

*Immigrant Women, Foreign Families,  
and Networks of Assistance in Interwar Paris*

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During the interwar period, the pronatalist and familialist logic of French welfare initiatives made foreign families and, significantly, foreign women more eligible for state and municipal assistance than ever before. Though access to welfare was critical to immigrant households, that access diminished over the course of the 1930s as the economic situation in France, as elsewhere, grew grim. Naturalization was one option to ensure the uninterrupted flow of aid from *l'Etat providence*, but it was a tiresome, expensive, and lengthy process; moreover, state officials preferred certain kinds of households to others. As the French state gradually pulled away from foreigners, foreigners in the capital turned to family-friendly immigrant aid societies and maternalist aid associations willing to provide relief, inspired as they were by a populationist politics. While these private organizations undoubtedly had pronatalist objectives, they also had a beneficial impact on the lives of immigrants struggling to make ends meet. In particular, maternalist organizations run by middle-class French women provided much-needed material aid, advice, and mediation to foreign working-class women in the capital during the 1920s and 1930s. Although women's role in the burgeoning welfare state has typically focused on middle-class efforts to manage and regulate the reproductive capacities of working-class women, I argue that poor immigrant women devised strategies of their own to make this orientation work for them. Foreign women pursued naturalization from the French state and availed themselves of the resources offered by private organizations, carving out their own survival strategies from the dense web of state, municipal, and private assistance networks that existed in interwar Paris.

“S'éviter les ennuis des papiers d'étranger”: Foreign Families, Immigrant Women, and Public Assistance<sup>1</sup>

The French Third Republic was once portrayed as laggardly in the realm of welfare legislation as compared to its Western European neighbors. That image has been corrected to reflect the record more accurately, especially in regard to the early Republic's “peculiar achievements” in the realm of mother-oriented, child-friendly, and family-forward legislation.<sup>2</sup> One reason, among others, for this delayed reappraisal was that the welfare system in the 1920s operated according to two decentralized systems involving little to no state presence: these were employer-run systems of family allowances, or *caisses*, and mutual aid societies, or voluntarist associations for male workers to insure themselves against work accidents and illness. Both came gradually under state purview over the course of the 1930s then definitively after WWII under Pierre Laroque's direction.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these overarching systems, municipal welfare offices provided benefits to select groups – the aged, infirm, and unemployed as well as pregnant women, large families, and young children.<sup>4</sup> In Paris, *bureaux de bienfaisance*, or local welfare bureaus, administered these benefits. Immigrant families settling in the capital, then, navigated this veritable patchwork of welfarist terrain.

For both French and foreign, access to state and municipal social programs varied from one locality to the next, the result of conflict between national directive and local initiative.<sup>5</sup> But foreigners also had to contend with a host of bi-national treaties and conventions that structured

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<sup>1</sup> Demande de Naturalisation, 4 December 1926 for Marie M. née L., 24229x27, Archives Nationales (hereafter AN).

<sup>2</sup> Philip G. Nord, “The Welfare State in France, 1870-1914,” *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 821-838.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Hatzfeld, *Du paupérisme à la sécurité sociale, essai sur les origines de la sécurité sociale en France, 1850-1940* (Paris: A. Colin, 1971); Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Paul V. Dutton, *Origins of the French Welfare State: the struggle for social reform in France, 1914-1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michel Dreyfus, ed., *Se protéger, être protégé: une histoire des assurances sociales en France* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006); Philippe-Jean Hesse, *La protection sociale sous le régime de Vichy*, ed. Jean-Pierre Le Crom, Histoire (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> On the development of municipal welfare in a local context, see Yannick Marec, *Pauvreté et protection sociale aux XIXe et XXe siècles: des expériences rouennaises aux politiques nationales* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Françoise de Barros, “Secours aux chômeurs et assistances durant l'entre-deux-guerres. Etatisation des dispositifs et structuration des espaces politiques locaux,” *Politix* 14, no. 53 (2001): 117-144; Françoise de Barros, “L'Etat au prisme des municipalités. Une comparaison historique des catégorisations des étrangers en France (1919-1984)” (thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris 1, 2004), chap. 3.

their access to welfare provisions.<sup>6</sup> By 1936, France had concluded such treaties with Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Romania, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, and Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup> These were primarily arrangements relative to foreign workers and the degree of assistance available varied by country. Treaty stipulations determined access to free medical care and hospitalization on the one hand and access to state and municipal services and entitlements on the other hand. Generally speaking, Italians, Belgians, and Poles received the most favorable treaty terms and, consequently, the most generous welfare assistance from the French state. According to this system, those foreigners who could not invoke a treaty had no right to state benefits; however, and as many contemporaries of the period pointed out, this was not how it worked in practice.

