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White Australia and regional relationships

During the war, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) members in Australia had joined international networks to promote world peace and arbitration. Not long afterwards they began to realise that an internationalist mindset demanded engagement with the politics of race. With this in mind, the women involved with WILPF held public meetings between the wars to discuss the White Australia Policy (WAP). 'Is our Internationalism only a word, or is it a fact?' challenged Mary Fullerton in 1919.¹

These political women wished to ascertain if and how the economic policy of White Australia fostered militarism or otherwise represented an impediment to international understanding. They were willing to touch the 'thorny' issue of White Australia, normally seen as a 'nettle' that should be avoided.² Australian women in the peace movement drew attention to the hypocrisy of alliances with Asian and non-white countries during the war given the exclusionary policies of White Australia: 'if we make east and west one in time of war, we cannot make them two in time of peace'.³ Similarly, some proclaimed how White Australia maintained a militarised

1 Mary Eliza Fullerton, 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

2 'Australasian Peace Conference, Interesting Melbourne Meeting, The White Australia Nettle', *Daily Standard*, 8 April 1921, 3.

3 'White Australia Policy Done For', *Woman Voter*, 27 October 1914, 2.

world. 'I am against the White Australia Policy,' explained Lucy Paling, 'because the arming of brothers against each other is the only way it can be preserved.'⁴

The women's groups confronted the inconsistencies in their own position regarding race and interrogated the implications of exclusionist policies of immigration. Their conclusions were complex, since the socially internalised assumptions that underpinned the WAP were hard to think beyond. Yet they asked a set of fundamental questions of the policy in a serious way that tested the tensions and contradictions of their own beliefs. Their deliberation was anxious, and their engagement with a policy supported across almost the entire political spectrum illustrated how discomforted they were by the realisation of its inconsistency with their aspirations for internationalism. Australian delegates at the League of Nations, meanwhile, argued vehemently in support of racial exclusion, placing supposed national interests above global cooperation and seeking to define an internationalism that could somehow encompass a racially exclusive immigration policy. They sought to harness the bureaucracy of international structures for the purposes of defending White Australia.

This chapter will focus on the way the women of WILPF confronted their understanding of racial politics between the wars. Many were motivated by a sense of unease at the way Australia was enacting national racial exclusivism and sought to engage practically with different countries whose people were excluded from Australia through the women's Pan-Pacific movement. It will focus on two meetings that occurred in Melbourne regarding the WAP: one in 1919 and the other in 1921. At these meetings there was an attempt to understand the complexity of the WAP and a push to dismantle it, a position that did not gain traction among politicians and the wider public until well into the middle of the twentieth century. Lastly, this chapter will explore how WILPF in Australia interacted with Pacific and Pacific Rim nations through the first Pan-Pacific Women's Conference in 1928. For this conference delegates travelled to Hawai'i and reported experiences that encouraged the section to prioritise regional engagement.

4 Lucy Paling, 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3. Mrs Lucy Paling was the founding president of the Sisterhood from 1915 to 1917.

WILPF considered racial politics through its interest in international relations. It was concerned more with cultural engagement with the outside world than with the treatment of Aboriginal Australians at this stage. In most of their discussion of White Australia, Indigenous issues were notably absent. This is not surprising, for the WAP was an immigration policy, not an approach to Aboriginal policy which, apart from in the Northern Territory, remained a state-based matter until 1967. As WILPF member Eleanor Moore noted later, 'by common consent, apparently, they were ignored as irrelevant'.⁵

The White Australia Policy

In 1901 the new federal parliament introduced the *Immigration Restriction Act* as the legislative expression of 'White Australia'.⁶ Subsequent legislation and regulations complemented the initial Act and were aimed at restricting non-European immigration and promoting a racially white nation-state.⁷ Many of the colonies had already implemented various forms of Asian immigration restriction and the WAP was a reinforcement of ideas and beliefs that were already widely held.⁸ Within a global context, WAP proponents wanted to reinforce national unity through a mono-ethnic state in an attempt to avoid racial problems they perceived in other countries such as the United States of America. The labour movement, with its own industrial preoccupation with what they called 'cheap coloured labour', strongly endorsed this view. The implementation of 'White Australia' represented a foundational doctrine in international relations for Australia. It announced Australia's status as a self-governing dominion rather than a subservient colony.⁹ Under the banner of White Australia, self-consciousness was cultivated within the community about who was considered white, and who was not. This manifested in concerns about interracial mixture, suspicion of cosmopolitanism and, in some sections of society, the adoption of an aggressive racially supremacist language.

5 Eleanor M Moore, *The Quest for Peace, As I Have Known It in Australia* (Melbourne, 1948), 70.

6 Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*, Australian ed. (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 137.

7 Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Carlton North, Vic: Scribe, 2005), 7.

8 Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 10.

9 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 144.

Not only was the policy supported by both major political parties, it was almost unanimously accepted by the public and by other institutions. The trade union movement supported exclusionary immigration to protect white workers from labour competition, while the press, employer groups, Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia and church groups offered limited opposition.¹⁰ Dissent was decidedly rare and cautious, though not absent. Petitions from the public were typically confined to individual cases of deportation, and rarely criticised the policy agenda as a whole. The WAP caused embarrassment to the British Government.¹¹ To ensure that there would be no interference from this direction, discretion was given to customs officials to keep 'undesirables' out by means of a literacy test in 'any European language'.¹² Designed so many would fail, this was an indirect form of racial exclusion. In effect, the WAP prevented Australia from engaging with the kind of international relations that utopian internationalism envisaged. It consciously looked to strengthen connections with other 'white men's countries'. The restriction of international conversations about interracial encounters to the sphere of 'white men's countries' only increased isolationism.¹³

Making connections during wartime, and the parliament for women debate White Australia

The Sisterhood of International Peace (the Sisterhood) took racial politics seriously throughout the war. In 1916 it published an article in its journal *Peacewards* which was clearly influenced by racial science and eugenics: 'we are opposed to the mixture of races at this state of human evolution'.¹⁴ Even so the article went on to criticise a speech made by the prime minister which they felt was 'unwise, not to say unfeeling' in its discussion of 'coloured races'. '[C]ould anything be more likely to stir up racial feelings against Australia,

10 Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 14.

11 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 144.

12 Marilyn Lake, 'From Mississippi to Melbourne via Natal: The Invention of the Literacy Test as a Technology of Racial Exclusion', in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU Press, 2005), 222, doi.org/10.22459/CW.03.2006.

13 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 4.

14 'The Coloured Races' *Peacewards*, published as a supplement to the Australian Church's *Commonweal*, State Library of Victoria (SLV), 1 September 1916.

and to provoke future war, than to flaunt the flag of “White Australia”?¹⁵ The Sisterhood clearly made the connection between inflammatory uses of exclusion and overt discussions of race relations with the causes of international hatred and war. ‘Thus wars are made, and if Australia is ever invaded those who thus stir up racial hatred will be responsible’. A Christian way of ‘durable peace’ was proposed as the way forward, and while separation was still preferred, it represented ‘respect for fellow-men, whatever their colour, unselfish justice, and international, inter-racial goodwill’.¹⁶

Continuing on from the early considerations of race and war, the Peace Army held a public forum in June 1919 where it too put on record its concern with the WAP.¹⁷ At this meeting women and men expressed concern about the policy that had until then provoked little opposition. *The Woman Voter* reported the meeting in full.¹⁸ It was advertised as a ‘Parliament for Women’ convened specifically to discuss the WAP, which was an ‘all important subject’.¹⁹ Among the speakers were many prominent voices in the pacifist and progressive trade union movement. In the initial description, the editors recognised the significance of the question as a subject of continuing debate:

The theme is a fruitful one; never more so than at the present time, when the world’s politics have made it more alive than it has been in Australia at any time since the inauguration of the Commonwealth, with its restrictive legislation regarding the alien races. Everybody has ideas about a White Australia of some sort, and to that one must immediately add that few people who are not actually students of Internationalism, party politicians, or idealists, have any very absolute opinions upon this vital question.²⁰

Recognising the complexity and sensitivity of emotions and opinions on the issue, they structured the meeting so that expressions of dissent and of approval of the WAP were equally acceptable. Opposition to the WAP was not presumed to be the orthodox position, or the one necessarily aligned with the Peace Army’s ideology. The Sisterhood and the Peace Army had not yet merged, but they collaborated and both groups were participants. Both were ambivalent on the WAP. They were aware through

15 ‘The Coloured Races’ *Peacewards*, 1 September 1916.

