

Contested Territories in the Short Twentieth Century: Sarah Wambaugh (1882–1955), Plebiscites, and Gender

Dagmar Wernitznig 

Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Email: Dagmar.Wernitznig@ff.uni-lj.si, dagmar.wernitznig@oxfordalumni.org

Abstract

This article deals with Sarah Wambaugh's life and work concerning global territorial questions of border disputes and nationalities as well as minorities issues. Trained at Radcliffe College in the disciplines of international law and political science, Wambaugh engineered a somewhat unprecedented career for herself in diplomatic circles after the First World War, achieving a worldwide reputation as the foremost expert on plebiscites, especially in areas of post-war conflicts. By looking at three case studies, this contribution particularly emphasizes Wambaugh's role as an extra-governmental analyst of these referenda at the intersections of gender and universal suffrage. Within the context of geographic demarcations, aspects of citizenship, national belonging or affiliation, and minority rights, palpably, were paramount. While integrating these parameters into her theoretical discourses, Wambaugh went a step further by also adding the element of the franchise for women as an imperative coefficient regarding the drawing of borderlines. Hence, the female voting corpus – in most cases of quantitative significance during the aftermaths of wars, due to the substantial decimation of the male population on battle fields – attained a pertinent part in referenda-based rights to self-determination, and Wambaugh paid credit to this fact in her activism and writings.

Keywords: plebiscites; interwar; gender; borderlands; League of Nations

Introduction

In many instances, the actors involved in the peace negotiations in Paris of 1919 were facing a war that had not yet ended (Gerwarth 2016). As empires had dissolved or crumbled, new demarcations lines emerged, and especially the European continent witnessed partially armed disputes over territories and regions. By usurping strips and pockets of land, states, old and newly formed, attempted to create *faits accomplis*. At the same time, the post-1918 era was also a phase of demobilization and reconstruction in tandem with political paradigm shifts, such as the introduction of universal suffrage that also extended to female citizens. While women were banned from the negotiating tables at Versailles out of fear that they would be too lenient, compassionate, or passive in their demands on the defeated powers (Kuhlman 2008; Siegel 2020, 2), they could, nevertheless, make their voices heard in elections as well as plebiscites that were implemented during and after this Greater War in Central and Eastern Europe and gravitated around questions of territorial autonomy or nationhood. Paradoxically, one woman had the chance to find an *entrée* into diplomatic affairs and international relations (henceforth IR), itself a newly coined phrase in the wake of the First World War, albeit mostly as a backstage agent, operating behind the scenes, via her

knowledge and expertise in plebiscites. Her name was Sarah Wambaugh, and, from 1918 onwards, she carved out a convenient and comfortable niche within the newly founded League of Nations (henceforth LoN) as an adviser on all matters pertaining to plebiscites. Despite her rather distinctive status as a female on almost exclusively masculine platforms at the LoN, Wambaugh's life and work have not attracted a lot of attention in scholarship so far. Quite symbolically, for example, her archive was only discovered by mere coincidence in the basement of the Harvard Law School Library in 1970.

This article seeks to remedy this situation by shedding more light on Wambaugh's activism regarding plebiscites during the interwar years. Throughout this study, it should also become transparent that she placed an enormous emphasis on the gender dimension in the various referenda¹ she either oversaw for the LoN or dissected for her research and many publications on the issue. While she did this quite diplomatically in the truest sense of the word by using subtle language and comments, it is evident that she regarded the female franchise as vital for fair and democratic referenda about contested areas and national cultural autonomy.

Furthermore, this study also tries to amplify the often overlooked and decidedly American-flavored approach to questions of democracy and self-determination on the international stage of the Cincinnati-born Wambaugh. As an extra-governmental officer for the LoN, Wambaugh was officially detached from US interests in the various geographic regions she encountered and analyzed. Yet she projected – perhaps more or less unconsciously – American perceptions of political, economic, and ethnic autonomy or sovereignty onto territorial quandaries interlaced with plebiscites. Her assessments of overseas territories and their populations, ranging from Europe to Asia, through an American lens indirectly influenced the bureaucratic conduct of plebiscites to a certain extent throughout the short twentieth century, particularly under the guidance of the LoN and later the United Nations (henceforth UN). As a thorough examination of all plebiscites that Wambaugh scrutinized would go beyond the scope of this article, three interwar referenda, two in Central Europe, one in South America, have been selected: the plebiscite in the Klagenfurt Basin in 1920, the attempted plebiscite in Tacna and Arica, 1925–26, and the plebiscite in the Saar territory in 1935. Representing a nuanced spectrum of conducted and abandoned plebiscites as well as short- and long-term territorial disputes at the intersections of language, economics, religion, paramilitary violence, and gender, these referenda also help to highlight Wambaugh's agency and attitudes.

Peripatetic Wanderer of Frontiers: The Making of Sarah Wambaugh amidst Self-Determination and Plebiscites

The daughter of Eugene Wambaugh, a Harvard law professor, Sarah Wambaugh was educated at Radcliffe College, graduating in 1902. Thereafter, she continued to stay there as an assistant for the next four years. From 1906 to 1916, she worked for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, founded in 1877 to promote women's professional, economic, and political chances in society, and she also actively engaged in the fight for women's votes. Besides inheriting her father's interest in legal matters, her decade-long commitment to this social project honed her dedication to gender equality that she came to pursue for the rest of her life. In 1916, she returned to Radcliffe College for graduate studies and earned a master's degree in international law and political science. For her future academic field and interest, Wambaugh chose a scholarly topic that was relatively unknown and rather neglected in the English-speaking world at that time: plebiscites in history and practice. Her male peers had not zeroed in on that field yet – with the exception perhaps of Johannes Mattern's 1922 doctoral thesis, *The Employment of the Plebiscite in the Determination of Sovereignty*, in which gender, unsurprisingly, does not feature at all. This allowed Wambaugh to devote her attention to it and become an erudite expert and acknowledged advisor on all matters pertaining to plebiscites for the next decades. For instance, her research for the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference was published in 1920 as *A Monograph on Plebiscites, with a Collection of Official*

Documents, followed by many other titles on the topic, such as *La Pratique des plébiscites internationaux* (1928), *Plebiscites since the World War* (1933), and *The Saar Plebiscite* (1940). In *A Monograph on Plebiscites*, Wambaugh also provided the sparse reasons for her initial motivation to investigate the historiographic, legal, and socio-political implications of referenda: James Brown Scott, the director of the Division of International Law of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggested to her to compile such a collection in 1917 (Wambaugh 1920, ix). Overall, it is quite difficult and nearly impossible to retrace or reconstruct her fascination with plebiscites or her private thoughts on her endeavors during the performance of individual referenda. Apart from the many honors that she received, her papers merely comprise “professional” files and are completely devoid of more confidential items, such as personal correspondence or diaries, for example.

In the early 1920s, Wambaugh became a member of the LoN secretariat and was employed in its administrative commissions and minorities section. Additionally, she conducted research at the University of Oxford and today’s London School of Economics and lectured briefly at Wellesley College. She also taught at the Geneva Institute for Advanced International Studies in 1935, and in the 1940s she was a consultant to the director of the enemy branch of the Foreign Economic Administration in the United States. Until her death in 1955, she conceptualized several plebiscites and acted as a hands-on observer in the relevant regions. Thus, she was involved in the attempted Tacna-Arica plebiscite of 1925–26 as a technical advisor to the Peruvian government, in the Saar plebiscite of 1934–35 as one of three committee experts of the LoN to draft the plebiscite regulations and as a deputy member of the plebiscite commission, in the Greek elections of 1945–46, where she counselled the UN mission, and in the Indian plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir of 1949.

