement of women, that Britain unequivocally showed its resistance to any imperative to developing countries to prioritise this issue when it came to requests for UN aid. Part of this draft resolution recommended that Member States themselves *accord* "greater priority to projects and programmes directed towards the advancement of women in submitting requests for technical assistance".⁵³⁶ Such an initiative underscored the role the CSW could play in utilising the UN to encourage developing countries to promote women's rights. Yet Britain opposed this recommendation – abstaining in the CSW vote and instructing the UK delegate to ECOSOC to again abstain in the vote, repeating the familiar point on sovereignty that the UK is "not prepared to endorse a proposition which enjoins developing countries to accord greater priority to...programmes directed towards the advancement of women" when submitting requests to the UN for technical assistance since "priorities are for them to determine".⁵³⁷ Clearly unwilling to set a precedent that would put women's advancement at the centre of development programming, the UK delegate's brief further added that "it would be very difficult to maintain,

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

as a general rule, that projects for the advancement of women are more urgent or important than other development projects.”⁵³⁸ Women’s advancement, it appeared, was not deemed by Britain as a development priority at all.

Moreover, Britain was successful in weakening the final agreed language when the resolution came before ECOSOC later that year. Rather than, “according” greater programmes directed towards the advancement of women within the submission of requests for technical assistance, it merely called for their “inclusion”.⁵³⁹ Thus the insincerity of Britain’s claim to support women’s role in development was once again exposed by the way the UK delegate opposed a recommendation calling on developing countries to prioritise women’s advancement within their requests to the UN for technical assistance.

Therefore by 1968, Britain’s general resistance to a structural shift towards women’s advancement within development left little scope for Britain to actually push its so-called priority on women’s role in development at the CSW. Rather it continued to confine its engagement on this issue to analysing responses to the Secretary-General’s questionnaire on the role of women in development. Britain claimed this would be important to “establish more precisely the needs of individual countries in this field before launching” a UN unified programme for the advancement of women.⁵⁴⁰

Yet, despite this stalling tactic, Britain had not abandoned the idea of the programme itself. Indeed Britain felt that 1968 – Human Rights Year – provided the “best psychological moment” for

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 13 February - 6 March 1967, E/4365, UN Documents.

⁵⁴⁰ UK delegate brief to the 1968 CSW session, compiled 24 January 1968, 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

launching the UN unified programme for the advancement of women. Since the UN Secretariat had not sent out the questionnaire until August 1967, the Foreign Office feared “it may well be the case that the Commission will have few replies before it when it comes to consider this matter” at the 1968 CSW session. As such it suggested establishing an outline for the programme on the basis of information available. The UK delegate’s brief to the 1968 CSW session also suggested that the delegation call for an annual item on “The role of women in development” as a means of promoting a change in emphasis in the CSW’s work towards economic and social rights and away from civil and political rights.

So whilst Britain leant on the questionnaire and annual agenda item as its main contributions to this issue at the CSW in 1968, it continued to stress the sovereignty line that “the amount spent on technical assistance in this field must depend upon the degree of importance which the developing countries attach to projects of interest to women” in comparison to other technical assistance projects.⁵⁴¹ As only 26 governments had provided responses to the questionnaire for consideration (showing little appetite among governments to take the matter seriously), Britain sponsored a resolution inviting “Governments and non-governmental organizations which have not so far done so, to send their replies to the Secretary-General as soon as possible” well in advance of the session in 1969.

With regard to the issue of development aid at the UN, respect for the sovereignty of governments requesting assistance was a key principle developed within the UN Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance⁵⁴². Stokke has argued that “over and over again, UN bodies emphasized the sovereignty of recipient governments and the principle of non-interference as the guiding norms

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Stokke, *The UN and Development*, p128.

of UN technical assistance” as a means of preventing neo-colonial interference.⁵⁴³ But, however strongly Britain claimed to support this principle, it did not apply it equally in all areas. By way of comparison with other areas, Britain played a more active role in pushing the family planning agenda at the CSW at the time. Although the 1968 UK delegate brief noted that developing countries should make the initial running on family planning debates, it also urged that Britain should “give them firm support” since “it is our object to see the United Nations, the WHO and UNICEF, in particular, as well as the FAO and UNESCO and ILO pursue sound, effective programmes in this field”. On family planning, Britain wanted to support “active policies” at the UN. Points about cultural relativism in developing countries were noted in terms of the efficacy of the arguments Britain should employ. A warning was sounded that the delegation should be careful to not provoke a “hostile reaction” from developing countries if they “are made to feel that the developed countries are thrusting population control upon them”.⁵⁴⁴

Indeed, Britain established a Population Bureau within the Ministry of Overseas Development to provide a centre for both a knowledge base and for the promotion of family planning in developing countries, including increasing the availability of experts to assist in with population programmes in developing countries.⁵⁴⁵ Further, Britain’s position at the UN was to contribute resources to the UN Trust Fund on population, thus earmarking resources for family planning within its aid programme.⁵⁴⁶ This example demonstrates that Britain’s deference to the principle of sovereignty as an argument not to prioritise women’s advancement within development assistance was not applied consistently across issues. Thus, women’s advancement within development assistance was clearly not a priority for Britain. Moreover, Britain’s interest in acting on family planning was

⁵⁴³ Ibid, p116.

⁵⁴⁴ UK delegate brief to the 1968 CSW session 24 January 1968, 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

⁵⁴⁵ UK Response to UNSG on Questionnaire on the Status of women and family planning, 4 February 1969, S-0445-0131-14225, UN Archives.

⁵⁴⁶ UK delegate brief to the 1968 CSW session, compiled 24 January 1968, File 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

framed within the 1968 CSW UK delegate's brief in terms of dealing with the "world population problem".⁵⁴⁷ Just as with Britain's instrumental framing of "women's role in development", British interest in family planning was understood in terms of what this could do for economies and societies, not the importance of this issue for the sake of women's own rights and opportunities.⁵⁴⁸

Clearly, Britain's commitment to respecting sovereignty could be bypassed on an issue which was deemed to be a long-term threat to British interests. This provides an explanation as to why Britain failed to demonstrate progressive leadership on the issue of the unified long-term programme for women at the UN while concurrently supporting family planning initiatives: the fundamental rights of women in and of themselves were not the priority.⁵⁴⁹ Opposing a stand-alone UN development programme on women's advancement; opposing contributing to a stand-alone voluntary fund; stalling on the idea of any such stand-alone women's advancement programmes at the national level; and resisting attempts to even encourage the prioritisation of women's advancement as part of country requests for UN technical assistance meant that Britain was anything but a champion of initiatives for women in development at the CSW. The questionnaire on the role of women in development was thus Britain's only contribution to this effort.

7. Britain's interest in community development discussions at the CSW 1967-1969

Next, Britain utilised the debates on community development at the CSW to oppose the provision of stand-alone programmes on women's advancement in development. The CSW's interest in a

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ The legacy of white settler governance in seeking to limit population growth may also have played a role in the appeal of family planning policies. For example on Family planning policies in Southern Rhodesia see Josiah Brownell, *The Collapse of Rhodesia, Population Demographics and the Politics of Race* (London: I.B.Touris, 2011), p57.

⁵⁴⁹ UK delegate brief to the 1968 CSW session, compiled 24 January 1968, 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

UN unified programme for the advancement of women from the mid to late 1960s, had coincided with interest in the CSW on community development. This was to be considered as one of the practical means by which national long-term programmes for the advancement of women could be realised.⁵⁵⁰ In 1965, the CSW adopted a resolution which noted the “great importance of community development in stimulating the advancement of women” and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on “the participation of women in community development and the possibility of increasing the scope and content of their contribution” within such programmes.⁵⁵¹ This therefore provides another site within the CSW to analyse the degree and nature of Britain’s self-identified commitment to women’s advancement in international development.

A preliminary version of the Secretary-General’s report, prepared by the Status of Women section, was circulated for the 1967 CSW session. The Secretary General’s report outlined that the goals of community development were twofold: the comprehensive improvement of communities; and the integration of the development of communities with national development. The report drew on ECOSOC’s definition of “community development” from a decade earlier as a “process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities” in addition to integrating these communities “into the life of the nation”.⁵⁵² The report explained that this process included two elements. Firstly the participation of people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living “with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative”.⁵⁵³ Secondly, the provision of technical

⁵⁵⁰ Secretary-General report for the CSW session 13 February - 6 March 1967, E/CN.6/473, UN Documents.

⁵⁵¹ Resolution 6 (XVIII) Commission on the Status of Women, CSW session 1 - 20 March 1965, E/4025, UN Documents.

⁵⁵² Full ECOSOC 1956 definition of Community Development: “the process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation, and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress” in Secretary-General report for the CSW session 13 February - 6 March 1967, E/CN.6/473, UN Documents.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

and other services in ways which “encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help”.⁵⁵⁴ In this way, programmes defined under the community development umbrella could both be voluntary-based initiatives by individuals and communities, or programmes provided by governments in terms of the services and facilities needed locally.

Importantly, the report noted that the concept of “community development” did not originate at the UN, acknowledging that Britain was one of several countries which had pioneered in the field under its “mass education” programmes in Asia and Africa in the 1940s.⁵⁵⁵ Supporting community development – formerly known as mass or community education - had become a popular theme within British welfare circles and among the Mandates Commission at the League of Nations. It was adopted as part of British colonial policy in the 1930s. Under this model “agents” would help make aid interventions more permanent through giving instruction in areas such as farming, marketing of crops, health, hygiene and sanitation. A variety of media were also identified to assist in this community education, including radio, cinemas installed in local village schools, press pamphlets and posters.⁵⁵⁶ In 1944, the Colonial Office’s Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical Dependencies (established in 1923) published a report titled *Mass Education in African Society*, giving education a central role in engendering broader advances in social welfare, stating that planning must take place for the social, political and economic progress of colonial peoples and mass education should play a leading part in assisting this progress. The report stressed the importance of educating the community as a whole though the use of mass

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, which references “Community Development: The British Contribution” (London, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office 1962, pp3-9). For more background on community development see; Joanna Lewis, *Empire State Building: War and Welfare in Kenya 1925-52* (Oxford; James Curry, 2000), pp312-319.

⁵⁵⁶ Lewis, “Tropical East Ends and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives”, p45; John Holford, “Mass Education and Community Development in the British Colonies 1940-1960, A study in the politics of community education”, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol.7, no.3 (1988), pp163-183.

education officers such as voluntary teachers, teachers' associations, official and unofficial agencies, government departments, churches, cooperatives and trade unions.⁵⁵⁷

It was as a result of this push for community development in British colonial policy in the 1930s, and following the proactive interest of the Colonial Office in the “transformatory potential” of women, that women were singled out as a means to achieving broad social gains.⁵⁵⁸ While initially considered under the purview of education (with few specifics on how this would be achieved) other areas began to place emphasis on the role of women in social transformation within the field of community development. A report on nutrition in 1939 advocated radio, cinema and the gramophone as new technologies for the instruction of domestic science to women as well as the establishment of women's groups as a means to reach women on issues such as infant welfare.⁵⁵⁹

Despite a legacy of British colonial policy interest in, albeit instrumentally, supporting women in community development, Britain failed to pursue women in development agenda at the CSW with any vigour. In 1967 the CSW agreed a request to the Secretary-General for additional information from governments regarding specific programmes in the field of community development “in which women play an effective role”. The Foreign Office wrote to the Ministry for Overseas Development that the principle of even having to provide information on the matter “runs somewhat counter to our general policy which is of course that women can and should (as they do) play an effective role in all aspects of community development in their capacity as citizens rather than because they happen to belong to one particular sex”. Despite this however, the

⁵⁵⁷ Holford, “Mass Education and Community Development in the British Colonies 1940-1960: A study in the politics of community education”, pp163-183, which notes Colonial. No 186 (1944) *Mass Education in African Society*.

⁵⁵⁸ Lewis, “Tropical East Ends and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives”, p44; Lewis, *Empire State Building: War and Welfare in Kenya*, pp52-53.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid p46 which notes *Nutrition in the Colonial Empire* (Cmd. 6050, 1939).

Foreign Office reluctantly acknowledged that there are “obviously areas in the community development field in which women are especially qualified to play a particularly effective role”.⁵⁶⁰

In a more progressive effort, Mercer, an official at the Ministry of Overseas Development, responded to the Foreign Office seeking to elevate the emphasis that British community development programmes had placed on women:

In Community Development programmes with which the United Kingdom has been associated in developing countries great importance has always been attached to the participation of women, who have frequently been both the most important beneficiaries of and the most important contributors to such programmes.⁵⁶¹

Yet despite the emphasis on women, this approach continued to situate women within broader development programmes. In preparation for further debate on the community development item at the 1969 CSW session, the UK delegate brief noted that the delegation should be “guided by our policy of regarding the advancement of women’s interests as part and parcel of promoting the interests of the community as a whole”.⁵⁶² As with Britain’s position on national programmes Britain’s policy was that women should be considered merely as community members, without any concerted effort to address specific issues or barriers faced by women.

Thus, as with the broader CSW debates on women and development, the community development agenda also exposed the insincerity of Britain’s interest in women’s advancement in development: it utilised this agenda item to affirm its opposition to stand-alone programming.

⁵⁶⁰ Letter from Foreign Office (Mackilligin) to Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer), 13 August 1969, 84, FCO 61/544, UK National Archives.

⁵⁶¹ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer) to Foreign Office (Mackilligin), circa August 1969, 87, FCO 61/544, UK National Archives.

⁵⁶² Final Brief for 1969 CSW session, compiled 27 January 1969, IOC (69), 32, FCO 61/542, UK National Archives.

8. Britain's conservative approach towards the agreement of the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women 1969-1970

Moving towards the end of the decade, little had changed. As the 1969 CSW session looked set to discuss the UN unified programme for the advancement of women (later to become the UN Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women), the UK delegate brief listed this as the most important part of the agenda. With the failure of the CSW to agree an outline of the Unified Programme in time for the UN Tehran Conference on human rights in 1968, the Conference had in its stead, passed a resolution which endorsed a set of basic objectives for the programme.⁵⁶³ Britain became resolved in 1969 to use the upcoming CSW to go further and produce a general outline of the programme.⁵⁶⁴

Yet Britain's conservative position on a UN unified programme for the advancement of women remained focused on integration, stating explicitly that it should be developed as an "integral part" of the existing frameworks of UN technical assistance and not as a separate programme for the advancement of women. The brief for the 1969 CSW session also reiterated the line from 1966 that the amount spent on technical assistance in this field should depend on the degree of importance which the developing countries attached to projects of interest to women, in comparison to that which they attached to other technical assistance projects.⁵⁶⁵

Britain had now further solidified its position on the issue of national level programmes for women's advancement. Following consultation with UK government departments, the 1969

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

delegate brief noted that departments were “united in the view that a separate programme of this sort was not desirable” and in opposition to any special treatment for women it noted that the advancement of women’s interests was “part and parcel of promoting the interests of the community as a whole”. It continued, “As far as the advancement of working women is concerned, this can best be achieved by their integration into the economic life of the country as part of the total work force”.⁵⁶⁶ Once again, absent from the brief was any recognition of the opportunity stand-alone national programmes could provide to promote women’s advancement in developing countries, including Britain’s ex-colonies. Nor was there any acknowledgement that this would help to stimulate international assistance for such efforts under the UN unified programme for the advancement of women. The failure to acknowledge these opportunities, led Britain to disregard the importance of national stand-alone programming as a wider concept or tool in international development. Rather, its concern was merely to focus on avoiding any pressure to initiate a stand-alone programme in the British context.

Britain’s now defined opposition to stand-alone programming on women’s advancement at national level married with its long running resistance to a stand-alone programme within UN architecture. This resistance was again demonstrated by Britain in 1969 when the UK delegate, Shirley Summerskill (a Labour MP), argued that a separate programme was not the best approach since women’s rights should not be taken in isolation but seen as “part of the interests of the community as a whole”.⁵⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Britain was not alone in this regard. In the CSW sessions at the end of the decade, Australia continued its caution against a stand-alone unified programme at the UN on the advancement of women under its familiar line that a stand-alone programme would risk pushing women’s advancement beyond the ability of the community at large to adapt

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ UK Delegate (Summerskill), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.533, UN Documents.

to such changes.⁵⁶⁸ France continued to favour an integration approach.⁵⁶⁹ Tunisia, Liberia, Cyprus and Malaysia stressed the importance of integrating women into national development plans.⁵⁷⁰

As the issue of women in development moved to the 1969 ECOSOC session later that year, Britain's obstructive role ratchetted up another level, and it attempted to dilute the force of the proposed UN unified programme for the advancement of women altogether. At the earlier 1969 CSW session, Britain had outlined its priorities for the unified programme for the advancement of women, including on family planning. Summerskill highlighted the importance of the ratification of conventions relating to women's rights, access of women to public office, the creation of educational programmes for women and family planning.⁵⁷¹ This reference to education is of little surprise given colonial policy-makers' interest in women's education, and Britain's preference to call for education over legislation during its interventions at the CSW throughout the 1950s (see Chapters One to Three). Rather, the focus on the ratification of conventions marked an interesting shift for Britain at the CSW. However, given the recent accession of the UK to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1967, and the announcement in 1968 that Britain would be acceding to the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, it was apparent that the areas which the UK had found contentious to date (owing to a lack of a territorial application clause) were no longer of political significance. Indeed, a recent review by the British government had confirmed that "with very minor exceptions the principles

⁵⁶⁸ Australian delegate (Miller), CSW Summary Records 1969, E/CN.6/SR.534, UN Documents.

⁵⁶⁹ French delegate (Chaton), CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.509-21, UN Documents.

⁵⁷⁰ Delegates for Tunisia (Chater), Liberia (Stevenson), Cyprus (Vakis) and Malaysia (Chani), CSW Summary Records 23 March – 10 April 1970, E/CN.6/SR.555-6, UN Documents.

⁵⁷¹ Telegram on the Status of Women Commission session proceedings 3-7 February 1969, sent 10 Feb 1969, 58, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives; UK delegate (Summerskill), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.533, UN Documents.

in the Convention and Recommendation are already incorporated in the law of the United Kingdom and Dependent Territories.”⁵⁷²

Yet even though Britain was keen to draw up an outline of priority areas for the UN unified programme for the advancement of women, it attempted to block the UN from organising programming around a priority focus on women in development more structurally. When a resolution from the 1969 CSW passed to ECOSOC for approval recommending that the Governing Council of UNDP “give priority consideration”⁵⁷³ to project requests concerning access of women to education, Britain tried to block this language. The resolution in question had proposed that UNDP stimulate activity in terms of women’s access to education, which Britain argued was contrary to the principle that UNDP can only respond to specific requests from governments, and thus accord the priority given to them by recipient governments. For Britain the status of “priority area” was clearly one which it felt could not be underlined or instituted by the UN itself, since UNDP “can only respond to specific requests from Governments”.⁵⁷⁴ In the ECOSOC session Britain supported Pakistan’s proposal to reword the resolution to a weaker form which recommended that governments, “in formulating requests for technical assistance from UNDP, give due priority to projects concerning the equal access of women and girls to education”, which was adopted by ECOSOC.⁵⁷⁵ Therefore, in this concrete way, Britain played a direct role in taking the imperative away from UN development institutions in stimulating projects for women’s

⁵⁷² IOC briefing for ECOSOC on the CSW session 27 January – 12 February 1969, 13 May 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁵⁷³ Resolution III to the ECOSOC on Access of Women to Education, Report of the Commission on the Status of Women 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/4619, UN Documents.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid; IOC briefing for ECOSOC on the CSW 27 January – 12 February, 13 May 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁵⁷⁵ Delegates for Pakistan (Hague) and UK (Chitty), ECOSOC Summary Records, Twenty Fourth Session, 1969, E/AC.7/SR.616, UN Documents. The Indian delegate (Piparsania) also supported the proposal.

education and allowing only governments to choose whether or not the equal access of women and girls was of interest to them when applying for UNDP technical assistance.⁵⁷⁶

It was in this vein that Britain brought the climax of the unified programme for the advancement of women, which would now be known as the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women, into question. The CSW had agreed a resolution to ECOSOC which had included a request to the Secretary-General to prepare a five-year programme for concerted action for the advancement of women, drawing on the guidelines of the unified programme as agreed in Tehran in 1968. It requested that this programme of action be submitted to the CSW by its 1970 session.⁵⁷⁷ Timing was key; the CSW resolution noted its hope that Member States take fully into account the full participation of women and men in various national development plans and their requests for assistance.⁵⁷⁸

Despite the years of deliberation for such a programme since 1962, and the potential momentum such a programme could hold coming into the UN Second Development Decade, the UK brief to the 1969 ECOSOC session insisted that:

In view of the fact that technical cooperation programmes should depend on the requests made by individual governments...this request to the Secretary-General to prepare a programme appears invalid, and should be questioned.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁶ Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office on ECOSOC 23rd Session, 27 May 1969, 75, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁵⁷⁷ The specific paragraph within the CSW resolution requested the Secretary-General to “prepare a five year programme of concerted action for the advancement of women within the framework of technical cooperation programmes including the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights, taking due account of projects already initiated under such programmes”. See Resolution 9 (XXII) in Report of the CSW 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/4619, UN Documents.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ IOC briefing for ECOSOC on the CSW 27 January – 12 February, 13 May 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

The brief further added that there was a risk that such a request for a five-year technical cooperation programme would lead to recommendations for an increase in the budget for the UN programme overall.⁵⁸⁰ At the ECOSOC session Britain objected to the resolution as worded, arguing as per the brief that the request to the Secretary-General to prepare the programme offended against the principle that technical cooperation programmes should depend on the priority to projects given by individual governments.⁵⁸¹ In response, Margaret Bruce (Head of the UN Secretariat Section on the Status of Women) responded that the Secretary-General's report would focus on "principles governing UNDP technical assistance".⁵⁸² Since there were a number of programmes within the UN family which were relevant to the advancement of women, the Secretary-General's report would aim to achieve greater "co-ordination", with the benefits of increasing economy and effectiveness.⁵⁸³ With no support, and no action demanded of ECOSOC in the resolution, Britain its objection to the wording in the resolution. However, the exchange demonstrates the way in which Britain sought to limit the Programme of Concerted Action for the Advancement of Women not only in terms of promoting gender mainstreaming as integration rather than allowing a stand-alone focus on women, but in fact to limit the extent to which the UN itself could mainstream women's advancement as a priority area within its technical assistance programming.

Finally, in 1970, the General Assembly agreed a resolution outlining the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women. The resolution served as a complement to the first UN International Development Strategy agreed a couple of months before on the specific issue of women and development. As such, the resolution offered a list of minimum targets to be

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ UK delegate (Chitty), ECOSOC Summary Records, Twenty Fourth Session, 1969, E/AC.7/SR.616, UN Documents.

⁵⁸² Head of UN Status of Women Section (Bruce) ECOSOC Summary Records, Twenty Fourth Session, 1969, E/AC.7/SR.616, UN Documents.

⁵⁸³ Ibid; Telegram from UK Mission in New York to FCO on ECOSOC 23rd Session, 27 May 1969, 75, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

achieved during the Second United Nations Development Decade until 1980.⁵⁸⁴ The targets were grouped under four main areas: of education; training and employment; health and maternity protection; and administration and public life.⁵⁸⁵ The UN International Development Strategy was the first to explicitly refer to women, endorsing the full integration of women in development efforts.⁵⁸⁶ But the text of this resolution went much further when it called for “concerted efforts to be made to increase the resources available for technical cooperation projects which advance the status of women and that consideration be given to allocating a specific percentage of the available funds for this purpose”. At the ECOSOC prior to its agreement, Britain once again highlighted that “If a reference to the UNDP technical co-operation programmes was intended, it should be born in mind that UNDP could not allocate resources at the request of a functional commission, but only at the request of Governments. Besides, resources for advancing the status of women were already in the programmes of advisory services.”⁵⁸⁷ It was with these reservations that Britain stated it would be able to support the draft resolution. While the wording remained in the resolution, Britain’s efforts in these development debates continued to stress that the impetus should not sit with UNDP to stimulate activity.

Conclusion

Ondine Barrow and Michael Jennings rightly recognise that development assistance, by its very nature, presupposes the identification of priorities, demanding tough choices about the legitimacy and desirability of institutions.⁵⁸⁸ As such, it is of little surprise that development priorities shift

⁵⁸⁴ United Nations, *The UN and the Advancement of Women*, pp28-19.