16 ‘The Coloured Races’ *Peacewards*, 1 September 1916.

17 The Women’s Peace Army 7 June 1919 meeting has been discussed in Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 162.

18 ‘White Australia Convention’, *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

19 ‘White Australia Convention’, *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

20 ‘White Australia Convention’, *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

their internationalism that 'a change with us has taken place in the racial aspect of the question' and that Australia should be less opposed to 'the admission on a more generous basis than obtains of the coloured races'.²¹

Vida Goldstein, as the leader of the Peace Army, changed her views on the WAP over the period between 1911 and 1919. Goldstein's biographer, Janette Bomford, notes that Goldstein was 'in favour of White Australia'.²² Early on, she supported many aspects of the WAP especially in relation to her political views on capitalism and labour rights. However, after observing race relations during the war and focusing more specifically on internationalism and anti-war activism, Goldstein began to change her views on the policy.

Goldstein and the members of the Peace Army always self-identified as non-party. This allowed the Peace Army to avoid any automatic adherence to a party position when reconsidering the benefits and limitations of immigration policy. After her travels in 1911 Goldstein keenly observed race relations and connected what she saw to her understanding of race in Australia. When in Colombo, Goldstein's experience reinforced in her mind that 'mixture' of races degraded them both and that Australia was not ready to deal with these complexities. She wrote:

Every time I used a rickshaw I had a feeling of self-contempt. I could never get used to treating even the most degraded type of black man as an animal. I left Colombo believing more firmly than ever in the wisdom of a White Australia. At this stage of our civilisation the black and white cannot dwell together without both deteriorating—in spite of American experience. The coloured man takes all the vices of the white man, and the white man becomes dehumanised. He is so accustomed to being waited on hand and foot that he never does a thing for himself when he can get a coloured man to do it, and he is so full of contempt for the coloured man that he sees everything out of focus, and his tendency is to live only for himself and in himself.²³

Goldstein, through such experiences, felt that in abandoning a White Australia, the nation would be creating a new underclass of exploited labour at the expense of the 'white man's' working conditions and that both whites and people of colour would be degraded in the process. This position

21 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

22 Janette M Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 60.

23 'Extracts From Miss Goldstein's Letter From Colombo', *Woman Voter*, 6 April 1911, 8.

revealed how Goldstein consciously enjoyed the privileges of whiteness, and as historian Angela Woollacott has observed, failed to see Australia as a 'racially structured society' like that of America despite the presence of Asians and Aboriginal peoples.²⁴ Her position was likely due to her own personal experience of urban Melbourne where she had 'probably never seen Aboriginal people working as employees or servants of white people as they did in pastoral areas'.²⁵ Urban progressives, many of whom grew up in middle-class families, often had a limited understanding of the issues of race in Australia. Travel encouraged Goldstein to consider the privilege of whiteness as part of the British Empire, which, despite her criticism of some aspects of colonialism, she sought to protect and uphold.

While Goldstein approved of the WAP and the culture of whiteness it enshrined, the Women's Political Association (WPA) did not support it unconditionally. When the Maternity Allowance Bill was passed in 1912 the WPA spoke out about the exclusion of the benefit to 'women who are Asiatics or aboriginal natives'.²⁶ Reasoning that the 'Asiatic' women in question gave birth to their children within the Commonwealth, and were therefore 'British subjects', they believed that this was 'the White Australia Policy run mad. Maternity is maternity, whatever the race.'²⁷ Evidently the WPA's position on White Australia was nuanced, and set between other pillars of its moral architecture, notably respect and recognition of motherhood. Their support for the policy focused upon immigration restriction, not discriminating against those already within the Commonwealth.

By 1914 Goldstein and the WPA identified another major inconsistency within the WAP caused by the war effort. They believed that once Japan became an ally of the Commonwealth, and 'coloured troops' were used in the armies, any arguments in favour of White Australia were voided. The *Woman Voter* carried the headline 'White Australia Policy Done For' in October 1914.²⁸ The article explained that the association supported White Australia on 'economic grounds without a thought of racial hatred', but felt that the economic argument no longer applied and 'self-respect will no

24 Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 44.

25 Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 45.

26 'Maternity Grant', *Woman Voter*, 9 October 1912, 1.

27 'Maternity Grant', *Woman Voter*, 9 October 1912, 1. See also Lake, *Getting Equal*, 75.

28 'White Australia Policy Done For', *Woman Voter*, 27 October 1914, 2.

longer allow [us] to uphold the principle' because of the way that 'coloured people' were being asked to fight alongside 'whites' as equals.²⁹ The article continued:

If we consider coloured people good enough to use for the purpose of helping us to kill our enemies and expand our Empire, then we cannot refuse them the opportunity of using us for their purposes.³⁰

Wartime and Commonwealth interaction with non-white Allied countries prompted these women to reconsider their ideas about the WAP. It revealed to them the 'racial hatred' behind the policy that they had defended on economic grounds until now. This racism made them uneasy and conflicted with their views on internationalism.

At the 1919 Parliament for Women meeting, these issues were re-examined. With such a strong representation of voices from the trade union movement, it was clear the biggest concern was the issue of the white working man's wage—perhaps the central pillar of the WAP's justification among the Australian progressive movement. It was assumed that any influx of migrants would have an undercutting effect as 'coloured labour' had the tendency to 'bring down the wage'.³¹ Many examples of where this had occurred in other countries were cited, showing an international framing of the debate on both sides. In this matter the women of the Peace Army sided with the trade union movement, as those representatives, likewise avowed pacifists, identified themselves as the progressive side of politics. In an attempt to rationalise this stance in a non-racialised way, the Peace Army noted:

It is not so much a war against colour as against Capital and its machinations, that holds our working class to the principles of our present legislation.³²

This meeting was hosted and chaired by women but was open for men to join in the general debate. Many of the participants in the meeting were undecided about their position on the WAP, or how they should discuss it. Alfred Foster frankly stated 'I do not seek to justify the White Australia Policy, but I accept it'.³³ Some reiterated the concerns of the unions, as many of the women were involved in peace activism because of their

29 'White Australia Policy Done For', *Woman Voter*, 27 October 1914, 2.

30 'White Australia Policy Done For', *Woman Voter*, 17 November 1914, 2.