As by-products of modernity and, indirectly, the phenomena of nation-states, plebiscites were a fairly new concept in national and international politics or terminology, emerging with the French Revolution (Farley 1986; Qvortrup 2014). There are basically two types of plebiscites: firstly, referenda about the legitimacy of rulership, frequently utilized by authoritarian regimes; secondly, referenda dealing with territorial disputes between nations, usually involving ethnic-cultural ramifications, and the latter was Wambaugh’s area of expertise.

The principal characteristic of the mechanism of plebiscites is the *vox populi*, directly deciding the fate of a nation, which makes it very advantageous for individual sovereigns or nations as carriers of power to circumvent parliamentary institutions and channels. The implementation of such referenda thus requires a population that is fully or substantially enfranchised. Accordingly, plebiscites were a concomitant of the spreading of universal or common suffrage and the emergence of nation-states in the western hemisphere. Especially after the First World War, a growing number of countries enfranchised citizens, also female ones. So, for the first time, diverse and large strata of constituents were given the chance to decide elections or referenda about what type of nation they wanted to belong to politically, economically, culturally, or religiously – until recently, a prerogative of monarchs, emperors, or, at best, of selected and minuscule elites, deriving from the aristocracy and clergy. This intertwined set-up of universal suffrage in combination with transnational debates over geographical “separation, cession or annexation” (Wambaugh 1920, ix) was Wambaugh’s stepping stone into diplomatic circles, allowing her to build a livelihood by investigating an extremely neoteric and, so far, underexamined theme in diplomatic historiography, theory, and practice.

Reflecting a mandate of the people, plebiscites are prone to propaganda by all parties vying for the popular vote, be that an authoritarian leader fortifying their rulership or nations contesting frontiers. The second option applied to practically all referenda observed by Wambaugh. By no means unaware of the many flaws of plebiscites, she still insisted that “even in the case of the most faulty it is apparent that the result of the voting gave a fairly accurate picture of the wishes of the inhabitants” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 485). Parallel to that argument, she underscored that “the claim to

the right of secession by plebiscite” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 488) was acknowledged neither by President Wilson nor by the Paris Peace Conference.

In her approach to the complexities and conundrums of plebiscites during the interwar years, Wambaugh, though operating as an impartial agent for the LoN, was, nevertheless, decidedly influenced by Wilsonian politics and rhetoric specifically and an American interpretation of democracy generally. For example, on the cover of her earliest work, *The Doctrine of National Self-Determination* (1919), she paid homage to the American Declaration of Independence and Wilson’s principles of self-determination. In her subsequent publications, again, she refrained from addressing this American perspective directly. Yet the term self-determination is pivotal in all her writings and reoccurs in practically every analysis of plebiscites, be they official or irregular. It is important to stress that Wilson’s and the Allies’ utilization of this iridescent term at Versailles and beyond was not to be taken at face value, carried geopolitical meanings, and served particular interests at that time. For instance, self-determination was neither included in Wilson’s Fourteen Points, as Wambaugh frankly admitted (Wambaugh 1933:1, 11), nor was it originally connected to questions of human rights or the political protection of minorities, except for cultural and linguistic entitlements.

Semantically and pragmatically, “self-determination” underwent a metamorphosis after another world war, with UN charters and mandates, decolonization, and its equivocal origins from the German language (i.e., *Selbstbestimmung*), also in hindsight on Nazi-Germany (Wambaugh, 1933:1, 3n1; Hurst 1993, 2–12). As a discussion of this term after 1945 would go beyond the format of this contribution, the focus here is placed on the interwar period and Wambaugh’s adoption of self-determination within the context of territorial referenda as an antidote to regressive politics or economic and cultural decline into preceding ages and as a vehicle for an American version of progress and enlightenment. In her unpublished manuscript, “Frontiers by Plebiscite,” for example, she referred to Europe as a continent haunted by “centuries of conquest, of colonisation, and of royal marriages, together with the traditional policies of religious and racial persecutions [...] a minute patchwork of dark glowing colors.”²

Although plebiscites became more common post-1918 after a period of moratoria, they were still applied rather sporadically by the LoN as a means to solve frontier enmities, particularly with defeated nations. Wambaugh made clear that officially sanctioned referenda were rather the exception than the rule, “as a method of compromise, to escape from a dilemma rather than as a deliberate choice” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 42). In the same oeuvre, she narrated further on self-determination in Wilsonian and Allied terms that were used quite elastically. Indeed, many individuals like Secretary Lansing and Colonel House were sceptical of the practicality and outcome of plebiscites, while President Wilson was looked upon by those “who believed that the new frontiers drawn at the Peace Conference should be based on self-determination” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 4, 13).

Especially the concept of the “frontier” and, quite acutely, “the European frontier – a fortified boundary line running through dense populations” (Turner 1894, 200) – assumed a pivotal point in Wambaugh’s treatment of interwar plebiscites. At a time when Frederick Jackson Turner’s classic frontier thesis became increasingly re-evaluated and critiqued by her American contemporaries (Beard 1921; Dewey 1922), she, too, obliquely recontextualized it for political purposes to craft or rearrange post-conflict borders. Calling herself a “veteran of frontiers,” because of her extensive traveling across them in Central Europe after the Great War (32 times, according to her own records), she described frontiers as “unhappy places” when they are “artificial boundaries” (Wambaugh 1923, 174), drawn by mankind and not nature. Wambaugh interpreted these borderlands as “raw wounds” (Wambaugh 1923, 174), which cut off communities and economic or cultural organisms and needed mending by international organizations such as the LoN. Similar to American westward expansion, where the frontier symbolized an obstacle to be overcome for better prospects and the pursuit of happiness (it might be added,

at the expense of native peoples, indigenous to the soil in question), Central European borderlines for her required a stitching up to restore cultural and economic entities that had developed over centuries within geographically determined boundaries. As a supranational organization, the LoN, Wambaugh argued further, had the potential to sort out the intricacies of national and international interests. She provided the example of Upper Silesia, where the LoN stepped in with experts from neutral countries “to sew up the cut” and make the border porous, so that residents “can go back and forth at will” (Wambaugh 1923, 176). This idea of a permeable crossing line to ensure stability, equality, and economic comfort was also indirectly addressed by Wambaugh in terms of emancipation and women’s rights. She herself, quite metaphorically, trespassed frontiers as a female employee of the LoN and later UN, forging a somewhat untypical career in an environment traditionally dominated by masculinities and male prerogatives.

During Wambaugh’s lifetime, appointing women as diplomats was not simply considered effeminizing and weakening this privileged profession, but also insulting the country they were sent to. In military and non-military realms, a female emissary or even ambassador signified disrespect for the host nation in question. In the diplomatic service and IR, women were at best permitted to pursue surrogate politics and duties that were auxiliary or administrative, not executive or representative. As Helen McCarthy argued, for instance, only from 1946 onwards, after another world war, were British women realistically considered and recruited as diplomatic deputies, and the marriage bar for British women envoys was lifted only in 1973 (McCarthy, 2009, 2014).

Unlike most of her male colleagues, Wambaugh therefore also expressively translated the “Wilsonian moment” (Manela 2007) and the quite abstract notion of self-determination into a gender context that encompassed electoral rights, privileges, and duties for women:

The principle of woman suffrage in all the plebiscites appears to have been adopted as a matter of course by the Allies at Paris, and it formed a part, as well, of the conditions for plebiscites demanded by the German, Austrian, and Hungarian delegations. In only two cases since the war, Vilna and Tacna-Arica, has there been an attempt to exclude women from the electorate. (Wambaugh 1933:1, 477)

Wambaugh’s task within the LoN rather than outside of it provided her with the unique opportunity to influence and modify conventional norms and customary standards about voting processes and female citizens. Unlike many other women activists for the female franchise and its practical execution, she therefore came to exhibit and exert characteristics of an “innovating ideologist” by reconceptualizing the dynamics of plebiscites through the prism of gender with “rhetorical manipulation [...] that any society succeeds in establishing, upholding, questioning or altering its moral identity” (Skinner 2002, 149). According to the intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, the role and profile to be fulfilled by such an innovating ideologist “is to legitimate a new range of social actions which, in terms of the existing ways of applying the moral vocabulary prevailing in his society, are currently regarded as in some way untoward or illegitimate” (Skinner 1974, 294). As an innovating ideologist, Wambaugh, simultaneously, endowed woman suffrage with a more complex meaning, particularly in post-war and interwar times, and was able to manipulate socio-political discourses to a certain degree and on a transnational level.