⁵⁸⁵ UN General Assembly Resolution 2716 (XXV), 15 December 1970, UN Documents.

⁵⁸⁶ United Nations, *The UN and the Advancement of women*, p29.

⁵⁸⁷ UK delegate (Chitty), ECOSOC Summary Records, Twenty Fourth Session, 1969, E/AC.7/SR.616, UN Documents.

⁵⁸⁸ Ondine Barrow and Michael Jennings, *The Charitable Impulse: NGOs in East and North East Africa* (Oxford: James Curry Ltd, 2001), p13. Their analysis of the shift within the NGO sector from a sole focus on humanitarian programming to expand into development programming in the 1960s, argues that this had important implications

over time, whether in light of new evidence or new choices around the legitimacy of different development approaches. Indeed, Jennings argues that the twentieth century has witnessed a series of failures and shortcomings, as well as shifts and changes, in how development has been implemented, and how it has been understood:

The story of development is not of one single process, but a series of inextricably entwined discourses, processes, and paradigms, each feeding off the perceived failure of its predecessor and swinging the pendulum from one theory to another.⁵⁸⁹

As this chapter outlines, the debates on the unified programme for the advancement of women at the UN, and on national programmes for women's advancement and community development at the CSW, related to the question as to whether women's advancement should become an explicit aim of development which the UN should promote. This research provides a case study of the actions the British government took in connection with this premise.

This chapter has examined the extent to which British policy sought to champion the agenda of women's advancement, as part of international development proposals at the CSW in the 1960s. This was particularly significant as Britain transitioned to a decolonising power during this decade, given its relevance for a focus on women within its former colonies and other developing countries. While Britain had determined that its policy priority at the CSW in the mid-1960s was to promote a focus on the "role of women in development", it did so in *very limited ways*. By supporting only an approach to development which understood women as citizens who were "part and parcel of the community", it failed to accord priority to addressing the gender specific barriers in development programming. Britain similarly dismissed the importance of taking specific efforts

for their mandates. The shift away from life-saving assistance which sought, in theory, to be neutral and impartial, now moved to a situation in which development assistance demanded making choices about the legitimacy and desirability of institutions.

⁵⁸⁹ Michael Jennings, "Development Processes of the 20th Century" in *International Development Governance*, eds. Ahmed Shafiqul Huque and Habib Zafarullah (Florida: Taylor and Francis, 2006), p600.

to advance the position of women as an end in itself, in line with its instrumental interest in women as part of colonial development policy in the early twentieth century. While Britain's position on women and development paid no recognition to its former – or (in some cases at the time) continuing – role as a colonial power at that time, or the opportunity to promote women's rights within newly-independent developing countries, it was the colonial policy of instrumentalising indigenous women which endured. British development policy in this period ignored the importance of making specific efforts to advance the position of women as an end in itself. Britain's resistance to reconfiguring development programmes in order to focus explicitly on gender barriers or issues also reflected the broader lack of data and analysis of the impact of development programming on women's advancement in the 1960s.

Likewise, Britain sought to discourage a stand-alone UN programme for women's advancement throughout the mid- to late-1960s, further utilising a focus on community development at the CSW to further its opposition to stand-alone programmes for women's advancement. It was not alone in this regard, with the balance of members of the CSW calling for an integrated approach. But what perhaps is most significant is it that while it supported integrating or mainstreaming women's advancement in theory, in practice it resisted attempts to call on developing country governments to accord greater priority to projects and programmes directed towards the advancement of women when submitting requests to the UN for technical assistance. It also opposed moves for the UN agencies themselves to stimulate activity on women's advancement in this regard. It is here that the third question of the analytical framework of this research – on the impact of Britain's policy positions on the development frameworks adopted - is also important, because Britain consistently stymied attempts for UN agencies to catalyse a shift to women's advancement. This conservatism reflects the *global* colonial legacy around women's rights which

Britain had established in its actions at the CSW in the 1950s through its efforts to maintain its colonial interests as established in Part One of this thesis.

It was in this vein that Britain explicitly challenged the assertion that women's advancement should be prioritised. Similar to the arguments of sovereignty that Britain invoked to justify why it would not sign its colonies up to conventions on women's rights without their consent, Britain again sought to defer to the priorities of countries requesting assistance from the UN. Under this mindset, by 1969 Britain brought the climax of the agreement of the unified programme into question. Yet here Britain's impact was limited, as the programme was approved in 1970.

In both resisting the establishment of stand-alone programmes on women's advancement *and* limiting attempts to integrate women's advancement into existing architecture, in reality Britain was doing more to mainstream women *out* of UN development assistance in this period. As such, the impact of Britain's position was to undermine more concerted attempts to institutionalise support for women's advancement within the UN system that were being put forward by the Secretary-General and in the CSW at the time, and ultimately, to discourage a shift towards a greater focus on women's advancement within UN development assistance. Further, Britain refused to commit financial resources to the UN for this work. Instead, it chose to deploy the very limited levers of a questionnaire on the role women could play in economic and social development and a suggestion for an additional annual CSW agenda item on the matter. In the face of such empty rhetoric on women's advancement in development, a further examination into Britain's motivations is undertaken in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5: UNDERSTANDING BRITAIN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT AT THE CSW

As explored in the previous chapter, Britain's approach to women and development at the CSW from the mid-to late-1960s appears as conflicted at best. On a matter of principle, Britain had identified women in development as a policy priority at the CSW in this period. Yet in practice Britain continued to derail more progressive proposals for a stand-alone UN programme for women's advancement. Despite calling for integration of women's advancement within existing UN activities, Britain opposed moves to encourage countries requesting assistance from the UN to prioritise women's advancement and resisted the idea that UN agencies themselves should "stimulate" activities to promote women's advancement.

This chapter further interrogates the reasons behind Britain's conflicted and tepid approach to women in development and examines this within the context of other contentious issues around colonialism between 1966 and 1970. A fundamental question remains: why was Britain keen to move the issue forward (in line with its overall priority of moving the CSW to progress on economic and social rights) when it clearly held little regard for real action at the UN on women's advancement? Such interrogation provides crucial insights for the second question of the three-point analytical framework set out in the *Introduction*, namely whether the conventions, frameworks and broader debates at the CSW served as a site of embarrassment on Britain's colonial record.

As will be shown, Britain's lack of genuine support for initiatives on women and development at the UN evolved from both the legacy of an innate colonial conservatism around women's rights and an indifference to women's rights in a post-colonial era of international development. However, the issue of women and development had a saving grace in the eyes of British officials, in that it provided a relatively soft, non-contentious issue at the UN at the time, in contrast to race relations in southern Africa and colonial legacies more broadly. Progress on women and development served an instrumental purpose of distraction from these otherwise more overtly political issues.

This chapter then documents how Britain's growing frustration with what it viewed as overly politicised aspects of the CSW became a major factor in its broader institutional attack on the machinery for women's rights at the UN itself now, under a Conservative Government from 1970-1974. This would manifest itself as lobbying to decrease the frequency of CSW sessions and questioning its own membership in the body. It culminated in an attempt in 1973 by Britain to dissolve the CSW, instrumentalising the very agenda of women and development to do so. This is highly relevant to the third question of the analytical framework adopted for this research which seeks to examine the impact of Britain's policy positions on the frameworks adopted on conventions international development policy frameworks. Indeed, it goes further by understanding how Britain's diplomacy on these issues at the CSW affected its relationship with that very institution itself.

1. The politics of Britain's interest in women in development at the CSW 1966 -1973

Britain's weak and conflicted approach to women and development in the CSW from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s is best understood as a product of disingenuous interest arising out of

two counteracting forces. On the one hand, an enduring innate colonial conservatism around the status of indigenous women in the British Empire and fears of extension to the colonies of international legal frameworks in the 1950s and early 1960s acted as a brake on any efforts to promote a rights-based approach in this field. This manifested itself as Britain's expressed desire to utilise the CSW to progress on economic and social issues rather than legal and political rights. Further, the issue of women in development offered a softer counteracting force to serve an instrumental distraction from otherwise more overtly political issues around colonialism. Certainly this was so in the case of the CSW, where debates on slavery and race relations proved the most problematic for Britain in the late 1960s. Yet on the other hand, Britain had failed to find a real interest in women's rights within the emerging international development agenda of the 1960s which meant there was little political will to catalyse genuine progress. The combination of these factors meant that Britain's interest was not rooted in a genuine desire to promote women's advancement in development but was at best a distraction from areas of potential embarrassment relating to Britain's colonial past and present.

To re-cap, as argued in the introduction to this thesis, Britain's innate colonial conservatism around women's rights emerged at the CSW within the context of a legacy of limited action on women's issues in the British Empire. Early British feminist campaigns on women's welfare in the colonies had drawn on a moral imperative framed in terms of indigenous brutality rather than an imperative for the realisation of indigenous women's rights as an end in themselves. Even when the Colonial Office paid attention to women in the early twentieth century in light of a focus on (limited) social reform in the colonies, this was seen just as a means to achieving broader development within society.⁵⁹⁰ This conservatism was once again reflected in Britain's opposition to the concept of

⁵⁹⁰ Lewis "Tropical East Ends and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives", p46.

colonial extension of international legal frameworks in the 1950s and 1960s, as documented in this thesis in relation to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Convention on Nationality of Married Women and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage and Registration of Marriages (see Chapters One and Two). It also manifested as a broader resistance to the CSW's remit focusing on women's political and legal rights throughout this period. By the mid-1960s this became explicit. Between the 1965 and 1966 session, the UK reviewed its policy towards the CSW generally, concluding that historically there had been "too exclusive attention to the questions of civil and political rights" within the CSW and that it could "profitably devote more of its time to economic and social questions".⁵⁹¹ A focus on women and development enabled this broader shift, in line with Britain's long-running resistance to a political and legal focus. The UK recognised specifically that it would be more "in tune with the trend of United Nations activity" for the CSW to focus on the "role of women in development".⁵⁹²

1.1 UN conventions on women's rights

Indeed, the conventions on women's political rights and marriage rights continued to prove problematic for Britain in the mid-1960s from its perspective as a colonial power.⁵⁹³ In the lead up to the 1965 CSW session, Britain had chosen not to submit voluntary information to the Secretary-General about the degree to which British Non-Self-Governing territories were implementing the principles of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. This was out of fear that it would "invite unfavourable criticism...where the fact that many of these territories are at an early stage of development will be overlooked".⁵⁹⁴ This led the USSR, Poland and Guinea to argue at that

⁵⁹¹ Brief for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, IOC (66) 18, compiled 17 Feb 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Report of the CSW 13 February - 6 March 1967, compiled by Barbara Richards at UK Mission in New York, FCO 61/259, UK National Archives.

⁵⁹⁴ Final Brief for the CSW session 1- 20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives. An ECOSOC resolution calling for voluntary reporting by member states of the UN who were not parties to the Convention were invited to supply the Secretary General every two years with information

session that the information in the Secretary-General's report on the status of women in Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories was inadequate and unacceptable, and that *only with the end of colonialism* could men and women have basic freedom and equal rights.⁵⁹⁵ The USSR pointed to the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, while the delegate for Poland added that "Representatives of the newly-independent countries would undoubtedly testify to the obvious fact that the colonial system could only retard the advancement of women".⁵⁹⁶ In response, the UK delegate (Margaret McKay) attempted to defend Britain's colonial record on women's political rights by arguing that "great progress" had been made in "granting the franchise, including the right to choose the candidate as well as the right to vote, to women in the non-self-governing territories administered by the United Kingdom". However, she argued that the British government was careful "not to impose on indigenous peoples a system they were not ready to accept or which was alien to their traditions". Going further, McKay claimed a British policy of "releasing countries from colonialism" with India as a recent example.⁵⁹⁷

Britain continued on the defensive. In preparation for the 1966 CSW session, the UK delegate brief again prepared for an attack on the basis of its colonies. Such concern proved to be well-founded: at the session Hungary and the USSR highlighted the impact of colonialism in holding back the realisation of women's rights.⁵⁹⁸ The UK delegate brief stressed that consultations with territorial governments in acceding to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women were now complete, with nine of the dependent territories able to accept the whole convention, and that many others only had difficulties with "minor aspects of it, on some of which sovereign states

they consider appropriate "with regard to implementing the principles of the convention" passed in 1963 (ECOSOC Resolution 961B (XXXVI)), 30 July 1963. UN Documents.

⁵⁹⁵ UK Mission in New York (Sir D. Wright) to Foreign Office, Report on the CSW session 1-20 March 1965, 20 March 1965, US17312/51, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁵⁹⁶ USSR delegate (Mirinova) and Polish delegate (Dembinska), CSW Summary Records 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/SR.414-415, UN Documents.

⁵⁹⁷ UK delegate (McKay), CSW Summary Records 1-20 March 1965, E/CN.6/SR.414, UN Documents.

⁵⁹⁸ Delegates for USSR (Ivanova) and Hungary (Bokor), UN Summary Records 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/SR.446, UN Documents.

have made reservations in acceding to the convention”.⁵⁹⁹ Due to the recent admission of women as Life Peers to the House of Lords removing a barrier to the convention in the UK itself (although hereditary peerages still posed an issue which needed a reservation) , the delegation was instructed to state, if put under pressure on this subject, that the convention was indeed “entirely acceptable in the United Kingdom itself”,⁶⁰⁰ and that it therefore regretted that it was prevented from becoming a state party “by the absence of a colonial application article”.⁶⁰¹ Once again, Britain stressed that “these territories should have the same right of choice whether to accept the obligations of a Convention as any sovereign State enjoys”.⁶⁰² Clearly, the convention continued to provide a source of strain for Britain’s reputation at the CSW.

Britain finally acceded to the Convention in 1967, with a carefully worded reservations clause to cover the remaining domestic issues and few territories which remained under British rule. Indeed, Britain’s accession to the convention came partly as a response to campaigns from British women parliamentarians and partly as a response to the evolving human rights agenda at the UN.⁶⁰³ New conventions on the elimination of discrimination of racial discrimination (1965); economic, social and cultural rights (1966); and civil and political rights (1966) once again raised colonial concerns for Britain with their articulation of national self-determination as a human right.⁶⁰⁴ Laville has argued that signing up to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women was seen as a way of

⁵⁹⁹ UK delegate brief for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, IOC (66) 18, 17 Feb 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁶⁰⁰ Final Brief for the CSW session 1-20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives

⁶⁰¹ UK delegate brief for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, IOC (66) 18, 17 Feb 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

⁶⁰² Ibid. Internal minutes confirmed that the main problem to accession would now be to work out suitable reservations to cover the position in dependent territories around equal pay in the civil service and jury service, including Aden and Rhodesia and minor aspects of U.K. practice. See Internal Note Foreign Office (A.J. Coles) for a briefing call with Dr Summerskill planned for 2 June 1966. UNS17311/41, FO 371/189953, UK National Archives.

⁶⁰³ See Laville, “Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the States of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, p494.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, p494.

signalling British support to this broader field at the UN without having to confront these new (higher-profile) treaties – and with them the issue of colonial rule.⁶⁰⁵

Even with Britain's accession to the convention in 1967, the Foreign Office still felt vulnerable to potential anti-colonial critiques. In preparation for the 1968 CSW session, the now Foreign and Commonwealth Office [referred to here as Foreign Office] noted that for the agenda item on the political rights of women, "We will provide defensive material in case the position of women in dependent territories is attacked".⁶⁰⁶ The UK delegate brief urged the delegation that if an attack was mounted by Communist states, the delegation should demonstrate that "we have nothing to hide and that our territories are doing as much, if not more than, many sovereign States in this field". The British line was to further stress that the fact that Britain had now acceded to this convention: "with so few reservations in respect of our dependent territories", means that the obligations of the convention would be fully carried out (reservations excepted). Britain, keen to once again stress its benevolent practice as a colonial power (see Chapter Three), noted that the British overseas territories had a "very credible record when the varying degrees of social advancement in the territories in question are taken into account".⁶⁰⁷ Thus as in the 1950s and early 1960s, Britain sought to maintain its colonial reputation, demonstrating its role as a "benevolent" colonial power in the CSW discussions around this convention, fearing attacks from the USSR on its international reputation in this regard, even after becoming a signatory in the late 1960s. These CSW debates around the convention further explain why Britain remained cautious of espousing political and legal rights even in this later period of the late 1960s.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, p494.

⁶⁰⁶ Internal Foreign Office Note on the upcoming CSW agenda, 3 January 1968 (A.J. Coles), 63, FCO 61/260, UK National Archives.

⁶⁰⁷ Final brief for CSW session 29 January – 19 February 1968, 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

Similarly, Britain felt vulnerable to criticism from a colonial perspective around its resistance to becoming a state party to the Convention on Marriage Practices. A UN seminar held in Togo in 1964 had included discussion on the legal conditions relating to marriage with a focus on the effects of polygamy. In a further attempt to divert attention away from legal rights on the matter, and the place of the convention in this regard, the brief for the UK delegate for the 1965 CSW session again took the UK line of prioritising education over legislation as a means for addressing this issue, noting if reference is made to the convention on marriage practices the delegation should state that:

Britain opposed the inclusion of a specified minimum age in the convention because we were of the opinion that in view of the wide diversity of religious and social customs in so many countries it would be unreasonable to try to pass international legislation aimed at standardising practice⁶⁰⁸

Here, the colonial legacy of conservatism on women's rights and preference for customary law through indirect rule clearly persisted into the late 1960s. As with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, a statement was prepared for the UK delegation for the 1966 CSW session on the convention on marriage practices with a similar caution to not "imply we are on the defensive" by giving information gratuitously. It noted that while the convention was entirely acceptable in Britain, it was unable to become a state party due to a lack of a territorial application clause.⁶⁰⁹ Again in 1968, the brief for the British delegate to the CSW session noted that while Britain itself is was able to accept the convention, "there have been some cases of dependent territories who are not able to accept the Convention in full."⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁸ Final Brief for the CSW session 1-20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁶⁰⁹ Letter from the Colonial Office (D. Slight) to Foreign Office (A. Coles) on the Convention on the consent to marriage, 25 January 1966, UNS173/7; UK brief for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, IOC (66) 18, 17 Feb 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives. The Foreign Office had not consulted dependent territories but as part of their own research identified the following issues: need for legislation to set a minimum age of marriage, as well as issues with Articles 1 and 3 due to religious social customs.

⁶¹⁰ Final brief for CSW session 29 January – 19 February 1968, compiled 28 January 1968, 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

Therefore, Britain's stated preference for a focus on economic and social rather than legal and political rights for women at the CSW was grounded in its broader reputational risk as a colonial power. While the conventions on women's political rights and marriage rights had been debated and agreed many years before in the CSW, these legal instruments continued to pose challenges for Britain in light of its remaining empire into the mid-to-late 1960s. Even when Britain became a signatory to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, its role as a colonial power still left it exposed to criticism. It is therefore of little surprise that Britain wanted to promote a change of emphasis in the nature of the CSW's work.

1.2 Development as safer ground

As such, shifting the CSW's focus to economic and social issues would not only divert attention away from Britain's problematic position on these key legal instruments on women's rights. Britain also recognised that a focus on women and development could hold a utility in deflecting forms of attack around colonialism and Britain's colonial legacy at the CSW and UN more broadly. In this way the Foreign Office regarded women in development as a relatively soft, non-contentious issue that could serve as a useful distraction in relation to "hotter" human rights issues at the time such as slavery and race relations.

This is evidenced by a briefing note to the Foreign Office Minister of State (Roberts) immediately after the CSW session in 1968. The briefing reiterated the British policy of encouraging the CSW to "concentrate more on the economic and social aspects of women's rights" and highlighted Britain's "constructive" role in discussions on the unified long-term programme for the advancement of women (latterly the Program of Concerted Action for the Advancement of

Women).⁶¹¹ It noted that the recent CSW session had failed to move the programme forward for consideration at the upcoming Tehran Conference on Human Rights because too few governments had yet replied to the Secretariat's questionnaire on women's role in development, and that the UN unified programme for the advancement of women would therefore have to be moved for consideration at the CSW in 1969. As such this gave cause for concern: would the Tehran agenda be open to issues that were more contentious issues within the British Empire?

This raises the question of what the Tehran Conference will be able to do now, under its sub-item on the promotion of women's rights. We should like this item to be given some positive content: for one thing, we are anxious that the Conference should not deteriorate simply into another jamboree on Southern African race issues.⁶¹²

Certainly, it is clear that the topic of women and development was far less contentious in the CSW itself than other issues such as slavery and race relations in Southern Africa which proved much more politically charged. The debates around a potential UN unified programme for the advancement of women, and the question of national development plans, did not provoke the usual attacks from the Soviet Bloc around colonialism. Rather the main debates were with developing countries such as Ghana, which focused on issues such as financing for the advancement of women within the development agenda.

In particular, the issue of slavery proved an acute area for anti-colonial attacks on Britain at the 1968 CSW session, following a recent draft resolution at the UN Human Rights Commission which called on the CSW to study and formulate specific proposals the UN could adopt to eradicate all forms and practices of slavery and the slave trade affecting the status of women. This

⁶¹¹ Briefing for meeting of Shirley Summerskill with Goronwy Roberts (Minister of State at Foreign Office), 11 March 1968, 110A, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

⁶¹² Ibid.

was the first time that the question of slavery had been taken up by the CSW.⁶¹³ The brief for the UK delegate to the CSW session that year noted that “The Communist countries and others will doubtless try to exploit the mandate given by the existing Resolutions on the subject to link practices of slavery and the slave trade with apartheid and colonialism”, although it was hoped that the CSW would be “critical of such attempts”.⁶¹⁴ The brief advised that any allegations of “slavery like practices” in British colonial territories should be strongly rebutted:

Our colonial policy, with its object of bringing colonial peoples to independence, has nothing in common with any of the practices which are described in the two United Nations Conventions on slavery. Nor can we accept any statement that apartheid or colonialism are in themselves to be identified with slavery⁶¹⁵

Britain’s concern centred on the insertion of language by the USSR into a US draft resolution on slavery. In these amendments, the USSR referred to the “slavery like practices of apartheid and colonialism”.⁶¹⁶ In the CSW session, Liberia argued that the UN remained the “best hope for the complete eradication of slavery and such practices as colonialism and apartheid” while the UAR “wished to condemn apartheid and colonialism, which were openly practiced forms of legal slavery”.⁶¹⁷ Having lost the vote excluding this language at the CSW,⁶¹⁸ Britain was forced to abstain on the resolution as a whole, stating that the UK “could not possibly accept that the practice of colonialism was akin to slavery. H.M.G’s policy was to bring the people of our remaining territories to self-government, and had nothing in common with slavery”.⁶¹⁹ To distance

⁶¹³ Intervention by Head of Section on Women at the UN Secretariat (Margaret Bruce), CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.492, UN Documents.

⁶¹⁴ Final brief for CSW 21st session 24 January 1968, File 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Telegram from UK Mission in New York (Lord Caradon) to Foreign Office, 13 February 1968, 91, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives; USSR delegate (Korchunova), CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.492-508, UN Documents.

⁶¹⁷ Delegates for Liberia (Stevenson) and UAR (Telawi), CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.492-508, UN Documents.

⁶¹⁸ Vote on this reference was 27 in favour, none against, with Britain abstaining alongside Australia, France, the Netherlands and Botswana.

⁶¹⁹ Telegram from UK Mission in New York (Lord Caradon) to Foreign Office on the CSW session 29 January – 19 February 1968, 20 Feb 1968, 97, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives; UK Delegate (Summerskill), CSW Summary Records January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.509-521, UN Documents.

the practice of slavery from British colonial policy, the UK delegate Shirley Summerskill argued that slavery was a “long-standing social custom” tolerated by “local populations”.⁶²⁰

Slavery was not the only politicised aspect of the CSW’s agenda in 1968. Summerskill vented her frustration at the number of “political issues” at the session. She lamented that these were “time consuming” and that it was irrelevant to discuss “colonialism, racialism and international crises”.⁶²¹ This was particularly in reference to a sub-item focused on colonialism which was adopted for the agenda of the 1969 CSW session on the “Influence of activities of foreign and other economic interests on the living conditions of women in dependent territories”.⁶²² The Foreign Office had assumed a knee-jerk response to criticism, labelling it as propaganda. It noted internally that there was “nothing we can do about this so long as the anti-colonialist and other lobbies have the numbers on their side”, but express our opposition.⁶²³ Indeed, Britain recounted that at the 1969 CSW session this item proved the occasion for “propaganda attacks” from the Soviet bloc and Iraq, with the USSR “claiming that investment in Southern Africa was used to suppress liberation movements”.⁶²⁴ The USSR delegate spoke in a similar vein to an intervention from Hungary that

⁶²⁰ Giuseppina Russo, “Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women 1946-1975”, PhD Thesis p197 which references CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.501, UN Documents.

