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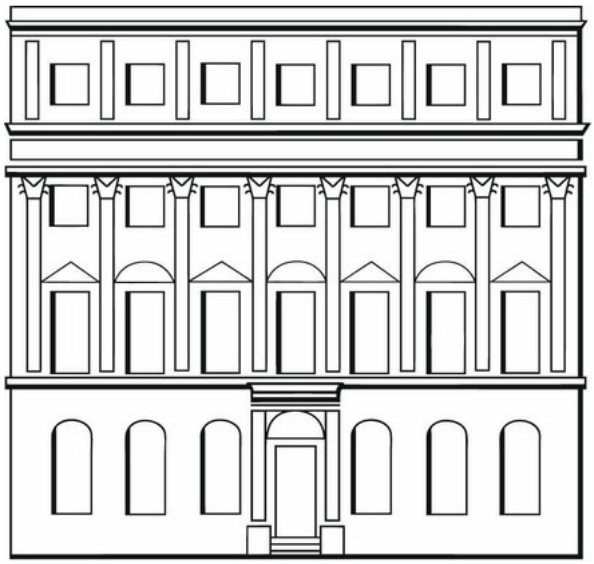

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Joëlle Droux

Humanitarian history is such a recent field of research that, according to expert historians, 'much of the history of humanitarian activism is largely or wholly unwritten'.[1] The flourishing of humanitarian activism is a challenge to historians willing to map out this field, and underlines the importance of undertaking more case studies in order to historicize its successive configurations, as recently outlined by P. Y. Saunier.[2] The Save the Children International Union (SCIU), a non-governmental organization founded in 1919 to assist foreign child victims of war, is especially relevant in this context. This is first because, like other NGOs, it illustrates the complexity and multidimensional nature of circulatory phenomena. Now seen by historians as mediators of intercultural dialogue and facilitators of contacts between nations, NGOs are studied as precursors of contemporary processes of globalization.[3] Even if previous authors have demonstrated the role of the SCIU in the international diffusion of universal norms of children's rights,[4] there is still much

A shorter version of this paper was submitted to the 2012 ENIUGH Congress, London, 2011, and published in *Journal of Modern European History*, 12/3 (2014), 377–97.

[1] Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, 'Towards a History of Humanitarian Intervention', in eid. (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge, 2011), 1–24.

[2] Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'La Secrétaire générale, l'ambassadeur et le docteur: un conte en trois épisodes pour les historiens du "monde des causes" à l'époque contemporaine, 1800–2000', *Monde(s): Histoire, Espaces, Relations*, 1/1 (2012), 29–47.

[3] John Boli and Georges M. Thomas (eds.), *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford, Calif., 1999); see also Sandrine Kott, 'Les Organisations internationales, terrains d'étude de la globalisation: jalons pour une approche socio-historique', *Critique Internationale*, 52 (2011), 9–16, at 7–9.

[4] Dominique Marshall, 'Dimensions transnationales et locales de l'histoire des droits de l'enfant: la Société des Nations et les cultures politiques canadiennes', *Genèses*, 71 (2008), 47–63.

to be done to understand its influence on the circulation of private and public policy models aimed at the younger age groups during the twentieth century. Second, the SCIU is noteworthy because of its structure. Unlike other NGOs, which are mostly run by national actors (such as the Red Cross International Committee), the organization of the SCIU was internationalized from the start, making it an original case whose functioning announced the further development of a globalized humanitarian activism.

Finally, the SCIU was also unique for its longevity, since it lasted through much of the century, from 1919 to 1986. Surprisingly, most of the historical work on its evolution focuses on the first decade of its existence. Often taking a hagiographical perspective, these studies tend to concentrate on the SCIU's founder, Eglantyne Jebb, while giving minimal consideration to other grass-roots activists in the long run, or to the organization's inner workings. Still unresearched are its links with existing networks (either humanitarian or reformist), or the successive transformations of the cause of the child for which it campaigned.[5] All of these issues need to be addressed for a full understanding of how an international organization such as the SCIU emerges in a given temporality, then develops or evolves in changing contexts, with uneven resources and moving constituency.

It is these phenomena, conducive to the SCIU's longevity and adaptability, that will be explored here. The focus will be on the Second World War, which represents a real turning-point for the SCIU. Unlike the historiography of NGOs, which presents the idea of a strong discontinuity between the system created around the League of Nations and the one established after 1945,[6] the SCIU's history provides a much more complex view of the periods of humanitarian action, the challenges they faced, and the methods they developed to survive the global chaos.

By looking at the case of the SCIU, this essay will address these historiographical issues while also examining the various circumstances that confronted it during the conflict. First, it will provide a narrative of the SCIU's foundation in 1919 and its aborted evolution, during the inter-war period, towards becoming

[5] Clare Mulley, *The Woman Who Saved the Children: A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb* (Oxford, 2009); Linda Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children 1876–1928* (Basingstoke, 2009).

[6] See Philippe Ryfman, *Une histoire de l'humanitaire* (Paris, 2008); Bob Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organizations from 1815 to the Present Day* (London, 2009); *Relief in the Aftermath of War*, special issue of *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43 (2008).

an expert network advocating child protection. The second part will look at the entirely new pressures that were unleashed on the SCIU's modes of governance with the outbreak of war in 1939, threatening its very existence. Paradoxically, however, the war offered the SCIU's leaders the chance to introduce a long-awaited change. Taking advantage of the disappearance and marginalization of other networks in the field of child welfare, the SCIU's leaders strove to transform it into one of the most representative universal NGOs specializing in the field of youth welfare.