31 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

32 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

33 Alfred Foster quoted in 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

activities in women's rights movements interested in protecting the position of mothers and children, presumed beneficiaries of the WAP settlement. These maternalist feminists deferred to the masculinism of the trade union movement and those who reasserted rights for men to earn a family wage. Maternalist welfare feminists campaigned for state support for mothers, to enshrine the idea of domestic work as paid work and ensure that poor mothers would not be forced to undertake waged work and neglect their children.³⁴

In the workplace women were limited to earning between 50 and 60 per cent of the male wage, so while campaigners argued for equal and fair wages, they too wanted women out of the workforce, which was in line with policies of male labour activists.³⁵ Labour women therefore strongly believed in both having state recognition for women's work and enshrining the bedrock of the 'civilized man's wage'. In practice, any support by the state such as the maternity allowance introduced in 1912 was exclusively intended for white mothers.³⁶ Australian women invoked motherhood when demanding more rights for women by demonstrating 'women's value to the nation ... in the breeding of a stronger and sturdier race'.³⁷ Most interwar feminist activists were not as willing to question race-based immigration exclusion. Vida Goldstein and the WPA opposed the exclusions of the maternity allowance and called for non-white mothers to have access, but many other feminist activists in support of White Australia did not comment.³⁸

The 'civilised man's wage' had only recently been sanctified by the Harvester judgement decided on by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court with Justice HB Higgins as president in 1907. This judgement set a minimum wage as a 'fair and reasonable' living wage that assumed men should support their families.³⁹ To threaten the breadwinning capabilities of husbands would destitute women and children and force them into the workplace. So many of the women's ideas of wage labour were tied,

34 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 72.

35 Shurlee Swain, Patricia Grimshaw and Ellen Warne, 'Whiteness, Maternal Feminism and the Working Mother 1900–1960', in *Creating White Australia*, ed. Jane Carey and Claire McLisky (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009): 214–29.

36 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 76.

37 Marilyn Lake, 'A Revolution in the Family' in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 379.

38 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 76.

39 John Rickard, 'Higgins, Henry Bournes (1851–1929)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB), National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/higgins-henry-bournes-6662/text11483, accessed online 1 April 2014.

tangentially, to racism and class issues. Higgins was a pacifist supportive of international attempts at diplomacy and peace negotiation. While his judgement was not explicitly racial, but class-based, he still saw no tension between the WAP and wider pacifism.

Other women at the 1919 meeting were more radical and rejected the nexus between the claims of 'civilized labour', maternal and child welfare, and the WAP. One participant, Mrs Griffin, said 'imperialism is the menace, not the people', and 'our moral superiority is a joke'.⁴⁰ Another, Mabel Singleton, remarked that 'The Japanese do not seek to flood Australia, only to have our recognition of their "equality"'.⁴¹ These women, along with Fullerton, Paling, and others who represented WILPF symbolised the element within the meeting that pushed for a rejection of the WAP. Their views were forcefully articulated. In the words of Paling from the Sisterhood: 'if we want to keep our nation on a high standard, we should banish the undesirable of our own race'.⁴² One solution, suggested by Amelia Lambrick, was to 'let the coloured men bring their women, and there is no racial problem'.⁴³ Lambrick, who was active in the peace movement and a future president of WILPF, was vocal about the White Australia issue from as early as 1907. She wrote for the *Socialist* under the pseudonym 'Hypatia' and criticised the socialist movement for not understanding the meaning of 'brotherhood': 'we shout "brotherhood" in the major and "White Australia" in the minor and seem quite unconscious of the discord'.⁴⁴ However, her own position on racism still seemed equivocal and ill-defined. '[R]acial instincts', noted Lambrick, 'will prevent marriage save in the very lowest strata of society ... if we are superior beings we will not intermarry with an inferior race'.⁴⁵

Given the range of contradictory positions among such a diverse group of delegates, the meeting concluded without a definitive pronouncement. The deep reservations that the participants of the meeting had with the idea of actually removing the WAP were apparent in the evasive words of the report:

40 Mrs Griffin, 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

41 Mabel Singleton, 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

42 Lucy Paling, 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

43 Amelia Lambrick, 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3. Lambrick was president of WILPF from 1932 to 1936 and attended the 1926 WILPF Congress held in Dublin.

44 Hypatia (Amelia Lambrick), 'The Cry for Freedom', *Socialist*, 9 March 1907, quoted in Graeme Osborne, 'A Socialist Dilemma', *Labour History*, no. 35 (1 January 1978): 114.

45 Osborne, 'A Socialist Dilemma', 114.

The golden precipitate gathered from the convention is the growth of internationalism and of brotherhood that the tone of the proceedings marked. We are, despite economic fears and purity of blood considerations, learning that 'colour caste's a lie', and that 'a man's a man a' that.⁴⁶

This result was complicated. It recognised the force of the principle of racial equality but found no way to reconcile it with the WAP, and the suspicion that capitalism would exploit any change. Yet it was still pro-internationalist and assumed with time attitudes could change. What was made clear was how prominent figures in the peace and trade union movements believed the WAP to be necessary and not inconsistent with their call for peace. It was the specific international dimension of peace activism that prompted criticism of race-based exclusion among the women of the Sisterhood and the Peace Army.

White Australia and the world stage

Australia's postwar engagement with international governance was dominated by the strictures of White Australia and its preservation. The Peace Army folded in 1919 and the Sisterhood became the Australian section of WILPF, effectively allowing the two membership bases to merge and connect with the international section of WILPF. In November 1920, Australia sent Nationalist Party Senator Edward Millen as part of a national delegation to the first League of Nations Assembly. The newly reconstituted Australian section of WILPF sent a letter of introduction about Millen to their international comrades as a way of sharing information about how best to approach him. This initial letter encouraged WILPF International to spend time 'beguiling him into the international atmosphere' showing how it saw the diplomatic positions of each nation as a vital part of the international decision-making machine.⁴⁷ The women's groups invested time and energy in meeting and discussing issues with the chosen national representatives.

46 'White Australia Convention', *Woman Voter*, 3 July 1919, 3.

47 Moore as secretary of the APA to Balch, Geneva, 29 September 1920, series III reel 54, WILPF International Papers 1915–1978, Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corp. of America, c 1983, accessed at the National Library of Australia (NLA). Hereafter referred to as WILPF Papers.

However, there was a profound disconnect between how the women wished the delegates to approach their roles and how the delegates themselves planned on engaging with this first, very modest, gesture toward international government. Millen saw his job as defending Australian interests against any internationalism that would encroach on national policy. It has been well noted how Prime Minister Billy Hughes defended the WAP at the Paris Peace Conference, calling his successful attempt to prevent a racial equality clause being inserted in the League of Nations Covenant a victory despite aggravating diplomatic relations with Japan.⁴⁸ Millen was a close colleague of the prime minister and at the League of Nations he promoted the WAP as sacrosanct, just as Hughes desired.⁴⁹

For the government of Australia, the idea of the League of Nations was threatening. Their involvement with the League was defined by an intention to monitor and curtail pressure to change White Australia. Hughes was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, describing how Australians should be suspicious about this type of internationalism:

Australia was a signatory to the covenant of the League, and she had, perhaps, more than any other nation to lose by the League's decision, because many of the things for which her soldiers fought had not yet assumed as definite a shape as was desired ... Australia could not even listen, for instance, to anyone who suggested any encroachment on the policy of the White Australia.⁵⁰

The international section of WILPF was not impressed with the Australian delegation at the first League of Nations meeting in 1920. The reports about Millen became something of an embarrassment to Australian WILPF women, and perhaps encouraged them to see the disadvantages in the WAP, especially when Australian representatives such as Millen used the policy as a way of disrupting and derailing progress at the conference. When the international section of WILPF approached the official Australian delegation as part of their commitment to lobbying all national sections for peace, the distrust Millen had for the goals of the League of Nations was apparent. As detailed in letters to the Australian section of WILPF, this attitude left them underwhelmed:

48 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 150.

49 Martha Rutledge, 'Millen, Edward Davis (1860–1923)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/millen-edward-davis-7577/text13227, accessed online 2 April 2014.

50 'League of Nations: Senator Millen a Delegate', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 September 1920, 13.