Especially in post-conflict countries with substantial decreases of male inhabitants due to combat casualties, women are usually heralded as bearers and guardians of the nation. Mothers as procreators and nurturing protectors of, preferably male, offspring for future military service, who might be drafted by the adversary behind enemy lines, were explicitly targeted in plebiscites, such as the Carinthian one in 1920. Although Wambaugh was not directly involved in this referendum, it assumed a central place in her work as “the best precedent,”³ and she referred to

it and used it as a positive and successful template in practically all of her studies about the theory and practicalities of plebiscites.

The Plebiscite in the Klagenfurt Basin (1920): Of “*Windische*” and Women

On the fringes of the German Austrian territory of the former Habsburg Monarchy, two plebiscites in the years immediately after the Great War were performed, first and foremost, in Carinthia in 1920 and then in Ödenburg/Sopron in 1921. Also in 1921, referenda in the Tyrol and Salzburg were held about a union with Germany, and all these were preceded by an unauthorized referendum in Vorarlberg in 1919 between Switzerland and Austria.

To this day, a southern province of Austria, Carinthia, has a mixed German- and Slovene-speaking population, with the Slovene minority amounting to circa 25% in 1920, mostly residing in areas bordering today’s Slovenia. After the partial usurpation of these borderlands and the Carinthian capital Klagenfurt/Celovec by forces of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (henceforth SCS) at the end of the First World War, a plebiscite, commissioned at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and by the Treaty of Saint Germain, was held on October 10, 1920, with 59.04% (22,025 votes; approximately half of which were speaking Slovene) of the Carinthian constituents opting for Austria (Gullberg 2000; Weimann 2008; Révész 2016).

In her theoretical analyses, Wambaugh always underlined that the conflict over the Klagenfurt Basin, situated at the heart of strategic railway infrastructure that ran from the north to the south, became one of the most important minor disputes at the Paris Peace Conference, since particularly Italian interests in undisrupted train connections and transport ways were at stake (Wambaugh 1933:1, 163). Conducting field studies of the entire Alpine region while travelling from Vorarlberg to the Burgenland in 1922, she also visited this strategic triangle from June to September. With this trip, she somewhat followed the route of the American Field Commission that had been led by Major Sherman Miles and that had gathered data for Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge, prior to the referendum. Miles’s team came to the conclusion that this basin was a geographic and economic unit and that the majority of all residents, even Slovenes, preferred to stay with Austria.⁴ Colonel Martin further recounted the apparent anomaly that German-speaking estate holders favored Yugoslavia, while much to his “surprise the majority of the Slovenes thought it wiser that they should continue to be subjects of Austria” (Martin 1929, 348). The question of cultural, linguistic, or national identity thus was deprioritized by most inhabitants for economic benefits. As demonstrated by the cases of the estate owners, who held land across the Alps in the SCS state, and the “average” Slovene-speaking peasants, who wanted to remain with Austria in order to be able to sell their produce at the nearest markets, language and national belonging only peripherally entered the plebiscite equation. Similarly, after her tour, Wambaugh shared this finding of the Miles Mission: “The fact appears to be that in the Klagenfurt area language statistics gave little indication of national sympathies” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 202). Putatively, Wambaugh detected streaks and manifestations of “national indifference,” decades later excellently captured by scholars like Jeremy King, Pieter M. Judson, and Tara Zahra (King 2002; Judson 2006; Zahra 2008).

Overall, several practical and pragmatic factors determined the Slovene votes for Austria, underscoring their preference as Carinthian inhabitants for a particular type of state rather than a linguistic or ethnic disposition. Firstly, as a newly created republic, Austria was considered to be more “progressive” with better social benefits and welfare provisions than the SCS Monarchy. Secondly, farmers, who represented a large segment amongst electors, understood that they would have to transport their products to economic markets across the Alps in onerous journeys if they became part of Yugoslavia. Thirdly, as stout Catholics, they viewed the Orthodox Church in Serbia quite sceptically, with few chances for religio-cultural identification. With her keen eye on gender constellations in everyday life, Wambaugh deconstructed this voting behavior quite accurately, stressing that electors’ decisions in mountainous Carinthia were less based on demographic and

more on economic-materialistic parameters, with farmers – and especially female farmers in their function as keepers of the hearth and as such home economics – calibrating the nearest and thus most convenient markets for their goods:

And to reach that country [the SCS state] they had to climb back over the lofty mountain passes of the Karawankens, a part of the Alps, or to take a costly railroad journey through the one tunnel which pierced them; while to reach their market town of Klagenfurt, from which they were asked to cut themselves, they need only walk a few miles.⁵

She continued to explain further how Carinthian peasant women (with a Slovene background) consulted their priests, most of whom were rather strong supporters of the Slovene national cause, only *after* they had ticked their ballot papers for remaining with Austria: “But even the peasant women were sufficiently independent to vote against their priests’ advice, for a Slav told me that many of the women had come to the priests for absolution for having voted for Austria.”⁶ This very efficient and logical reasoning of peasants and “common folks,” usually stereotyped as too simple-minded to comprehend politics, starkly juxtaposed propagandistic and nationalistic agendas of a collective “groupism” (Brubaker 2004, esp. 11).

Another incentive to select Austria was an *Entschliessung* [proclamation], issued on September 28, 1920, by the tentative province assembly in Klagenfurt, that promised active support for the Slovene language and culture and guaranteed the protection of minority rights, as enshrined in the Treaty of Saint Germain.⁷ Theoretically, Saint Germain compelled each nation to observe and safeguard the diverse minorities’ legal entitlements; practically, it became a substratum for future rifts, antagonisms, and discrimination in many instances, as Carinthian battles, reverberating into the twenty-first century over mere bilingual topographical signposts for villages and towns, exemplified (Knight 2000, 2017).

Equally, in Carinthia after the plebiscite, Saint Germain statutes hardly found any realization in everyday life, because politics were predominantly determined by the *Deutschnationalen* [German nationalists]. The central figure for setting the tone for the treatment of Slovene speakers in Carinthia was the *Landesverweser* [governor or administrator of the province] Arthur Lemisch. Already at the *Landtagssitzung* [province assembly] on November 25, 1920, he detailed his plans for the Germanification of Slovene-speaking people by means of the schooling system and the church. His was an almost imperialist speech, whose biblical and belittling language characterized Slovenes as “Verführte” [seduced ones], who had fallen prey to Yugoslav promises and sins and should be educated in “Germandom” as quickly as possible, preferably within one generation.⁸ By embedding his message into a Catholic framework, Lemisch certainly aimed to ease the rigidity of its content.