From Humanitarian Activism to Advocacy Network (1919–1939): Sailing through the Twenty-Year Crisis

The SCIU was founded in the aftermath of the First World War by a network of activists convinced that the Continent could only be rebuilt on the basis of pacifism and international solidarity. The founding of the British Save the Children Fund (SCF), an international movement, led to the creation of a new organization in December 1919: the Save the Children International Union (Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants), based in Geneva.[7] The choice to concentrate on childhood was dictated by the fact that children were presented as innocent victims, representing neutral, sacred, and universal issues most likely to transcend international resentments and enmities. Active solidarity around childhood thus became an integral part of the process of 'demobilizing the mind', one of the few open roads that might lead to the resumption of dialogue between former enemies.[8] In this regard, the SCIU's endeavours differed significantly from other kinds of humanitarian actions during the war, which had been developed on the basis of national or identity-forming preferences.[9]

From its creation, the SCIU encouraged national committees to affiliate with it and to design their own publicity in order to attract funds. The money raised was collected by the SCIU's management

[7] Archives d'État de Genève, Archives de l'Union Internationale de Protection de l'Enfance (hereafter AEG, AUIPE), AP 92.3.6: Sociétés affiliées, Dec. 1919.

[8] See John Horne, 'Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War 1919–1939', *French History and Civilization*, 2 (2009), 101–19; Emily Baughan, '"*Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!*" Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-War Britain', *Historical Research*, 231 (2013), 116–37.

[9] Peter Gatrell, 'Refugees and Forced Migrants during the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26 (2008), 82–110.

in Geneva and spent on a wide range of humanitarian operations, priority being given to the Central European countries most affected by war and famine. In this regard, the SCIU was one of the first organizations to give equal representation to both defeated and victorious countries.

The form which this assistance took was partly built on pre-existing models—in particular, on the International Committee of the Red Cross's ethics (neutrality) and decentralized organization. The SCIU was, indeed, a federation of independent national committees, united around the child as its one and only target. The network's coherence was maintained by a collegiate administration in Geneva, in the form of an executive committee, some of whose members were appointed by national committees.[10] In reality, this administration was dominated by local individuals (ICRC members, diplomatic officials), delegates of the Save the Children Fund, and especially by a small team of employees headed by a secretary-general. It was this handful of people who laid down the organization's purpose, distributed donations, designed publicity material, and managed the relationship between the SCIU and other organizations.[11] Under their dedicated guidance, the SCIU rapidly met with great success. No fewer than seventeen national committees were affiliated in 1922, scattered all around Europe and actively working for the global diffusion of the SCIU's ethics and peace-building efforts.[12] The aim of providing relief to foreign child victims of war proved highly effective for mobilizing a wide range of actors, from feminist networks to Red Cross societies and movements such as the League of Nations,[13] and finally, even if it was difficult to quantify, a broad general public, which generously contributed to the SCIU's programmes from the start. People were concerned by the severe humanitarian crises (epidemics, famine) of 1921–2 in Eastern Europe, which strongly reactivated the initial momentum of solidarity.

[10] This committee was composed of thirty members, elected for a three-year term, and the membership of one-third of the committee was renewable each year.

[11] Joëlle Droux, 'L'internationalisation de la protection de l'enfance: acteurs, concurrences et projets transnationaux (1900–1925)', *Critique Internationale*, 52 (2011), 17–33.

[12] AEG, AUIPE, IV[c] Conseil Général, 22–3 Feb. 1923.

[13] A number of SCIU members were recruited from League of Nations societies. On its British section see Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–1945* (Manchester, 2011).

The SCIU collected, transferred, and redistributed some SwF 10m. throughout Europe.[14] With the end of the health crises from 1923 on, however, the SCIU soon registered a significant decrease in its income (SwF 2.6m. collected in 1923). Its leaders thus decided to relaunch the movement in order to recycle the organization's international prestige and credit towards new humanitarian tasks.

Urgent aid for children in the event of disasters was fast becoming a secondary purpose behind the SCIU's new ambition to become a platform or clearing house for information and the international dissemination of best practice on child protection (regarding health, education, youth employment, and assistance). The call to promote a development policy[15] *avant la lettre* was directed especially towards 'backward' countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where the SCIU had first developed its humanitarian work as soon as the war ended. Embodying this development angle, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was drafted by the SCIU in 1923,[16] underlining the sense of moral superiority that was a direct reincarnation of Europe's nineteenth-century 'civilizing mission', a current that flowed freely through many other humanitarian engagements at the time, in particular towards the European peripheries.[17] Building on its network of national committees (notably in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia), the SCIU from then on helped to construct a network of health and social institutions modelled on Western structures of philanthropy. Along with other foreign charities, US foundations, and international NGOs, the SCIU helped to set up this network's financing, recruitment, and training policy.[18]

[14] AEG, AUIPE, V^{e} Conseil Général, 28–9 Feb. 1924.

[15] On the application of this concept see Marc Frey and Sönke Kunkel, 'Writing the History of Development: A Review of Recent Literature', *Contemporary European History*, 20 (2011), 215–32.

[16] Droux, 'L'Internationalisation'.

[17] Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacres: Humanitarian Intervention in the Ottoman Empire 1815–1914* (Princeton, 2012); Jane Cooper, *Embroidering History: An Englishwoman's Experience as a Humanitarian Aid Volunteer in Post-War Poland, 1924–1925* (Croydon, 2012); Keith D. Watenpaugh, 'The League of Nations' Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927', *American Historical Review*, 115 (2010), 1315–39.

[18] AEG, AUIPE, AP.92.2.3: 7^{e} conseil général de l'UISE, 23–5 Sept. 1926. On the involvement of foreign NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe see Barbara Brush and Joan E. Lynaugh (eds.), *Nurses of All Nations: A History of the International Council of Nurses 1899–1999* (Philadelphia, 1999); Ludovic Tournès, 'La Fondation Rockefeller et la naissance de l'universalisme philanthropique américain', *Critique Internationale*, 35 (2007), 173–97.