Mr Millen kept us for two hours and was very urgent about seeing us again. He did most of the talking and the burden of it was 1) that he himself looked out for his own people first ... and that 2) the delegates of the League of Nations were a contemptible crew who were not ready to sacrifice their particular national interests for the general welfare. There was not a glimmer of perception that there was an inconsistency in this. I regret to say he was the most ill considered and most disliked personality in the Assembly. [He had a] frank contempt for every race but his own. Is it not too bad that Australia to whom we all look with such high expectations should have to suffer being represented in such a fashion.⁵¹

Millen's crude style was provocative and highlighted to the Australian women the political vulgarity of the WAP. To the women of WILPF, the League of Nations was a crucial part of their internationalism and the promise for disarmament and peace. They realised the organisation would only succeed if all nations were able to engage by moderating national chauvinism. They criticised the drafting of the covenant for giving too much emphasis to national sections. To receive letters describing Australian delegates in the above terms would have prompted many in the internationalist movement to reconsider the way Australia was projecting itself to the world. Soon after hearing the critique, WILPF actively participated in the organising of an interstate Australian peace conference to be held in Melbourne that devoted the majority of its time to considering the WAP. Millen's appearance at the League of Nations suggests a tension between his representations of the national interest, and the priority of Australian WILPF who hoped to represent Australia's international goodwill.

The interstate peace conference, 1921

In 1921 the Australian Peace Alliance (APA) organised an interstate peace conference that brought together 38 peace societies from across Australia and New Zealand. Eleanor Moore, secretary of Melbourne WILPF, had taken up a part-time paid secretary position with the APA, and was centrally involved in the administration of the meeting. Held in Melbourne in March it met to discuss the 'new theme' of the WAP.⁵² The timing of this conference was significant. It came directly after Australia's engagement with the first League

51 Balch to Moore, 11 January 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

52 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 69.

of Nations meeting. The APA had held many public meetings in 1920 to discuss Australia's contribution to the international forum, which through the efforts of Senator Millen, had been a studied exercise in the obstruction of internationalists' goals.⁵³ The participants believed the issue was 'new' as it had 'been the accepted policy of all political parties for over 20 years' and the conference claimed that it was 'now, for the first time since Federation, made the subject open for public discussion'.⁵⁴ As historians David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska have pointed out, this idea of looking to Asia as being something 'new' for Australia has had a long history.⁵⁵ It was a tactic used to ignore difficult issues and convert 'those who are concerned with Australia's Asian future into visionaries, bravely going where none have gone before.'⁵⁶



Disarmament Sunday, Yarra Park, Sunday 6 November 1921.

Source: Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, MS 9377 State Library of Victoria.

⁵³ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 69.

⁵⁴ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 69.

⁵⁵ David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska, eds, *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2012), 2.

⁵⁶ Walker and Sobocinska, *Australia's Asia*, 2.

At this large Melbourne meeting, two speakers were there by special invitation, Dr W Lowe from Melbourne and Rev. Sydney Strong from the US. Two representatives of the trade union movement, RS Ross and Don Cameron, were vocal participants, and had been present at the earlier Peace Army meeting of 1919 where White Australia was questioned.⁵⁷ As representatives of the trade union movement, they felt it important to reinforce the need for the policy on the grounds of protecting white wage labour. At the 1921 meeting, only six women were present out of thirty-eight participants, and four officially represented WILPF's various branches.⁵⁸ Three were recorded as speaking, and those women were the only participants who pointed to the issue of racial exclusion as a potential cause of war. Isabel Swann, who was in Melbourne representing a small WILPF branch in Sydney, directly linked the rise of militarism in Australia with the narrow worldview promoted by the WAP:

Why was the White Australia Policy ever introduced? We were not getting swamped with Asiatics. Behind it was the desire to create fear in the mind of the worker, so as to allow military power to be foisted on Australia.⁵⁹

Swann's position showed how she believed the focus on White Australia encouraged people to prioritise defending it with violence and war. Eleanor Moore spoke out about the damage of nationalism and the fostering of war sentiment, but her position remained within the orthodox framework of language used to understand whiteness:

The present policy makes for war. War will do nothing to settle this question, but will embitter it, and further weaken the white race. It should be made widely known that we are dissatisfied with the present position, and we are seeking a just solution.⁶⁰

The 'present position' she referred to was the tension between the policy and the use of it by nationalists in the international setting. According to Moore's biographer, Malcolm Saunders, Moore was a faithful supporter of the WAP, and though her position softened after prolonged engagement with women

57 Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, held at the Friends' Meeting House, Melbourne, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

58 Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, held at the Friends' Meeting House, Melbourne, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

59 Isabel Swann, quoted in Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, held at the Friends' Meeting House, Melbourne, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

60 Moore, quoted in Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, held at the Friends' Meeting House, Melbourne, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

from across all regions of the world, she never fully renounced it.⁶¹ Moore compared Australia with the US and its racial problems, and believed the mixture of races led to 'the blight of a fearful civil war', therefore signalling a belief that racial difference was prone to stir up violence.⁶² This perspective was not unusual. Higgins, an important public figure even before his historic 'Harvester' judgement, considered himself a pacifist and had articulated similar sentiments when the WAP was introduced. Looking to the United States, he noted the country had experienced the 'greatest racial trouble ever known in the history of the world' and told the parliament that Australia should 'take warning and guard ourselves against similar complications'.⁶³

Moore's argument represented a strong current of thought on nationalism and ethnicity in the early interwar period, even among the most liberal. Ethnically, religiously and linguistically homogeneous states were preferable to the social unrest caused by 'mixing' races and difference. The connection of ethnicity to nation was central to some perspectives of how to secure global peace. The rest of the participants debated issues of miscegenation and social mixture of races, Christian morality, industrial and capitalist threats to white wages and racial pseudoscience. Kathleen Hotson from Queensland representing the Children's Peace Army challenged the anxiety of trade unions by stating; 'Are we too weak and narrow to organise coloured workers if they come here? Why are they necessarily the asset of capitalism only?'⁶⁴

Participants attempted to answer her statement, citing the illustrative example of 'Kanakas' in Queensland, or the different standards of living of other 'black or yellow peoples'. Ross explained that he felt the policy complemented rather than complicated his pacifism by categorising the WAP as a call for self-determination: 'Japan for the Japanese, Australia for the Australians'.⁶⁵ Ross put forward his own motion that urged conference delegates to recognise that under the capitalist system coloured immigration would 'produce enmity, unrest and war within'.⁶⁶ Fearful too that 'coloured races' would be used to break strikes, he acknowledged the racism of

61 Malcolm Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter: The Life and Thought of an Australian Pacifist: Eleanor May Moore 1875–1949* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1993), 331.

62 Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter*, 332.

63 HB Higgins, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, 6 September 1901, quoted in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 143.

64 Kathleen Hotson, quoted in Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

65 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, Appendix 9, 183.

66 Osborne, 'A Socialist Dilemma', 125.

his argument, especially when countering another speaker discussing miscegenation; 'keep your races pure'.⁶⁷ The historian Graeme Osborne has written about Ross's involvement in this meeting, recognising that as a leader of the socialist movement of the time his promotion of the WAP led to the collapse of any possibility for the Victorian Socialist Party to become genuinely international.⁶⁸ Ross's position was hardline and strident. By contrast, the WILPF women were too reserved to fully denounce it but refused to support it unequivocally. WILPF's nebulous and variegated approach afforded a way through by recognising the contradiction. They used personal internationalism as a way forward, making connections and visiting excluded countries as a way to move beyond a grand national political impasse.