The result of the plebiscite was interpreted by Lemisch and other German nationalists as a successful continuation of the Germanification of Slovenes, since, in his eyes, their majority voluntarily desired to assimilate with their pro-Austrian votes in October 1920. The aforementioned socio-economic calibration by these constituencies about nearby markets, for instance, was completely eclipsed in this black-and-white pattern of the “mischievous” versus the “derivative” alien other. This dualist set-up allowed Lemisch and his likeminded acolytes to relegate the Saint Germain argumentation about minority rights conveniently as invalid and superfluous. By acknowledging Austria in the plebiscite, Slovenes, according to his explanation, strived to shed their Slavic heritage and hence ceased to be a minority. Those “renegades” supporting Yugoslavia he likened to ignorant and defiant children, who had to be elevated to the “proper” way of living of the majority with the paramount trinity of home, school, and church. Therefore, the approach taken by the Carinthian policy makers divided Slovenes into two categories: the “loyal” ones, supportive of their German compatriots, and “traitors,” looking towards Yugoslavia and frequently labelled as irredentists. In this dualistic concept, the first group, who should later be defined as “*Windische*” or “our *Windische*,” was expected to assimilate voluntarily at the expense of their Slovene background.

The “scholarly sugar-coating” for this nationalistic program was provided by a historian named Martin Wutte.

Wutte, a future NSDAP-member who called Hitler “ein gesamtstaatsmännisches Genie” [a universal, statesmanlike genius] (Wutte 1940, 70), appeared most prominently on the public scene in 1919 as a Carinthian delegate at Saint Germain and as the creator of the so-called *Windischentheorie* (Priestly 1997). Originally deriving from *Wendisch*, *Windisch* unanimously denoted “Slavic” or “anybody Slavic,” including their language and signifying “otherness.” In the second half of the nineteenth century and with increasing German-nationalist tendencies in the Dual Monarchy, *Windisch* gained an even more complex negative and demographically inspired connotation. It could either be applied as a derogatory, unflattering characterization of “poor, uneducated” countryfolks, merely uttering low-brow language with limited mental capacity, or, equally discriminating, to Slovene assimilationists in petite-bourgeoisie milieus, hoping to climb the social and economic ladder of success in Carinthian society. In short, *Windisch* stood pejoratively either for “hillbillies” or “sycophants,” evoking Carinthian paternalism with every nuance.

Wutte then instrumentalized and distorted this image of *Windisch* assimilationism further. Accused of and blamed for being wannabe Germans by their Slovene-speaking brethren and especially Slovene nationalists, these *nemčurji/nemškutarji* or *Deutschtümmler* [emulators of “Germandom”] became the “token” Slovenes for him. Set apart from the “barbaric” rest with a slightly different vernacular variant of Slovene that resembles and is linguistically akin to a quasi-Creole or hybrid mix of Slovene and German, they were expected to aspire to and to embrace “Germandom” by Wutte and his peers. Employing a divide-et-impera twist in his “noble-ignoble savage” theories, Wutte aimed to shrink the official number of Slovene speakers in Carinthia by incorporating into “Germandom” the “loyalists” who had cast their vote for Austria in the plebiscite and thereby refuted their minority rights. For him, the “Slavophiles,” adhering to Yugoslavia, were doomed by refusing this “amelioration” in the German family.

Wambaugh, again, relied almost uncritically on Wutte’s work and used the term *Windisch* herself, comparing it to “*Wasserpölnisch*” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 213), spoken in Upper Silesia. Moreover, she corresponded with Wutte, who, for his part, sought to elicit and harness transatlantic approval and prestige with the outcome of the 1920 plebiscite.⁹ For this purpose, he was at the forefront of lobbying for the Knight Cross, first class, an Austrian order of merit, for Wambaugh, which she was actually awarded in 1935.

By contrast, the Yugoslav side complained that the *Windisch* vernacular was a means to “Germanize” Slovene speakers in Carinthia and alienate them from their southern homelands (Wambaugh 1933:1, 166n1). This in-between dialect was also used for pro-Austrian, bilingual pamphlets, distributed in both zones of the Klagenfurt Basin before the referendum. (For the purpose of the plebiscite, the Basin had been divided into two zones, Zone B under Austrian, Zone A under SCS control.) As the Yugoslav side hermetically sealed their zone “as if it were a battle front” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 182), children and women, as seemingly unpolitical and harmless bystanders, were employed by the Austrian propaganda to smuggle this material into enemy territory. The actual *Windisch*-German flyers also played and preyed on women’s votes, particularly in connection with military service, by trying to convince mothers that the SCS Monarchy, unlike the democratic republic of Austria, would forcefully draft their sons.¹⁰ This “engendering” (Bahovec 2010) of borders was instantly reacted to by the Yugoslav side that “induced about eighty girls to sign a manifesto reading, ‘I would not have a son who was not a soldier’” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 184). Female voters in Zone A were further at the center of attention with Yugoslav “[w]omen’s clubs [...] organized to win over the women and girls” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 182).

At the same time, Yugoslav bullies, called “Prügelbanden” [thugs] (Wambaugh 1933:1, 195–197) by the Carinthian side, frequently roamed the countryside, particularly during night-time, spreading fear and especially threatening women to side with SCS. Herself an ardent suffragist and member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (henceforth WILPF), Wambaugh was painfully aware of this carrot-and-stick setting of “the Yugoslav police, priests

and crowds of rowdies who were rushed to the spot in special trains from Yugoslavia [...] with revolvers and bludgeons,”¹¹ which went hand in hand with SCS efforts to bribe locals by taking “advantage of the famine condition in Austria” and sending “in automobiles every Sunday laden with milk and eggs and white bread.”¹²

This narrative, it must be remembered, was composed within the tapestry of the Red Scare in the American 1920s and the fabric of the “tribal twenties” (Higham 1955, 264–299). Subsequently, Wambaugh’s concern about the spreading of Bolshevism surfaced much more pronouncedly with her inspection of the Sopron plebiscite, held in 1921, when the city and its surroundings eventually fell to Hungary, provoking fears of a “Red peril.”¹³ Referring to the first Austrian chancellor Karl Renner’s proposal to the Versailles Conference in June 1919,¹⁴ about the necessity of a plebiscite in West Hungary, she emphasized, “The transfer of the area to Austria was now growing more attractive to the Allies. The Béla Kun rule in Hungary, which had begun in March, 1919, gave a strong inducement for pushing back the frontiers of Bolshevism as far as possible from Vienna” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 275).

Wambaugh called the Sopron plebiscite unfair and controversial, because of “Hungarian *Freischärler*, or insurgents, well supplied with arms, hand-grenades and machine-guns” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 278), the equivalent to the Yugoslav *Prügelbanden*. Based on an account of a British eyewitness to the referendum, she portrayed these bands as “mostly Hungarian students who were fearless in throwing out threats and committing terrorism,”¹⁵ even murders. Next to these physical extortions, Wambaugh communicated further, the Sopron plebiscite was flawed, because “many, including young girls, sisters of religious orders, etc., voted several times, using the registration certificates which had been withheld from the registered Germans” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 293). Besides the seemingly irreproachable status of Catholic nuns, who could thus cast their vote more than once, this passage, again, also accentuates women’s general portrayal as “innocent” voters that could get away with more arbitrary behavior, as compared to males. Deemed more “unpolitical” as newly enfranchised citizens, female voters were useful helpers for the Hungarian side, just like Carinthian women, alongside children, were recruited to trespass behind the enemy lines by smuggling propaganda material a year before.

Interestingly, Wambaugh’s sentiments against the rise of Bolshevism and the dissemination of its doctrines were shared by Sherman Miles (Miles 1923, 319, 326) and were also conveyed in George Creel’s writings. Creel, the director of the newly founded Committee on Public Information or CPI – basically a US propaganda bureau – travelled this area shortly before Kun’s takeover. He also visited “Leibach” in his efforts of “‘Americanizing’ Mittel Europa” and lamented that “Kun, plentifully supplied with Bolshevik money, was preaching the gospel of a new revolt” (Creel 1920, 424). US interests and concerns about geopolitical chess games on a global scale then re-emerged more strongly with Wambaugh’s appointment as an advisor to the Peruvian government during the Tacna-Arica plebiscite four years later.