The SCIU thus took on a new dimension which allowed it to develop its collaboration with the Geneva group of international organizations. Putting forward its field experience in helping to set up progressive networks of child welfare institutions, the SCIU engaged deeply in international debates and enquiries focused on childhood and youth, either with the International Labour Organization (ILO) or with the Child Protection Committee of the League of Nations (LoN, created in 1925).[19] Its influence within these forums, however, proved to be limited, first because the efficiency of international organizations largely depended on their ability to attract experts, information, and support networks from national terrain.[20] In this regard, the SCIU remained marginal by comparison with major actors such as the League of Red Cross Societies or the Health Section of the League of Nations. These were in a much better position to secure the collaboration of skilled national experts thanks to their privileged relationships with American foundations.[21]

Second, the Union's mandate as an expert advocacy network aroused mixed feelings within the executive committee, with some leading members strongly voicing their attachment to the organization's purely humanitarian *raison d'être*.[22] The crises of the 1930s fuelled these tensions by giving child relief activities a new urgency. Recurrent natural disasters, social, economic, and political crises, and, finally, military conflicts all pushed the SCIU's committees towards emergency relief again (famines in China in 1930 and in Bessarabia in 1935–6; earthquakes in Bulgaria and Greece in 1928; the events of 1934 in Vienna; wars in Ethiopia and Spain; actions in support of German and Czech Jews).[23]

[19] Dominique Marshall, 'The Rise of Coordinated Action for Children in War and Peace: Experts at the League of Nations, 1924–1945', in Davide Rodogno, Bernhard Struck, and Jakob Vogel (eds.), *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s* (New York, 2015), 82–107; Joëlle Droux, 'From Inter-Agency Concurrences to Transnational Collaborations: The ILO Contribution to Child Welfare Issues during the Interwar Years', in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (Basingstoke, 2013).

[20] See Sandrine Kott, 'Dynamiques de l'internationalisation: l'Allemagne et "l'Organisation Internationale du Travail (1919–1940)"', *Critique Internationale*, 52 (2011), 69–84.

[21] See Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organization, 1921–1946* (Frankfurt a.M., 2009); Tournès, 'La Fondation Rockefeller'.

[22] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.4: Comité exécutif, 30 Apr. 1929.

[23] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.10: Comité exécutif (1934–6).

In spite of this revived commitment to the cause of international child relief, the 1930s also deeply threatened the SCIU's working order and internal relations. The emergence of authoritarian and stridently nationalistic regimes directly provoked a haemorrhage of defections: between 1934 and 1938 several national committees (Austrian, Czech, German, and Soviet) left the SCIU, abandoning its ethics of international solidarity. This considerably weakened the SCIU financially, as national committees made a crucial contribution to its budget. Even more worrying was the question of its representativeness within the group of international networks still working around the ILO and the LoN. The SCIU, which was prompt to publicize its membership consisting of thirty-three national sections in 1937, rapidly shrank to a mere twenty-five less than two years later. The loss of national expert resources from these territories meant a cut in the vital flow of information which was the real backbone of the SCIU's position within the LoN-related international forum, thus crucially affecting its utility and legitimacy. In order to regain some of this fast disappearing credibility, the SCIU leaders proposed different projects aimed at developing child protection in the event of war. Several meetings were held in conjunction with Red Cross representations, advocating the creation of international neutral zones, to be enshrined in specific treaties in order to address the issue of new types of conflict in which civilian populations were fast becoming a central military target. These projects, however, were met with scepticism by the SCIU's members.[24] Preparing for a close and inevitable conflict was a far cry from the SCIU's pacific ideals.

At the end of the 1930s, the SCIU was thus undoubtedly undergoing an identity crisis fed by the rising power of belligerent nationalism. This crisis soon triggered another no less vital one one in its governance. Between 1936 and 1940 the SCIU lost half of its budget and most of its permanent staff. Reduced to a mere two full-time employees with an additional part-time member of staff, the organization could only look back to the period of its former glory and prestige, when its advice was widely solicited by both national committees and related networks.[25] After twenty years de-

[24] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.12: Commission administrative, 22 Nov. 1939.

[25] Joëlle Droux and Damiano Matasci, 'La jeunesse en crise: acteurs et projets transnationaux face au problème du chômage des jeunes durant l'entre-deux-guerres', *Revue d'Histoire de la Protection Sociale*, 5 (2012), 46–59.

dicated to the cause of childhood, campaigning for the international dissemination of best practice in child welfare and for the universal norms of children's rights to be recognized as a basis for reconstructing international dialogue, the SCIU was now fighting for its very existence in an international context of military violence, mutual estrangement, and nationalism. If the SCIU's ideals and actions were unable to survive in an atmosphere of mounting nationalist pressures, how would it cope once total war had been unleashed?

From Circulation to Confinement (1939–1944): Surviving Total War

From the beginning of the conflict in the autumn of 1939, the Swiss government forced the SCIU to review the composition of its executive committee in order to ensure its neutrality, and to create an administrative commission whose members were recruited from citizens of neutral countries (essentially from the French Swiss region, such as its new secretary-general, Georges Thélin, former employee of the ILO).[26] The SCIU was thus able to remain a non-governmental international federation. Communication between national committees and the administration in Geneva, however, was significantly reduced, because the war made it much more difficult to maintain links between European countries, so much so that during the General Council of May 1940, only fourteen national committees were represented.[27] The SCIU's overall federal organization broke down.