Like the 1919 meeting, the interstate peace conference was inconclusive and did not commit to any clear position on the WAP. In their failure to produce a workable alternative, the peace movement joined most other political movements that discussed the WAP in being unable to 'suggest anything more than a nominal relaxation of the restrictions'.⁶⁹ The interstate peace conference ended with resolutions that encouraged closer cultural understanding but avoided any recommendation to abolish the exclusionist immigration policy.⁷⁰

While neither explicitly disagreeing with nor wholeheartedly denouncing the foundations of the WAP, these recommendations were still radical at the time. They looked to address anxieties of labour activists by suggesting the unions should prioritise organising Asian workers and repudiated the idea of any 'intrinsic superiority' of the white race. They stated that cultural understanding and exchange needed to be pursued, recognising that the policy itself, regardless of the initial reasons for its implementation, had encouraged prejudice between 'people of the East and West'.⁷¹ It was radical enough that media such as *The Australian Worker* reported simply that 'the Peace Conference which recently sat in Melbourne carried a resolution against the White Australia policy.' It elaborated: 'Unquestionably the

67 Osborne, 'A Socialist Dilemma', 125.

68 Osborne, 'A Socialist Dilemma', 128.

69 AC Palfreeman, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 119.

70 Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

71 Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

delegates concerned are men actuated by high ideals, but sometimes high ideals cannot, or should not be given precedence of vital and irrefutable facts'.⁷² Incorrectly assuming all delegates were male, the article reiterated the unionist position that capitalism would exploit the 'vast differences' between races. Eagle-eyed Moore picked up on the article and responded, asking for it to be modified. Her letter was printed in full in the next edition. She maintained that no resolution was 'against' the WAP and that the output of the conference was 'by no means unconditional'. Moreover, 'the question whether some measure of exclusion may not, in the best interest of both races, be desirable, on economic or other grounds, is left entirely open'.⁷³

Without the crisis of war, interest in peace organising did not seem as critical to many and the APA stopped meeting in 1922, though it never officially disbanded.⁷⁴ Therefore, the proposed 'inter-racial congress' to discuss the WAP in more depth was never convened. Enthusiasm for such cross-cultural exchanges seem to have only been seriously pursued by the women in the peace movement, who then looked for ways to fulfil the recommendations independently. They found a new forum in the Pan-Pacific movement which enabled them to personally interact and challenge their own prejudices, however obliquely.

Division over the policy within the progressive internationalist movement shows how deeply naturalised the principles of White Australia were in the 1920s. It is also revealing of the many competing visions that existed within WILPF on what could reasonably be considered 'progressive'. In the Australian political sphere, 'progressive' movements were steeped in issues of concern to the working class and often preoccupied with protecting white wage labour. Support for the logic of the Harvester Judgement of 1907, and the principle of racial exclusion its racialised understanding of civilised life entailed, was an article of faith for most Australian progressive movements.⁷⁵ Internationalism represented a different form of progressive engagement. While peace was at its core, the new complexities about race that it raised meant a re-evaluation of how new internationalists should engage with the other active progressives. The women involved in WILPF sometimes experienced the WAP as insufficient and stifling, but they did not know how to oppose it or what to replace it with. Their action, overall,

72 'Mainly Political', *The Australian Worker*, 7 April 1921, 1.

73 Moore, 'White Australia', *The Australian Worker*, 21 April 1921, 2.

74 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 72.

75 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 157.

might not have been drastic, and tended more to unnerve rather than dissent, but having debate and discussion where opposition was raised and recorded remains significant as it shows that while support across Australia was dominant, it was not universal.

WILPF ventures out of White Australia: The Pan-Pacific movement

Despite their inconsistent position on the issue of White Australia, the Australian section of WILPF was eager to prove that their views had nothing to do with the respect they held for other countries. It became a priority to find ways to engage with neighbouring countries through WILPF, and reinforce that although immigration remained a fraught topic, a close international relationship was still desired. WILPF International proposed a fact-finding trip to China, and the Australian section repeatedly communicated their interest in the expedition. The delegates, Camile Drevet from France and Edith Pye from England, both travelled to China in October 1927.⁷⁶ The Australian section raised a generous contribution of £5 for their expenses, and forwarded a contact list of sympathetic individuals given to them by a fellow pacifist in China as a missionary from the Society of Friends.⁷⁷ They asked the delegates to 'assure the women of China' that Australian women 'desire to see most peaceful and cordial relations established'. They reiterated that the WAP was not meant to offend and that any interpretation of the policy being based on 'enmity' was 'largely imaginary'.⁷⁸ Moore wrote:

I do not mean to imply that the exclusion law is a dead letter—that is far from being so—but it would be quite a mistake to conclude that it necessarily means either insult or contempt to another people. We of the [WILPF] in Australia join with our sisters in all other countries in hoping the visit of our delegates to China will be productive of great good in the way of improved understanding on all sides, and the making of many personal friendships.⁷⁹

76 Camile Drevet and Edith Pye, *Report of the WILPF Delegation to China*, Geneva 1928, P 172.4 DRE NLA.

77 Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary of WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1927, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

78 Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary of WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1927, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

79 Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary of WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1927, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

There was no mention in the official report of any discussion that the delegates had with Chinese women about White Australia, but there was recognition of 'their awakening sensitiveness to treatment as an inferior nation from unenlightened and unimaginative foreigners'.⁸⁰

During the 1920s the peace movement began to look for ways to interact with countries of the South Pacific. There was a realisation that internationalists had mistakenly ignored Australia's near neighbours. Meetings were held to discuss how to encourage 'friendship' to foster a peaceful region, such as the 'Pan-Pacific Friendship meeting' held in the Town Hall in Sydney in 1923 which was hosted by the NSW Branch of the London Peace Society.⁸¹ As more was known about the region from experts and commentators discussing the peculiar issues of the area, WILPF too looked for ways to become involved. When the potential for a Pan-Pacific Women's conference was circulated among women's networks, the Australian section of WILPF enthusiastically pursued this opportunity to interact with neighbouring countries in a constructive way. They wished to show a different interpretation of the WAP, one that diverged from the crude exclusivism espoused by Hughes and Millen, and which did not aim to offend or reject interaction with neighbouring nations.

The Pan-Pacific Women's Conference movement began organising in the 1920s and arranged its inaugural conference in 1928. It was set up out of the Pan-Pacific Union, which had headquarters in Honolulu, Hawai'i.⁸² Looking at the series of eight Pan-Pacific conferences that took place between 1928 and 1958, historian Fiona Paisley has analysed how the women involved in the organising built upon 'ideals of cross-cultural exchange and interracial harmony' across a period when the world grappled with decolonisation, economic depression and world war.⁸³ The political motivation for these women's conferences was inherently internationalist and seemed out of step with the dominant Australian approach to regional engagement. Because of the debates over the WAP, many 'women who sought to learn more about Asian women's lives and to cooperate with them

80 Drevet and Pye, *Report of the WILPF Delegation to China*, 49.

81 'A Short Account of the Pan-Pacific Friendship Meeting', 3 September 1923, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

82 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 96.

83 Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 425, doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824833428.001.0001.

on women's issues were consciously at odds with their cultural context.⁸⁴ They revelled in the idea of the network representing 'East meeting West' and encouraged the attendance of non-Western nations. The promotion of cultural diversity complicated understandings of nationalism throughout the network. As some Western participants hoped that internationalism would promote a 'world identity', it became clear that for some non-Western countries nationalism represented an important anti-colonial struggle in which Western women were implicated.⁸⁵ Paisley notes that many non-Western women joined the network and participated in the conferences because nationalist anti-colonial governments were still not enfranchising women. They hoped to find a way to improve the situation for women in their countries and to criticise their own government's militarism.⁸⁶

The very real divide between 'east and west' was clear in the Western modes of political dominance present in the structures of the conference. The proceedings were conducted in English and the choice of place, Hawai'i, was accessible to westerners because of its ties to the US.⁸⁷ In 1928 that connection was clear with the closing remarks from the chairman, WILPF International's Jane Addams, who stated that 'Honolulu is an outpost of America in the midst of the Pacific'.⁸⁸ At the first conference the site of Honolulu was very specifically chosen not simply because it was the home of the Pan-Pacific Union, but because it was 'at the ocean's crossroads' and was 'a laboratory of social and racial relationships'.⁸⁹ Hawai'i was colloquially considered the 'Geneva' of the Pacific.⁹⁰ It was around this time that it was proclaimed to be 'the most successfully racially mixed society in the world'. The Pan-Pacific Women's Association (PPWA) believed that 'the youngest and oldest civilisations' exist side by side because 'the people of the Pacific are without great traditional hatreds'.⁹¹ This perspective obscured the colonial history of Hawai'i itself while also promoting a more thoughtful and moderate approach of the mixture of races, one that they thought should be studied and replicated in Europe and around the world.