The Attempted Plebiscite in Tacna and Arica (1925–26): Of Minerals and Mothers

The controversy over the provinces Tacna and Arica reached back to the nineteenth century and the Guerra del Pacífico [War of the Pacific], lasting from 1879 to 1883 between Bolivia, aided by Peru, and Chile (Niebuhr 2019). At the center of this conflict were mineral-rich and strategically important coastal areas, especially the Atacama Desert. After the post-war Treaty of Ancón in 1883, the so-called Question of the Pacific arose over Tacna-Arica with both Chile and Peru laying claim to it and unwilling to agree upon terms for a plebiscite. According to the third article of this treaty, Tacna-Arica was conceded to Chile, victorious in this war, for a decade before the planned plebiscite (Woolsey 1929, 606; Wambaugh 1933:2, 281–282). Particularly the interpretation of the phrase “[e]spirado este plazo” / “at the expiration of this term”¹⁶ caused much dispute between the two parties involved (Wright 1925, 34; Jane 1929, 96). Finally, a referendum was scheduled for the mid-1920s, but never materialized. The US, however, assumed a prominent role in mediating

between both parties during the presidency of Calvin Coolidge (cf. Coolidge and Kellogg 1926; Dennis 1931) and after the abandoned referendum, with the result that the province was split after a treaty in 1929: Arica remained with Chile, while Peru gained Tacna and monetary compensation.

This post-1918 US role was determined by trying to stymie the vested interests of Britain, France, and Germany in the natural resources there. Tacna-Arica, to a certain extent, was also a continuation of geopolitical constellations during the Great War, with Peru rather siding with the US and Chile more favorable towards and thus also backed by Germany. General John J. Pershing supervised the Plebiscitary Commission, set up in 1925, but had to resign, officially claiming ill health, amidst allegations of bias towards Peru. Under his successor, General William Lassiter, the planned referendum was terminated the next year. The reason given was the US concern about Chilean attempts to threaten pro-Peruvian voters.

Wambaugh questioned the prudence of sending military men as negotiators, although she did not doubt their diplomatic skills (Wambaugh 1933:1, 406). She, again, acted as an advisor to the Peruvian government and hence supported the US inclination towards this country implicitly. For this service, she even received the Order of the Sun, somewhat similar to her medal from Austria and, ironically, not entirely devoid of the masculine connotation of warfare. Notwithstanding that Tacna-Arica was mostly devoid of precious minerals, unlike neighboring areas, Wambaugh depicted its topography in candid words as a strategic “gateway” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 333) to the Pacific Ocean with crucial ports for Bolivian access. She further admitted that she could only rely on “the various statements and documents of the American and Chilean delegations” (Wambaugh 1933:1, x) for her book chapter on Tacna-Arica. Nevertheless, the failed Tacna-Arica referendum served as a matrix for her exegeses about plebiscites, because it “constitutes a most valuable source for the study of the requisites for a successful plebiscite” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 331), particularly in contrastive analysis to her most ideal example, the Carinthian case of 1920.

Much more outspoken in her opinions and views in her unpublished manuscripts and drafts, she concluded that the Klagenfurt referendum, while being the worst in terms of treaty provisions, was the best concerning “the organisation of machinery to safeguard the freedom of the vote”¹⁷ and thus could serve as a model and blueprint for Tacna-Arica. Compared to all other referenda that she observed, the plebiscite preparations for Carinthia and Tacna-Arica were the only ones without neutral troops supporting the plebiscite commission (Wambaugh 1933:1, 447). While Wambaugh regarded this as unproblematic in the case of the Klagenfurt Basin, which was a small, rural environment with adequate transport routes that could be easily policed (Wambaugh 1933:1, 497–498), she feared it would endanger the fairness of the plebiscite process in the mountainous, inaccessible landscape of Tacna-Arica. Based on reports by General Pershing, she detailed the terror of the so-called “Cowboys” of the Chilean Sociedad de Tacna y Arica [Society of Tacna and Arica], who coerced the local, overwhelmingly Peruvian, population, due to the absence of international watch guards, and were comparable to the earlier-mentioned Yugoslav *Prügelbanden* and Hungarian insurgents (Wambaugh 1933:1, 398–399). Like General Miles, who traversed the Alpine region, General Pershing journeyed Tacna-Arica with a team of eight fellow US inspectors, called “observers,” in 1925 and interviewed “people on the roads and in the fields” and conducted “house-to-house visits” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 358). Learning that residents were particularly frightened of this cowboy posse on horseback, Pershing and his delegation listed hundreds of cases of intimidations and deportations. This persecution and expulsion, built on a forceful “Chilianizing” (Wambaugh 1920, 161; Borchard 1922, 46–47)¹⁸ of the mostly Peruvian inhabitants, was realized through closures of Peruvian-run schools and constraints imposed on Peruvian churches and the press in the preceding years.

The threat of conscription towards Peruvian men, eligible to cast a vote in the referendum, was another, more indirect, way to drive them out of the territory and across the borders to Peru.¹⁹ This intended diminution of a male electorate that was most likely to opt for the other side in a plebiscite, incidentally, was inverse to the precariously minimized numbers of male voters as the result of a war, for instance, in the Carinthian case, which, alternatively, fostered the inclusion and wooing of

females as enfranchised citizens. By contrast, the threat of conscription of males, especially sons, as previously encountered in the case of the referendum in the Klagenfurt Basin, was used by the Chilean government to deter Peruvian men from staying in Tacna-Arica and going to the ballot. With her astute eye for gender inequalities and hierarchies, Wambaugh understood the dialectics of franchise rights, particularly as a *quid pro quo* for military service and combatant availability.

Unlike most other (male) analysts of the Tacna-Arica situation of her time – Quincy Wright or Edwin Montefiore Borchard, for example – Wambaugh elaborated on the blatant marginalization of women of this planned plebiscite. Next to the equally abandoned referendum in Wilno of 1920–21, the regulations for the Tacna-Arica plebiscite were the only ones of the interwar period trying “to exclude women from the electorate” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 477), the rationale being that women were disenfranchised in both countries, Chile and Peru. Characterizing and indirectly criticizing this decision in both cases – for Tacna-Arica by the Arbitrator, for Poland and Lithuania by the responsible Civil Commission of the LoN – as quite unfounded (Wambaugh, 1933:1, 348, 324), she even went a step further by matter-of-factly-stating that “Peru would have won had the women, as in all the other post-war plebiscites, been given the vote” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 407). This exclusive focus on male electorates, moreover, reduced female persons to mere onlookers concerning propaganda materials, such as posters. Whereas women were explicitly targeted in Carinthia, as mentioned before, Peruvian women in Tacna-Arica solely featured in sidelined and supportive roles to their male relatives. Wambaugh underlined this in *Plebiscites since the World War* with a Peruvian poster that showed a peasant woman with an infant in her arms, urging her son to do his “deber de patriota votando por el Peru” [duty as a patriot by voting for Peru] (Wambaugh 1933:1, 363).

Active in suffragist circles before her appointments by the LoN, Wambaugh magnified this omission of female citizens from political contribution forcefully by forwarding a letter by Peruvian women of Tacna-Arica to the grande dame of transnational suffragist matters, Carrie Chapman Catt. As president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (1900–1904; 1915–1920) and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (1904–1923), Catt was the doyenne of the US and the international woman suffrage movement. Establishing the Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women, Catt also visited South America in 1923, including Chile and Peru, and stated that “I never did a piece of work which has so interested and stimulated my desires to help as this” (Van Voris 1987, 178). However, she generally considered the continent too conservative to advance the female franchise, except perhaps Peru, which she described as more progressive (D’Itri 1999, 111).