⁶²¹ Report by UK delegate Shirley Summerskill, 8 April 1968, 113, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

⁶²² The addition of an item on Israeli treatment of Arab inhabitants of the Gaza strip (under the title “Protection of Women and Children in Emergency or Wartime, Fighting for Peace, National Liberation and Independence”) also caused concern for Britain. Russo argues that at the 1968 CSW session, women delegates from the decolonised territories agreed that foreign economic interventions prevented the creation of a just society with ‘deleterious effects on the living conditions of women’ (“Universalism, Difference, and Body Politics: The UN Commission on the Status of Women 1946-1975”, pp196, which references CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.500, UN Documents.

⁶²³ Briefing for meeting of Shirley Summerskill with Minister of State at Foreign Office (Goronwy Roberts), 11 March 1968, 110A, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

⁶²⁴ Final briefing CSW session for 23 March – 10 April 1970, finalised 18 March 1970, 12, FCO 61/698, UK National Archives. The CSW adopted a resolution (sponsored by Byelorussia and Guinea) which invited the Special Committee of Twenty-Four to include a passage on women in its forthcoming report, which the Special Committee duly “noted”. Yet no such reference was included in its 1969 report. The General Assembly asked the Committee to report further in 1970. In the 1970 CSW session, Morocco sponsored a resolution which the UK considered a remedy to the absence in the Committee of 24 report - designed to get the Committee of Twenty-Four to take some action to comply with the Commission’s resolution 3 (XXII). See report of the UK delegation on the CSW session for 23 March – 10 April 1970, circa April 1970, 32, FCO 61/698. UK National Archives.

British and American investment in South Africa made them “partners in the system of apartheid”.

She adopted a high moral tone, worth presenting in full:

The exploitation of man by man was one of the most urgent problems of the modern world; the suppression of the overwhelming majority by a colonialist minority could only have an adverse effect on the indigenous inhabitants of dependent Territories and especially on women...foreign monopolies played a key role in maintaining colonialism, racism and apartheid. Nowhere was that role more apparent than in southern Africa, an area exceptionally rich in mineral deposits. The United States, West Germany, the United Kingdom and other countries exported raw materials from that area, and the profits were used by NATO powers to manufacture armaments which were subsequently imported to such colonial Territories as Southern Rhodesia for the purpose of suppressing national liberation movements.⁶²⁵

Britain sought to exclude such broad attacks on colonialism, as it had in the 1950s. At the 1969 CSW session, Summerskill argued that “Unless the Commission confined itself to the discussion of problems which involved women specifically, it ran the risk of becoming embroiled in irrelevant discussions”.⁶²⁶ The 1970 UK brief set out that this agenda item was not within the remit of the Commission which “should deal with women’s problems and not range widely over questions concerning private foreign investment”. It sought to shut down this powerful critique by further stressing the familiar lines that the issue under discussion – in this case questions over private foreign investment - was not unique to dependent territories.⁶²⁷

This heightened tension around colonialism also surfaced at the 1969 CSW session where race relations in Rhodesia formed the basis of further criticisms against Britain’s colonial legacy in these independent but white-dominated territories. The delegation had been prepared for this potential

⁶²⁵ USSR delegate (Nikolaeva) and Hungary (Gyarnati), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.525, UN Documents.

⁶²⁶ UK delegate (Summerskill), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.524, UN Documents.

⁶²⁷ Final briefing for CSW, finalised 23 March – 10 April 1970, 12, FCO 61/698, UK National Archives.

embarrassment since the mid-1960s.⁶²⁸ At the 1966 CSW session, the USSR highlighted the “violation of human rights by Governments, such as those of South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal” and called for the struggle against racism, apartheid and colonialism to be intensified”.⁶²⁹ The following year at the 1967 CSW session, the Byelorussian delegate raised her concern under the annual agenda item on political rights about the way that racial discrimination was rife in Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa and the Portuguese colonies.⁶³⁰ In 1969, the publication of the Secretary-General’s report on the status of women in non-self-governing territories was supplemented with information beyond that supplied by administering powers, to also include relevant papers from the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.⁶³¹ Anticipating debate around Southern Rhodesia, the British delegation for the 1969 CSW session were instructed to respond to any criticisms on the infringement of women’s rights in Rhodesia on the grounds that “the United Kingdom is not currently in a position to ensure that the obligations imposed by the Convention on the Political Rights of Women can be fully implemented in respect of Rhodesia or to take direct action with regard to other matters regarding the status of women there.”⁶³²

Indeed, Ghana, Liberia, and the UAR took up the issue of Rhodesia at the 1969 CSW session, putting pressure on Britain despite the defence from Summerskill that Britain could not take action. They argued that the conditions in Rhodesia were in fact directly relevant to the CSW’s

⁶²⁸ Final Brief for the CSW session 1-20 March 1965, IOC (65) 33, 25 February 1965, UNS 17312/41, FO 371/183660, UK National Archives.

⁶²⁹ USSR delegate (Ianova), CSW Summary Records 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/SR.444, UN Documents. Rhodesia declared itself independent in 1965 under a white-dominated government.

⁶³⁰ Byelorussian delegate (Marinkevich), CSW Summary Records 13 February - 6 March 1967, E/CN.6/SR.468, UN Documents.

⁶³¹ CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.524, UN Documents.

⁶³² Final brief for CSW session, 27 January – 12 February 1969, IOC (69) 2, 32, FCO 61/542, UK National Archives.

work⁶³³ The UAR delegate argued that it was “inevitable that, in certain cases, political questions directly affecting the status of women should be raised during the Commission’s debate”.⁶³⁴ The delegate from Liberia expressed astonishment at Britain’s response: “The Commission was responsible for examining the status of women everywhere in the world”.⁶³⁵ Once again, the USSR stressed the importance of fully implementing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in order for “women throughout the world to enjoy their rights”.⁶³⁶ The question of Rhodesia was also introduced in a special agenda item on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency or War Time, Fighting for Peace, National Liberation and Independence. The delegate for Morocco pointed to the “women still suffering under the yoke of colonialism and of those who were victims of wars of aggression” citing South Africa and Southern Rhodesia and supported by the delegate from Byelorussia.⁶³⁷

Thus it clear that slavery and conditions relating to dependent territories were becoming the focus of heated political debates around colonialism in the CSW. These presented a further risk of additional embarrassment to Britain at the impending UN Human Rights Conference. They also presented reputational risks to Britain in the CSW itself, with the issue of apartheid in southern Africa and white minority rule in Rhodesia adding an additional area of concern by the end of the decade. In contrast, the issue of women and development proved a much safer area in political terms, as explicitly recognised by the Foreign Office.

⁶³³Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office, 3 Feb 1969, on the CSW session 27 January – 12 February 1969, 45, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶³⁴ UAR delegate (Telawi), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.524, UN Documents.

⁶³⁵ Liberia (Stevenson), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.524, UN Documents.

⁶³⁶ USSR delegate (Nikolaeva), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.524, UN Documents.

⁶³⁷ Delegates for Morocco (Warzazi) and Byelorussia (Marinkevich), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.526, UN Documents.

Indeed, CSW summary records show that the discussions on women and development also provoked attacks on the basis of colonialism, but they demonstrate that attacks were minor in comparison to the linkages made between British colonialism and slavery, apartheid and race relations. For example, Guinea, as an observer at the 1963 session and member at the 1966 session, highlighted during the discussions on development how colonialism had disrupted previously matriarchal gender relations under which women had received the same training as men, thus “creating an educational gulf between the sexes”, and that women would have to make up “considerable leeway” following “foreign domination by the colonialist powers”.⁶³⁸ In 1968, Poland and the USSR used the issue of the questionnaire on women’s role in economic and social development, that had been pushed by Britain as a means to establish the needs of a UN unified programme for the advancement of women (see Chapter Four), to highlight the need to end colonialism. Poland thanked the governments of developing countries “especially those which had recently been liberated from colonialism, for their candid descriptions of the situation with regard to the status of women”.⁶³⁹ The USSR noted that every increase in the participation of women in national economic and social life – as was the title of the questionnaire – had “come about as the achievement of genuine political and economic independence by their countries”.⁶⁴⁰ Therefore the issue of women in development did provide a site for anti-colonialism, but the blows to Britain and other colonial powers proved much softer and far less frequent.

⁶³⁸ Guinean delegate (Martin), CSW Summary Records 11 - 29 March 1963, E/CN.6/SR.394, UN Documents; Guinean delegate (Martin - Cissé), CSW Summary Records 21 February – 11 March 1966, E/CN.6/SR.453, UN Documents.

⁶³⁹ Delegates for Poland (Dembinska) and USSR (Korshunova), CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.509-521, UN Documents.

⁶⁴⁰ USSR delegate (Korshunova), CSW Summary Records 29 January – 19 February 1968, E/CN.6/SR.509-521, UN Documents.

1.3 Women's integration within British aid and the British Empire

Turning next to the issue of Britain's lack of interest in women's rights within the emerging international development agenda of the 1960s, it is clear that Britain's failure to grasp the importance of promoting women's advancement in both a stand-alone UN programme, *and* in national strategies of developing countries, can be traced to indifference towards women's advancement within the British government machinery on aid more generally. Responding to a Foreign Office request for briefing material for the 1970 CSW session, the Ministry of Overseas Development made clear their lack of expertise in the matter. Edith Mercer explained to an official at the Foreign Office that the Ministry of Overseas Development "as the channel for British development aid would not have a great deal to contribute on the general topic of the Status of Women", with little concrete content to pass on in terms of British policy in this regard, other than the existence of the 'Population Bureau' for the British government's overseas aid on family planning.⁶⁴¹ Such lack of policy content was quite astonishing given that "women in development" had been a supposed policy priority for Britain at the CSW for a number of years.

The Ministry of Overseas Development's failure to capture and conceptualise its focus on women was exemplified in 1967 when Britain had to make public its work on women in development within the Secretary-General's report on the participation of women in community development. In finalising the report, the Secretary-General wrote to Member States "requesting information about the contribution of women to community development projects". The Foreign Office thought that "this might be an opportunity to provide material on community development

⁶⁴¹ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer, Principle of Schools and Teacher Training Department) to Foreign Office (M. S .Baker-Bates), 16 March 1970, 8, FCO 61/698, UK National Archives.

projects in our dependent territories” and requested the Ministry of Overseas Development to supply information in this regard.⁶⁴²

In response, Mercer at the Ministry of Overseas Development wrote to the Dependent Territories Division within the Commonwealth Office confirming that this “would provide a good opportunity to submit material on community development projects” in the dependencies, for while “we in the [Ministry of Overseas Development] know a fair amount of what is going on in this field in the dependent territories, we have no formal accounts or recent reports on the position”. Clearly, while Britain claimed to emphasize “women in development” in its policies, this was not something which had been prioritised as part of broader departmental strategies and thus had not been a priority for documentation or monitoring. As such, Mercer suggested that a circular be sent to the dependent territories to request a statement on the programming taking place in this area.⁶⁴³

By autumn 1967, the Dependent Territories Division had received replies from Bahamas, Bermuda, Hong Kong, Falkland Islands, Gilbert and Ellice Islands and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. The responses gave varied accounts of the level of prioritisation of women in community development programmes. The British Solomon Islands, where no community development programme was in place, noted that despite the existence of women’s clubs, the lack of government staff employed solely on the organisation of women’s interests meant that “the help given to the clubs is limited”. Contrastingly, the reply from Mauritius detailed a number of programmes in community development “in which women are participating” including on

⁶⁴² Letter from Foreign Office (A.J. Coles) to Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer), 7 July 1967, FCO 61/259, UK National Archives.

⁶⁴³ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer) to the Commonwealth Office, Dependent Territories Division (C. A. Axworthy), 14 July 1967, FCO 61/259, UK National Archives.

maternity and child welfare, social education, home economics, family planning sewing and dress making and vocational training. Others, such as Bermuda, drew on the existence of women's groups and women's participation in government offices as sufficient evidence that "it can be said that the women in Bermuda play an active role in community life", and further declared that while no national commission considering the status of women was in place, none was needed. Similarly, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands stressed that women's clubs were rapidly developing, so that "Women are thinking for themselves and doing things for themselves, running clubs etc". However their response also stressed caution on the idea of women's advancement itself:

The women on the whole, are developing quite quickly and at a rate that they, and society can absorb without causing a rift between men and women. Accelerated development might do more harm than good. They must now develop at their own rate, with guidance and assistance.⁶⁴⁴

While other responses did not go as far as discouraging action for the advancement of women, they adopted an instrumental approach. The Hong Kong response stressed the impact of the informal gathering of women as having a "definite impact, though of indefinable weight, on community development". Bermuda highlighted the impact of women's active role in community life as contributing "greatly" to its development. Mauritius conceived the advancement of women in terms of extending subordinate gender norms: "Mauritian women more conscious of their role as mothers, wives and housekeepers". Some responses denied that gender inequality was even an issue. In Bermuda, the response noted that women's status was "not inferior to that of men", in Hong Kong that "By and large women enjoy equal opportunities with men to pursue [sic] formal education and to practice in a profession of their choice..." and in the Bahamas that women "...have as much opportunity to play a part in the growth of the country as men have".

⁶⁴⁴ Letter from Commonwealth Office Dependent Territories Division (A. Axworthy) to Foreign Office (A. J. Coles), 25 October 1967, FCO 61/260, UK National Archives.

Taking these together as a collection of responses, it is clear that colonial officials failed to see the importance of community development in raising the status of women for its own sake, and showed little to no understanding of how women could be involved in community development or how gender inequality was impacting the lives of women in each context. Unable to demonstrate its position as an international leader on this issue, all the Ministry of Overseas Development was able to add to this was a note that training in community development was available for female British students from overseas.⁶⁴⁵ These responses were subsequently submitted to the Secretary-General in November 1967.⁶⁴⁶

Thus, in understanding the politics of Britain's stance on women and development, we must understand Britain's problematic position in relation to UN women's rights conventions (even after becoming a signatory) and the contentious issues in the CSW at the time which risked resonating with criticism of Britain's colonial record. Britain's staunch defence of its role as a colonial power with regard to the rights and welfare of women in relevant debates in the CSW (and latterly in ECOSOC) continued throughout the 1960s, despite its slow alignment with the UN women's rights agreements which had been developed through these bodies. Even though Britain moved to become a signatory to the political rights and marriage conventions by the end of the decade (in 1967 and 1970 respectively), the debates on slavery and Rhodesia proved areas of contention around British colonialism, prompting attacks from the Soviet Union as well as newly independent developing countries. In the moments that these areas proved potentially embarrassing for Britain, it simply sought to abstain on resolutions and stymie debate, trying instead to highlight Britain's role as a "benevolent" colonial power.

⁶⁴⁵ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer) to Foreign Office (A.J. Coles), 13 November 1967, FCO 61/260, UK National Archives.

⁶⁴⁶ UK Mission in New York note to UN Secretary-General, 23 November 1967, FCO 61/260, UK National Archives.

Yet, in order to fully understand why Britain's stance on women and development was so apathetic, in reality, we must also consider Britain's overall expertise on international development. Given Britain's lack of documentation on, or detail in, policy on women's advancement within development, as evidenced by its outreach to the dependencies on this very issue in 1967, it had very little of substance to contribute to this agenda at the CSW.

2. Britain's deprioritisation of the CSW and the Trojan horse of women and development 1969-1972

Concerns about the politicisation of the CSW were harboured by Britain throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As documented in respect of Britain's responses to the conventions on the political rights of women, nationality of married women and on consent, age and registration of marriage (Chapters One and Two), Cold War dynamics and rhetoric all played out within the narrative frame of colonialism, acting as the proxy war between the Eastern and Western blocs on the CSW. As Laville's study of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women from 1947 through to its ratification by 1967 confirms, the British government's position towards the CSW was "unenthusiastic", and reflective of an institutional sexism within the Foreign Office. Indeed, in a review of the CSW in 1963, an official from the Foreign Office's UN Economic and Social Department argued that the CSW was established as a result of the advocacy efforts of women's rights organisations rather than "considerations of strict logic".⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁷ Laville, "Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67", p480, which notes, Confidential Memo on the future of the UN CSW, 27 September 1963, FO 371/172746, UK National Archives.

These concerns continued into the late 1960s as race relations in Rhodesia formed a new site of debate between the two blocs on colonialism. Britain was also beginning to lose its influence in the CSW through membership changes. Until 1966, the CSW had 21 members, but in that year numbers were expanded to 32.⁶⁴⁸ With this new formation, Britain felt that the Communist countries “have a better representation vis-à-vis Western countries on this Commission than on most other United Nations bodies”.⁶⁴⁹ In 1968, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office noted to Summerskill that on the issue of “political issues” in the CSW, “I am afraid that, though we always have been opposed to this and have sometimes given a strong lead against it, there is no chance of our defeating the anti-colonialist and other lobbies, who have the numbers on their side”.⁶⁵⁰ Such political arithmetic was thus now a structural concern for Britain within the CSW as an institution.

During the 1950s, the Foreign Office had felt the CSW was of little use – going as far as describing the 1956 session as to call it “very dull” – and at by 1969 strongly favoured a move to biennial sessions.⁶⁵¹ The UK delegate briefing for the 1953 CSW session stressed the need to “prevent prolonged discussion of agenda items that will produce no useful results.”⁶⁵² In comparison to other delegates to the CSW, who were seen as respected “feminists”, the British delegates were political appointments with little or no UN experience.⁶⁵³ Unlike other delegates such as Marie-

⁶⁴⁸ See full expanded membership list in Report of the CSW 13-Feb – 6 March 1967, E/4316, UN Documents.

⁶⁴⁹ Final delegate brief for CSW session, 29 January – 19 February 1968, 24 January 1968, 71, FCO 61/261, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵⁰ Letter from Minister of State at Foreign Office (Goronwy Roberts) to UK delegate (Shirley Summerskill) in response to her report from the 29 January – 19 February 1968 session, 1 March 1968, 100, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵¹ Comments on the agenda for CSW session 12-29 March 1956, compiled 22 Feb 1956, UNS17314/11, UK National Archives. Laville, “Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical? British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, p479-480; Final brief for 27 January - 12 February, 1969 CSW session, 27 Jan 1969, IOC(69)5, 22nd session, 32, FCO 61/542, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵² Draft Briefing to UK delegate to 1953 CSW session, 10 March 1953, 1734/44, FO 371/107134, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵³ Internal Correspondence in Foreign Office, 1956, UNS 17314/44, FO 371/123800, UK National Archives.

Hélène Lefauchaux representing France, who was described as “entirely unreliable, with a foot in every camp”⁶⁵⁴ and prone to voting in line with her own conscience rather than France’s position, British delegates were to follow instruction from London. Reflecting on her role in 1957, the British delegate (Lucile Sayers) remarked that Britain took a “defensive role” of merely proposing small amendments, rather than taking the initiative on proposing resolutions, noting that “it seems to me that the time has come for a more positive attitude of leadership”.⁶⁵⁵

By the late 1960s, Britain was also becoming increasingly critical of the capacity of the Status of Women Section, which served as a secretariat for the CSW. In 1968 the UK Mission in New York noted that the capacity of the Status of Women Section had “had a poor record for some time for issuing its documents on time”. When Ghana suggested at the 1968 CSW session that increasing staff and changing the status of the Section to that of a Division, was the only way sufficient attention would be paid to the question of the advancement of women by the UN, the UK Mission in New York remarked to the Foreign Office that the very idea of greater emphasis on the advancement of women at the UN was “questionable” and, if it was a good idea, whether this would be the best way to achieve it.⁶⁵⁶ This reaction repeated and carried forward Britain’s general distaste for a stand-alone emphasis on women’s issues at the UN. It also underlined and expressed the sentiment of the Foreign Office throughout the 1950s and 1960s which regarded the CSW as an annual procedural endeavour in which focus was needed to defend Britain’s prestige on the international stage, rather than as a vehicle for progress on women’s rights internationally, including in its colonies or former colonies. So rather than strengthening the CSW and its

⁶⁵⁴ Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office (Warner), 13 April 1954, on the 1954 CSW session, 17312/97, FO 371/112483, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵⁵ Phone conversation between UK delegate (Sayers) and Foreign Office (G.R. Gauntlett), May 25 1957, 17314/56, FO 371/1229974; Letter from Sayers to Foreign Office (G.R. Gauntlett), 10 July 1957, 17314/69, FO 371/1229974. Both in UK National Archives.

⁶⁵⁶ Report by UK Mission in New York (Milton) to Foreign Office on the 29 January – 19 February 1968 CSW session, sent 27 Feb 1968, 106, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

secretariat, at the 1968 session the UK Mission in New York had been seeking to put forward the idea of actually reducing the length of CSW sessions, although it did not pursue this due to lack of time in the session.⁶⁵⁷

Next, the Foreign Office's growing dissatisfaction with the CSW also appeared to lead to a questioning of its very existence. However, while London and the institutional parts of its diplomatic missions seemed to lose any faith in the CSW's potential, it was Britain's female CSW delegates themselves who tried to make the case for it internally. These women clearly believed in the importance of the CSW as a critical space for women's rights within a sea of male policy-makers within the Foreign Office establishment. Summerskill, in her own report back after the 1968 session, stressed the necessity of the CSW. She prepared a staunch defence to this "frequently asked question", presumably by the Foreign Office itself, noting her answer as a "definite affirmative". Despite her aversion to the term feminist, although describing herself as someone "conscious of discrimination",⁶⁵⁸ Summerskill took a very strong stance in defending the importance of the CSW as a stand-alone space for women's rights issues at the UN:

It lays down guidelines concerning the interests of women and there is no other U.N. body so exclusively concerned with this major subject. The Human Rights Commission would never be able to devote the necessary time to such matters as family planning and the status of women in private law, the political rights of women and the problems of working women. It is women themselves who are best qualified to discuss these. I believe that the Resolutions passed do have an effect on Governments, even if this is not an immediate one, and also on public opinion...The seminars, and the subsequent reports, are greatly appreciated. There is only one women delegate on the Human Rights Commission (and she is an alternate) and it is well known that the General Assembly and the senior posts of the U.N. Secretariat are almost exclusively male. Until this situation changes it would seem important to preserve the Status of Women Commission where the female view can be expressed.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁷ UK delegate Shirley Summerskill's report of the 29 January – 19 February 1968 CSW session, included in IOC(68) 26, 8 April 1968, 113, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵⁸ *The Times*, 20 December 1967, found in UK National Archives, FCO 61/260, UK National Archives.

⁶⁵⁹ UK delegate Shirley Summerskill's report of the 29 January – 19 February 1968 CSW session, included in IOC(68) 26, 8 April 1968, 113, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

Thus despite her reluctance to consider herself a feminist, she took a strong line in defending the CSW as a vital space for women's issues and voices to be heard on the UN stage. Summerskill had obviously concluded that a key aspect of her job as UK delegate to the CSW had evolved into defending this very institution in light of the Foreign Office's mounting reservations as to its usefulness. Indeed by 1969, its misgivings about the CSW had prompted it to call for an end to annual sessions, in favour of biennial sessions. The UK delegation for the 1969 CSW session was instructed that the main argument was that of "efficiency and economy in the working of the UN as a whole" and in terms of the CSW specifically, that this would "afford a better chance of proper preparation, and study by governments, of material on those items where a productive debate be held".⁶⁶⁰ Absent was any consideration of the CSW as an important annual space for women delegates to discuss women's rights, but rather, a focus on efficiency, and by implication, a cull of current unnecessary items. For the Foreign Office, as a male-dominated institution, reducing the sessions of the main international space to deliberate women's rights issues was of no significance.

Amid this push to reduce the frequency of the CSW sessions, another female British CSW delegate, Margaret Chitty, based in the UK Mission in New York, was the next advocate to have to make a case to defend the practical utility of the CSW to the Foreign Office. Chitty was a First Secretary in the mission, with a long career behind her in the Commonwealth Relations Office.⁶⁶¹ She stressed the effectiveness of practical results of the CSW agenda, since "a number of delegates from Africa and Asia" had assured her that appeals aimed at governments – such as those to ensure implementation of international instruments to eliminate sex discrimination in economic

⁶⁶⁰ Final Brief for CSW session in 27 January – 12 February 1969 CSW session, 27 Jan 1969, IOC (69) 5, 32, FCO 61/542, UK National Archives.