84 Angela Woollacott, 'Inventing Commonwealth and Pan-Pacific Feminisms: Australian Women's Internationalist Activism in the 1920s–30s', *Gender & History* 10, no. 3 (November 1998): 435, doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.00112.

85 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 25.

86 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 25.

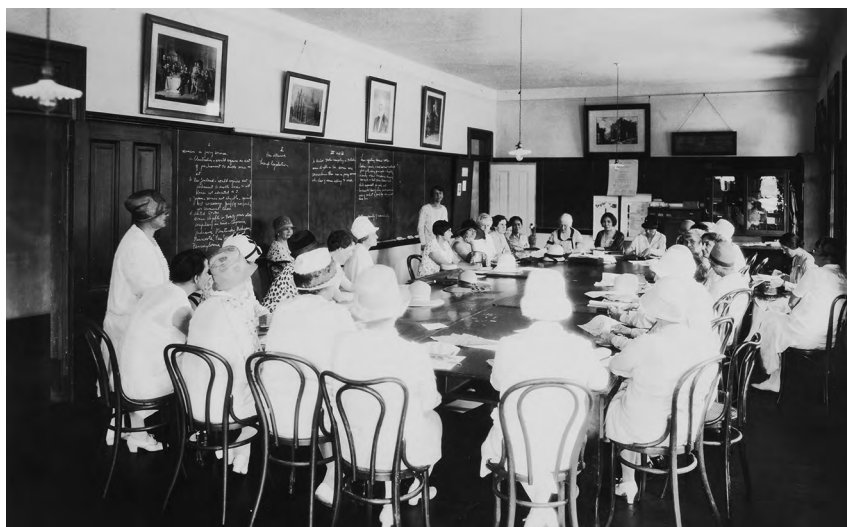
87 Hawai'i became a state of America in 1950. Bessie Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women: A Record of Fifty Years Struggle for Equal Citizenship* (Perth: Paterson Brokensha, 1964), 123.

88 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 69.

89 *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, The Pan-Pacific Women's Conference Honolulu, August 1928, accessed NLA, 3.

90 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 16.

91 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 41. *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 3.



Pan-Pacific Women's Conference, Honolulu 1928. Round table, government section, chaired by Miss Kikue Ide (Japan). Eleanor M Moore standing at left.

Source: Various photographic views and portraits of Eleanor May Moore, alone and with various pacifist groups she belonged to, taken in Australia and overseas at conferences and demonstrations, ca. 1918–1945 Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW MLMSS 4170 PXE 1025.

The gatherings were organised to 'measure up the prevailing standards of life in those nations bordering on this great ocean'.⁹² The emphasis on development and health, education, social science, and industry meant the participating countries ensured their delegations were experts in their chosen fields. Twelve nations participated including Australia, Canada, China, Java, Fiji, Hawai'i, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Samoa and the United States, with around 150 delegates in total. Australia sent 13 delegates and some associates from a number of different societies and organisations. Eleanor Moore was elected as the representative for Australian WILPF, and again they diligently raised the funds for her travel.⁹³ Her nominated area of interest was 'women in government' and she was allocated to engage in a round table discussion.⁹⁴ Two of her colleagues from WILPF Victoria joined her. The first was Mrs Bryning, whose speciality was listed as 'associated with child welfare activities'. The other was Mrs BM Fowler who was listed as an associate without voting rights.⁹⁵ The journey of the delegation took 16 days,

⁹² *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 3.

⁹³ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 97.

⁹⁴ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 97.

⁹⁵ *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 6–7.

which while seeming long, was substantially shorter than the journeys that were required to reach any WILPF congresses in Europe.⁹⁶ The delegates all travelled together and recognised that this international conference was unique and even a 'new phase of international representation' because it brought together delegates from more than one nationally organised body, and represented different world movements.⁹⁷

The leader of the Australian delegation was Bessie Rischbieth from Western Australia, an active internationalist who had co-founded the British Commonwealth League of Women and was a board member of the International Alliance of Women (IAW). In 1935 she would be awarded an OBE for her work advancing women's rights.⁹⁸ Rischbieth became a mentor for many Western Australian WILPF women and had lobbied in the 1920s for women to attend the League of Nations as Australian supplementary delegates. She was later a substitute delegate in 1935.⁹⁹ Women's groups were pleased that a substitute delegate to the League of Nations became standard practice and WILPF member Edith Waterworth took on the honour in 1936, though it was often felt that government appointments were not prioritised or appropriately funded: 'with only one exception the appointment has never gone to a woman unless she was already on the other side of the world.'¹⁰⁰ Eleanor Hinder was another of the internationalists pursuing practical work in China before the Pan-Pacific conference. She was an Australian involved in the International Labour Organization (ILO) and was living in Shanghai working for the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) with American Viola Smith, who was the US Assistant Trade Commissioner in China.¹⁰¹ Hinder was already known to WILPF, and had even been promoted by them as a potential delegate to a committee of the League of Nations because of her known international work in China.¹⁰² Similarly, Hinder was supportive of WILPF, having arranged accommodation and assisted with travel for the two WILPF delegates in

96 *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 6–7.

97 *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 30.

98 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 157. Nancy Lutton, 'Rischbieth, Bessie Mabel (1874–1967)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rischbieth-bessie-mabel-8214/text14373, published in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 2 April 2014.

99 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 35.

100 Julia Rapke, 'Edith Waterworth', Papers on various Australia Women, Manuscript. Exact dates unknown, though Waterworth essay written between 1940 and 1945, NLA.

101 Meredith Foley and Heather Radi, 'Hinder, Eleanor Mary (1893–1963)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hinder-eleanor-mary-6678/text11515, published in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 2 April 2014.

102 Moore to Secretary, 31 August 1927, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

China.¹⁰³ Hinder was involved in the 1928 conference through the Chinese delegation and although not officially present as an Australian delegate, she was able to represent the wide network of Australian professionals working for women's rights abroad.

At the second conference in 1930 the PPWA was inaugurated to take on the responsibility of organising and promoting future conferences.¹⁰⁴ The first president was an Australian woman, Dr Georgina Sweet. Though not part of the first delegation, she became a very important figure in the organisation and promotion of the conferences in Australia. Sweet was an academic from Melbourne University specialising in zoology who was a founding member of the Women's Graduate Association and the international vice-president of the YWCA from 1934. She too was later awarded an OBE for her international work. Another participant, Dr Ethel Osborne, was an 'industrial hygienist' who was directly invited by the Pan-Pacific Union to chair the health section of the conference because of her achievement in that area. Her involvement attests to the ambition of the conference consisting of professionals and experts from the Pacific who would be able to influence the proceedings with their expertise. Osborne studied medicine at the University of Melbourne, specialising in obstetrics and gynaecology.¹⁰⁵ All of these women directed their training and skills towards international agendas. They focused on the challenges faced by 'less developed' nations and sought to improve women's health, hygiene and status domestically, hoping that their influence would foster a unity that would transcend nationalism and promote internationalism. The close contact of these women with the women of WILPF, facilitated by their engagement with the Pan-Pacific conference movement, illustrates how WILPF became interconnected in the wider women's network. Many formed close collaborative ties to other women who were working as internationalists or promoting internationalism in other fields.