Starting off by evoking “the principle of self-determination,” this epistolary plea by the Peruvian female dispatchers then explained to the addressee Catt that they were now uniquely responsible for coping with the family unit as well as matters of everyday life, albeit without command over going to the ballot, since most of their male relatives had vanished:

Is our part to be only that of sending our men to vote for us? Our men, where are they? Alas, many of us have no men. Fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, for eighteen years our alien rulers have been killing them, have caused them to disappear or have deported them to forced labor in Chilean nitrate fields. This is a land of women and old men left to till the fields and rear the children.²⁰

Following up on this petition, Wambaugh also contacted General Pershing directly about individual women, Adriana Alfaro and Elvira Oviedo, both jailed for three hours for having dared to speak to the Peruvian side.²¹ Indeed, Pershing’s reports reflected Wambaugh’s impact in the end, documenting cases of intimidation, especially of female residents, “with many of the women weeping as they related stories of losing husbands, sons, or relatives.”²² On her part, Wambaugh reiterated the strategy of “combing” the territory for male voters through conscription, “not to

obtain recruits, but to get rid of Peruvians by forcing them to serve or leave” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 359).

Whereas conscription was elementary in the Tacna-Arica plebiscite, it never entered the equation in the case of the Saar referendum in 1935 between France and Germany, both countries executing the draft long before the dawn of the twentieth century. In the Saar plebiscite, women were eligible to vote, but, unlike in the Klagenfurt Basin, the conscription of sons – or the lack thereof – as a topic to win plebiscite votes was not openly articulated, due to Hitler Germany preparing and channelling resources for war. Moreover, German women were assigned a fundamental part in convincing Saarlanders to side with Germany.

The Saar Plebiscite (1935): Of Faith and Fascism

Next to Austria, the Saar was considered the “potential flashpoint in Europe, where one false step could lead to a new world war” (Hill 1974, 123). The Saar plebiscite, held on January 13, 1935, was the last to be conducted under the Treaty of Versailles, and Wambaugh devoted an entire opus to it. Having visited the Saar Basin four times since 1920, when she had acted as an expert advisor regarding its administration for the LoN Secretariat for half a year, she helped establish the rules for this plebiscite for the LoN Council in Geneva in 1934. Subsequently, she moved to Saarbrücken for seven months in her role as a “technical adviser and deputy member of the Plebiscite Commission” (Wambaugh 1940, vi).

Economically valuable with iron and coal industries, the Saar Basin had been a pivotal territory in power plays between Prussia and France long before the First World War. When the German armies occupied Northern France during this war, they deliberately flooded the coal mines there, both to cut off potential spy routes and to cause essential damage to this infrastructure. As a form of reparation for this act, France received authority over the Saar Basin mines for fifteen years at the peace negotiations in Paris in 1919, while a Governing Commission, set up by the LoN, administered the region until the scheduled plebiscite in 1935, stipulated in the Treaty of Versailles. Accordingly, “[a]ll persons without distinction of sex, more than twenty years old at the date of the voting, resident in the territory at the date of the signature of the present Treaty”²³ were entitled to choose between three alternatives: the status quo (i.e., the continued protectorate of the LoN), opting for France, or for Germany.

The reference to equal suffrage, reinforced by the Treaty of Versailles and including men and women, is quite remarkable, since France would not grant female citizens the vote until after another world war and Germany had only introduced the female franchise in 1918. Although the signatories of the Treaty always tried to reinforce universal suffrage, as mentioned earlier, this was not to be taken for granted. It showed the value of female voters, especially in their roles as procreators after a war that had decimated the male population on the frontlines for both sides. While analyses of the goings-on before the plebiscite have mainly focused on the rallying and propaganda of Hitler’s Germany in conjunction with issues of economy, class, and religion, the factor “gender” (and its relevance for the outcome) has largely been ignored.

Economically intertwined with coal mainly transported to Germany and iron exported to Alsace-Lorraine (Hirschfeld 1934, 173), the Saar territory thus was traditionally home to miners, over 70% of whom subscribed to the Catholic faith (Wambaugh 1940, 15; Lewy 1964, 184). Based on the census of 1910, 99.36% of the Saarlanders described themselves as German (Lewy 1964, 184) and, indeed, Wambaugh overtly asserted that this plebiscite “was of only one nationality” (Wambaugh 1940, v). In the 1930s, the Saar Basin also became a refuge for many Jewish, communist, and socialist exiles from Nazi Germany.

Agitation for a return to the German “motherland” – a noticeable choice of term – started immediately after the Treaty of Versailles and was especially pursued by private initiatives, such as the so-called Bund der Saarvereine [Federation of Saar Associations] (Becker 2004, 2007). It gained

momentum with Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the appearance of Nazi organizations, operating for a pro-German vote in the region (Paul 1984, 1987; Muskalla 1995). As an umbrella organization, the Deutsche Front [German Front] subsumed several political interest groups by forcefully lobbying for the NSDAP and was mostly condoned by international appeasement strategies toward the Third Reich. Particularly the SA and SS exercised a regime of harassment, and in her responsibility as LoN employee Wambaugh critically reflected that approximately 1,500 of the 10,000 SS corps in this area were female (Wambaugh 1940, 213).

At the same time, individual women, usually of aristocratic descent, used charitable and philanthropic avenues to enforce a "yes" for Germany at the ballot. For example, the unemployed were targeted via communities for laborers by Bertha Hedwig, Countess of Francken-Sierstorpf, but could join this aid program only if they demonstrated their loyalty to *Deutschtum* [Germanism] (Wambaugh 1940, 110n13). The Vaterländischer Frauenverein [Patriotic Women's Union] of the Red Cross under the leadership of Helene von Vopelius, again, distributed milk in the Warndt, a forest region in the Saar territory, at competitive prices to Lorraine milk producers and under the aegis of a Christian cross with the slogan "*Herr, mach uns frei!*" [Lord, liberate us!] (Wambaugh 1940, 110n13). The displayed Christian and especially Catholic symbolism obviously catered to most Saarlanders' denomination, but it also synergized with the decision of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Trier, Franz Rudolf Bornewasser, to pick Germany over France openly and officially. (Regarding religious affairs after Versailles, the Saar Basin remained under the dominion of the Bishops of Trier and Speyer during the fifteen years of LoN governance.) In the – as it later turned out vain – hope that the position of the diocese and Catholic Church could be strengthened in the Third Reich, six bishops, amongst them Bornewasser, even distributed a declaration in the Cologne church bulletin to support Germany after the "Versailler Gewaltfrieden" [Versailles peace by force],²⁴ urging that pro-German sermons should be preached from the pulpits on the Sunday preceding the plebiscite on January 13, 1935. Whereas this nationalist stand by the episcopate was not shared by many priests and lower clergy, it had a decisive effect, most potently perhaps on female worshippers.

Religion, nutrition, and commodities were one way to address women voters as mothers and carers of the family, "human" and "cultural" exchange another. The wives of miners, for instance, were invited by mayors of German cities "as heroic victims of a despotic rule, and festivals and military parades were held in their honor" (Wambaugh 1940, 110). Equally, children of impoverished Saar families were taken to Germany via the Winterhilfswerk [Winter Relief Organization] 1933/34, and these winter vacations were endorsed by Bishop Bornewasser (Becker 2004, 232n1019). Strategies like these were not simply aimed at alleviating the budget, workload, and chores of the mothers of these households, but also at counteracting latent French schooling policies in the Saar Basin by reinforcing German as *mother* tongue (Wittenbrock, Michaux, and Dostert 1994). They were merely an additional measure to induce loyalty to Germany in youngsters, because, similar to ecclesiastical issues mentioned before, the training of teachers in the Saar Basin was left by the Governing Commission to Germany. As Wambaugh affirmed: "No matter how much propaganda may actually have been carried on in the French schools, the fact remained that the German teachers had had an infinitely greater opportunity to affect the minds of the children and of their parents, for they had in their hands the education of the great mass of the Saar children" (Wambaugh 1940, 120). And she continued to explain how events like *Heimat-* or *Elternabend* [patriotic or parents' evenings] in combination with groups like the Hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth] were used as fora for "political speeches without permission of the proper Saar authority" (Wambaugh 1940, 136).