Since its foundation, the SCIU had been predicated on the possibility of rapid cross-border circulation of information, personnel, and funds. The war deeply affected each of these factors, vital for the SCIU as for all Swiss humanitarian assistance.[28] Within a few weeks, communication was reduced to a minimum, and information on material needs and the conditions for shipment or distribution dried up, especially from occupied areas. Delegates sent by the SCIU to obtain information were unable to compensate for this gap as they were not allowed to enter the more sensitive combat zones.[29]

[26] Georges Thélin (1890–1963); after graduating in sociology and law, Thélin joined the ILO in 1920 before resigning to become the secretary-general of the UISE (1940–57).

[27] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.3.99: 21e Conseil Général, 8 May 1940.

[28] See Joëlle Droux and Mariama Kaba, 'L'Aide suisse à l'enfance française en danger', in Isabelle von Bueltzingsloewen (ed.), '*Morts d'inanition*': *famine et exclusions en France sous l'occupation* (Rennes, 2005), 281–95.

[29] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.12: Commission administrative (1939–40).

The national committees, disrupted by population movements, the relocation of command centres, or military occupation, were not in a position to provide more accurate information. Thus from the autumn of 1940, the SCIU faced an unprecedented situation with regard to the extent of needs in occupied countries (but also in Britain and Hungary, where evacuee and refugee camps were set up) and the difficulty of quantifying them.

While the Western Front finally stabilized in France and Belgium, uncertainty still prevailed, notably in the relationship between the administration in Geneva and the national sections. The administration repeatedly had to be reorganized, for example, when France was split into a free zone in Marseille and an occupied zone in Paris, or as a result of the mobilization of staff, or successive purges.[30] Many factors and constraints forced the SCIU constantly to change its interlocutors and mediators,[31] in order to obtain the necessary authorizations for the possible transfer of funds or material. To be sure, delegates were sent to maintain contact with these successive interlocutors, but as the war went on, travelling became more difficult and thus less frequent. There were times when all contacts between Geneva and national sections or members were abruptly severed, such as when the occupier forced the dissolution of some SCIU committees, as happened, for example, in Poland and the Baltic countries in 1940. Gradually, and more clearly from 1943–4 on, the flow of information between the SCIU's headquarters and the rest of the world slowed to a trickle, when it was not indeed completely interrupted.

These communication difficulties naturally affected the organization of relief, already hampered by mounting financial barriers. Indeed, the SCIU committees, whose contributions kept the organization alive, not only no longer contributed, but some of the best organized now requested contributions, as in the striking case of France. With its displaced populations, refugee camps, bombed cities, and families broken up by deportations, the country rapidly became dependent on foreign humanitarian relief. The president of the Child Relief French Committee, well-known feminist and pacifist Geneviève Malaterre-Sellier (1889–1967), was keenly aware

[30] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants (1940–2).

[31] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.32.15: Assistance aux enfants européens (failure of the transactions between the UISE, the Swedish committee, and Germany to obtain authorization to assist children in Belgium from 1940 to 1942).

of this spectacular downturn which suddenly put France and French activists on the receiving end of foreign philanthropy: 'It is very painful to admit that after trying to do our best to help children all over the world, it is our turn—those of us who sit on the French committee—to envisage that we may need help and assistance from our foreign friends, in particular from the International Union.'[32] This shift in the flow of humanitarian assistance was all the more dramatic since the national committees of Central and Eastern Europe, still attached to the SCIU, were in no position to fill its coffers.

Nor did they have any intention of doing so. Almost everywhere, national interest now prevailed when dealing with humanitarian strategies. The funds collected by the SCIU's committees for child relief were totally absorbed by assistance for local populations. The international organization's finances and its potential to help by exporting food parcels via neighbouring regions or territories were paralysed. Even if the SCIU retained minimal material resources—the British SCF, for example, never stopped its own contributions to the Geneva headquarters—it was unable to transfer these funds. Increasing and more exacting exchange controls gradually made it impossible to transfer funds easily, as the SCIU had done in the past, even to neighbouring countries.[33] At some point, therefore, the SCIU was virtually powerless to meet even the gravest need. Such was the case when the SCIU delegation sent to Hungary impotently witnessed the inflow of refugees from occupied Poland, but lacked any financial means to organize their reception.[34] The circulation of merchandise was equally difficult, since every European country limited its exports in order to protect itself against a shortage of food or the threat of it. From their headquarters in Switzerland, the SCIU and the ICRC were able to send their few shipments of food and clothes only by complex and excruciatingly slow routes.[35]

Facing the disintegration of its assistance network, from 1941 the SCIU gradually turned to new partners. Building on its relationships with the SCF and the Red Cross, the SCIU established contacts

[32] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.19: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 20 Sept. 1939.

[33] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 4 Aug. 1941.

[34] *Bulletin de l'UISE et Revue Internationale de l'Enfant*, July–Sept. 1940.

[35] In 1943 the shipments received by the SCIU delegation in South America had to transit via Algeria before arriving in Italy (*Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1944, 27).

with several philanthropic organizations abroad.[36] It sent delegations to South America, the USA, and Canada to solicit members' donations, albeit not without difficulty. For example, since the SCIU had not entertained close relationships with these regions during the 1930s, it was hard for delegates to know whom to ask for help in navigating the jungle of American charities.[37] Links were successfully developed, however, and the Geneva SCIU headquarters succeeded in raising funds to finance its child relief work. Nonetheless, seen as a latecomer in humanitarian action by its US interlocutors, the SCIU remained a minor agency as far as the major overseas organizations active in the European humanitarian field (such as the American Red Cross and the Quakers) were concerned.[38]