From the outset, the women from Australia saw the promotion of Pacific cooperation as paradigm-shifting and talked at length about how the will for such a cross-cultural gathering was due to the area being the 'new World

103 Drevet and Pye, *Report of the WILPF Delegation to China*, 17.

104 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 2.

105 Osborne was a substitute delegate with the official Australian delegation to the League of Nations in 1931. Diane Langmore, 'Osborne, Ethel Elizabeth (1882–1968)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/osborne-ethel-elizabeth-7925/text13791, published in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 2 April 2014.

Focus'.¹⁰⁶ They believed the meeting was 'pioneering', as rarely had so many 'races and creeds met' to 'learn and exchange'.¹⁰⁷ 'Australians', wrote Moore, 'were slowly beginning to realize that this Dominion is not an island just off the coast of Europe, but a continent in the Southern Pacific Hemisphere.'¹⁰⁸ Hinder, who published a piece on the first conference in *Pacific Affairs*, also noted how the focus of most international women's organisations was Europe, to the detriment of women of the Pacific.

The headquarters of the main international groupings of women ... are in Europe. Their international conferences have been in Europe. It follows from this that women of Australia, New Zealand, and China and Japan are able to be present in very small numbers.¹⁰⁹

The conferences did not start out as explicitly pacifist gatherings but the involvement of women like Moore and Addams allowed the issue of peace to permeate throughout all the round table discussions. Moore wrote a report for the new international WILPF publication *Pax International* that began distribution in 1926, discussing how peace became central to all discussions:

It was not a Peace Conference; that is to say, the subject of international peace had no place on the agenda, but it was implied throughout all discussions. More and more it was recognised as the days went on, that in our times the problems of one country are the problems of all; that every question proves under examination to be an international question; and that no satisfactory solutions are possible except on a basis of peace and cooperation.¹¹⁰

The Australian Government had a different understanding of their place in the global and geographical context. In contrast to the women seeking out intellectual and cultural exchange, the Australian Government treated the Pacific through a prism of defence, strategy and security. After the Paris Peace Conference, Australia was mandated control over New Guinea. Rather than any developmental goals, Millen unequivocally acknowledged

¹⁰⁶ *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 96.

¹⁰⁹ Eleanor M Hinder, 'Pacific Women', *Pacific Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1 July 1928): 9–12, doi.org/10.2307/3035494.

¹¹⁰ Eleanor Moore, 'Neighbours in the Pacific', *Pax International* 4, no. 3 (January 1929).

that the benefit of controlling the territory was to create a buffer between Australia and other Pacific nations. According to Millen, '[i]f Australia has any policy in the Pacific it is a somewhat nebulous desire for safety'.¹¹¹

All the women involved were interested in promoting cultural understanding between nations. Even so the topic of immigration was skilfully avoided. Moore recalled in her memoir that 'etiquette forbade' the discussion in any programmed way.¹¹² According to Paisley the first real discussion of the White Australia question at the PPWA was not until the 1937 conference. As official Australian WILPF delegates only attended the 1928 and 1930 conferences, WILPF did not explicitly engage with any critique of the Women's Political Association (WPA) through the PPWA.¹¹³ Yet, in all Moore's writing about her time at the conference, there is a very strong sense that she wanted to experience a more cosmopolitan world.

In Moore's memoir, published towards the end of her life, she recognised how much this meeting changed her opinions on race. Moore noted that the atmosphere and the 'artistic, poetic and religious tradition' of the Pacific nations 'had its silent influence upon the preconceived ideas of the "whites"'.¹¹⁴ In her reflection, she also noted how much the WAP and the insularity that it had created stunted the cosmopolitan growth of Australia:

Australians could not but recognise that, whatever values the 'White Australia' policy had conserved, these were seriously offset by impoverishment in cultural and artistic graces. In that cosmopolitan atmosphere Australians felt their own insularity ... while it had lain on our consciences that we might be doing others an injustice in excluding them, it had not occurred to us that we ourselves might thereby be losers too.¹¹⁵

She was quick to add a caveat that it was also the affinity within the gathering that facilitated her interactions with like-minded people, and that these relationships of 'finer character' would always be easier on an individual level than between nation-states.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless she was moved by her

111 Senator Millen, quoted in WJ Hudson, *Australia and the League of Nations* (Sydney: Sydney University Press in association with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1980), 140.

112 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 97.

113 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 151.

114 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 98.

115 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 97.

116 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 98.

engagements with the Japanese delegations, recounting their conversations and noting a story told to her by the Japanese of how grateful they were to Australia for sending aid after a natural disaster. Again, none of these experiences led her to unequivocally oppose the WAP but they did prompt her to re-evaluate the racialised principles that underpinned it.

The Australian women involved in the PPWA in 1937, when the White Australia discussion occurred, had a similarly difficult time reconciling the policy with the ideas of cultural internationalism that the Pan-Pacific conferences promoted. With anxieties about an overcrowded Europe as well as problems of food security and potential territorial expansion, population pressure was believed to be an aggravating factor that had the potential to cause conflict or war. By the 1937 conference the PPWA had embraced the idea of addressing peace as one of the most important issues facing the Pacific and its people. In the population pressures panel, immigration and 'even distributions' were considered as an outlet for the pressing issue as the 'etiquette' that forbade discussion at earlier conferences was put aside. As the delegates were asked to give presentations on population and immigration in their own countries, the Australian delegate Jean Daley, a Labor member and committed unionist, used a map as a prop.¹¹⁷ She attempted to illustrate the nature of the 'open space' that was often cited as showing how Australia was capable of taking more of a population burden, and she characterised the continent as dry and lacking water, to indicate how much of the space was uninhabitable.¹¹⁸ Paisley noted this as 'defensiveness' on the Australian delegation's behalf, as it tried to justify the safeguarding of Anglo-Saxon culture without resorting to any cultural arguments for restriction that could be seen as offensive. In a self-conscious way, these women internationalists exhibited their anxiety about the 'superiority complex of the white race'. Instead of embodying racist ideology, they wished to be seen as embracing and enjoying the pleasures of cosmopolitan society.¹¹⁹

There remained two different views about how peace and immigration interacted. One articulated in the Melbourne meetings about White Australia supported the policy because many believed that unregulated immigration would cause social unrest and violence. It would jeopardise

117 Judith Smart, 'Daley, Jane (Jean) (1881–1948)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/daley-jane-jean-5866/text9977, published first in hardcopy 1981, accessed online 11 January 2022.

118 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 154.

119 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 154.

the 'character of the people'.¹²⁰ The perspective prevalent at these Pacific gatherings, however, recognised that overpopulation would invariably lead to war and underpopulated areas like Australia should be open to accepting immigrants. Both opinions were considered and debated by internationalist women. But again the complexity and the lack of any ready solution to the reconciling of national exclusivism with cosmopolitanism meant that their discussions did not translate into a platform for action. As they were in no position to change the policy, there was no real need to produce a solution. The organisation of the PPWA was also constantly criticised for being 'anglocentric' and for not reflecting the diversity of its ambitions in its internal hierarchy.¹²¹ In these shortcomings, the ideal of internationalism was revealed as in tension with the more complex and difficult issues of integration and immigration.