⁶⁶¹ Chitty began working at the Dominions Office in 1940, before moving to the Commonwealth relations office in 1947-52 and 1958 and served as First Secretary of the Commonwealth Relations Office 1958-1968. See Diplomatic Service List, 1969, 351.010.25, UK National Archives.

development or the responses to the Secretary-General's questionnaire on the role of women in economic and social development of their country "really do in the long run have an effect on Government's policies". She further pressed that seminars on particular subjects "would be a practical achievement".⁶⁶² Her perspective, as part of the delegation, had provided her with a realisation of the value of the CSW as an institution. This was not shared by her Foreign Office counterparts in London.

As part of their efforts to defend the CSW to Foreign Office sceptics, Chitty and Summerskill also separately relayed to London the resistance Britain had met in trying to move to biennial sessions at the 1969 CSW session (which they had earlier anticipated from African and Asian delegations going into the session).⁶⁶³ Summerskill stated that Britain's move for biennial sessions was misrepresented by the majority of delegates as a criticism of the value of the CSW and an "inexcusable attempt to limit its activities" in the emotionally charged debate.⁶⁶⁴ Chitty noted that despite working hard with the Australians to achieve biennial sessions, with the benefit of hindsight "it is extraordinary that we ever thought we would succeed" with the weight of opinion against Britain and strong interventions from Ghana and Morocco.⁶⁶⁵ The delegate for Ghana argued that rather than reducing the number of sessions, they should be extended in order to meet the heavy work-load. Expressing her dismay at Britain's suggestion of biennial sessions, she argued that "If the number of meetings was reduced, the Commission's activities would decrease correspondingly."⁶⁶⁶ Ghana put forward a resolution to maintain annual sessions and France, the Philippines, Guinea, Madagascar, Liberia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Tunisia, Iraq and Peru also

⁶⁶² UK Mission in New York Report from the 1969 CSW session compiled by Chitty, 25 February 1969, 60, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁶³ Final Brief for CSW session in 27 January – 12 February 1969 CSW session, 27 January 1969, IOC (69) 5, 32, FCO 61/542, UK National Archives.

⁶⁶⁴ Report of 27 the 27 January – 12 February 1969 CSW session by Shirley Summerskill, 7 March 1969, 63, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁶⁵ UK Mission in New York report from the 27 January – 12 February 1969 CSW session compiled by Chitty, 25 February 1969, 60, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁶⁶ Ghana (Jagge), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.534, UN Documents.

defended the importance of an annual sitting.⁶⁶⁷ For this reason, the UK Mission in New York recommended to London that since no clear progress could be made at the 1969 session without hardening the position between developed and developing countries, Britain should abstain on the matter.⁶⁶⁸

The imperative of delegates to defend the institution of the CSW, in fact, reaches back to the beginning of this study where, in 1953, Sutherland defended the role of the CSW. She argued that, as an institution it gave “hope and inspiration to courageous groups of women for example in the Middle East and South East Asia who are striving to break down barriers of old tradition and prejudice to win education and political opportunities for women”.⁶⁶⁹ Her successor, Sayers, ended her time at the CSW in 1957 by demanding the UK government take more a more “positive attitude of leadership.”⁶⁷⁰

Although Britain had felt outnumbered within the CSW on the question of the frequency of CSW sessions, it returned to the issue of its periodicity at the ECOSOC session in the summer of 1969. In collaboration with France and Belgium, Britain stressed that reducing the frequency of sessions would be desirable and advantageous.⁶⁷¹ But now women’s organisations in Britain were taking note of Britain’s manoeuvrings, including the British Federation of University Women (BFUW).

⁶⁶⁷ CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.534-543; Draft resolution for the CSW session 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/L.564. Both UN Documents.

⁶⁶⁸ Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office, 8 February 1969, 45, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives. However, as Ghana put forward a resolution maintaining annual sessions, Britain, the US and Australia all voted against, arguing they had not had a chance to express their views. See UN Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.543, UN Documents.

⁶⁶⁹ Laville, “‘Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical?’ British Responses to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, p492 which notes Letter from Sutherland to Foreign Secretary Eden, 21 January 1953, FO 371/107134, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, which notes letter from Mary Sutherland to Foreign Secretary Eden, 21 January 1953 FO371/107134; and Letter from Lucile Sayers to G.R. Gauntlett, 10 July 1957 FO 371/129974, both at UK National Archives.

⁶⁷¹ Telegram from UK Mission in New York to Foreign Office on ECOSOC session 1969, 75, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

This organisation wrote to the Foreign Secretary to voice its opposition to Britain's attempt to call for biennial sessions at the CSW.⁶⁷² The Foreign Office's response to the BFUW stressed that such a move would "increase effective working" of the Commission, and that the high value Britain attached to the commission was evidenced by the fact that in many past years the UK delegation has been led by an MP⁶⁷³. This proved a wise defence in the absence of scarce substantive achievements of Britain at the commission.

Despite these domestic protests, Britain's push for biennial sessions at ECOSOC was a success since a vote was secured and won for biennial sessions. While Britain stood by its rationale for biennial sessions as one of efficiency, it is clear that the Foreign Office's patience with the CSW had reached a critical low by the end of the 1960s. The UK delegate briefing for the 1969 ECOSOC session noted that Britain was:

particularly anxious to remove the increasing tendency in recent years for the Commission to waste time discussing controversial political issues of the moment only thinly disguised as having anything at all to do with matters directly affecting the status of women.⁶⁷⁴

The offending areas of the most recent 1969 CSW agenda were highlighted. Firstly, "The influence of foreign, economic and other interests on the living conditions of women in dependent territories" was noted for its focus on colonialism, alongside the agenda item on the Middle East. Additionally, the brief stated that the longstanding item on "The Political Rights of Women" was also used by most delegates "as the occasion for routine exercises in anticolonial polemics".⁶⁷⁵ Thus despite Britain's decolonisation of most of its empire in Asia and Africa by the end of the 1960s, it was still aware of its vulnerability relating to colonialism in the CSW itself.

⁶⁷² Letter from BFUW to the Foreign Secretary (Michael Stewart), 28 July 1969, 82, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷³ Response to BFUW from Foreign Office (King), 28 August 1969, 88, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷⁴ Briefing for ECOSOC session 1969, IOC 13 May 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

Clearly, these “controversial political issues” were causing Britain to miss the importance that an annual session would bring to the CSW as *the* major international organ on women’s rights – including the ways in which this could encourage women’s advancement in British ex-colonies. But further, the Foreign Office also began to consider Britain’s membership of the CSW entirely, noting that:

the commission has tended to spend the major part of its time wrangling over political subjects having little or no relationship to its terms of reference; and that if this trend is extended at next year’s session there might be a case for reviewing our membership of the Commission.⁶⁷⁶

Chitty, as the UK Delegate in the New York Mission again jumped to the defence of the CSW and Britain’s role on it. She argued that if Britain withdrew its membership “it would be interpreted (presumably correctly) as meaning we attach no importance to the objectives of the Commission”. She connected this explicitly to the role of the CSW in promoting women’s rights in developing countries, stating that Britain’s withdrawal would be “further evidence of the negative British attitude when the interests of developing countries are involved”. She reminded the Foreign Office of her earlier remarks, that in fact the CSW was of significant practical use (as she had evidenced in her talks with representatives of Ghana, Botswana, and the Philippines).⁶⁷⁷ Her powerful defence proved effective. The Foreign Office in London replied that “we shall not decide to take such a serious step as to withdraw”, based on the very arguments she outlined. However, the CSW remained vulnerable to a new form of attack as the Foreign Office began to canvass suggestions for the CSW to be merged with other functional commissions within ECOSOC.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁶ Letter from Foreign Office (Mackillingin) to UK Mission in New York (Chitty), 9 July 1969, 80, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷⁷ Letter from UK Mission in New York (Chitty) to Foreign Office (Mackillingin), 23 May 1969, 76, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁷⁸ Briefing for ECOSOC session in 1969, IOC 13 May 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

By 1970, the new lead of the UK delegation to the CSW – Guinevere Tilney, wife of a prominent Conservative MP of the time and herself co-chair of the UK Women’s National Commission, was also forced to defend the CSW to the Foreign Office.⁶⁷⁹ Reporting on the 1970 CSW session, she argued that the CSW was “a most valuable body capable of doing far-reaching work” and serving as a “life-line for women from developing countries”. In this way, while devoid of examples to draw on, she felt the CSW offered a “really constructive way in which women from developed countries can offer their expertise and help”.⁶⁸⁰ The irony of these remarks emerges when this is compared to British action on the agenda item of women in development, since it was continuing to block institutional changes which would strengthen the UN’s hand to promote women’s advancement as part of its development programme (see Chapter Four).

Finally, in an attempt to appease Tilney and give her “some form of initiative for the 1972 session”, the Foreign Office began to moot the idea of Britain hosting a CSW seminar. This proposal had clear benefits: the primary being that given Britain’s push for biennial CSW sessions was proving “so unpopular with members of the Commission and with Women’s organisations in the UK”, pushing for a seminar in the “off-year” was a British strategy for support, with the offer to host the first of these in London.⁶⁸¹ It would also prove to be a method through which to champion Britain’s line on the importance of the integration of women into development, rather than stand-alone programmes, and through this, to disband the CSW itself for the very same reason.

⁶⁷⁹ The Women’s National Commission was set up by the Prime Minister Wilson in July 1969 as a Government sponsored and financed (but not government controlled) body, with its first meeting held on 24 October 1969. The Commission’s terms of reference was to “To ensure by all possible means that the informed opinion of women is given its due weight in the deliberations of Government on matters of public interest”. See background note on the Women’s National Commission, 4, 25 April 1974, CAB 164/1420, UK National Archives.

⁶⁸⁰ Report on 23 March – 10 April 1970 CSW session, by UK delegate (Guinevere Tilney), 27, FCO 61/698, UK National Archives.

⁶⁸¹ UK delegate briefing for 14 February – 3 March 1972 CSW session on programme of work (item 4), 10 Feb 1972, 32, FCO 61/988, UK National Archives.

3. Britain's CSW seminar and the attempt to dissolve the CSW in 1973

In May 1973, Britain put forward a resolution to a working group in ECOSOC on rationalisation which proposed merging the CSW and the UN Social Development Commission. The idea of merging the CSW with other UN commissions had been on Britain's radar since the late 1960s, and was given further attention by the Overseas Development Administration (formerly Overseas Development Ministry) and a leading figure at the UK Mission in New York touted the idea to the Foreign Office in London.⁶⁸²

It was the Overseas Development Administration's defence of the continued functioning of the UN Social Development Commission in 1973 as a forum which it described as having played "a prominent part in formulating a development philosophy relating to the real needs of the developing world" which led it to search for other commissions which it felt were less strategic.⁶⁸³ Here, the CSW was identified as a ripe target for the focus on rationalisation. In March 1973, the Overseas Development Administration and the UK Mission in New York hatched a proposal to merge the CSW and Social Development Commission, noting three reasons to support the merger:

...legitimate pressure over the status of women tends to be discounted rather than to succeed...if it is exercised by "women's committees" – ie bodies like the CSW and the Third Committee alike which are largely feminine in membership. Secondly the pressure would be more soundly orientated within the context of comprehensive development. Thirdly, there seems little future for the alternative possibility: either the CSW's merger with or its subordination to the Human Rights Commission. This in theory would be

⁶⁸² The UK ECOSOC delegation were alerted to listen out to the possibility of such a move as early as 1969. I.O.C., 13 May 1969, report on the CSW for Item 12 of ECOSOC session for 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

⁶⁸³ Brief by ODA on policy options for the future of the UN Social Development Commission, 18 Jan 1973, 1, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

equally logical but in practice, given the character of the Human Rights Commission, it could not be defended against attack from women's lobbies.⁶⁸⁴

In addition to dismissing the importance of a separate space to deliberate women's rights issues, their letter dismissed the idea of women's rights as a universal struggle. It noted that action was only now needed in "backward countries" which it referenced developing countries and the USSR, rather than in most developed countries. In this way, it asserted that women in development was the most relevant way the global campaign for progress on women's rights could be applied.

Subsequently the UN desk at the Foreign Office in London put such a proposal forward for Ministerial approval.⁶⁸⁵ This was granted in May 1973.⁶⁸⁶ Within the submission it argued that the CSW was "of little more value than a pressure group" which had "failed to deal with the economic and social problems of women, especially in developing countries, and is not capable of handling these problems which can only be dealt with in the general development context". The fact that it was Britain that had been blocking proposals for stand-alone emphasis on this issue within the UN seemed lost in the brief. Nor was there any reference to the newly agreed Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women (see Chapter Four). Britain's rejection of stand-alone consideration of women's issues in general was deep rooted. The Submission states that, "It is undesirable to treat women in isolation and a separate Commission implies discrimination" and that the CSW is composed "almost exclusively of women and little attention is paid to what they say".⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁴ Letter to Foreign Office (Keeble) from UK Mission in New York (McCarthy), U.K. Delegation to the United Nations Organization, New York, 12 March 1973, 12, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives. McCarthy held the senior rank of Minister (Economic and Social Affairs) at the Mission, which sat below the Permanent Representative.

⁶⁸⁵ Submission for Ministerial approval by Foreign Office (Keeble), 23 March 1973, 14 and 15, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁶⁸⁶ Foreign Office Internal minute (Nigel Wenban-Smith), 4 May 1973, 34, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁶⁸⁷ Submission for Ministerial approval by Foreign Office (Keeble), 23 March 1973, 14 and 15, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

Ultimately, the proposed merger offered the chance for the Foreign Office to achieve two wins simultaneously. On the one hand, it contained the opportunity to dissolve a commission which it deemed of little merit and which still proved itself a risky forum for matters relating to the British dependencies and its colonial legacy throughout the 1960s. Secondly, it would provide the institutional machinery to promote the general policy on “integrating” women’s advancement and development, without having to take any action to reconfigure development mechanisms at UN level, within UK aid infrastructure, or to encourage developing countries to prioritise the issue. The proposal simply noted that:

A merger on the Status of Women and Social Development Commissions would ensure that discussion of the status of women was integrated into the discussions of the overall development process.⁶⁸⁸

The UK Mission in New York was encouraged further by the idea after mooted the proposal informally to the President of the International Council of Women, who surprisingly thought the idea “made a great deal of sense” and was worthy of examination.⁶⁸⁹ When Britain put forward a resolution for the merging of the two commissions at the ECOSOC working group on rationalization in May 1973, stressing the importance which ECOSOC attached to “strengthening its efforts to advance the political, social and economic status of women especially in the developing countries and the least developed among them”,⁶⁹⁰ the reaction was hostile. The Assistant Secretary-General of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs suggested the proposal was contrary to the UN Charter.⁶⁹¹ Chile, China and African delegations opposed the idea, leaving Britain struggling to find any fellow governments to champion it.⁶⁹² By

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Letter from UK Mission in New York (McCarthy) to Foreign Office (Keeble), 22 March 1973, 17, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁶⁹⁰ ECOSOC Coordination Committee 1973 session, E/AC. 24/L.450, UN Documents.

⁶⁹¹ Letter to Lady Tilney from Foreign Office (Tilling), 15 June 1973, 35, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁶⁹² Telegrams from UK Mission in New York (Crowe) to Foreign Office, 4 May 1973, 27 and 28, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

the following week, only Finland were providing guarded support to Britain.⁶⁹³ Head of the UN Secretariat Section on the Status of Women (Margaret Bruce) also opposed the proposal. Given “this marked lack of enthusiasm”, Britain decided not to press the matter but leave it for “consideration at some future juncture” noting that in retrospect “we would have benefited from more lobbying before discussions began”.⁶⁹⁴

It was in this vein that the proposed CSW seminar in London began to be reconceived as a means to generate political support for the idea of dissolving the CSW and merging it with the Social Development Commission. Gerard, a Social Development advisor at the Overseas Development Administration wrote to Nigel Wenban-Smith, Assistant to the UN Department at the Foreign Office in London, noting that the seminar currently under discussion was “perhaps something of a liability both from the development and from the political point of view”. Gerard argued that the agenda was too loose. He argued it was likely to create “positively erroneous and ill-balanced notions of women’s position in development” thus requiring urgent intervention to do all possible to prevent it being a “complete waste of time”.⁶⁹⁵ Clearly keen to co-opt the seminar to dissolve the CSW, he argued that from a political perspective:

...much could be gained if the UK Representatives were to go in to bat with one central theme in mind and with one main aim – the adoption by the Seminar of some kind of resolution about the integration of women into the social development process and indeed into development as a whole. If delegates from the UK were to take up this theme and were to emphasise the need “in UN structures and elsewhere” for women’s integration to be seen as part of the total social development process we would then have a useful lever in our future discussions.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ Telegrams from UK Mission in New York (Crowe) to Foreign Office, 32, 11 May 1973, UK National Archives.

⁶⁹⁴ Letter to UK delegate Tilney from Foreign Office (D.R. Tilling), 15 June 1973, 35, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁶⁹⁵ Letter from Overseas Development Administration (C. Gerard) to Foreign Office (Nigel Wenban-Smith), 14 June 1973, 36, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

Gerard's letter to the Foreign and Commonwealth's UN desk in London also included suggestions about using a new tactic. While not expecting the seminar discussion to touch on the merger proposals directly "which have so far proved abortive", it could call for an end to "women's ghetto organisations, comprised solely of women and talking only about women's problems".⁶⁹⁷ Seemingly ignorant of the feminist sentiment behind the establishment of the CSW as a stand-alone space within the UN machinery to deliberate on progress for women's rights, he argued that it was this idea of ending the "women's ghetto" that underlined the British proposal to merge the two commissions, believing that "we could no doubt persuade at least some of the delegates from developing countries of the force of the argument for the full integration of women into the social development process rather than their treatment as a special sub-category all on its own".⁶⁹⁸ Further, he claimed that even if some delegates who had previously opposed the merger at ECOSOC caught wind of Britain's manoeuvring, "they can hardly reject the contention that integration of women into the development process ought to be a primary objective...effectively paving the way for the revival, in a few months' time" of the merger proposal.⁶⁹⁹

In this way, Gerard believed that winning the narrative at the seminar could undermine the important feminist principle of the importance of women's spaces for their own sake. The UK Mission in New York generally supported this strategy, but cautioned that Britain would likely run into opposition given that a solid body of opinion existed which understood the "betterment of women's lot...mainly in the human rights context" arguing that approaching the question from this angle would be likely to be more effective.⁷⁰⁰ Indeed such need for caution on the issue of

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Letter from UK Mission in New York (Macrae) to Foreign Office (Nigel Wenban-Smith), 20 June 1973, 38, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

adopting Gerard's approach was recognised by his own Ministry who would later describe him as "apt to expose some not fully controlled enthusiasms".⁷⁰¹

Nevertheless, now emboldened, the Overseas Development Administration prepared a briefing for the UK delegates to the seminar. This outlined the British position to merge the commissions, and the ambition to formulate a recommendation that would "reflect our concern for action in the UN on the integration of women in development".⁷⁰² The Foreign Office, however, remained cautious. It decided not to distribute the paper for risk of leaks from "10 very independently minded ladies", who had been drawn from various women's rights organisations and the private sector. Further, the Foreign Office noted that even if everything went to plan, it would still be unlikely for the seminar to pass resolutions dealing specifically with the need to reorganise UN bodies.⁷⁰³ Instead, the Foreign Office favoured an informal briefing to the delegates, in which the watchword of "integration" rather than "discrimination" was pushed, stressing "we should no longer treat the problems of women in isolation" without mentioning to them the long-term objective of the merger at all, unaware of the broader political objective at stake. The Foreign Office felt that the delegates were "genuinely convinced of our arguments from their different experiences in dealing with the problems of women".⁷⁰⁴ Little did they realise that they were merely pawns in Britain's biggest initiative yet to lessen the focus on women's advancement in the UN's structures, with a potential effect of once again mainstreaming a focus on women *out* of development debates.

⁷⁰¹ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (King) to Foreign Office (T. Brimelow), 19 August 1975, FCO 61/1427, UK National Archives.

⁷⁰² Overseas Development Administration briefing for London Seminar Sent to Foreign Office (Nigel Wenban-Smith), 26 June 1987, 39, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷⁰³ Letter from Foreign Office (J. James) to Overseas Development Administration (C. Gerard), 3 July 1973, 41, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

Despite these stealth-like tactics, this joint departmental campaign quickly began to run into resistance from key figures in the UN Secretariat. They were on the alert for such manoeuvring at international conferences, and making the most of advocacy opportunities themselves. A month prior to the London summit, Bruce and the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (Helvi Sipilä) made a strong appeal to delegates at the Women and Family Planning international seminar in Indonesia in June 1973. Referring to Britain's attempt to subsume the CSW under the Social Development Commission, Sipilä and Bruce argued that this would be a highly undesirable move which would deprive women of a voice and reduce further the areas in which women's affairs could be raised. The UK delegate attending that conference noted that Sipilä and Bruce held the position that a separate UN forum was necessary to bring about the recognition of women's concerns and contributions in development, seeing the UK's merger attempt as entirely negative. In private Bruce "expressed her disquiet – along with an anxiety that this position might colour the atmosphere" at the London seminar.⁷⁰⁵ Bruce and Sipilä's lobbying also proved successful – with the UK delegate (Joan Chapman from the UK Population Bureau) noting that a number of delegates "appeared to commit themselves in general terms to blocking any move to do away with the Status of Women Commission". She also noted that the strength of this feeling should not be underestimated. She further warned of a likely continuation or follow up on these points at the London seminar.⁷⁰⁶

When it came to the London seminar itself in July 1973, the Overseas Development Administration reflected that the loose title of "Family in a changing society" led to an "inept" and "wide-ranging" discussion.⁷⁰⁷ This resulted in little content on women and development. Of the

⁷⁰⁵ Report on Overseas visit to Status of Women and Family Planning Summit Jogjakarta, Indonesia 12-30 June 1973 (Joan Chapman), 44, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Overseas Development Administration report on the London Seminar by Teresa Spens and Joan Chapman, circa August 1973, 436, FCO 61/1130, UK National Archives.

numerous recommendations, one included references to more extensive utilisation of assistance for rural development under UN programmes, while another called for the need for women to play an important part in the context of national development.⁷⁰⁸ The lead organiser of the seminar based in the Foreign Office questioned “whether the considerable expense was justified”, although it was felt that this at least “demonstrated the UK’s interest in the United Nations and human rights in general and in the status of women in particular”.⁷⁰⁹ The Overseas Development Administration reflected that the British delegates stuck to the line that more emphasis was needed on the social and economic aspects of integration of women into development and that “by implication at least” that less weight needed to be attached to the concept of women’s rights.⁷¹⁰ But they also felt that the counter campaign orchestrated by Bruce and Sipilä had created a tense atmosphere with the UN organisers, sometimes spilling over on to the participants. Because of this the British participants and the Chairman “were thus seen...as part of a calculated attempt to put a particular United Kingdom line”.⁷¹¹

4. Women fighting back

Indeed, such perceptions by delegations to the conference accurately reflected British strategy which continued after the seminar. A subsequent meeting, organised to review the discussions at the seminar, brought together Sipilä and Bruce, the UK representatives, and government officials. The UK representative to the Social Development Commission (Prosser) stressed explicitly that the UN’s institutional arrangements needed to be looked at in the light of eliminating “functional

⁷⁰⁸ Official record of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the United Nations Seminar on the Family in a Changing Society, circa August 1973, 417, FCO 61/1130, UK National Archives.

⁷⁰⁹ Note on the Seminar by Foreign Office lead organiser (Veasey), 8 August 1973, FCO 61/1130, UK National Archives.

⁷¹⁰ Overseas Development Administration report on the London Seminar by Teresa Spens and Joan Chapman, circa August 1973, 436, FCO 61/1130, UK National Archives.