Moreover, the political and strategic alliance established between the British and US governments, on military grounds and relating to future reconstruction, made it easier for British and US agencies to work together rather than confiding in a powerless Swiss organization. This marginalization of the SCIU in the international humanitarian field was all the more striking because it affected the nature of its internal organization. Because of the difficulties of communicating with Switzerland, the Swedish and US committees developed their own humanitarian commitments quite independently of the Geneva centre, adopting national preferences to direct their assistance. The SCIU's secretary-general deplored this weakening of its neutrality ethics as early as the spring of 1941: 'In a number of countries, increasing efforts are being made on a national basis and the few organizations that are still able to participate in actions in other countries are doing so directly.'[39] Thus relief offered by the Save the Children Federation of America went almost exclusively to the London SCF ($40,000 a month as against $2,900 a month sent to SCIU headquarters).[40]

All of the organization's actions were more or less affected by this shift in its humanitarian practice. This was the case in the individual

[36] The SCIU had had a permanent delegation in South America since 1941, and another in the USA since 1942.

[37] The SCIU had only one committee in North America from 1932 (the Save the Children Federation of America).

[38] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 27 Dec. 1940; on the development of humanitarian organizations in the USA during this period see Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2002), 48–53.

[39] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 26 Aug. 1941.

[40] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.12: Commission administrative, winter 1940–1.

sponsorship scheme based on photocards created by the association in 1920, which allowed a donor symbolically to adopt a child for a monthly payment. Although marginal during the inter-war period (only 1,420 children in seventeen countries benefited from this assistance in 1925), it became a central issue for the SCIU from 1940. More than 2,000 children received direct assistance in this form from the SCIU's Geneva centre in 1942. By 1943 the figure had risen to 3,500, and at the end of 1944 it was 6,500. The whole photocard scheme, adopted by several national committees, benefited around 68,000 children in 1944.[41] This kind of assistance, however, was pitiful in comparison to the need.[42] It required a great deal of administrative work—sponsors had to be found, lists of recipients drawn up, and the relationship between them fostered—and was unsuited to emergency relief actions or to any form of planning. From 1943 the SCIU amended the scheme, now favouring collective sponsorships which would allow a group of children (a foster-care shelter, orphanage, or school) to be symbolically adopted.[43] But the ethical dimension of neutrality was also strongly undermined in this case—for example, when the Swedish committee limited its assistance almost exclusively to Scandinavian children (2,750 of the 21,1150 sponsorships made in 1943 concerned Swedish children, 17,500 involved Finnish or Dutch children, and only 1,200 related to children in other countries).[44] The Swiss Red Cross's Secours aux Enfants (the SCIU committee for Switzerland) was more eclectic, but continued to concentrate on France. Of the 17,375 sponsorships registered between 1940 and 1942, half were for French children (although many of them were of Swiss origin).[45]

This 'unilateralization' of humanitarian actions not only weakened the SCIU by marginalizing its Geneva headquarters: the politics of humanitarian preference and partiality (national, cultural, and ethnic) followed by various SCIU national committees was a radical breach of the neutrality principle on which the SCIU had initially built its legitimacy. Faced with a number of

[41] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1944, 26.

[42] In April 1942 the Union's 2,082 sponsorships benefited 968 children in France, 451 in Finland, 316 in Belgium, 198 in Poland, 36 in Israel, and 28 in Holland (AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.13: Commission administrative, 12 May 1942).

[43] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 22 Dec. 1943.

[44] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1943, 24; the Save the Children Federation of America sponsored only children living on British territory.

[45] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1943, 24.

difficulties resulting from the conflict, the international charities thus went through a double movement of decentralization and renationalization which, in the long term, risked making the SCIU totally obsolete as a body co-ordinating humanitarian assistance.

This risk no doubt explains why the SCIU decided to regain some visibility and legitimacy by taking part in other humanitarian actions, such as supporting convoys of children. The most striking example of this partnership was the system of railway convoys for child victims of war suffering from malnutrition or trauma set up between France (and, in smaller numbers, Belgium) and Switzerland, with a view to providing temporary shelter with host families.[46] This kind of assistance had already been offered at the end of the First World War, but the SCIU had rapidly abandoned it during the 1920s, arguing that it was much better not to separate families when offering humanitarian assistance. This scheme would be reactivated during the Spanish Civil War by a number of humanitarian associations at a time when setting up humanitarian institutions seemed a rather less efficient way of helping children than simply removing them from ravaged areas and savage bombing. As soon as the conflict reached France and Belgium, the scheme was revived and broadly implemented by a Swiss humanitarian federation. The SCIU willingly joined in, all the more so as it allowed it to overcome the difficulties related to the export of funds and material by bringing the beneficiaries to the relief, rather than the other way round. When these convoys were interrupted between November 1942 and the summer of 1944 with the occupation of the south of France,[47] however, the SCIU's assessment was not overly enthusiastic.

Its organization marginalized, the SCIU never managed to gain any control over the identity of the children benefiting from its assistance. Recipients were chosen on the basis of racial and national criteria that had been meticulously negotiated between the Swiss Red Cross, the federal authorities, and the German occupier, with the result that Jewish children were excluded. Once again, humanitarian action in time of war, where it was even possible, required ideals and practices to be twisted to such an extent that they starkly contradicted the SCIU's ethical basis as publicized in the famous 1924 Children's Charter, which emphasized ethnic neutrality as a priority of the organization's actions. This is not

[46] Droux and Kaba, 'L'Aide suisse'. [47] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1942.

to say that the SCIU was inactive with regard to Jewish children who were hunted and stigmatized. In order to provide relief to those children and families that were subjected to mortal danger, the SCIU's leaders worked on clandestine actions,[48] or offered indirect assistance. Most notably in France, the SCIU also financed foster homes for foreign or stateless children. These actions allowed the SCIU to perpetuate its universal ideals and the practices of international solidarity which embodied them,[49] but the discretion that they required meant that public opinion could not be kept informed about them.