WILPF had a large presence at the first Pan-Pacific in 1928, mainly because its international president, Jane Addams, presided as the conference international chairman, since Hawai'i was in United States territory.¹²² WILPF also had a meeting alongside the gathering to capitalise on the fact that so many members were gathering from distant places, where delegates could not usually travel to European conferences.¹²³ This not only served the purpose of having WILPF members report on sections but also allowed the promotion of WILPF to those interested who were not members. In her report, Moore noted that many women were initially sceptical of WILPF and of putting peace on the agenda. Addams, however, in opening the conference, was skilfully able to promote WILPF without 'uttering a word from the chair that could be so construed'.¹²⁴ The WILPF meeting that convened after, hosted by the Honolulu branch, was open for observers where according to Moore, Addams gave a talk 'with such wisdom and wit that not only were the objectors silenced, but the local branch of the League enrolled about a hundred new members within a few days.'¹²⁵ Australian WILPF members were proud to showcase their organisation to other internationalists.

120 Report of the Fourth Interstate Peace Conference, held at the Friends' Meeting House, Melbourne, 25–28 March 1921, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

121 Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 70.

122 *Report of the Australian Delegation 1928*, 1.

123 'The W.I.L. Conference at Honolulu', *Pax International* 3, no. 11 (October 1928).

124 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 97.

125 Moore, 'Neighbours in the Pacific', *Pax International* 4, no. 3 (January 1929).

How the Pan-Pacific experience changed WILPF Australia

On return from the conference, Moore and other WILPF women lectured on their experiences at the Pan-Pacific conferences. In 1930 Moore journeyed to New Zealand on a lecture tour about the Pacific and spoke at various places in Victoria and New South Wales. Several years later, in 1936, she embarked on a lecture tour for the Country Women's Association. Moore was always surprised to find that in rural towns, 'Australian training in exclusiveness had not lessened their willingness to hear and believe the best that could be said of peoples outside their own borders.'¹²⁶ After the experience of 'oriental' culture and close contact with women of similar minds from 'eastern' countries, Moore's critique of the WAP changed from it being about embarrassment and excluding other countries, to the idea that Australia was missing opportunities to enrich its own culture. WILPF Australia began to reiterate the need for 'good feeling' between different nations as a way to overcome the idea that the WAP was causing racism and xenophobia. They specifically credited the PPWA as a factor in Australian society that promoted greater understanding of Asian neighbours, as noted in this letter sent to the international section of WILPF:

On account of our 'White Australia' policy, which excludes most Asiatics as undesirable aliens, people here know very little about India, and have a general feeling that it is not their business. But within the last few years there have been a great extension of interest and sympathy towards the peoples of Asia. The series of Pan-Pacific Congresses held in Honolulu have done much to foster this spirit.¹²⁷

The constant reference to the WAP as the cause of Australia's insularity further complicated the women's attitude towards exclusionary immigration policies and their own internationalism. The women of WILPF argued that the policy was not entirely racial. Over time, however, they had to concede that their world view and the perspective of the Australian people had been changed by it in a way that limited their understanding of other nations. The benefit of their engagement in the PPWA was not just in further illustrating to themselves the inconsistency in their country's racial immigration policy. It also reoriented their internationalism towards regional issues rather than

¹²⁶ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 101.

¹²⁷ Moore to Zueblin, WILPF Geneva, 1 July 1930, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

maintaining the focus on Europe.¹²⁸ More WILPF representatives could be sent because it was closer to home and cheaper, which would have increased the interest and excitement at local meetings. Once they had arrived, delegates felt more involved in the conference proceedings, and more fully present as participants rather than as token antipodean curiosities. Moore expressed a feeling of comfort in a letter to WILPF International where she wrote of how the Australians and 'Orientals' felt more 'at ease, and more ready to express themselves'. The atmosphere was less foreign and they were 'literally more at home', while the content discussed was more directly relevant.¹²⁹

The feeling of achievement from their involvement was such that WILPF Australia began to question the zeal with which they should engage with the European-centric organisation. In the same letter to WILPF in Geneva, Moore noted how the Australian sections were beginning to discuss how their contribution to the world movement could be best facilitated. They believed that focusing on 'peaceful fellowship in the Pacific' was more important than making an effort to send delegates to conferences in Europe at great expense.¹³⁰ A sense of self-consciousness about the place of Australia in the world movement emerged from their deliberations. Weighing up the ties to the British Empire with the impact Australia could have locally, Moore felt that Australia's contributions to Europe were not worth as much had they had once been. Strengthening regional ties in defiance of 'sanctions from Westminster' would be the most effective way for Australia to contribute to keeping a check on British militarism. A shortage of funds and the practicalities of internationalism played a large influence in their debate. As Moore wrote, 'might we not really help the peace cause more in the long run by using the money, say, to go to Japan, or to India, or even to western America, and trying to cultivate and consolidate peaceful contacts there?'¹³¹

128 For an overview of the various regionally focused groups see; Marie Sandell, 'Regional versus International: Women's Activism and Organisational Spaces in the Inter-War Period', *The International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011): 607–25, doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2011.620737.

129 Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1928, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

130 Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1928, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

131 Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1928, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

As well as reorientating their internationalism, Pan-Pacific engagement gained credit among members for increasing the understanding of WILPF as an organisation within Australia. Such regional activity facilitated the networking of women involved with other groups who were not 'definitely pacifist' but were 'internationally broad-minded'. Moore happily noted how 'co-operation with other societies is open to us now as it never has been before, and it will be interesting to see what good comes of it.'¹³² Relationships formed here continued after the series of conferences and contributed to the longevity of WILPF by establishing it as a respected organisation with wide-reaching networks.

The Pan-Pacific conferences brought WILPF Australia into a new internationalist circle and encouraged women who were working as internationalists in Pacific countries to join the peace cause. It represented a complex engagement with cultural imperialism and whiteness, especially as many Pacific countries saw nationalism as an anti-imperial struggle. Given their own reluctance to confront the restrictive immigration laws of Australia, WILPF tried to engage with what it saw as 'oriental' cultures on an individual basis. Their experience of living in Australia with the WAP had created a perceived dearth of understanding of neighbouring countries, for they had been socialised to accept that there was a wide barrier between themselves and Asian others. For many, their interactions with foreign nationals often surprised them, not least by stirring up feelings of empathy and friendship. By the late 1930s Eleanor Moore's view on the WAP was considerably more relaxed if not entirely transformed. In a report of the section from 1939 Moore explained how:

Internationalists are turning from the disappointment of Geneva to the hopes of the Pan-Pacific movement; open-minded Australians, enlightened by personal meeting with cultured Orientals, are realizing their previous mistake in assuming that all Asiatics were of the ignorant coolie class, and have begun to question whether the total exclusion policy, which they had accepted as an axiom of national life, is after all quite sound.¹³³

¹³² Moore to Sheepshanks, Secretary WILPF Geneva, 21 November 1928, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

¹³³ Moore to Baer, 'Some points of Australian Policy', 1 May 1939, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

Having the WAP in place meant that the Australian section of WILPF had to clarify and deal with the racialised constraints of the interplay between nationalism and internationalism. The questions and debates that it initiated forced them to engage with very complex ideas regarding peace and exclusion. The WAP exposed the paradoxical relationship of liberal internationalism, nationalism and peace, and as a political organisation in Australia they were not the only ones confronted by it. They were however among the few who vocalised the confused evolution of their position. WILPF found it difficult to produce a clear and coherent dissent from the WAP because there was not one available to them that would coalesce their internationalism with the precepts of Australian progressive thought. The engagement with the WAP exposed the limits of WILPF's internationalist imagination and restricted their ability to engage with the region as the equals of women elsewhere. They mapped out the contradictions, and the paradox, that recognised national exclusivism as distasteful and discordant but they retained the assumption that it was somehow indispensable. They had no serious reform proposition to offer other than a softening of the edges of the policy; it remained a difficult topic of discussion until after World War II, when the local and international context had changed sufficiently for WILPF and the progressive movement of Australia to begin opposing the policy outright.

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