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

parallelism”.⁷¹² Bruce made a follow up phone call to make a strong personal plea for Britain to change its policy on the merger. In addition she spent time at the seminar itself emphasising the value of the CSW as an institution; a plea which Gerard dismissed as a woman wishing to retain her “rather ill-defined job until her husband retires in 4-5 years time”.⁷¹³ At the luncheon, Sipilä noted in private that one day the CSW might be associated with the Social Development Commission once various legal instruments on legal discrimination had been “cleared away”, provided there were built in safeguards such as a special subcommittee on women’s affairs.⁷¹⁴ The Overseas Development Administration came to the conclusion that the best way forward would be to down-grade the merger push, until an opportune moment in years to come: “It may be possible in a couple of years to reach a bargain whereby the Secretariat will give these proposals their backing providing the UK is accommodating over various outstanding bits of “anti-women discrimination legislation”⁷¹⁵ It further stressed that a decision “does not need to be taken for some while”, and that in the interim a light touch strategy could be employed of occasionally making it clear to other delegations that “the full integration of women into development is a positive policy” and that the proposed merger did not make Britain “anti” the role of women in development.⁷¹⁶ Thus while the idea had been parked, Britain clearly still felt no need to prioritise women’s integration in development in concrete terms or fully acknowledge the threat that dissolving the CSW posed to this end.

Significantly, this decision had coincided with increasing protest from women’s organisations in Britain which had voiced their opposition to the proposed merger as part of the informal

⁷¹² Letter from Overseas Development Administration (C. Gerard) to UK Mission in New York (Macrae) on the London Seminar, 7 August 1973, 46, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

discussions at the London seminar.⁷¹⁷ As with Britain's resistance to support for the convention on the political rights of women (see Chapter One) or its initial resistance to support a convention on marriage practices (see Chapter Two), these organisations enlisted the support of women parliamentarians to champion their cause. Doris Fisher, a new backbench Labour MP, wrote to the Conservative Minister of State at Foreign Office, Baroness Tweedsmuir, in August 1973. She noted that "Many women's organizations have contacted me indicating that they were never consulted" on the issue of winding up of the CSW, arguing that this should have been the case "If a fundamental change of this nature is envisaged".⁷¹⁸

Under pressure to respond to this external criticism, Tweedsmuir replied confirming that this would not be pursued at present as the "matter has been left for consideration at some future date". Further, she stated in the letter that the Foreign Office had in fact consulted the UK representative to the CSW, the Social Development Commission, the National Council of Social Service and the secretariat of the Women's National Commission, who "expressed their support" in an attempt to feign good practice on outreach with the British women's movement..⁷¹⁹

But, another Labour MP, Judith Hart – also former co-chair and one of the founders of the Women's National Commission – also wrote to the Foreign Office, this time to the Secretary of State Sir Alec Douglas-Home – noting her dismay that the "British Government is said to have indicated that women's organisations were in favour of such a move" when "they were never consulted on the matter and from their reactions it would seem they are opposed to such a

⁷¹⁷ Internal Foreign Office submission (Keeble), UN Department, 23 August, 1973, 47, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷¹⁸ Letter from Doris Fisher MP to Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Baroness Tweedsmuir of Belhelvie), 15 August 1973, 45, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷¹⁹ Reply to Doris Fisher MP from Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Baroness Tweedsmuir of Belhelvie), 28 August 1974, 49, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

move”.⁷²⁰ In a second letter to Douglas-Home, she argued that the Women’s National Commission was intended to serve as a national committee for the Status of Women and as such the changes proposed by the government “ought to have been put first for discussion” to it. She added “It is not enough for the secretariat to have been consulted...There are proprieties to be observed in these matters”.⁷²¹ Former CSW delegate and Labour MP, Summerskill, also wrote to the Foreign Office - now targeting Julian Amery, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, arguing that “It appears that women’s organisations in this Country have not been consulted on the matter and it would seem that they are opposed to such a move”. These Labour MPs were writing to the Foreign Office, not only as members of the political opposition to the government. They had, through their respective roles on the Women’s National Commission and as the UK CSW delegate, become strong supporters of the CSW as a global mechanism for progress on women’s rights. This development proved something that the Overseas Development Administration, UK Mission in New York and the Foreign Office had failed account for in their political calculations in trying to dissolve the CSW.

The interest in the issue on the part of women’s organisations – and their lobbying efforts among MPs – appears to have been sparked at least in part by Bruce’s informal campaign against the merger at the London seminar. After the seminar, Bruce met with a number of NGOs, for example giving a talk at the offices of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in London, which resulted in support from a number of British women’s organisations that resolved to lobby the Foreign Office.⁷²² It is clear from correspondence, that the UN Association (UNA) organised a

⁷²⁰ Letter from Judith Hart MP to Foreign Secretary Sir Douglas-Home, 20 August 1973, 50, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷²¹ Letter from Judith Hart MP to Foreign Secretary Sir Douglas-Home, 14 November 1973, 54, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

⁷²² Letter from IPPF (Sieve) to Margaret Bruce, 6 August 1973, S-0445-0363-0005, UN Archives; Joan Chapman, Population Bureau minutes to Foreign Office from a meeting with IPPF, 8 August 1973, 51, FCO 61/1039, UK National Archives.

meeting with Bruce in the days after the London Seminar, and that this led to the UNA subsequently sending a letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs which noted that the proposed merger was “strongly opposed by many women’s organisations as it is felt that the time is not yet ripe for disbanding the Status of Women Commission”.⁷²³ In a second letter to the Secretary of State in December 1973, the UNA also stated that “Mrs Sipilä...and Mrs Margaret Bruce...are in complete agreement with our views”, citing Sipilä’s arguments made in the 1973 ECOSOC session that “The proposed merger of the two Commissions would limit the fundamental purpose for which the Commission was established”.⁷²⁴ This network of women had forged a powerful lobbying coalition.

The protests of the CSW secretariat and the way in which it galvanised action from women’s groups in Britain, demonstrates the strength of international collaboration between women’s groups and the CSW at the time. Ultimately, the counter campaign by the CSW Secretariat, UK based women’s rights organisations, and Labour women MPs resulted in a retreat from Britain’s campaign to dissolve the CSW.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the reasons behind the apparent gap between Britain’s stated prioritisation of women and development and its failure to enact this policy position in the development framework under debate at the CSW in the 1960s. It has demonstrated that this position was linked to the fact that the CSW continued to serve as a site of embarrassment for Britain, in light of attacks on colonial powers throughout the 1960s. Even though Britain moved,

⁷²³ Letter from UN Association (Rubens) to Joan Vickers MP, 7 November 1973, 451, FCO 61/1130, UK National Archives.

⁷²⁴ Letter from UN Association (Rubens) to Foreign Office (Tilling), 13 December 1973, 453, FCO 61/1130, UK National Archives.

albeit slowly, to become a signatory to the political rights and marriage conventions by the end of the decade (in 1967 and 1970 respectively), the debates on slavery and Rhodesia proved areas of contention around British colonialism, promoting attacks from the USSR as well as newly independent developing countries. In this way, little had changed from Britain's approach at the CSW in the 1950s. Despite Britain's loss of most of its empire in Asia and Africa by the end of the 1960s, it was still aware of its vulnerability relating to colonialism in the CSW itself. And it is at this juncture that it becomes easy to understand why Britain favoured the CSW focussing on international development, even if only with a mild enthusiasm and a general aversion for structural change. Indeed, the debates around how to structure UN technical assistance did not evoke the same attacks against British colonialism.

Yet while women and development seemed like a safer option for Britain from a reputation perspective, it is clear that Britain lacked a real understanding of the practicalities of the issue of women and development. In 1970 the Ministry of Overseas Development was more explicit about its indifference and lack of expertise on the issue of women in development, stating that for Foreign Office briefing purposes, despite being the channel for British development aid, it would not have a great deal to contribute on the general topic of the status of women.

It is thus in answering the second question of the analytical framework utilised within this thesis – whether the conventions and frameworks served as a site of embarrassment on Britain's colonial record – that we can understand the motivations behind, and true nature of Britain's policy positions on women and development in the CSW in the 1960s.

By the end of the 1960s, the Foreign Office's patience with the CSW had reached a critical low. However, where London and the institutional parts of its diplomatic missions seemed to lose sight of the CSW's potential, it was Britain's female CSW delegates themselves who tried to make the case for it internally. These women clearly believed in the importance of the CSW as a critical space for women's rights within a sea of male policy-makers within the Foreign Office establishment.

Not only did Britain try to shift the CSW to biennial sessions, it also began to consider its membership of the body. While the defence provided by these women delegates stemmed the tide of Britain's growing distaste for the CSW until the start of the 1970s, by 1973 officials began to rekindle this hostility as Britain embarked on a campaign to dissolve the CSW into the UN Commission on Social Development.

Thus, while this chapter concludes that the CSW served as a site of embarrassment for Britain over its colonial record reinforcing Britain's conflicted and confused interest in women and development, it goes further by demonstrating that the pressures the Foreign Office faced over Britain's colonial record impacted its perception of the value of the CSW itself. And it was here that Britain's global colonial legacy fused with its supposed policy position to integrate women into development efforts into a campaign which almost ended the CSW itself. Thus this chapter takes us further in answering the third question of the analytical framework for this research – Britain's impact on conventions and development frameworks in this period – in recognising that impact rocked the very foundations of the CSW itself.

However, Britain was unable to make those foundations crumble. It is here that the role of women in powerful positions – in the secretariat and as women MPs – and in women's rights organisations,

worked in combination to challenge the government's position. Through informal meetings and formal letters to government officials, this group of women formed a powerful lobbying coalition which successfully inhibited Britain's campaign against the CSW and saved the CSW as a unique site for women's rights debate on the international stage.

CHAPTER 6: BRITAIN AND DEVELOPMENT AT THE UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, 1975

By 1970, the UN International Development Strategy, launched to mark the Second Development Decade, had recognised the need for the “full integration of women into the development effort” alongside the launch of Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of women (see Chapter Four).⁷²⁵ The distinct but parallel subjects of women and development now began to converge at the UN.⁷²⁶ Moreover, during the 1970s, the understanding of the relationship between women and international development at global level became more nuanced and evidenced. Ample research had emerged to show that women would not automatically benefit from development, and that in many cases, it had worsened the situation of poorer women.⁷²⁷

Although by now the CSW had been in existence for 25 years, it was only in the 1970s that women’s issues moved to centre stage at the UN, starting with the World Conference on Women in 1975.⁷²⁸ A Plan of Action – which served as a non-binding stimulant for national and international action over a 10-year period – was developed as the major product of the conference,

⁷²⁵ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p4, p48-50; International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Decade”, UN General Assembly Resolution 2626 (XXV), 24 October 1970; Puetilä, *Engendering the Global Agenda*, p30.

⁷²⁶ Snyder, “The politics of women and development”, p96.

⁷²⁷ Margaret Bruce “Women and policy making in the United Nations”, in *The United Nations and Decision-making: the role of women* (UN: UNITAR, 1978), p72.

⁷²⁸ Kristen Ghodsee, “Revisiting the United Nations Decade for Women: Brief reflections on feminism, capitalism, and Cold War politics in the early years of the international women’s movement”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 33 (2010), p3.

which drew on the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women and the UN International Development Strategy.⁷²⁹ This international interest in women was also expressed more broadly, following the rise of second wave feminism and the further rise of women's movements in developing countries in the mid-1960s.⁷³⁰ It was in this context that the World Conference focused on the issue of women's integration into development – or “women in development” – as it became known – as a major theme.

This final chapter provides an assessment of Britain's relationship with women and development at the 1975 World Conference on Women. It looks across the three questions of the analytical framework to ascertain Britain's policy position around development and its relationship to its interests as a decolonising power; at the ways in which the issue of development offered a safer route around the embarrassment of other issues; and finally at the impact of Britain's role at the conference on the agreements on women and development that were adopted.

The World Conference on Women followed a quarter of a century of British engagement with the CSW on issues relating to the advancement of women. This international conference, held in Mexico City, was unprecedented: the first intergovernmental conference on women's advancement. The official delegates included 133 national delegations, representatives of eight UN agencies, 13 UN programmes and 192 NGOs in consultative status with the UN. In addition, a 6000-strong NGO contingent attended a parallel conference in the city.⁷³¹ The conference was hugely significant, for bringing together two main agendas: the women's agenda as defined by the

⁷²⁹ Draft International Plan of Action prepared by UN Secretariat, E/CONF.66/CC/2, 8 February 1975, UN Documents. This also drew on the World Population Plan of Action and World Food Conference, alongside African and Asian regional action plans for the three themes of the conference.

⁷³⁰ Snyder, “The politics of women and development”, p96.

⁷³¹ Virginia Allan, Margaret Galey and Mildred Persinger, “World Conference of International Women's Year” in *Women, Politics and the United Nations*, ed. Winslow (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p33.

CSW since its inception in 1946, and the larger political agenda of the UN.⁷³² While observers and historians disagree as to whether this was the “greatest consciousness-raising event in history”, Jocelyn Olcott argues that it marked a watershed moment for transnational feminism.⁷³³ Further still, with women delegates making up 73 percent of the official delegates, and heading the majority of government delegations, the ratio of men to women delegates was reversed for the first time in history.⁷³⁴

Somewhat unexpectedly, in terms of the focus and climax of this thesis, this conference proved a turning point for Britain’s hitherto tepid interest in women in development. As we shall see, Britain reversed its previous resistance to supporting a dedicated UN fund, in fact acting as a pioneer as one of the first donors. Britain continued its call for the integration of women in development, but engaged in more specific approaches pushing the UN system to reflect on project appraisal processes than it had done in the 1960s (see Chapter Four).

1. Momentum on women in development

During the 1960s, UN technical assistance through the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance – later to become UNDP – had started to pay lip service to women, but without specifically working to empower them. As such, many UN agencies took a conventional approach, emphasising home economics and welfare services for women which focused on women’s role in the family.⁷³⁵ The policies of many UN agencies predominantly centred on welfare-driven policies around maternal and child health, mothercraft and home craft.⁷³⁶ Some started to expand this focus for instrumental reasons. For example, UNICEF’s focus on women’s clubs as part of community

⁷³² Ibid, p29.

⁷³³ Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Sexual Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women’s Year Conference”, *Gender and History*, vol.22, no. 3, (2010), p735.

⁷³⁴ Bruce, “Women and policy making in the United Nations”, p63.

⁷³⁵ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p63.

⁷³⁶ Snyder, “The politics of women and development”, p97.

development programmes was undertaken on the assumption that women's empowerment aided children. Others argued that women formed the major beneficiaries of their work. The World Food Programme claimed that its food-for-work programmes made it the largest supporter of development projects involving and benefitting poor women. During the early 1970s, the issue women in development would experience a step-change.⁷³⁷

Two UN conferences on Food and Population in 1974 played an important part in elevating the profile of women's role in development. These expanded the traditional view of women as mothers and stressed their role in population policy making and as producers of world food supplies.⁷³⁸ The UN Economic Commission for Africa had also played a key role in recognising women's centrality to development. Following the commission of a series of studies, the head of the Commission (Robert Gardiner), reflected in 1966 on the failure of capital-intensive industrialisation. As an economist, he called for small-scale, labour intensive, small to medium industries which were geared to national consumption patterns.⁷³⁹ Momentum in the Economic Commission for Africa also grew after the establishment of the All Africa Women's Conference and the first Kenya women's seminar organised by Margaret Kenyatta (daughter of Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta) in 1972.⁷⁴⁰ This led to a focus on women in development and to a regional five-year plan.

⁷³⁷ Maggie Black, *The Children and the Nations: The story of UNICEF* (New York: UNICEF, 1986) p183; John Shaw, *The UN World Food Programme and the Development of Food Aid* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2001), p4 based on Craig Murphy, *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way*, p 201.

⁷³⁸ Unpublished interview with Helvi Sipilä, New York 3 November 1990 in Hilka Pietilä and Jeanne Vickers, *Making Women Matter* (New Jersey: Zed Press, 1990), pp74-75.

⁷³⁹ Craig Murphy, *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way*, p202.

⁷⁴⁰ Margaret Snyder, *Transforming Development: Women, Poverty and Politics* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995), p26; United Nations Report of the World Conference of International Women's Year, Mexico City, 19 June-2 July 1975, E/CONF.66/34, UN Documents.

Women academics played a pivotal role too. Margaret Snyder argues that the publication of Ester Boserup's *Women in Economic Development* in 1970 also contributed to this shifting understanding of the role of women in development in the early 1970s. The book provided evidence of the centrality of women's (often uncounted) contribution to economic production, and warned that economic growth would be undermined if this was not recognised. This was bolstered by the presence of newly independent countries at the UN which bought a "fresh, grassroots approach, identifying women as providers of food, energy and water and as the backbone of rural economies".⁷⁴¹ Furthermore, feminist development theorists were highlighting the fact that traditional economic development programmes were in fact reinforcing women's subordination.⁷⁴² Here too colonialism was judged to have intensified women's subordination through changes to areas such as land rights, which left many women excluded from the economic sphere. Also the introduction of cash crops was blamed for having led to changes in the family division of labour.⁷⁴³

Indeed, Boserup's book sparked the Social Development Commission to convene in tandem with the CSW, an interregional meeting of experts on the integration of women in development. It marked the first global meeting on women and development where experts came together to discuss common strategies for effective integration.⁷⁴⁴ At the meeting, Margaret Bruce (Head of the UN Secretariat Section on the Status of Women) stressed that the low status of women, especially in developing countries, was a major factor in global concerns such as poverty, rapid population growth, illiteracy, forced urbanization, and poor nutrition and health conditions. Boserup prepared the background paper for the meeting which challenged the assumption of most governments, namely that economic progress would improve women's as well as men's lives. She

⁷⁴¹ Snyder, "The politics of women and development", p97; Esther Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (London: Allen and Urwin, 1970).

⁷⁴² Tinker, "Introduction" in *Developing Power*, pxiii.

⁷⁴³ Jocelyn Olcott, "Empires of Information: Media Strategies for the 1975 International Women's Year", *Journal of Women's History*, vol.24, no.4 (2012), p34; Rai, *The Gender Politics of Development*, p20-21.

⁷⁴⁴ Snyder, *Transforming Development: Women, Poverty and Politics*, p17.

argued that women were being marginalised by advanced agricultural technology and that investment in women would increase the overall efficiency of development efforts.⁷⁴⁵ Kristen Timothy, who worked in the Social Affairs Division of the UN Secretariat at the time, reflected on the impact of this on the development sector:

This new interest in development with social justice led us to deconstruct development beneficiary groups to better understand the needs of different income groups. Our aim was to counter the prevailing tendency to lump together all the targets of development into undifferentiated categories with no regard for gender roles, class interests, or cultural factors – indicators that went beyond GNP...but we were still handicapped by a dearth of data disaggregated by sex.⁷⁴⁶

The expert meeting recommended a programme of education, vocational training and jobs for women, which marked a clear departure from the welfare approach in which women were seen as beneficiaries.⁷⁴⁷

Increased understanding and evidence of women's central role in development were not the only reasons for a step change in the recognition of women in development in the early 1970s. Snyder argues that wider challenges to the UN's modernisation theory of development – and the idea that increases in GNP would trickle down to the poorest and thereby benefit whole societies – were also significant.⁷⁴⁸ Alongside the increase in the number of Member States from developing world to the UN, including the perspectives of women from developing countries, the rebirth of the women's movement outside the UN corridors also brought increased political pressure on women's issues.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁵ Kristen Timothy, "Walking on eggshells at the UN", in *Developing Power*, eds. Fraser and Tinker (New York: City University of New York, 2004), p54.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid, p54.

⁷⁴⁷ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p53.

⁷⁴⁸ Snyder, *Transforming Development: Women, Poverty and Politics*, pp9-10.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, pp9-10.

By the mid-1970s the OECD's Development Advisory Committee was also taking a keen interest in women's integration into development, convening an expert meeting in 1975 which adopted criteria for bilateral aid requiring women to be involved in preparing women-specific and general development projects. This followed legislation in Sweden in 1964, mandating the government to support women through its foreign assistance programmes and an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act in the US in 1973 (Percy Amendment) which mandated the inclusion of women in programmes designed to alleviate poverty abroad.⁷⁵⁰ Moving to the World Conference on Women in 1975, the concept of "women in development" was beginning to take hold as shorthand for the integration of women into international development.⁷⁵¹

2. British support for the integration of women in development

With International Women's Year on the horizon for 1975, the CSW agreed at its meeting in 1974 to mark the year by convening the first UN World Conference on Women. The conference was tasked with agreeing an international action programme with short and long term measures in three key areas including: women's advancement in development; steps to eliminate gender based discrimination; and efforts to widen the involvement of women in international peace and the eradication of racism and racial discrimination.⁷⁵² In crystallising its objectives on the issue of women's advancement in development the conference aimed "to ensure the integration of women

⁷⁵⁰ Snyder, "The politics of women and development", p98; Tinker, "Challenging Wisdom, Changing policies: The Women in Development Movement" in *Developing Power: How Women Transformed International Development*, eds. Fraser and Tinker (New York: City University of New York, 2004), pp70-71.

⁷⁵¹ Snyder, "The politics of women and development", p98.

⁷⁵² United Nations, *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*, p33-34.

as full and equal partners with men in the total development effort, by emphasizing women's responsibility and important role in economic, social and cultural development".⁷⁵³

Despite its ambition, as an intergovernmental conference, political currents were never far away. The inclusion of a focus on international peace and the eradication of racism was the result of Soviet pressure. This was much to the dissatisfaction of Britain, which felt this could lead the conference in "very undesirable directions" serving as a potential area for political attack.⁷⁵⁴ The briefing materials for the UK delegation noted that the Soviet Union "will exploit the Conference for its standard themes of political propaganda...and the Africans and Arabs will press attacks against South Africa and Israel".⁷⁵⁵ Britain further feared a push by some developing countries towards the live issue of a New International Economic Order – a campaign to revise the international economic system through global trade and finance to better serve developing countries – in terms which would be unacceptable to Britain.⁷⁵⁶ This followed the adoption of the Declaration of the New International Economic Order by the UN General Assembly in 1974, asserting developing nations' rights to control their economies and exploit their own natural resources, which Britain had voted against.⁷⁵⁷ The briefing papers noted that while some developing countries were likely to attempt to turn the discussion to international economic issues, "the delegation should concentrate on matters of special and direct concern to women".⁷⁵⁸ It was in this way that the theme of the integration of women in development came to offer a means for Britain to steer through the controversies. Britain's delegates were reminded that they might be able to place emphasis on the need for integration of women in development, particularly in the

⁷⁵³ United Nations Conference of the International Women's Year, 6 Jan 1975, E/5606, UN Documents.

⁷⁵⁴ Internal Foreign Office Minute, (James to Maxey) 19 Feb 1975, File 41, FCO 61/1422, UK National Archives.

⁷⁵⁵ UK delegate Brief for the World Conference on Women, 10 June 1975, FCO 61/1424 UK National Archives.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid; Margaret Snyder, "Walking my Own Road: How a Sabbatical Year Led to a United Nations Career", in *Developing Power: How Women Transformed International Development, How Women Transformed International Development*, eds. Arvonne Fraser and Irene Tinker (New York: City University of New York, 2004) p42; McCarthy, "The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year 1975", p841.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid, p84.

⁷⁵⁸ UK Delegate brief for the World Conference on Women, 10 June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

context of poverty, together with other kinds of social action at the *national* level, away from the controversies of questions of international relations.

The delegation reflected after the conference that there had been many political issues raised at, including on apartheid and colonialism.⁷⁵⁹ As such, Helen McCarthy underscores that the Foreign Office's reading of the conference was "refracted through the prism of Cold War politics and postcolonial struggles", with diplomats conceptualising gender politics as "essentially a proxy for these larger ideological battles".⁷⁶⁰ Eastern European and Third World delegates stressed women's need to "participate in the struggle against colonialism, racism, apartheid and foreign occupation" and implement a New International Economic Order. Further, Kristen Ghodsee maintains that this position was reinforced from the perspective that women had a predisposition to be less violent than men and that women's participation in international affairs could challenge the uniquely male forces such as neo-colonialism, apartheid and racism.⁷⁶¹ The Israel-Palestine conflict also proved a highly contested issue at the conference, with the G-77 (a coalition of developing countries) proposing a draft conference declaration designating "Zionism a form of racial discrimination" alongside an Arab delegation walkout when Israel's chief delegate addressed the conference.⁷⁶² Similar to Britain's focus on development for change at the national level, France and Australia stressed that bilateral and multilateral development programmes were needed to

⁷⁵⁹ Telegram from UK Delegation to Foreign Office, 9 July 1975, FCO 61/1426, UK National Archives.