The war thus directly and almost fatally challenged the SCIU's functioning. Disconnected from its international partners, limited in its forms of action, marginalized in the field by its own local committees, the SCIU seemed doomed to disappear from the humanitarian scene. And the same applied to the ideals and principles that it saw as its brand, since the conflict spared neither civilians nor children. Powerless against the obvious loss of the sense of their cause during this worldwide war, seeing clearly its impact on all European networks active in the field, the SCIU's leaders attempted to build a new credo and find a new niche for their organization.

Preparing for a Global Post-War World (1944–1947): The Promises and Limits of Reconstruction

The leaders of the SCIU very early became aware of the threats to their organization created by the constraints of war. The huge humanitarian needs and the SCIU's inability to help mitigate them triggered the risk that donors and donations would shift towards other humanitarian actions.

Since the beginning of the conflict, a discussion had begun about the SCIU's role and future. Two options were contemplated: following a humanitarian calling to provide immediate relief; or setting up an advocacy network to provide expertise and advice. Several members of the SCIU's management stated that the time

[48] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 23 Nov. 1943. The French committee sent Geneva encrypted lists of children to be sponsored, allowing them to indicate which were Jewish.

[49] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.18.16: Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants, 4 Mar. 1941. In 1941 the French committee managed four foster homes in the south of France. In December 1943 they received 120,000 francs from the Swedish committee, via the SCIU in Geneva.

was ripe to revive the restructuring process initiated before the war: 'The SCIU's future certainly lies in a different direction: that of an international centre for child protection.'[50] The context did seem particularly favourable for such an evolution towards an expert organization advocating the protection and development of children and young people rather than promising immediate relief. Indeed, since the beginning of the conflict, an increasing demand for information on different social challenges had emerged, largely related to the impact of the war on young people. Families torn apart, mobilizations, the weakening of education systems, and a rise in juvenile delinquency linked to black market activities raised overall fears that young people in danger would, sooner rather than later, become dangerous young people. Facing this growing challenge, public authorities multiplied measures and interventions in this field.[51] The issue of managing young people seemed likely to replace the cause of child relief as the hub of reconstruction, raising cross-border discussions and debates.

However, the pre-war networks which had centralized and disseminated information about these issues were no longer active. Most notably, the work of the Association Internationale de Protection de l'Enfance and its sister agency, Association Internationale des Juges pour Enfants, with their respective head offices in Brussels, had been harshly interrupted by military operations.[52] Intergovernmental organizations, whose responsibilities also included the issue of the social integration of young people, were similarly disorganized; the ILO was forced to move from Geneva to Montreal, and the employees of the LoN's technical sections (the Child Protection Committee and the Health Section) were rapidly dispersed, leaving behind only a number of idle international civil servants.[53]

The new secretary-general of the SCIU, Georges Thélin, a former ILO civil servant, was quick to propose that the Union address this gap by profiling itself as an international platform with

[50] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.12, Commission administrative, 13 Aug. 1940.

[51] For France see Sarah Fishman, *The Battle for Children: World War II, Youth Crime and Juvenile Justice in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge Mass., 2002); for the USA see Kriste Lindenmeyer, *'A Right to Childhood': The US Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912–1946* (Urbana, Ill., 1997), 203–24.

[52] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.13.1: Œuvre Nationale de l'Enfance en Belgique, 28 May 1942; id., AP 92 T.15.1: Association Internationale des Magistrats de la Jeunesse (1942–64).

[53] On the Health Section of the League of Nations see Marta A. Balinska, *Une vie pour l'humanitaire: Ludwik Rajchman 1881–1965* (Paris, 1995), 169–225.

expertise in child policies. He had indeed constantly advocated such a change during the pre-war period, and he now strove to relaunch it, taking advantage of the conditions resulting from war. His first steps focused on the SCIU's governance: the weakening of relations between national committees and the SCIU's management resulted in a relative empowerment of the latter since the general council no longer played a role in the democratic debate within the organization. Reduced to a small group of decision-makers, including several members of international networks who held influential positions in this field, the SCIU's leaders were called by the secretary-general to re-establish the movement. During internal discussions in December 1940 to January 1941, Thélin presented a lucid analysis of the SCIU's marginalization in the field of humanitarian relief, proposing to profile the Union more assertively as an expert organization with international status and clout, 'putting it entirely within the network of big, essential, international humanitarian organizations'.[54] Abandoning the humanitarian mandate in favour of expertise was clearly depicted as a prerequisite for the SCIU's survival, but also as a new source of legitimacy in order to re-establish its authority over the centrifugal tendencies within national committees and to prepare for a future role within the international organizations to be reformed at the end of the conflict (in Geneva, as the SCIU wrongly assumed at that time).[55]

Thus at the end of 1940 the SCIU's leaders unilaterally decided, without consulting the affiliated committees, partially to transform the SCIU's mandate and turn it into a federation of expert committees. Immediately acting upon this path-breaking decision, the general secretariat created specialized sections within the Geneva headquarters (information, relief, medical, and social, the latter including the sectors of law and care institutions for endangered children), underlining the SCIU's willingness to develop contacts outside the sphere where the SCIU had initially drawn support. By building on local contacts which allowed it to establish strong links with scientific networks,[56] the SCIU was able to create solid connections with the medical education sector (judges in juvenile cases,

[54] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.1.12: Commission administrative, Dec. 1940–Jan. 1941.

[55] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92. 32.16: Comité suédois, autumn 1943.