Wambaugh was certainly aware of the central role women played in individual households as primary caretakers of offspring and the overall family wellbeing, including budgets, and thus must have clearly understood the impact of such activities and festivities along pretexts of culture, recreation, and welfare. Similarly, she deciphered women's status in the political and legal spheres, next to their position in the private space, and how this could affect the result of the pending

referendum. More precisely, she paid particular attention to the female franchise in correlation with the quite evasive residency regulations for the Saar plebiscite.

The plebiscite in the Saar Basin differed from all others specified by the Treaty of Versailles in that the franchise for this referendum was not automatically determined by birthplace or duration of residency (Wambaugh 1940, 165n2). Thus, the concept of legal domicile, expressed in French with the term *habitant*, could be interpreted in various ways, stretching over the period of fifteen years and with reference to the aforementioned passage (i.e., Pt. III, Sect. IV, Annex, Art. 34) of the Treaty. The LoN Council of Four in the Saar even insisted on replacing the term “domicile,” the equivalent to the German *Wohnsitz*, with “residency,” in German, *Einwohneigenschaft* (Wambaugh 1940, 172n17). The fact that the residence of a married woman was verified by and analogous to that of her husband²⁵ – thereby turning wives into what was known as *femmes couvertes* in the Napoleonic *Code Civil* – complicated the pre-referendum preparations and elicited protests from transnational feminist-suffragist organizations like the WILPF (Wambaugh 1940, 237). Wambaugh detailed further that the so-called *Meldekarten* (police records of citizens, settling in a particular commune or county) were subsuming entire families (Wambaugh 1940, 235n97). This convoluted the actual registration process for the referendum and risked double entries for female voters under their maiden and their married name. Given her experience of the Sopron plebiscite in mind, where nuns had voted twice or even several times, Wambaugh advised the ballot certificates or *Ausweise* for women to be stacked separately in the *Karhotekbüro*, the card index office, and flagged with red tags, indicating the maiden name of each married, widowed, or divorced female (Wambaugh 1940, 241n109).

Amidst these provisions for electoral transparency and voter mobility, the referendum took place on January 13, 1935, with 97.87% of the electorate going to the ballot and a clear majority for Germany with 90.36%, versus 8.81% for France and only 0.40% for the status quo (Pollock 1935, 282). The political scientist James K. Pollock, who was the only US chairman of a *Kreis* [voting precinct] for this plebiscite, further stated that many of the 901 invalid ballot slips for a reunion with Germany had “*gegen Hitler*” [against Hitler] scribbled onto them (Pollock 1935, 282n14).

In her retrospective writings about the Saar referendum, Wambaugh reiterated her belief in the success of the Governing Commission as well as her preference for a German Saar area to warrant stability in the wider region as not to incite nationalist tendencies. For example, in a 1944 lecture at the New School for Social Research in New York City, she stated: “I remember perfectly well my own experience in the Saar, and I was in the Rhineland during the separatist movement. I know perfectly well if the United Nations divide Germany, then the liberal Germans will join with the others in feverishly working day and night to unite Germany again.”²⁶ One year later and with hindsight of the Saar plebiscite after another world war, Wambaugh still held the opinion that the Saar, together with the Rhineland and Ruhr, should remain German, as disconnecting these territories would be “a Draconic measure” (Wambaugh 1945b, 2) for her. However, she insisted on diminishing the German armory to ensure world peace. Citing the Saar plebiscite of 1935 as a precedent, she proposed another period of international civil administration, modelled after the first that had lasted from 1920 to 1935, since in her opinion this governance “was successful in everything except popularity with the inhabitants” (Wambaugh 1945b, 4). This unpopularity she blamed entirely on German propaganda. In the same article and especially after another world war with the US contemplating joining the UN, Wambaugh could afford a more critical stand towards her home nation and its role in international policing alongside the LoN during the interwar period:

Had the United States been a member of the first League of Nations, had we not remained neutral, claiming the right to trade with the aggressor as well as with the victim, I, for one, am convinced by close observation at Geneva, and particularly during the early years, that the League would have been able to stop the Axis in its infancy. (Wambaugh 1945b, 1)

Concluding Remarks: Wambaugh's World Order

Foreign Minister then handed me brief biography Sarah Wambaugh, saying it would be extremely useful if such a specialist in international elections could be attached to Embassy to back-stop Foreign Office. He added that personality suggested was simply chosen as an example of the kind of expert required. He agreed that, if a suitable expert of other than American nationality could be found, it would be preferable.²⁷

Regardless of prevailing sexism and misogyny after 1918, Wambaugh cemented her positive reputation as the key figure for plebiscite questions of the LoN and later the UN. She could easily fly under the radar by operating as a transnational, formally objective agent of these institutions. Not officially affiliated with her country of origin, the US – in her own words “the one great state which so far refuses membership [of the LoN]” (Wambaugh 1921, 17) – hers became labelled a neutral, transcontinental job, signifying international interests. Indeed, during the interwar years, the LoN increasingly advocated women’s validity in humanitarian and minor or medium-level administrative positions for precisely that reason (Herren 2016). With her alternative trajectory to ambassadorial arenas, Wambaugh could negotiate and conquer political terrain as a non-governmental attaché for the LoN and its transnational infrastructure. Camouflaged as a shadow or surrogate diplomat and seemingly separate from American political motivations, she earned worldwide respect for her plebiscite work (Merriam 1922; Briggs 1934; Mattern 1935; Florinsky 1940; Morgenthau 1940).

Tangibly, the complex triangular constellation of maternalism, suffrage, and service for one’s nation became the crux for locating Wambaugh’s rather comfortable place within the worldwide and interwar plebiscite schemes and programs of the LoN. Herself a rare species in diplomatic domains that were almost absolutely male and a female pioneer on many fronts, who achieved many firsts, for example, as “the first woman to have been invited to lecture before the Académie de Droit International at the Hague,”²⁸ Wambaugh went through great lengths to tease out the relevance and impact of female voters, particularly when categorized as mothers and custodians of the family. Rendering the female franchise as “axiomatic” (Wambaugh 1933:1, 501), Wambaugh’s material and angle of insight valuably illuminated women’s contribution to gender-related and multi-ethnic democratization dynamics during transitional periods in the aftermaths of wars, even though this perspective was not impartial but biased and with a particular cultural-colonial American component.