⁷⁶⁰ McCarthy, "The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year 1975", p836.

⁷⁶¹ Kristen Ghodsee, "Revisiting the United Nations decade for women: Brief reflections on feminism, capitalism and Cold War politics in the early years of the international women's movement", p6.

⁷⁶² Leticia Shahani, "The UN, Women and Development: The World Conference on Women", p30; Virginia Allen et al, "World Conference of International Women's Year" p36. Divisions between priorities of the global north and global south were also felt within the approaches of NGOs and other feminist delegates attending the conference. Ghodsee argues that American feminists thought that Mexico would be a venue to discuss specific topics such as legal barriers, employment discrimination, inequalities in educational attainment, or women's representation in political office. The women from the Eastern bloc countries, alternatively, argued that the international women's conferences should be a forum to allow women to have their own say about the same world issues that men debated in the UN such as peace in the Middle East and apartheid in South Africa. (Kristen Ghodsee, "Revisiting the United Nations decade for women: Brief reflections on feminism, capitalism and Cold War politics in the early years of the international women's movement", p5.)

change women's status⁷⁶³ The head of the British delegation, Labour MP Millie Miller, resented this "low key approach". McCarthy has evidenced that Miller felt Britain had taken an unnecessarily defensive position on matters of global inequality at a time when the Labour government in power was committed to the redistribution of wealth.⁷⁶⁴

While the issue of women's integration into development offered a means to circumvent debates on international economic relations or racial discrimination, Britain's interest in women and development was once again to be placed within strict limits. The UK delegation was warned that the focus on development should not come at the cost of a wholesale shift towards stand-alone women's rights focused programming within British development aid:

Over-exposure of aid programmes as a whole would probably lead to pressure on donors collectively to institute special earmarking of parts of their aid programmes to projects benefitting women alone. This we would oppose; in the context of the UK bilateral aid programme such earmarking procedures would be rigid and administratively difficult. In any case the basic idea itself has the drawback of tending to segregate aid projects involving women as special beneficiaries whereas desirably we would rather see the reverse approach – i.e. all aid projects should be appraised from the point of view of their impact on women as well as men.⁷⁶⁵

Thus, as before, the issue of women and development was not seen as worthy of stand-alone funding or a focus in terms of Britain's bilateral aid programme. Certainly, this opposition to stand-alone programming on women's advancement within the aid sector is consistent with Britain's policy position from the mid-1960s onwards. However, its policy had moved on in terms of more

⁷⁶³ Virginia Allen et al, "World Conference of International Women's Year", p35 which notes UN, OPI, Press Release IWY/29, 24 June 1975.

⁷⁶⁴ McCarthy, "The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year 1975", p845 which notes Miller 'International Womens' [sic] year conference, Mexico, June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁶⁵ UK Delegate brief for the World Conference on Women, 10 June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

concrete support for women's integration into development. It thus now accepted that women's advancement was a required goal of international development aid.

This new stance was significant. At the World Conference on Women, the British delegates were instructed to “stress the need for a redirection in UN programmes so that they take more account of the impact of all development activities on women”, and to praise those UN agencies that have “already achieved considerable progress in taking account of the social factors in development”.⁷⁶⁶ Such stress and praise marks a stark divergence from British policy in the late 1960s where Britain sought to block attempts for the UN to re-orientate its programmes in this regard (see Chapter Four). Britain was also now more proactively supporting the integration of women through the mechanism of the aid appraisal process. Britain drafted a resolution on the issue of project appraisal for the conference itself, requesting international and bilateral agencies to review criteria which they use for rural development so as to take account of the interests of rural women and girls. The final resolution – although “finally in the hands of Cuba and others” – was strongly influenced by Britain's language that multilateral and bilateral aid agencies incorporate an impact statement of how much proposed programmes would affect women as participants and beneficiaries in their plans and analyses.⁷⁶⁷

Not only was Britain now pursuing a much more specific foreign policy around the integration of women into development than it had in the 1960s around the proposed UN unified programme for the advancement of women, it was also having to institute this within its own development machinery. Reflecting on the resolution after the conference, Teresa Spens, one of the two official

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ Note by Ministry of Overseas Development (Teresa Spens), “Comments on the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in Mexico City...implication for ODM policy relating to women”, August 2015, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

delegates from the now reinstated Ministry for Overseas Development, who had formerly worked for the British Red Cross and the FAO and now part-time consultant for the Ministry specially on women's affairs,⁷⁶⁸ pressed upon Ministry officials the need to take this issue forward in its future planning:

There is considerable and mounting evidence that women's interests are either totally overlooked, or at least inadequately assessed, in a great deal of development planning. For this reason primarily, and also because the UK has taken a public stance in the matter, I recommend that the Overseas Development Ministry should consider whether present methods of project appraisal are adequate in this respect.⁷⁶⁹

Spens, as a champion of women in aid, could make the case for better integration within Britain's bilateral aid systems. As a lecturer in social anthropology in addition to her advisory role at the Ministry of Overseas Development, Spens took a keen interest in the place of women in development, stressing in particular the emerging feminist view in the early 1970s that development can do more harm than good when it comes to women's interests. Speaking at a meeting of the UK Standing Committee on the Second Development Decade in January 1975, she stressed the detrimental impacts of development where it was imposed without considering the true position of women within the context of particular societies.⁷⁷⁰ A speaking note prepared primarily by Spens for the Minister of Overseas Development (Judith Hart) to give to the Women's Advisory Council of the UK United Nations Association again emphasised these risks:

Although there are obviously many ways in which women have benefitted from 'development' – through health services, improved water supplies and sanitation, labour saving technology, increased agricultural yields, better nutrition, family planning

⁷⁶⁸ McCarthy, 'The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year 1975', p844.

⁷⁶⁹ Note by Ministry of Overseas Development (Teresa Spens), "Comments on the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City...implication for ODM policy relating to women", August 2015, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁷⁰ In particular, Spens referenced Esther Boserup's recent book *Women's Role in Economic Development*. Notes from the meeting of the Standing Committee on the Second Development Decade, 29 January 1975, Ei/64A, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

programmes and so on, it is also true that the implications for women of economic and technological change are often unfavourable⁷⁷¹

Such emphasis on looking at the impact of development on women, presented a new avenue of understanding on the integration of women in development in the Ministry of Overseas Development's policy. As such its advisors now recommended to their Minister that the "implications for women in all forms of planned development need to be much more carefully assessed than is generally the case at present" since "new developments may mean a loss for women of rights to land, of personal control over income, or of traditional roles which were once a source of self-esteem".⁷⁷² Hart herself recognised these risks in impacting gender-relations stressing that "countries introducing technological training must very much bear in mind the impact of those technical advances"⁷⁷³

Thus, the World Conference on Women itself provided a focus in which Britain became much more serious about how it would support women and development through effective integration. With an increasing understanding of the role of women in development - through UN expert meetings, women academics, and gender specialists from the Ministry of Overseas Development attending the conference - Britain embarked upon a step change in its approach to women and development. This shift was enabled by, and reinforced, Britain's foreign policy goals as the Foreign Office viewed the theme of the integration of women in development as offering a means for Britain to steer away from tricky issues such as colonialism, apartheid and the New International Economic Order.

⁷⁷¹ Speech for Women's Advisory Council of the UK United Nations Association, circa 1975, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁷⁷² Draft brief for Minister on funding for the International Women's Conference, 67 E(i), OD 62/39, UK National Archives.

⁷⁷³ Transcription of note of address by Judith Hart, International Women's Seminar, circa 1975, HART/10/11, Labour Party Archives.

With this new shift, Britain took pains to stress the need for programmes to take more account of the impact of all development activities on women and to proactively support the integration of women within the aid approval process. This led to a virtuous cycle, in which advisors such as Spens who championed gender equality in aid at the Ministry of Overseas Development, could make the case for better systems of integration of women within British bilateral aid. The growing strength of such champions within the Ministry rubbed off on the Minister herself, who also began to speak out in other fora on the need to understand the impact of aid on gender relations.

3. Rural development

It was also the case that Britain's broader policy shift to prioritise "rural development" offered a lens by which it felt it could encapsulate the idea of women's advancement in development as part of its broader international development objectives. Crucially, this was to be achieved without a broader prioritisation of development programmes aimed specifically at women's advancement but by continuing the integration of women as per its development policy in the mid-1960s (see Chapter Four). This interest in women came from the top with Hart interested in women through the prism of rural development.

While she was shadow minister for Ministry of Overseas Development in 1973, Hart had published *Aid and Liberation*. She had taken a keen interest in women's rights in connection with the rising concern around the rapid increase in world population. She argued that "two keys to the

stabilisation of population are greater equality in development, and the liberation of women”.⁷⁷⁴

As such:

development itself stimulates factors which exercise an important influence upon patterns of social behaviour affecting family size – education, communication, the economic role of the child, the status of women – become favourable to it, and that the provision of family planning services is desirable in itself and essential to the process of encouraging smaller families⁷⁷⁵

The Labour Party also began to develop a new aid strategy focused on rural areas, as part of a strategy to help “the poorest people in the poorest countries” in contrast to the “Tory preference for helping the already semi-developed nations”.⁷⁷⁶ Hart argued in the months preceding the world conference that “aid ought to be orientated towards the people in greatest need which means a poverty-orientated programme, which means that one takes the poorest countries and the poorest people in the poor countries”.⁷⁷⁷ Hart’s ideology rendered the need for a stand-alone programme on women’s development unnecessary since women would be aided through a focus on rural development: “Most women in the world live in rural areas: the rural areas in the Third World contain areas of poverty in which women are the most disadvantaged group of all”.⁷⁷⁸

Speaking off-the-cuff at a seminar to mark International Women’s Year, Hart again linked the idea of reaching women with a priority on rural development, arguing that: “My priority is rural development and the poorest people and this means the woman trying to keep her family alive must be one of the targets of our British aid programme”. Thus, rural development would be the focus with women’s advancement the positive by-product: “if we want to help our fellow women

⁷⁷⁴ Judith Hart, *Aid and Liberation: a socialist study of aid policies* (London: Gollancz, 1973), p95.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid, pp99-100.

⁷⁷⁶ Labour’s programme 1976, File 8/66 HART/8/66, Labour Party Archives.

⁷⁷⁷ Hart interview in “The Courier”, circa March 1975, 4, HART/10/11, Labour Party Archives.

⁷⁷⁸ Brief on UK Aid, 11 June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

in the rest of the world then we've got to back this development thing as far as we can"⁷⁷⁹. Hart continued:

We are formulating the programme in such a way that the women of the developing countries stand very much to gain today from our emphasis on rural development because in the world as a whole...people are coming rapidly to share our view that rural development is the thing we have to concentrate on in these matters. If our development assistance to the Third World as a whole begins to do this effectively then our woman in the developing country village perhaps begin[s] to be relieved from her burden of trying to look after her baby and her children – and that's the first step in her liberation⁷⁸⁰

Concluding her speech she argued that women would be the first to say:

you want to look after women, so look after people; for as you look after people then you get the enhancement of the status of women; and I think that perhaps ought to be the real keynote of International Women's Year⁷⁸¹

Such an approach, in arguing that women would benefit from general assistance to rural communities, failed to recognise or seek to break down the particular challenges faced by women living in poor communities.

With the draft Plan of Action for the World Conference itself incorporating language on rural development, an official at the Ministry of Overseas Development (Day) noted that this was of “special interest to the U.K. taking into account the increasing attention now being given to rural development”.⁷⁸² Both Spens and Day stressed that women should not have priority over other members of the population or any preferential treatment.⁷⁸³ Therefore the focus on rural

⁷⁷⁹ Transcription of note of address by Judith Hart, International Women's Seminar, circa 1975, HART/10/11, Labour Party Archives.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

⁷⁸² Comments on the Draft Plan of Action by the ODM (Day), 27 Feb 1975, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁷⁸³ Note by Ministry of Overseas Development (Spens) “Comments on the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in Mexico City...implication for ODM policy relating to women”, August 2015, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

development as the overarching aim enabled this broader compromise: rural development as the aim would be facilitated with an increasing focus on the advancement of rural women.

The interest of the British government in rural development presented a clear link to its colonial legacy of community development; both of which encompassed a multisectoral approach on areas such as “agriculture...education, health, transport and communications and social welfare”.⁷⁸⁴ Not only was this legacy recognised by Britain, so too was the idea that prioritising rural development could be construed as an intrusion on sovereignty. Hart argued that some might say that if Britain intends to give priority to rural development “this means that we are in danger of behaving as neo-colonialists”:

It is not our intention to dictate to the governments of developing countries what they shall do in their internal policies. It will always be their responsibility to come to us with proposals and suggestions as to how we can best help them achieve programmes of balanced development. But in deciding how to respond to these requests, we shall in future take greater account than in the past of whether the general policies of the recipient government are designed to secure a better distribution of wealth throughout the community and we shall try, wherever possible, to support schemes which directly help in the elimination of poverty, especially rural poverty.⁷⁸⁵

Thus, Britain now attempted to tread a delicate line in which it attempted to neutralise any appearance of neo-colonialism in a new era of decolonisation, yet assert the development aims which it wished its aid programme to support. Such prioritisation of rural development marked a departure from Britain’s invocation of sovereignty used as a reason for not giving preference for women’s integration in development in discussions around the UN unified programme for the

⁷⁸⁴ Brief on UK Aid, 11 June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives; For further reading on Community Development see Lewis, “Tropical East Ends and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives”, p45 and Lewis, *Empire State Building*, pp298-359.

⁷⁸⁵ Speech by Minister Judith Hart prepared for the Royal Society of Arts, titled “The Priority for Rural Development Overseas”, 6 May 1976, 10, HART/10/11, Labour Party Archives.

advancement of women in the 1960s (see Chapter Four). At the 1975 World Conference on Women, the head of the UK delegation, MP and former CSW delegate, Shirley Summerskill, asserted “we now attach first priority” to rural development, noting that “Rural development means the economic and social advancement of all living in rural areas, and thus the interests of rural women can – and must – be given more attention”.⁷⁸⁶

Yet at the same time, focusing its interest in women in development within the rural development lens also enabled Britain to continue to defer to the sovereignty of developing countries *to the extent that they wished to promote women’s advancement* and to “avoid any suggestion of patronage or of interference with the priorities of independent governments”. Official documents affirmed that “we are seeking to learn and not teach in the context of the discussions on women in development”.⁷⁸⁷

However, beyond this convenient coalescence of themes, Britain had little to add in terms of *how* to support women living in rural areas, noting simply that the “contribution” of women living in such contexts was still not fully explored “and may need more study and research”. After reviewing the focus of British aid at the time towards nutrition, employment and education, in preparation for the World Conference on Women, Britain had very little to say about how this was indeed benefitting rural women. The background briefings for the Conference emphasised many of Britain’s weaknesses in this regard, admitting that “relatively little expertise” had been provided to cover the employment problems of women as distinct from the community as whole and that very few of Ministry of Overseas Development’s research projects to date “relate directly to

⁷⁸⁶ Speech by Shirley Summerskill to the Mexico conference, 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁸⁷ Integration of Women in the Development Process as Equal Partners with men, 10 June 1975 (IOC (75)116), FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

women”. Where it noted that the British aid programme might be of benefit, it did so in vague terms: the contribution of non-formal education (such as literacy and rural extension training in agriculture) was “more likely” than formal education to be of direct benefit to women.⁷⁸⁸ Britain’s clearest positions on women and development related to women’s health and welfare where Britain was keen to present development and population issues as closely linked priorities. By 1975/6 over £3 million in British aid was designated for multilateral and international agencies for population activities, compared to £10,000 in 1965/66, alongside a more gradual increase in bilateral assistance in response to requests from governments.⁷⁸⁹

Therefore, while women in development provided a useful way for the British government to support its aims around rural development, much like British colonial policy before it, women were once again being instrumentalised towards this end. Further, while there was certainly a growing interest from the British government on women in development compared to the 1960s, Britain continued to have little to say on the matter. In this way its colonial legacy, which had failed to document how colonial policies were affecting women (see Chapter Five), again reproduced through the failure of the Ministry of Overseas Development to conduct its own research on the matter, was impeding its ability to take progressive steps forward.

4. Supporting the voluntary fund for women’s advancement

Nevertheless, despite this lack of clarity as to the detail of supporting women in rural development, Britain’s made a significant shift in policy at the World Conference on Women by championing, in conjunction with the Philippines, the idea of a new UN voluntary fund on women in

⁷⁸⁸ Brief on UK Aid, 11 June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁸⁹ Brief on Population prepared for the Conference on Women, 10 June 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

development.⁷⁹⁰ Further still, Britain now broke with previous resistance by pledging financial resources. Britain's financial contribution for £600,000, was a significantly smaller sum than its contribution to multilateral funds on population, and Britain called for its donation to the voluntary fund to be earmarked to support women in rural development projects relating to education, cooperatives and health.⁷⁹¹ Yet whilst giving a relatively small sum, Britain gained spontaneous applause at the conference when making the pledge.⁷⁹² It was indeed the second largest contribution (the highest being from the US).⁷⁹³ Britain led the drafting of a resolution at the Conference for "Special Resources for the Integration of Women in Development" alongside the Philippines, Afghanistan, Dominican Republic and the Netherlands. This invited the Secretary General to present a report to the General Assembly on the organisational arrangements for such a fund.⁷⁹⁴

Spens had championed the fund in her reports back to the Foreign Office, noting that many developing countries were very much in favour of the establishment of a new UN fund to be launched alongside the new Plan of Action "feeling that little would happen in the poorest countries unless a special fund was available". After the British announcement of funds she noted that several representatives from developing countries made appreciative remarks in private discussions.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁰ Snyder, "The politics of women and development", p99.

⁷⁹¹ Speech by Shirley Summerskill at the Mexico Conference; Brief on the Integration of women in the Development Process, prepared for the World Conference on Women, 10 June 1975, (IOC(75)116) both FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹² Note by Ministry of Overseas Development (Teresa Spens), "Comments on the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in Mexico City...implication for ODM policy relating to women", August 2015, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹³ Outline of minister's speech to inaugural lunch of the UK committee for the UN Development Fund for Women, 27 June 1975, E/39, OD 49/40, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹⁴ Note by Ministry of Overseas Development (Teresa Spens), "Comments on the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in Mexico City...implication for ODM policy relating to women", August 2015, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹⁵ Note by Ministry of Overseas Development (Teresa Spens), "Comments on the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in Mexico City...implication for ODM policy relating to women", August 2015, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives. Spens also noted that privately, officials from East and Central Africa expressed a

This marked a U-turn in British government policy which had been opposed to such a voluntary fund at the UN since it was first proposed in the mid-1960s. The shift in British policy on providing resources for this kind of voluntary UN fund – formally against British foreign policy⁷⁹⁶ – was in fact preceded, and enabled, through a smaller shift in March 1975, when Britain provided £10,000 to a UN voluntary fund for International Women’s Year. It was the Ministry of Overseas Development which provided the impetus and finances to make the £10,000 pledge, who did not feel the same objections to donating to UN voluntary funds since it was already contributing to the UN voluntary fund on population.⁷⁹⁷ Officials noted internally that “it is our policy to seek to promote activities in developing countries which are aimed at or likely to have the effect of enhancing the status of women”.⁷⁹⁸ Chapman, an advisor at the Ministry of Overseas Development’s Population Bureau, agreed on the importance of contributing to the UN fund for International Women’s Year, “because the improvement of the status of women, in the context of their integration into the development effort, has become part of the stated ODM policy in relation to programmes of rural development”.⁷⁹⁹ The Ministry of Overseas Development sought to persuade the Treasury to approve the funds on the basis that it would be of value to support a UN voluntary fund since it would be those countries which could benefit the most by improving the status of women that were in some cases the last to recognise it. Governments of such countries, the Ministry of Overseas Development maintained, were reluctant to make available resources for the promotion of International Women’s Year in their respective countries “but

fear that the UN Secretariat would draw on this fund for travel expenses and that it might “divert donor countries from contributing directly, as they are doing at present, to regional projects for the advancement of women.

⁷⁹⁶ Official Foreign Office policy was to not support the establishment of or to contribute to UN Voluntary funds as they felt the UN should conduct its business within the limits of its budget. See Ministry of Overseas Development Internal minute, 21 March 1975 (Finch to Cooper), OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹⁷ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Finch) to Treasury (Smith), 3 April 1975, on the proposed contribution of £10,000 to the International Women’s Year UN Voluntary Fund, 74, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹⁸ Ministry of Overseas Development Internal Minute, 21 March 1975 (Finch to Cooper), OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁷⁹⁹ Ministry of Overseas Development Internal minute Chapman, circa March 1975, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

politically might find it difficult to resist UN-sponsored work aimed at stimulating public opinion”.⁸⁰⁰ Britain thus began to sound like a champion state, using finances to galvanise action in developing countries on women’s advancement.

The support of these advisors internally, despite all-too familiar protests from their fellow advisor Gerard in the Social Affairs Department⁸⁰¹, was now supplemented with high-level political will following the appointment of Hart as Minister of Overseas Development, after Labour’s victory at the February 1974 General Election. Following her previous role as co-chair of the National Women’s Commission, it is perhaps of little surprise that, according to internal correspondence, she held a particular interest in supporting women’s affairs by all possible means.⁸⁰² As such she approved the contribution as long as it would be used for development purposes and not for travel costs for the World Conference on Women.⁸⁰³

The role of women champions was critical. McCarthy reveals that Barbara Castle, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services, who was lined up to give Britain’s opening speech at the World Conference on Women, lobbied for more funds beyond the £10,000 pledged for International Women’s Year. Although she was replaced by Summerskill at the last minute, Castle played a key role in “bombarding the Foreign Office minister David Ennals with letters and news clippings” berating the government for donating such a meagre sum compared to other Western

⁸⁰⁰ Letter from ODM (Finch) to Treasury (Smith) on the proposed contribution of £10,000 to the International Women’s Year UN Voluntary Fund, 3 April 1975, 74, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁸⁰¹ Gerard objected to providing a contribution to the UN International Women’s Year Fund on the basis that it may risk a pressure for further voluntary contributions to the various funds which he anticipated would result from the Conference, see Ministry of Overseas Development Internal Correspondence (C. Gerard), 14 March 1975, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁸⁰² Ministry of Overseas Development Internal Note (Turner to Freeman), 27 Sept 1975, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁸⁰³ Ministry of Overseas Development Internal Note (Cooper to Freeman), 19 March 1975, OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

governments.⁸⁰⁴ But the £600,000 funding pledge made by Britain for a new UN women's fund was actually committed by the Ministry of Overseas Development where Hart had taken a keen interest in the conference.⁸⁰⁵

Yet while Britain's support for the International Women's Year fund provided a solid basis for the Ministry of Overseas Development's support for UN voluntary funds, allowing it to make the larger subsequent pledge to the voluntary fund on women in development, this change in policy was in fact a compromise position in light of NGO demands. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom were lobbying Hart to make a much more substantial financial commitment to women's advancement in development by directing the main part of UK Overseas Development Assistance for 1975 towards education and help for women in rural sectors.⁸⁰⁶ Similarly, the International Committee of the Labour Party was also seeking to pressure Hart "to allocate part of its overseas aid to matters affecting women's status ie literacy, education and other training for women and family planning".⁸⁰⁷

Britain's pledge of £600,000 should therefore be understood at one and the same time as both a *departure* from previous policy on women in development at the CSW, and an opportunity to *reaffirm* Britain's resistance to stand-alone programmes for women's advancement in development. It was in the context of calls from NGOs and the Labour Party, and what the Foreign Office

⁸⁰⁴ McCarthy, "The Diplomatic History of Global Women's Rights: The British Foreign Office and International Women's Year 1975", p6.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, p843.

⁸⁰⁶ Letter from Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to Minister Judith Hart, 19 Oct 1974, 65 E(ii), OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

⁸⁰⁷ Letter from Acting International Secretary of the Labour Party (Jenny Little) to Minister Judith Hart, 13 September 1974, 45 E (ii), OD 62/38, UK National Archives.

identified as a risk that the World Conference on Women itself would lead to an earmarking of the British aid budget, that this much weaker commitment was made.

Conclusion

Leticia Shahani, who worked in the CSW secretariat during the 1960s and later became the Assistant Secretary-General for UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, argues that it was at the World Conference on Women that gender equality “went global”.⁸⁰⁸ The World Plan of Action adopted at this conference on Women provided goals and guidelines for governments, intergovernmental institutions and NGOs.⁸⁰⁹ Further still, the Declaration of Mexico, also adopted at the conference, included the right of women to participate in and contribute to the development effort, with the government signatories pledging to eliminate all obstacles that stood in the way of women’s full integration into national development and peace.⁸¹⁰ Visibility and momentum around “women in development” had reached a new high.