[56] In particular, l'Institut J. J. Rousseau des sciences de l'éducation. On this institution see Rita Hofstetter, Bernard Schneuwly, and Marc Ratcliff, *Cent ans de vie: la Faculté de psychologie et des sciences de l'éducation, héritière de l'Institut Rousseau et de l'ère piagétienne* (Geneva, 2012).

schools for specialized education, and correctional institutions).[57] These connections allowed the SCIU to provide information to different enquiries, whose results, published in its journal, contributed to validating its status as an international think-tank on public policies for youth. This strategy of conquering professional networks was coupled with a willingness to build firm foundations. From 1942–3 the general secretariat fought for the grouping of child welfare agencies on each national scene.[58] By means of this centralization, it attempted to create a symbiosis between different scientific communities within the SCIU's committees, which would help them become pools of legal, scientific, and technical skills for the SCIU's further enquiries or congresses.

The change sometimes produced mixed results, as in Sweden, where the national committee continued to prioritize the humanitarian relief activities which its neutral status allowed it to undertake more or less freely and independently.[59] But in general, the changes initiated by the Geneva management did result in the reorientation of the committees towards expert knowlege on child protection and legislation. Conversely, committees which did not fulfil the requirements were ruthlessly excluded. Such was the case with some respectable ladies' committees, subjected to administrative investigation by SCIU delegates and found to be lacking either scientific credentials or international voluntarism. They were disaffiliated from the professionalized SCIU and left to act by themselves in the old way and within their old horizons, as the secretary-general confided: 'I am certainly no misogynist, but I do not believe it is in the interests of the SCIU to carry on the old tradition of charity committees.'[60]

An effective strategy as far as the SCIU's credibility was concerned, this shift attracted associations previously affiliated to other networks, most notably the surviving members of the Association Internationale de Protection de l'Enfance in France, Switzerland, and Belgium.[61] The SCIU absorbed the latter in 1945, changing the association's name to International Union for Child Protection, the

[57] AEG, AUIPE, AP. 92.1.12: Commission administrative, Mar.–Dec. 1941.

[58] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1944, 34.

[59] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.32.15 and AP 92.32.16: Comité suédois, 1943–4.

[60] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.32.16: Comité suédois, 22 Nov. 1943. In 1947 eight committees were disaffiliated.

[61] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92. 1.13: Commission administrative, 3 Mar. 1942.

definitive abandonment of the term 'relief' clearly emphasizing the SCIU's new ambitions.[62]

Eventually the process of changes initiated at the beginning of the conflict, when the SCIU's original humanitarian project had come under pressure, seemed to turn to the organization's advantage. In 1941 the SCIU was composed of 39 committees spread through 26 countries; in 1944 it counted no fewer than 48 committees in 30 countries; by 1946, it had 54 member organizations in 34 countries.[63] This increase, however, concealed a breakdown in the pre-war situation: Central and Eastern Europe were now represented by only a handful of committees, clearly positioning the SCIU within the sphere of influence of Western democracies. Despite the SCIU's intention to gain the status of a universal organization, it more than ever embodied the European setting of child protection: of the 54 member organizations of the SCIU in 1946, 40 were in Europe, 2 in North America, 9 in Central and South America, and 3 in Asia. The SCIU was represented in 34 countries, 22 of which were European.

Yet the internal evolution of the SCIU towards true internationalization helped it to achieve its function as a global clearing house of information. At the end of 1942 the Geneva secretariat of the SCIU had ten employees, a figure which had doubled by the end of 1944. Recruited from a pool of young graduates of different nationalities, this secretariat possessed the necessary human resources to collect and process data provided by experts from local and national committees. Replacing the organizations related to the LoN, the SCIU was one of the first international agencies to publish surveys and statistics about post-war European youth.[64]

Nonetheless, the final results of this restructuring were less striking than expected, even if the SCIU survived the difficulties of war by profiling itself as the 'authorized voice of worldwide public opinion' in child protection matters, based on 'in-depth case studies carried out by the most qualified experts and stating with complete independence the multiple and ever changing challenges of child and youth protection on all continents'.[65] But in this area, the Union's leaders had to lower their sights and take note of their

[62] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1945.

[63] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1941–6.

[64] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1941: 'Les enfants et les adolescents dans le monde'; other case studies on juvenile delinquency and statelessness among children followed.

[65] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1944.

marginalization in relation to new international organizations that were being created overseas, headed by Allied states which took the place previously occupied by private networks of associations. The SCIU's new status as a federation of national charities for child protection undeniably allowed it to be represented within these associations, but once there, it remained a minor partner.[66] Moreover, the fact that the SCIU was established on European territory was detrimental to its universal ambitions because the structural weakness of its relationship with the USA was left virtually unchanged, despite frequent missions conducted after 1945 by its secretary-general.[67]

In fact, the United Nations head offices were finally established not in Geneva, as expected by SCIU pundits, but at Lake Success. The SCIU could have followed the advice of some of its North American partners to set up its management in the USA in order to gain credibility and visibility, but the organization's leaders refused to do so, more anxious to maintain their links with the networks it had federated, and in line with its past glory and prestige.[68] As a result, its links with the new United Nations agencies remained tenuous: the SCIU's publications were not read there, and its influence was so limited that it obtained only temporary consultative status.[69] 'We are proselytes standing at the door, with no power whatsoever,' the SCIU's secretary-general noted bitterly in relation to the United Nations, 'we have no say in the way anything is organized.'[70] The SCIU was doomed to remain 'on the periphery, or even outside'[71] of the debates that took place within the Social and Economic Committee or, even more strikingly, within its own field of child protection when faced with the Fonds International pour le Secours à l'Enfance (UNICEF).