Plebiscites conducted by the LoN or conducted under LoN auspices were thus an indirect way to steer and legitimate global power politics. Most importantly, the nexus between maternal empathies and iconographies of motherhood became a persuasive instrument in territorial disputes during war- *and* peacetimes. As a female emissary of the LoN, Wambaugh was especially conscious of the gendered prisms of referenda-based rights to self-determination. Anticipating less monolithic “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983), she ascertained that “not every man or woman is a strong nationalist. In every country there are always some with whom nationalism is the strong passion of their souls; with others, it is not so strong as their wish to keep their employment, or see themselves, or, perhaps, their children, saved from threatening famine.”²⁹

Specifically towards the end of her career, Wambaugh – by now an undisputed and esteemed consultant on international affairs amongst her male co-workers – could afford to expand and deepen her interests in referenda and non-territorial autonomies with a more pronounced engagement for humanitarian aid. By foregrounding humanitarian concerns and social reform during and after wartimes in the 1940s, she also harked back to her roots and earliest training in feminist aptitudes that she had acquired via the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston. For instance, one of only two rare examples of documents “with a personal touch” in her otherwise strictly professional archival files is a newspaper clipping of 1943, detailing her plans for an executive committee of the Boston Branch of the United Yugoslav Relief Fund “to stimulate

interest in sending more help to Yugoslav prisoners of war and to the children in the country itself.³⁰ Next to this article that features her directly, there can only be found another semi-private record in her papers, this time not about herself but about the International Congress of Women in The Hague of 1915, a gathering of suffragists and pacifists which served as the ideological and logistical basis for the future WILPF.³¹ Although operating in a diplomatic forum within the confines of the LoN, Wambaugh managed to maintain her feminist links and stay informed about other women's international struggles to generate peace and disarmament throughout the interwar years (Gottlieb and Johnson 2020). Significantly, the 1920s and 1930s typified a "gendering" of IR (Stöckmann 2018; Owens and Rietzler 2021). Likewise and with the dawning era of post-colonialism, intersectional responses to transnational problems and crises began to include the factor "race" in addition to "gender" and "class" (Blain 2018; Umoren 2018, esp. 11–36). Amidst these developments, Wambaugh, again, attained an exceptional status, because she represented gender interests inside the official channels, whereas most other female campaigners subscribed to para-official initiatives, running analogue to the LoN with occasional interfaces (Miller 1994).

Wambaugh's distinguished authority and credentials as a female intellectual and woman pioneer in the LoN ranks were not simply confirmed by prolific LoN and UN references to her work that are too numerous to list, but also by her contribution to a retrospective assessment of the LoN and a future conceptual orientation of the UN in 1945 (Wambaugh 1945a).³² Subsuming her work for the LoN that by then had spanned over nearly a quarter of a century in a chapter called "Control of Special Areas," she discussed the pending administrative design of and predicted the mounting challenges for its successor, the UN, "for building the foundations of the edifice of peace" (Wambaugh 1945a, 120). With remarkable foresight, she anticipated Cold War atmospheres and evermore pressing subjects of migratory flows and movements on a global scale that echo past the short twentieth century. In this text, Wambaugh thus outlined new types of borderlands beyond territorial quandaries, "where two or more nationalities are so mingled that no appropriate frontier can be drawn" (Wambaugh 1945a, 108). Little could she know how momentous and spot-on this statement should become in the twenty-first century.

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Disclosures. None.

Notes

- 1 The two terms "plebiscite" and "referendum" are more or less employed interchangeably.
- 2 Wambaugh, "Frontiers by Plebiscite," n.d., Sarah Wambaugh Papers, 1919–1948; 89-M64 [henceforth SWP1], box 2, folder 3, 6. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- 3 Wambaugh, "Memorandum," July 10, 1925, SWP1, box 1, folder 4, 2.
- 4 Unpublished reports by Lieutenant Colonel Miles and Lieutenant Le Roy King to Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge, as cited in Wambaugh 1933:1, 174n2.
- 5 Wambaugh, untitled, undated manuscript, SWP1, box 2, folder 1, 1.
- 6 Wambaugh, "Frontiers by Plebiscite," SWP1, box 2, folder 3, 16a.
- 7 Cf. the *Landtag* bill, as cited in Wambaugh 1933:1, 204n4.
- 8 Reprinted in Rumpler 2005, 23–24.
- 9 Correspondence between Wutte and Wambaugh, Sammlung [collection] Martin Wutte; AT-KLA 683-146 Su, box 18, Kärntner Landesarchiv [Carinthian province archive], Klagenfurt.

- 10 Wambaugh, "Frontiers by Plebiscite," SWP1, box 2, folder 3, 15. This bilingual flyer, which translates as something like "Mother, do not vote for Yugoslavia – otherwise I have to fight for King Peter!" (lithography, Klagenfurt/Celovec: Gutenberghaus Klagenfurt, 1920) can be found online: Digital Collection, Austrian National Library, ÖNB, Picture Archives and Graphics Department (POR), PLA16304292; 1920/2 (2045); <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa15821835> (Accessed November 25, 2020) and PLA16304293; 1920/2 (2044); <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa15821841> (Accessed November 25, 2020.)
- 11 Wambaugh, "Klagenfurt (Carinthia)," n.d., SWP1, box 2, folder 2, 1.
- 12 Wambaugh, "Frontiers by Plebiscite," SWP1, box 2, folder 3, 3.
- 13 Wambaugh, "The Plebiscite in the Burgenland," n.d., SWP1, box 7, folder 1, 2.
- 14 "Note de la délégation de la République d'Autriche, 22 mai–6 août, 1919" (Note No. 17, June 16, 1919, 57), as cited in Wambaugh 1933:1, 275n1.
- 15 Wambaugh, "The Plebiscite in the Burgenland," SWP1, box 7, folder 1, 1.
- 16 "Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Chile and Peru. Signed at Ancon, October 20, 1883," as reprinted in Wambaugh 1920, 993.
- 17 Wambaugh, "Memorandum," SWP1, box 1, folder 4, 1.
- 18 Yale law professor Edwin Montefiore Borchard was chief council to Peru from 1923 to 1925.
- 19 "Opinion and Award of the Arbitrator," as reprinted in Wambaugh 1933:2, 299.
- 20 "From the Peruvian Women, born in Tacna and Arica, to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt," n.d., SWP1, box 1, folder 7, 1–2.
- 21 Wambaugh to Pershing, August 5, 1925, SWP1, box 1, folder 6.
- 22 "Extracts from statement by General Pershing before the Plebiscitary Commission at the session of October 10, 1925," as reprinted in Wambaugh 1933:2, 345.
- 23 The Versailles Treaty, June 28, 1919, Pt. III, Sect. IV, Annex, Ch. III, Art. 34. <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/partiii.asp> (Accessed November 25, 2020.)
- 24 *Kirchlicher Anzeiger für die Erzdiözese Köln*, No. 1, January 1, 1935, 1, reprinted in Müller, 1963, 328.
- 25 *Règlement pour le vote plébiscitaire dans le Territoire du Bassin de la Sarre / Wahlordnung für die Volksabstimmung im Saarbeckengebiet*, Pt. I, Ch. 1, Art. 7, as reprinted in Wambaugh 1940, 359.
- 26 Wambaugh, "New Tools for Peaceful Settlement," April 13, 1944, SWP1, box 7, folder 6, 20.
- 27 "Telegram from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Reinhardt) to the Department of State," Saigon, June 29, 1955, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Vietnam, Vol. I, Department of State, Central Files, 751G.00/6–2955: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v01/d217> (Accessed November 25, 2020.)
- 28 Promotional flyer, "Sarah Wambaugh," Sarah Wambaugh Papers, 1902–1949; A-93 [henceforth SWP2], box 1, folder 5. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- 29 Wambaugh, "Frontiers by Plebiscite," SWP1, box 2, folder 3, 9.
- 30 "Women's Activities: Yugoslav Relief," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 17, 1943, SWP1, box 3, folder 2, n.p.
- 31 Mary Heaton Vorse, "The Women Who Said 'No!'," *The Ladies World*, n.d., SWP2, box 1, folder 10, 5–6.
- 32 A preliminary search for her name in the UN online databank yields eleven results alone of documents in English, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish from 1934 to 1983, in which her works on international plebiscites are cited as crucial sources. https://search.un.org/results.php?query=wambaugh&lang=en&Submit=Search&_gcl_au=1.1.785852415.1630061581&_ga=GA1.2.691553508.1630061581&_ga_Z047KJJ47B=GS1.1.1630061580.1.1.1630063183.0&_gid=GA1.2.1335451611.1631267564&_gat=1&_gat_TrackerTPL=1&tpl=dist_search (Accessed September 30, 2021.)

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