This welcome momentum also included a commitment to a voluntary fund, officially established in 1976, to support “the poorest women in the poorest countries”.⁸¹¹ With the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on the voluntary fund in 1976, it was tasked with giving specific consideration to rural and poor urban women and to emphasize programmes in the least-developed countries. Its mandate was confirmed as strengthening technical cooperation activities, regional and international programmes research, data collection, analysis and communication on

⁸⁰⁸ Leticia Shahani quoted in *UN Voices: The struggle for Development and Social Justice*, ed. Thomas Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij and Richard Jolly, *UN Voices: The struggle for Development and Social Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p257.

⁸⁰⁹ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, pp69-72.

⁸¹⁰ United Nations, *United Nations Decade for Women 1976-1985*, Pamphlet (New York: United Nations, 1978); Virginia Allen et al, “World Conference of International Women’s Year”, p42.

⁸¹¹ The United Nations and Human Rights p84; Puetilä, *Engendering the Global Agenda*, p38.

the implementation of the goals of the UN Decade for Women. The UK conference representative Spens was one of five representatives appointed to an intergovernmental committee for the oversight of the fund.⁸¹² This fund would be renamed the UN Development Fund for Women in 1985 (when Britain contributed another £100,000),⁸¹³ and become a major part of the infrastructure which would then become UN Women in 2010.

The World Conference on Women itself provided a focus for Britain to become much more serious about how it would support women in development through effective integration, although it continued in part to be more motivated by the wish to avoid more contentious issues including those around Britain's colonial record. British policy was now also more progressively supporting processes to better integrate women's advancement into development efforts – and supporting calls for the UN to do so. This led to a virtuous cycle, sparking questions of reform within Britain's own bilateral aid programme and lodging questions around gender-sensitivity in aid with Minister herself. In these ways Britain's policy began to move beyond its colonial legacy from the early twentieth century, and actually took the question of gender integration seriously. Even more so, it was now pledging resources to this end.

Clearly Britain was amassing an increasing understanding of the role of women in development at this time - through UN expert meetings, women development academics, Ministry of Overseas Development gender specialists– and through the confluence of these factors, embarked upon a step change in its approach to women and development. This shift was enabled by, and reinforced,

⁸¹² Snyder, "The politics of women and development", p99.

⁸¹³ Note titled "Women in Development and the British Aid programme", prepared for UK Mission in Vienna, 15 February 1985, 19, OD 49/39, UK National Archives.

Britain's foreign policy whereby pursuit of the integration of women in development came to offer a means for Britain to steer away from tricky issues at the World Conference on Women.

Thus the impact of Britain's role at the World Conference on Women was very significant, and marked a clear departure from its stance in the 1960s against contributing to UN voluntary funds. However, in understanding the impact of colonial interests on Britain's policy positions around development at the conference it is clear that elements of its colonial legacy around women endured. Britain continued to conceive women's advancement narrowly as an end to improving broader development aims under its main policy focus on "rural development". Much like British colonial policy before it, women were once again being instrumentalised towards another objective – rural development. Further, while there was certainly a growing interest from the British government on women in development compared to the 1960s, Britain still had little to say on the matter. In this way its colonial legacy of a failure to document how colonial policies were affecting women, was once again reproduced by the Ministry of Overseas Development's own lack of research on the matter, and impeded its ability to take progressive steps forward.

CONCLUSION

When looking back to understand the nature of Britain's legacy as a colonial power, it is not enough to understand Britain's relationship with its colonies alone. We must also acknowledge the nature of Britain's *global* colonial legacy ie the impact of its colonial interests on its approach to women's rights diplomacy at the UN. This thesis has sought to address this issue. Using women's rights as the site of analysis, it finds that when Britain came to engage with the emerging legal conventions, policy frameworks and debates at the CSW in the 1950s and early 1960s, Britain acted in ways which sought to maintain its colonial interests and reputation rather than to enshrine rights for the indigenous women in its colonial territories. It acted as a conservative colonial power, stifling attempts to bring in international legislation which would have had an impact in its colonial territories. Where it failed to weaken territorial scope of conventions it chose to become an outlier and delay ascension, not only withholding its application to the colonies but also failing to provide political momentum to these conventions more broadly. Britain also sought to demonstrate benevolence in its colonial practice as a means to maintain its colonial reputation, attempting to keep the spotlight off its colonies, and to refute evidence of abuses against women in its colonies (or blaming such transgressions on indigenous populations). In so doing, Britain tried to prevent the CSW from taking specific action in support of women in the colonies.

This finding is critical in an age where around a third of British people are proud of the British Empire.⁸¹⁴ It serves as a concrete example to help puncture the myth that Britain served as an altruistic power. Rather, Britain systematically sought to deny indigenous women rights in the

⁸¹⁴ Booth, "UK More Nostalgic for Empire than other Ex-Colonial Powers", 11 March 2020.

colonies. And what is more, in the process of doing so, it also retarded and failed to support the development and political momentum of international women's rights standards.

As Britain moved to become a decolonising power in the 1960s, it failed to recognise or use its potential influence to strengthen the rights of women in its former colonies in their transition to independence through the UN aid agenda. Despite claiming that women in development was a policy priority, Britain dismissed proactive attempts to mainstream women's advancement within UN aid, in a continuation of the conservatism it had demonstrated at the CSW in the 1950s and early 1960s around the development and adoption of women's rights conventions. Further, the legacy of Britain's colonial policy which instrumentalised women in the early twentieth century persisted in Britain's narrative around women in development, even as it broke from its hesitancy to engage in the issue by 1975 at the World Conference on Women.

Therefore Britain's global colonial legacy on women's rights at the UN was one of conservatism in the 1950s and early 1960s in order to maintain its colonial interests, and of ambivalence as a decolonising power since the issue of women in development was seen as little more than a useful distraction to maintain its colonial reputation. Both of these stances reproduced an earlier colonial policy which never really valued the rights of indigenous women beyond attaining broader (and limited) welfare outcomes.

This *global* legacy is detailed below in relation to the three-pronged analytical framework adopted for this study. This framework asks, firstly, whether the policy positions Britain adopted at the UN on the conventions and international development policy frameworks under review were impacted by its colonial interests and policies or recognised the process of decolonisation. Secondly, it

examines whether these conventions, debates and frameworks served as a site of embarrassment for Britain on its colonial record and explores the defensive arguments Britain adopted on the UN stage in response, in order to maintain its colonial reputation. Thirdly, it investigates whether Britain's policy positions impacted the very contours of these UN conventions and policy frameworks in positive or negative ways.

In addition to exposing the inaccuracies of modern-day myths around the benevolence of British colonialism, through its analysis of British policy at the CSW, this research also offers insights into future priorities for the women's rights agenda both in terms of the role of international women's rights conventions and the place which gender mainstreaming should hold as a development priority. Further, it enables us to draw key lessons for future feminist campaigns. These points go beyond the analytical frame on Britain's global colonial legacy, and as such are discussed as wider lessons.

2. Assessing Britain's global colonial legacy on women's rights

2.1 Britain's policy positions

Were the policy positions Britain adopted at the UN on the conventions and frameworks under review impacted by its colonial interests? Did they recognise the process of decolonisation as an opportunity for women's rights?

Starting with the 1950s and early 1960s, it is clear that Britain's policy positions around three conventions, on women's political rights, nationality rights in marriage and marriage practices, were strongly centred around its colonial interests.

In the early discussions of a potential convention on the political rights of women, Britain's preference for education over an international convention were sustained by concerns that the conventions would be unacceptable to the Colonial Office, in addition to other domestic concerns around the House of Lords and employment rules in the Foreign Service. For this reason, in 1951 the UK delegate was instructed to slow its development by explaining that a convention was not the best way forward, and as a delaying tactic, to call for its circulation to governments. When the draft text was indeed circulated to Member State governments in 1951 for comment, the Colonial Office notified the Foreign Office to stress that the draft convention was unacceptable form in many of the colonies. As a conservative colonial power, Britain sought to resist seeking change through legal means, relying instead on education, which it deemed both more effective and less disruptive to its colonial model. The Colonial Office called on the Foreign Office to emphasise education as the key lever in addressing women's political rights and maintained that too rapid action via legislation could have the reverse of desired results. Further, the Colonial Office stressed that without a territorial application clause (excluding the colonies), Britain would be unable to become a state party at all.

Therefore, not only did Britain's colonial considerations prove the leading factor in its efforts to undermine the development of the convention generally, they also proved to be a major factor in its own unwillingness to become a state party. It is clear that, in line with Britain's broader policy on human rights instruments at the UN in this period, Britain's attempts to derail, limit and then refuse to sign the Convention on the Political Rights of Women was primarily driven by the Colonial Office's rejection of the principle of requiring colonial territories to grant equal political rights for women. Further, by 1957, the absence of the territorial application clause was openly acknowledged in the British Parliament and by the UK delegate at that year's CSW session, as the main obstacle acceding to the Convention.

Conversely, Britain's initial indifference to a convention on the nationality of married women in 1953 was transformed when Britain decided to take a more proactive approach to the inclusion of a territorial application clause from the outset. This time, rather than challenging the need for a convention, or seeking to retard the process of its development, Britain tabled an amendment for the inclusion of a territorial application clause in the 1954 CSW session. Instead of abstaining on votes for the convention it voted in favour, with its territorial application clause attached in an annex for future consideration.

In short, Britain supported the development of the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women because it had a strategy to include a territorial application clause from the outset. It was also able to make the case for the clause in this case from a more progressive position, arguing that since there was only one citizenship for all citizens of the United Kingdom and the colonies, the clause was only necessary because of the special category of territories with their own citizenship. Thus, Britain argued, it was those with a *greater* degree of self-government and their own legal systems that necessitated Britain's accession to the convention to not be binding on them. It was Britain's insistence that such territorial application clause was an argument for greater self-rule that led to its inclusion in the final convention. Because the territorial application clause was included, Britain signed the treaty. Once again colonial considerations had driven Britain's approach to a human rights convention.

These strategies were deployed again by Britain in the debates on the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. Britain sought to discourage the early discussions on a potential convention in the CSW in 1958, again calling for education

rather than legislation. Britain once more attempted to slow the pace of its development by circulation to governments – and found success when ECOSOC agreed to do so despite the passage of a draft convention through the CSW. Yet differences also emerged in Britain's approach. Britain did engage in the development of the convention itself, specifically around the issue of a minimum age for marriage, while it had not engaged in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women a decade earlier. The Colonial Office accepted the need for a compromise on wording around legislation on the minimum age for marriage, allowing a provision for such legislation so long as the specified age was to be decided at national level (ie no international standard).

Nevertheless, colonial considerations still determined Britain's approach to this third convention. As with both earlier conventions of the 1950s, Britain called for the inclusion of a territorial application clause. When it failed in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, against a growing number of anticolonial opponents, it undertook a last-ditch lobby attempt to try and reinsert the clause. Britain tried to invoke the same argument used in the debates around the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, that such clause provided for greater autonomy in the colonies, marking a "mile-stone" in the progress towards the complete independence of the colonies. This time, however, Britain was overwhelmingly defeated with critics from across the Soviet bloc and former colonies in Africa. Its refusal to sign the convention at its entering into force in 1962 was based on this lack of a territorial application clause. Thus, Britain's colonial interests played a hugely significant role in determining its policy positions on the conventions under development at the CSW between 1950 and the early 1960s. Any interest or value in women's rights instruments internationally was outweighed in British foreign policy by this colonial motive.

It is therefore of little surprise that in moving to the mid-1960s, as the “Wind of Change” was sweeping across the British Empire, Britain failed to see the relevance of the emerging international development discussions at the CSW as many former colonies (including from the British Empire) moved towards independence. Absent from the British delegate briefs for the CSW sessions on the UN unified programme for the advancement of women in the 1960s was any recognition of the opportunity – at international level and national level – such a programme might create towards this end, as they underwent the process of decolonisation and began to set their own political agendas. By 1969 Britain brought the climax of the agreement of the unified programme into question.

Britain's policy on women in development in the 1960s through to 1974 appeared conflicted and confused, largely because it appeared to be juggling more complex entanglements with colonialism. Unlike in its approach to the three conventions on political, nationality and marriage rights, Britain's colonial interests were not so clearly driving policy to stop the roll-out of women's rights in the colonies. Now both internally and externally, Britain claimed the issue of women in development in developing countries - and by implication its former and remaining empire - to be a top priority in its engagement with the CSW. Yet at the same time Britain appeared cognisant of the rhetoric of neo-colonialism in its resistance to encouraging developing countries or even UN agencies to be asked to promote women's rights. Far from utilising the agenda on women and development at the CSW to encourage former British colonies to prioritise women's advancement, Britain appeared to adopt a stance of neutrality. Britain utilised a narrative of sovereignty and the non-politicisation of aid to argue that it was for developing countries to determine their priorities. As such, state autonomy on development priorities was to be a paramount principle.

Yet this apparent rejection of neo-colonial interference also coincided with its actual indifference to the advancement of women as a development principle. Britain argued that there could be no general rule that the advancement of women was more urgent or important than other development projects. Further, it was not an issue to which Britain would provide additional financial resources, nor would support any measures to earmark resources for this end within existing UN programmes. Bringing arguments on sovereignty and funding together, Britain argued that the amount spent on technical assistance must depend on the degree of importance developing countries attach to projects of interest to women. This contrasted with Britain's approach to areas such as family planning which did receive Britain's proactive engagement at the UN, as well as resourcing and a specialist unit back in the Ministry for Overseas Development. By contrast on the issue of women's advancement in community development in the mid-1960s, the Ministry admitted that it had little to contribute to the Secretary-General's report on this issue with no formal accounts or recent reports to hand. Even reaching out to remaining colonies brought little insight as to how women could be involved or how community development was impacting women's lives in these contexts. Moreover, in 1970 the Overseas Development Ministry was more explicit about its disinterest and lack of expertise on the issue of women in development, stating that for Foreign Office briefing purposes, despite being the channel for British development aid, it would "not have a great deal to contribute on the general topic of the Status of Women".⁸¹⁵

Thus despite Britain's claims at the CSW in the 1960s, women's advancement in development was clearly not a government priority at all and certainly not one it genuinely sought to promote in its foreign policy at the UN. It is unsurprising then, that throughout the 1960s Britain opposed the idea of a stand-alone UN programme to promote women's advancement, arguing instead that

⁸¹⁵ Letter from Ministry of Overseas Development (Edith Mercer, Principle of Schools and Teacher Training Department) to Foreign Office (M. S .Baker-Bates), 16 March 1970, 8, FCO 61/698, UK National Archives.

women's advancement should be integrated into existing programmes. Britain was not alone: other Member States voiced their support for integration rather than stand-alone programmes. Britain also opposed the idea of national level stand-alone programmes for the advancement of women, with the fear of being obliged to implement a national framework in Britain proving to be the driving determinant.

Such resistance to a stand-alone programme would be more understandable if Britain believed that integration was genuinely the more effective way to promote women's rights within UN and national level development mechanisms. But what is most striking is that in practice Britain resisted attempts to call on developing countries to give greater priority to projects and programmes directed towards the advancement of women when submitting requests for technical assistance. Further it resisted attempts for UN agencies themselves to "stimulate activity" on women's advancement. In reality, it appeared that even integration was too much for Britain to accept.

It is clear that the conservative response seen to the idea of promoting the advancement of women in Britain's colonies at the CSW in the 1950s and early 1960s, as established within this research, held fast and became institutionalised within the Foreign Office. As did the legacy of colonial policy from the 1920s and 1930s which merely instrumentalised indigenous women, disregarding the advancement of women as an end goal in itself, and focusing on women as a means to achieving broader development within society. On the issue of women in development in the 1960s, Britain merely focused on the roll-out of a questionnaire on the matter and suggestion of an annual agenda item. The case for such a questionnaire was made instrumentally: this was not about looking at how development programmes furthered women's rights but about the role women can play in the economic and social development of their countries and to contribute to

national activity. Thus the advancement of national development – rather than women’s rights – was the end goal.

Within the CSW’s debates on community development, Britain again argued that the advancement of women’s interests should be seen as part and parcel of promoting the interests of the community as a whole. The insincerity of Britain’s interest in women’s advancement in development was once again exposed.

By the early 1970s, Britain’s indifference to women and development hardened into an attempt to dissolve the CSW itself. Officials from the Overseas Development Administration and UK Mission in New York hatched a proposed to merge the CSW into the Social Development Commission. They rejected the need for a separate focus on women’s rights within the UN system and argued that the CSW would be more effective if it focused on social problems (rather than human rights issues). It provided a cosmetic opportunity to “integrate” women into development policy, while in effect not requiring any specific action to reconfigure development mechanisms within the UN. Accordingly, Britain put the proposal forward to ECOSOC in 1973 (although it later dropped the idea in light of push-back both at UN level and domestically).

The twist in the tale came only in 1975 at the World Conference on Women. Spurred by a commitment to providing funds for International Women’s Year in 1974, with a new (Labour) Government and new Minister for Overseas Development at the helm (Judith Hart), the indifference to women in development – and indeed the UN mechanisms surrounding it – began to transform. Marking a clear break with British policy of the 1960s, the UK delegation was instructed to stress the need for a redirection of UN programmes to take more account of the

impact of all development activities on women and to praise the UN agencies which had already achieved progress in taking social factors into account in development planning. Further, Britain was also now calling for a more systematic integration of women into development through the aid appraisal process, and drafted a resolution for the conference requesting international and bilateral agencies review criteria under use for rural development so as to take into account the interests of rural women and girls. In a further u-turn from 1960s policy, Britain went to the conference in not just supporting – but championing – a UN fund for women and development. It made one of the most significant financial contributions (£600,000) to this end at the conference, to support women in rural development projects relating to education, cooperatives and health.

Britain's shift to more concrete support for women's integration in development came from the top. Hart – a former founder of the National Women's Council - was interested in advancing women, in particular the poorest women, through the prism of rural development, in contrast to what Labour described as the "Tory preference for helping the already semi-developed nations".⁸¹⁶ Hart's desire to reach the poorest people in the poorest places came to encompass women. Yet Britain had very little to say as to how to support women in rural areas, and was still resisting any calls to support women in development beyond integration. The UK delegation to the World Conference on Women was explicitly warned to avoid a wholesale shift towards stand-alone women's rights focused programming within UK development aid or any kind of earmarking of the aid programme to projects benefitting women alone.

⁸¹⁶ *Labour's Programme 1976*, 8/66 HART, Labour Party Archives.

Thus progress had indeed been made since the 1960s and Britain's luke-warm approach to women in development. But while Britain had shifted to supporting more concretely the integration of women in development within UN dialogue, and had championed a new UN fund for women in development, it continued to oppose the idea of a stand-alone focus on women in development or the dedication of resources within its own bilateral programme.

Furthermore, this shift occurred a decade after the initial discussions on gender in development at the CSW, and as such failed to influence the UN system or British bilateral aid priorities during the decolonisation processes of the 1960s. Britain's approach to the decolonisation issue sought to maintain an appearance of non-interference in newly independent countries. It stated at the World Conference on Women that on the issue of women's advancement itself, sovereignty would remain sacrosanct, insisting that "we are seeking to learn and not to teach in the context of the discussion on women in development".⁸¹⁷

1.2 The CSW as a site of embarrassment for colonial Britain

Did the UN agenda on women and development serve as a site of embarrassment for Britain on its colonial record and what were the defensive arguments Britain adopted on the UN stage in response in order to maintain its colonial reputation?

Britain's obstructive approach to the women's rights conventions under debate in the 1950s and early 1960s at the CSW did provoke a backlash both domestically and internationally which

⁸¹⁷ Report titled, "Integration of Women in the Development Process as Equal Partners with men", 10 June 1975, (IOC (75)116), FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

arguably served as a site of embarrassment for Britain. However, such embarrassment was not significant enough to change Britain's insistence on territorial application clauses.

Britain's abstention on the draft convention on political rights of women at the 1951 CSW session provoked a flurry of protest from British women's rights organisations and their MP allies, who in turn raised their disapproval of Britain's abstention with the Foreign Secretary – both in letters and in Parliament. This protest did nudge the Foreign Office to reconsider its policy position around the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. But when the Foreign Office sought some latitude in the UK delegate brief for the 1951 ECOSOC session, the Colonial Office refused to give any leeway without the guarantee of a territorial application clause. This is important confirmation that Britain's obstructive stance around the convention was deeply rooted in its role as a colonial power. But it also shows that its concerns over the application of the convention in its colonies outweighed those relating to embarrassment around its colonial record back home.

The issue of the territorial application clause also provoked attacks on Britain at the UN. Yet Britain continued to call for a territorial application clause in the Convention on the Political Rights of Women through the debates in the Third Committee, *despite* arguments made by opponents that such colonial discrimination was unwarranted. When the clause failed to make it through the General Assembly, Britain had felt emboldened to announce its refusal to become a signatory, largely because of the absence of a territorial application clause.

This international pressure was also present in the General Assembly Third Committee debate on the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, where the insertion of a territorial application clause was opposed on the grounds that it would produce a tiered approach to human

rights principles in different countries, rather than one rule for all. Yet once again, while such attacks may have added pressure on Britain's international reputation within UN debates around the convention, Britain continued on with its strategy.

Once again, Britain's attempt to insert a territorial application clause triggered a backlash during deliberations on the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. This time, with a growing number of former colonies joining the UN by 1962, the number of anti-colonial critics had grown in number, increasing the intensity of attacks on Britain in the Third Committee debates and diminishing its chances of success. In refusing to accept its large defeat in Third Committee and launching a lobby effort directly with governments. Britain's advocacy efforts for a territorial application clause may well have been hotly debated, but was not enough of a potential embarrassment for Britain to change tack. Furthermore, the lobby efforts of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance attempted to put pressure on Britain back home, calling on the Foreign Office to commit to a universal minimum age. But Foreign Office held firm and responded that this was not appropriate in light of differing "climatic conditions".⁸¹⁸

Nevertheless, that is not to suggest that Britain felt no pressure at all around the need to play a positive role in the development of the women's rights conventions. Indeed, it was in connection with the marriage convention in which the UK delegate to the CSW (Vickers) – also an MP – was able to generate a shift in British policy so as to avoid a perception of the UK "dragging its heels". Indeed it was her intervention which led the Colonial Office to accept the need for a compromise

⁸¹⁸ Letter from Foreign Office to St Joan's Social and Political Alliance (F. Bally), 21 March 1961, UNS17314/10, FO 371/161038, UK National Archives.

allowing for a provision for legislation on the minimum age of marriage, so long as this was to be decided at national level.

Outside of the conventions deliberated in the CSW, the debates of the 1950s also saw anti-colonial attacks levelled on Britain. It is here that the defensive arguments Britain adopted are of great interest in confirming that Britain clearly did feel that the CSW served as a site of embarrassment in connection with its colonial role. Britain took pains to demonstrate a benevolence in its colonial practice as a means to maintain its colonial reputation and sought to keep the spotlight off its colonies, refuting evidence of women's rights violations or blaming abuses on indigenous populations. Significantly, in so doing, it failed to allow the CSW to take focused action in support of women in the colonies. It argued that the colonies should not be considered in a special category, and that the problems relating to women's advancement were not a consequence of the political status of the countries in question. While the issue of political rights proved a continuing battleground on the question of a specific focus on Trust and Non-Self-Governing territories throughout the 1950s, Britain also fought attempts for a specific focus on these territories through its opposition to certain resolutions on marriage practices, equal pay and education. As with Britain's arguments around political rights, it urged education instead of legislative reform and continued to argue that its territories faced the same problems as sovereign states and thus should not be treated separately.

Secondly, Britain insisted that so-called evidence presented within anti-colonial attacks was inaccurate, and that evidence pointed to progress in the colonies. Throughout the 1950s, Britain systematically prepared to defend itself against charges of poor colonial practice around women's political rights within the CSW, taking action to expose what it felt were inaccuracies and asserting that administering authorities were promoting the progressive development of women's rights.

But through the debates around harmful practices, including child marriage, and on equal pay and education Britain argued that its progressive approach was limited by the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies. It was the colonies themselves, Britain argued, which thus determined the speed at which women's advancement could be achieved.