Yet logically, the SCIU's performance looked a little better as regards its collaborations with international organizations established in Europe. Benefiting from previous contacts established

[66] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1943, on relations with the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations in Washington, and the Interallied Committe on Postwar Need and UNRRA in London.

[67] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.3.128: Mission du secrétaire général en Amérique du Nord, Jan.–June 1946.

[68] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.3.128: Compte-rendu d'un entretien entre le SCF et G. Thélin, 18 Feb. 1946.

[69] *Bulletin de l'UISE*, 1947.

[70] AEG, AUIPE, N.1.2: ONU, Division des activités sociales, 27 Mar. 1947.

[71] AEG, AUIPE, N.1.4: Conseil économique et social de l'ONU, 27 Mar. 1947.

by its national correspondents (most of those acting in Europe were long-standing allies of the Union), the SCIU participated in UNESCO enquiries from 1947,[72] and in the Food and Agriculture Organization's education on nutrition programmes. But it was especially within the Consultative Commission on Delinquent and Socially Unsuitable Childhood, created in 1948 to bring together different professionals involved with the system of juvenile justice, that the SCIU appeared prominently as an expert organization in this field. This permanent specialist commission was regularly consulted by international and regional organizations.[73] The SCIU thus contributed to the major developments in penitentiary systems and juvenile criminal courts during the post-war period (the training of educators, the dissemination of juvenile courts, and the medical and educational observation of young delinquents). In the area of monitoring youth at risk, the SCIU thus actively contributed to the regional convergence of approaches and methods at the European level.

Conclusion

The SCIU is frequently cited as one of the organizations symbolic of the new age of humanitarian assistance, which began after the First World War. Although many studies have examined its creation in 1919, the great figures who initiated the movement, and its founding principles (including the first Declaration of the Rights of the Child, drafted in 1923), its subsequent development is clearly much familiar. These subsequent episodes are not less interesting, however, since they reveal the constraints and opportunities that this type of organization faced when the humanitarian needs on which its work was based radically changed.

Founded in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles to help children affected by war and famine in Central and Eastern Europe, the Union was first established in response to the urgency of this chaotic situation. Very quickly, however, a second motive was grafted onto this base: to work towards international reconciliation by focusing on international relief to children, bringing together nations that had previously been rivals. On this basis, the SCIU acquired prestige and gained support from public opinion and the

[72] AEG, AUIPE, AP 92.36.13, Relations de l'UIPE avec sa consultante à l'ONU.

[73] AEG, AUIPE, N.1.1: Conseil économique et social de l'ONU, 1947.

national élites, which helped it to become associated with a wide range of private and publicly funded child welfare institutions at the beginning of the 1920s. But from 1925 the SCIU's founders faced a first dilemma: what were they to do when the reasons for their work threatened to become obsolete? This is what happened in the 1920s, as efforts for international reconciliation now went through the official channel of the League of Nations, and health and social conditions were progressively normalized throughout Europe. Wishing to retain their constituency's confidence and to contribute their experience and close networks of collaboration at the grass-roots level, the SCIU's leaders then tried to transform their organization into an international agency specializing in promoting the cause of childhood internationally, based on its expertise in the implementation and local maintenance of child welfare institutions in various European states. This development, although it allowed the Union to gain recognition in international organizations, did not generate much enthusiasm from its constituency, revealing yet another dilemma of contemporary humanitarianism: the difficulty of balancing public opinion in favour of a cause (which meant crucial financial support for survival) with the bureaucratic constraints tied to an expert role in international organizations (which, in turn, was essential for establishing its legitimacy in order to gain access to the humanitarian field). Before the war, the Union failed to resolve this dilemma and attempted, with mixed results, to reconcile the need for the public to express its solidarity with child victims of war or disaster through specific humanitarian actions with the need to participate in international think-tanks in order to establish universal child welfare standards.

With the Second World War, the Union found itself propelled into a context that, in many ways, prefigured the 'crisis of crisis relief' of the late twentieth century. In a highly unstable military and diplomatic environment, the Union faced a series of unprecedented health and humanitarian crises on a massive scale, with no way of coping with them, whatever the wealth of experience, relationships, and practices it had accumulated since its inception. Faced with this dilemma (of how to balance the spectator position and the agency requirement, in the words of Johannes Paulmann),[74] the SCIU's leaders chose to leave their humanitarian legacy behind, and to transform the Union into an international expert agency for child

[74] See the essay by Johannes Paulmann in this volume.

and youth welfare. They hoped that this metamorphosis would help them to position their agency as one of the future organizations serving as a think-tank to inspire public policies called for by post-war societies. The crucial dilemma of the inter-war period was thus resolved, and allowed the organization to profit from wartime disorganization and the disruption of rival associations to reformulate its priorities, gain membership, and recruit professional experts.

The success of this radical reform, however, was not as great as they had hoped. Indeed, the aftermath of war brought about a radical reconfiguration of internationalism with the advent of the United Nations and the outbreak of the Cold War, reshuffling the diplomatic and geopolitical maps, but also those of humanitarian action. The Union and its most prominent members, however, as Europeans, quickly found themselves marginalized within the new UN structures.

Much more work is needed to understand how the new constraints of humanitarian action in the post-war period were negotiated by the growing diversity of agencies active in this field. The requirements of development policies, which weighed heavily on their actions in the post-war context,[75] deserve particular attention, revealing renewed forms of contemporary humanitarian dilemmas related to a variety of decolonization contexts. In any event, this case study of the SCIU, which survived throughout the greater part of the twentieth century, offers a relevant vantage-point for observing the long-term evolution of humanitarian aid and the continuities and changes that affected its principles, practices, and audience in the light of recurring dilemmas and crises.

[75] See the contributions in this volume.