Yet, Britain also felt a pressure to demonstrate soft compliance with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. In arguing that many of its colonies were in fact complying with the convention's provisions, it had the unintended effect of bolstering the value of a convention it had previously deemed unnecessary.

Moving to Britain's engagement with the CSW in the 1960s around women in development, it is clear that while Britain's internal communications and resistance to funding indicated a weak, disingenuous policy position towards women and development, the issue also provided a useful way in which Britain could move to safer ground within the political turmoil of the CSW. By the mid-1960s, Britain felt that the CSW could "profitably devote more of its time to economic and social questions".⁸¹⁹ A focus on women and development enabled this broader shift which Britain felt would be more in tune with the trend of United Nations activity. The softer issue of women and development offered a softer counteracting force, instrumentally serving as a distraction from otherwise more political issues around colonialism in the 1960s.

Britain continued to face criticism for its colonial record in the 1960s around political rights. Even with Britain's accession to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1967, the Foreign

⁸¹⁹ Brief for the CSW session 21 February – 11 March 1966, IOC (66) 18, compiled 17 Feb 1966, UN S17311/18. UK National Archives.

Office felt vulnerable to colonial critiques and continued to prepare defensive material. Indeed, attacks by the Soviet bloc and Guinea continued in the 1960s, on the basis that the colonial system could only retard the advancement of women. Britain argued that great progress had been made in granting the franchise to women in non-self-governing territories, while cautioning against imposing systems on indigenous people. Thus, as in the 1950s and early 1960s, Britain felt under pressure to demonstrate its role as a benevolent colonial power in CSW discussions around the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Even after becoming a state party in 1967, Britain continued to prepare for attacks in light of the reservations it had included around its colonies. The convention on marriage practices proved a similar liability for Britain in the 1960s, prompting the development of further defensive arguments on Britain's colonial role and highlighting Britain's preference to promote education rather than legislative action.

Far from providing a potential site for embarrassment on Britain's colonial record, the issue of women in development served a useful distraction from other areas of embarrassment relating to Britain's colonial past and present. Discussions over the UN unified programme for the advancement of women and national development plans did not provoke hard-hitting attacks from the Soviet bloc. While the Soviet bloc highlighted that every increase in participation of women in national economic and social life – the title of the questionnaire on women and development – had come about as a result of independence from colonial rule, these attacks on colonialism were fairly mild. Rather, the main debates were with developing countries such as Ghana which focused on issues such as financing for the advancement of women in development.

Further, the Foreign Office was explicit about the way in which the issue of women in development would serve as a distraction at the 1968 Human Rights Conference in Tehran, citing its concern that the proposal for a UN unified programme for the advancement of women would

not be ready for discussion, thus opening up the risk of “another jamboree on Southern African race issues”.⁸²⁰ The 1968 CSW item on slavery caused anxiety for Britain for fear of links being drawn between slavery and colonialism, and indeed the USSR referred to the “slavery like practices of apartheid and colonialism”. Under the sub-item at the 1969 CSW session on the “influence of activities of foreign and other economic interests on the living conditions of women in dependent territories”, the USSR and Hungary maintained that British investment in South Africa made them “partners in the system of apartheid”.⁸²¹ The issue of indigenous women’s rights in Southern Rhodesia also proved problematic for Britain’s colonial legacy as Ghana, Liberia and UAR took up the issue at the 1969 session. The USSR stressed the importance of fully implementing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in order for women throughout the world to enjoy their rights. The discussions on slavery, apartheid and Southern Rhodesia were more forcefully and negatively connected to British colonialism than the debates around women in development.

With Britain beginning to lose its influence at the CSW by the late 1960s through an expanded membership which Britain felt favoured Communist countries, the Foreign Office lamented that “there is no chance of our defeating the anti-colonialist and other lobbies, who have numbers on their side”. Britain’s misgivings about the CSW during the 1960s led to the decision to call for an end to annual sessions. In 1969 it was “particularly anxious to remove the increasing tendency in recent years for the Commission to waste time discussing controversial political issues of the moment only thinly disguised as having anything at all to do with matters directly affecting the status of women”.⁸²² Britain took particular note of the item on the political rights of women as

⁸²⁰ Briefing for meeting of Shirley Summerskill with Goronwy Roberts (Minister of State at Foreign Office), 11 March 1968, 110A, FCO 61/262, UK National Archives.

⁸²¹ USSR delegate (Nikolaeva) and Hungary (Gyarnati), CSW Summary Records 27 January – 12 February 1969, E/CN.6/SR.525, UN Documents.

⁸²² Briefing for ECOSOC session 1969, IOC 13 May 1969, 72, FCO 61/543, UK National Archives.

the occasion for routine exercises in anti-colonial polemics and of the 1969 item on the influence of foreign, economic and other interests in the living conditions of women in dependent territories. Within this context, Britain went so far as considering whether to withdraw from membership of the CSW in 1969, until the delegate from the UK Mission in New York who focused on the CSW stepped in to defend it.

Similarly, as the 1975 UN World Conference on Women approached, Britain feared the conference would be utilised for political attacks on issues relating to South Africa and Israel and revisions to the international economic system as part of the campaign for the New International Economic Order. As such, it instructed the UK delegation to concentrate on matters of direct concern to women, rather than engage in such structural debates. Once again, it was the theme of women in development that offered a means for Britain to steer through the controversies with a focus on the integration of women in development for action at the national level as a means to circumvent discussion on the overall international economic system or race relations. France and Australia took a similar approach. Clearly then, the CSW did become a significant liability for Britain by the late 1960s and early 1970s. And it was in this context that Britain's began to shift its focus towards the integration on women in development.

1.3 The impact of Britain's foreign policy positions

Did Britain's foreign policy positions on women and development impact the very contours of the UN conventions and international development policy frameworks in this period in positive or negative ways?

Britain failed in its attempts to limit the territorial scope of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women or the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages to the discretion of colonial powers. But since the territorial scope for both remained broad, Britain's refusal to become a signatory to both conventions impacted their overall political weight. Given the latter convention on marriage practices coincided with a period of mass decolonisation, Britain's refusal to accede to it weakened its potential international influence at a time when newly independent nations were establishing new legal systems of their own.

Britain's failure to sign the conventions also had a direct effect on the obligations on British colonies – excluding all colonies from the obligation of meeting the standards set out in the conventions. Not all colonial powers took such a staunch position. France signed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, with reservations excepting those of its colonial territories which felt unable to align. Similarly, France signed the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages when it opened for signature in 1962, making no exemptions for its colonies (although taking half a decade to ratify the convention).

Conversely Britain's insistence on a territorial application clause in the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women immediately limited the territorial scope of the convention with regard to colonies. Yet it meant that Britain and other colonial powers could easily become a state party. Indeed, Britain immediately signed the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, with the territorial application clause included, and a handful of its territories were excluded from the obligations of the convention until they gave their assent between 1958 and 1962.

Thus Britain's role in terms of establishing international standards of these conventions was either to reduce their territorial scope by excluding their application to certain colonies and territories (Convention on the Nationality of Married Women) or in refuse to accede and thus fail to galvanise political momentum for mass adoption (convention on the political rights of women and convention on marriage practices). Further, Britain's role in seeking a compromise position in the convention on marriage practices led to the removal of a draft minimum age for marriage of 15 and allowing the minimum age to be determined at national level. This weakened the specificity of the provision in the treaty and inclusion of an international standard. In this way its influence on international law was a negative one across all three conventions.

This negative, conservative *global* colonial legacy on women's rights at the UN continued into the 1960s. Looking at the British impact of on the international development agenda at the CSW, it is clear that Britain did more to mainstream women out of UN development assistance than into it. Britain's interventions at the CSW dampened momentum towards a stand-alone programme at UN level and Britain refused to contribute financial resources and resisted earmarking within existing UN funds. Britain also successfully weakened language within a CSW resolution amending a requirement for countries to "accord greater priority" for programmes directed to the advancement of women to merely "include" them as part of UN aid requests. Only by 1975 did Britain's impact become more positive, pushing the UN system to act on the integration of women and pledging resources for a separate women's fund.

3. Wider lessons

3.1 The impact and limits of international conventions

One of the wonderful things which the UN can do [is]...to put pressure on national governments to think and act on global issues which also affect domestic policies”⁸²³ (Leticia Shahani, Chair of the CSW in 1974)

The first wider lesson from this research is that international conventions on women’s rights, in combination with the CSW as an international court of public opinion, have helped to push the agenda forward.

This holds a relevance for the wider field of international law and the question of the efficacy of international conventions in raising standards in non-state parties. Even before the CSW, women’s rights organisations lobbying for conventions at the League of Nations made the case that, despite the fact that the League of Nations could not legislate at a domestic level itself, conventions could become “guiding principles”.⁸²⁴ This thesis provides evidence through the case of Britain that international conventions on women’s rights in this period were indeed a positive force for compliance, even if states did not (immediately) become parties.

The Member States supporting the conventions at the CSW under review in this research, frequently invoked the role that international conventions could play in establishing international norms. In terms of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, in putting forward a

⁸²³ Jain, *Women, Development and the UN*, p69, which notes Oral History interview of Leticia Shanani, 27 November and 11 December 1999, in the *Oral History Collection of the United Nations Intellectual History Project*, The Graduate Centre, the City University of New York.

⁸²⁴ Statements Presented by International Women’s Organisations August 1935 noted in Carol Miller, “Interwar Feminism and the League of Nations”, *Women’s History Review*, 3, No.2, pp219-245; Laville, ““Woolly, Half-Baked and Impractical”? British Responses to the Commission on the States of Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1946-67”, p477.

resolution for a convention, Mexico maintained that this would “encourage the Governments which had not yet done so to recognize the equality of women in the sphere of politics”.⁸²⁵ Lending support, the Dominican Republic stressed the “moral pressure” such a convention would give women to induce their governments to ratify,⁸²⁶ with Haiti arguing that international pressure had helped bring political rights for women in its own case.⁸²⁷ In the final ECOSOC debates on the convention, Chile argued that a convention would “hasten the extension of political rights to women in all countries” and as such the UN should bring its “moral authority” to bear through a convention.⁸²⁸

Such arguments are significant because this thesis has found that Britain was put under real pressure in this period to provide all women with political rights in the colonies even when it did not want to be a party to the convention on the political rights of women. This is interesting because it undermines the arguments Britain itself made against conventions. On the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Britain argued “it would be of little value” in those countries which had so far refused to consider granting such rights.⁸²⁹ So much so, officials argued to the MPs and women’s organisations which protested against Britain’s abstention on the issue at the CSW in 1951 that education of public opinion was the *only* procedure likely to have “practical effect”.⁸³⁰ Indeed, Britain lamented the UN’s approach to developing international human rights standards wholesale, describing it as promoting “desirable aims by methods which we think wholly unsuitable and unrealistic”.⁸³¹ This was something which the Foreign Office argued throughout

⁸²⁵ Mexican delegate (Castillo-Ledon), CSW Summary Records 8-19 May 1950, E/CN.6/SR.71, UN Documents.

⁸²⁶ Delegate for the Dominican Republic (Bernadino), CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.84, UN Documents.

⁸²⁷ Haitian delegate (Guery) CSW Summary Records 30 April -14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.85, UN Documents.

⁸²⁸ Convention on the Political Rights of Women: History and Commentary, United Nations, 1995, Accessed in the Margaret Bruce collection, Lehman College New York, p8; Chilean delegate (Figueroa), ECOSOC Summary Records, Sixth Session, 1951, E/AC.7/SR.192, UN Documents.

⁸²⁹ UK delegate (Sutherland), CSW Summary Records 30 April – 14 May 1951, E/CN.6/SR.83, UN Documents.

⁸³⁰ Letter from Secretary of State to Irene Ward MP, 12 June 1951, 1734/71, FO 371/95870, UK National Archives.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

the 1950s and early 1960s – both under Labour (as per the development of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women) and under Conservative governments (as per the development of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages). As argued, Britain's failure to sign on to or ratify the convention also meant it failed to play its part to provide political momentum for other countries to sign up to the standards established within it.

Yet *despite* Britain's arguments against using international law to aid the realisation of women's rights and *despite* Britain's role in failing to provide political momentum by refusing to become a party for so long, the convention on the political rights of women affected Britain's behaviour in a way which shows conventions can in fact influence states that are not bound to them. The attempts of British governments to show compliance with the convention across the colonies after its adoption in 1952, but before become a Party itself, demonstrates the role of the UN as providing an international public platform which can pressure governments into alignment with such international standards. In 1957 and 1958, Britain sent circulars to its colonies to assess the extent to which they complied with the convention. It used this action to defend itself at the CSW, arguing that the government was consulting with the authorities in various dependent territories to ascertain whether they could consent to its application. While the responses showed that not all the colonies were able to comply, the fact that Britain felt compelled to assess compliance, and report this to the CSW, demonstrates the power of such international standards for non-state parties. Contrary to Britain's previous claims, those who had not ratified the convention clearly did still feel the force of the law.

Thus international conventions can establish norms which hold reputational currency, particularly if there is a forum like the CSW on the global stage to encourage such action where states are not parties and domestic legislation is therefore not in alignment. Moving forward, it is clear that international feminism benefits from an intergovernmental process, both in terms of agreeing conventions and in providing a specific space such as the CSW to assess and promulgate such international standards. Despite the British government's attempts to derail international conventions and then shut down the CSW, it is clear that exerting pressure internationally is paramount.

Further, beyond intergovernmental pressure, conventions can provide welcome leverage for the causes of the domestic women's rights movement. Britain's refusal to acknowledge the role the conventions could play in encouraging the colonies to conform to these standards - and the way in which women's rights organisations in those contexts could harness them - is reflective of the overall failure to consider the positive role of international standards in raising the bar of state practice.

While this is an important lesson to draw, it is also critical to pause and consider the ways in which Britain was able to escape judgement within the CSW around conventions. In fear of criticism over its colonial record, Britain shifted its approach in the 1960s at the CSW. It was no longer willing to share information on which of its colonies would accept the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, despite ECOSOC calling for voluntary reporting by non-state parties. Similarly, between its passage in 1962 and ratification in 1970, Britain shared very little information in the CSW sessions on compliance with the provisions of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. Britain took no steps to demonstrate

soft compliance, as had been the case with the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in the 1950s.

Yet at the same time, even in the mid-1960s, the UK delegate briefs ensured that Britain was able to defend itself at the CSW by stressing broad compliance with the conventions. Consultations with colonies on the Convention on the Political Rights of Women were now complete, with nine of the dependent territories able to accept the whole convention, and that many others only had difficulties with “minor aspects of it, on some of which sovereign states have made reservations in acceding to the convention.”⁸³²

Thus conventions can be a useful means of applying pressure on non-state parties, but they are insufficient in themselves. It was the constant criticism of Britain’s approach to women’s political rights in the colonies that led Britain to move forward on consultations with its colonies around the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. In short, conventions are not enough. They must be accompanied by effective political pressure in arenas with compulsory reporting on specific detail. And for this reason, the continuation of dedicated women’s rights spaces such as the CSW are critical.

3.2 Gender mainstreaming

The second lesson to draw from this thesis is that performance on gender mainstreaming is best understood as a spectrum. To reach the upper end of the scale, gender equality must be valued as a genuine political priority.

⁸³² UK brief for the 1966 CSW session, IOC (66) 18, 17 Feb 1966, UNS17311/18, FO 371/189951, UK National Archives.

In the early 1960s, Britain argued that the creation of a separate programme on women's advancement as part of UN international development efforts would be "wasteful".⁸³³ Britain argued that any programme for the advancement of women should be developed *within* existing frameworks as an integrated part of existing technical assistance and advisory services programmes and not as a separate programme.

Britain's call for the UN unified programme for the advancement of women to be integrated within existing UN architecture was intertwined with a resistance to the suggestion of additional funds for assistance activities for women. Importantly, Britain's position to integrate the proposed UN programme within existing UN programmes through the 1960s, was not rooted in maximising impact for women's advancement. Rather, it lay in a broader ideology around the autonomy of Member States in determining their own development priorities.

Such a position was held throughout the 1960s – first under a Conservative government and then under Labour governments from 1964 until 1970. As with the international women's rights conventions of the 1950s and early 1960s, rather than an issue of party politics, this was a question of how much priority gender equality should be given within international development objectives. And since it was not deemed a priority, Britain was weak in its support for women's integration in development during this period. Britain sought to leave it to countries requesting assistance to determine if women's advancement would be an area of technical support. Even the final agreement of the UN unified programme for the advancement of women (latterly the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women) in 1970 – despite being taken

⁸³³ Letter from UK Government to Secretary-General, 16 September 1963, S-0045-0127-14279, UN Archives.

forward as an integrated programme – was challenged by Britain, whose delegates argued that this offended against the principle that technical cooperation programmes should depend on the priority to projects given by individual governments.

It was only when the Labour Party was returned to power in 1974 under Hart's leadership at the Ministry of Overseas Development that the question of gender equality as an objective within international development began to take hold. Britain's position took a very different turn – with Britain now an international champion on the issue of a separate UN voluntary fund on women's advancement (which would eventually pave the way for the future UNIFEM and latterly UN Women institutions). Furthermore, at the World Conference on Women, the UK delegation were instructed to stress the need for a redirection in UN programmes so that they would take more account of the impact of all development activities on women. Britain drafted a resolution on the issue of project appraisal, requesting international and bilateral agencies to review criteria used for rural development so as to take account of the interests of rural women and girls.

Clearly, British interest in promoting gender equality at the UN was now much higher than had been expressed at the CSW in the 1960s. British performance had moved progressively along the spectrum of gender mainstreaming in ways which bore fruit for funding women's rights organisations in developing countries as well as in pushing system change within UN agencies. Yet, Britain had not reached the upper end of the spectrum by any means. Gender equality was still not valued as a policy goal in its own right. While women in development provided a useful way for the British government to support its aims around rural development, as with British colonial policy earlier, women were once again being instrumentalised. Such instrumentalisation continued to lead Britain to fall short on the promotion of gender equality in development. At the World Conference on Women the head of the UK delegation, MP and former CSW delegate,

Shirley Summerskill asserted “we now attach first priority” to rural development, noting that “Rural development means the economic and social advancement of all living in rural areas, and thus the interests of rural women can – and must – be given more attention”.⁸³⁴ Focusing its interest in women in development through the rural development lens enabled Britain to continue to claim to defer to the sovereignty of developing countries *to the extent that they wished to promote women’s advancement*.

Further, while policy was moving in the right direction at least, Britain had limited understanding of *how* to support women living in rural areas. The background briefings for the World Conference on Women emphasised many of the UK’s weaknesses in this regard, admitting that relatively little expertise had been provided to cover the employment problems of women as distinct from the community as whole and that very few of the Ministry of Overseas Development’s research projects to date relate directly to women. To reach the upper end of the gender mainstreaming spectrum, gender equality must be valued in its own right – both in international diplomacy and in terms of implementation within bilateral aid practices. Only at this point will it become a genuine political priority, steering the delivery of aid and our understanding of effective development.

2.3 The importance of feminist leadership and cooperation

The final wider lesson of this thesis is that feminist action works. But it requires leadership and cooperation across multiple political structures.

⁸³⁴ Speech by Shirley Summerskill to the Mexico conference, 1975, FCO 61/1424, UK National Archives.

Hart's progressive shift towards gender equality in British development policy, as evidenced by Britain's stance at the World Conference on Women, was not achieved by her alone. It coincided with a shift in understanding of the role of women in development in the early 1970s. This also relied on the work of feminist development theorists working in the development sector, as well as the presence of newly independent countries at the UN which bought a "fresh, grassroots approach, identifying women as providers of food, energy and water and as the backbone of rural economies".⁸³⁵ Key advisors within the Ministry for Overseas Development, including Spens and Chapman championed the idea of providing resources for a UN voluntary fund, marking a shift in the previous reluctance by civil servants to value the mechanisms to promote women in development proposed by the CSW. Other high-profile political figures also played a fundamental role. Barbara Castle, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services, who had been lined up to give Britain's opening speech at the Conference, lobbied for more funds beyond the £10,000 pledged for International Women's Year. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom lobbied Hart to make a much more substantial financial commitment to women's advancement in development by directing the main part of UK Overseas Development Assistance for 1975 towards education and help for women in rural sectors. Similarly, the International Committee of the Labour Party was also seeking to pressure Hart to allocate part of its overseas aid to matters affecting women's status ie literacy, education and other training for women and family planning.

In another example, when Britain attempted to dissolve the CSW into the UN Social Development commission, it was the leading women within the UN Secretariat, Sipilä and Bruce, who called it out and mounted a counter campaign. First, they made a strong appeal to delegates to maintain the CSW as a separate forum both at the Women and Family Planning international seminar in

⁸³⁵ Snyder, 'The politics of women and development', p97.

Indonesia in 1973 and later that year at the Family in a changing World Seminar in London. In both cases their lobbying also proved successful – in Indonesia a number of government delegates committed themselves in general terms to blocking any move to do away with the CSW and at the London Seminar Britain's attempts to gain ground on its vision of the integration of women in development were foiled. Once again, these lobbying successes, which led to Britain abandoning its attempt to do away with the CSW, were achieved through the cooperation of women in positions of power – in the secretariat and as women MPs (in this case in Labour opposition) - and women in the margins as NGOs working in combination to challenge the government's position. Through informal meetings and formal letters to governments, this group of women formed a powerful lobbying coalition which successfully served to scotch Britain's campaign to dissolve the CSW.

Further, Britain's general crusade against the CSW which actually began in the late 1960s –seen in efforts to shift to biennial sessions and in questions over its membership of the body – was challenged by Britain's women delegates to the CSW who tried to make the case for it internally. These women clearly believed in the importance of the CSW as a critical space for women's rights, but were up against a sea of male policy-makers within the Foreign Office establishment.

In the debates around the convention on marriage practices, it was British CSW delegate Vickers' assertive push for Britain to become more proactive that led to a more positive engagement within CSW sessions in comparison to the earlier debates over the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Supported by domestic activism by the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance back in Britain, and international pressure from within the CSW, Vickers successfully managed to gain agreement from the Colonial Office for the idea of a convention requiring governments to specify a minimum age for marriage without imposing a universal standard minimum age. While Britain

remained committed to its policy position around the inclusion of a territorial application clause in this convention as in others, the political pressure within the CSW had empowered the UK delegate seek this compromise from the Colonial Office.

In short, throughout the period under review, women worked in networks to clip the wings of the *realpolitik* of British foreign policy. Were it not for these women, situated across high politics, diplomatic posts, the UN secretariat and within the British women's rights movement, the British government would have been unchecked in its disregard for women's rights conventions, development frameworks and the CSW in the period under review in this research. These women helped to hold the line, and in the case of gender in development, push Britain's agenda forward. These efforts must be recognised within the field of international history and replicated in future relevant campaign strategies.

4. The path ahead

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I believe that by examining the past failures of British policy on women's rights, we can expose the inaccuracies of modern-day myths around the benevolence of British colonialism, underscore the priorities of the future for the women's rights agenda, and draw key lessons for future feminist campaigns.

By taking a gender and international diplomacy focus to interrogate the way in which Britain specifically interacted with the conventions, debates and frameworks at the CSW between 1950 and 1975 we have learnt that Britain's *global* colonial legacy on women's rights during this period was a negative one. It acted as a conservative colonial power to keep international law out of its

colonies and frustrated the development of international conventions and international development policy frameworks in the process.

With this in mind and looking at the future women's rights agenda, we must acknowledge that international conventions can play an important role in pressuring states to adhere to new international standards – and most effectively when there is an appropriate, women's rights focused international forum such as the CSW in which to create an atmosphere of international accountability. This thesis shows that it is through giving gender equality political priority that we can move away from the older instrumentalised approaches to women in development which suffused Britain's colonial policies of the early twentieth century. Achieving this may not be immediate, and we should recognize positive movements along the spectrum of gender mainstreaming. But valuing gender equality as a policy priority of development must be the ultimate aim if we are to achieve a step change in the way in which international development aid is directed and evaluated. And finally, we have observed that it is through women operating together – from within the corridors of power alongside those in the political margins - that effective campaigning coalitions can be forged to hold the line on women's rights, and to push that line forward. Future feminist campaigners should look to the collaboration of feminist actors across different institutions to capitalise on the political intelligence, specialist knowledge and political capital already in place in order to maximise political impact.

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