In fact, most foreign workers were granted free medical care and hospitalization in the 1920s, though not without some consternation from the French public. Throughout the interwar period, references to foreign populations crowding French hospitals abound.<sup>8</sup> In the 1920s, concerns crystallized mainly around the medical and hygienic threat to the French “race” posed by a rapid, unregulated influx of immigrants who were not properly screened before crossing the frontier.<sup>9</sup> Still, some municipal leaders in charge of local welfare bureaus saw a potential payoff in the population boost that large numbers of foreigners afforded a French nation laid low by demographic woes. G. Fabius de Champville, Secretary General of Paris welfare bureaus in 1926, both lamented the stream of diseased foreigners and applauded the healthful effect of their presence on French natality in the same breath.<sup>10</sup> By the 1930s, however, as the recession

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the uneven application of rights to guest workers from both treaty and non-treaty nations, see Gary S. Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France: The Making of a New Laboring Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Caroline Douki, David Feldman, and Paul-André Rosental, “La protection sociale des travailleurs migrants dans l’entre-deux-guerres : le rôle du ministère du Travail dans son environnement national et international (France, Italie, Royaume-Uni),” *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales* 2, no. 2 (2007): 167-171; Paul-André Rosental, “Migrations, souveraineté, droits sociaux: Protéger et expulser les étrangers en Europe du XIXe siècle à nos jours,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 66, no. 2 (2011): 335-373.

<sup>7</sup> For a complete list of bi-national treaties, see Georges Mauco, “Les Étrangers en France: étude géographique sur leur rôle dans l’activité économique” (thèse de doctorat ès lettres, Paris: Université de Paris, 1932), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Rosental makes a similar observation in “Migrations, souveraineté, droits sociaux,” 341.

<sup>9</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of Hygiene held in 1926 was organized around this very theme. The December 1926 special issue of the *Revue d’Hygiène* is entirely devoted to this topic. See also Victor Storoge, *L’Hygiène sociale et les Étrangers en France*. Thèse de médecine (1926).

<sup>10</sup> G. Fabius de Champville, “Banquet Annuel de la Société Amicale et d’études des administrateurs et commissaires des bureaux de bienfaisance de Paris,” *Bulletin de la Société amicale et d’études des administrateurs et commissaires des bureaux de bienfaisance à Paris* (hereafter *BSA*) no. 94 (15 April 1926), 2-17; *ibid.*, “Chronique,”

emptied state and municipal coffers, these concerns gave way to more practical ones regarding the heavy cost of supporting sick and, increasingly, unemployed foreigners.

According to treaties concluded in the 1920s, Belgians, Italians, Spaniards, and Poles were entitled unequivocally to the same unemployment benefits as French citizens so long as their papers were in order.<sup>11</sup> By 1930, Romanians, Austrians,<sup>12</sup> Yugoslavs, Czechs, Swiss, and Armenian and Russian refugees could also request lesser unemployment aid by invoking their diverse reciprocity treaties.<sup>13</sup> But as the crisis deepened and the ranks of the unemployed swelled, foreigners, among the first to lose their jobs, called in their assistance to varying effect.<sup>14</sup> As Mary D. Lewis has shown in the cases of Marseille and Lyon, many were flat-out repatriated unless they could prove they had formed familial attachments in France.<sup>15</sup> The situation was similar in Paris where certain municipal leaders called for an unequivocal end to unemployment benefits to all foreigners, regardless even of length of residence or family size.<sup>16</sup> This was a far cry from the open-armed welcome paid to fecund immigrants in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then again, that had been a time of prosperity.

To ensure the uninterrupted flow of aid from *l'Etat providence*, many foreigners sought naturalization during the interwar period. But, as others have shown elsewhere, this was easier said than done. During the interwar period, naturalization favored certain groups, among whom figured 1) young male immigrants with French wives and (male) French-born children; 2) young immigrant men who could soon complete military service; and 3) foreign families, especially those with sons who could serve in the French army.<sup>17</sup> The reproductive utility of young

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*BSA*, no. 95 (15 July 1926): 2-3, in Archives de l'Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris (hereafter APHP), B/3675/70 and APHP, B/3675/71.

<sup>11</sup> This according to article 19 of the Franco-Italian treaty of 30 September 1919, article 5 of the Franco-Polish Assistance Convention of 14 October 1920, and article 7 of the Franco-Belgian Labor Treaty of 24 December 1926. For more on the fluidity of foreigners' access to unemployment benefits, see Barros, "Secours aux chômeurs et assistances."

<sup>12</sup> Romanians and Austrians benefited from treaties concluded 28 January 1930 and 27 May 1930, respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Office central des oeuvres de bienfaisance et services sociaux, *Paris charitable, bienfaisant et social* (Paris: Editions de l'Ouest, 1936), 316. (hereafter *PCBS*)

<sup>14</sup> Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France*, chap. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic*, chap. 2-4.

<sup>16</sup> This was the position, for example, of Armand Levy of the 3<sup>rd</sup> arrondissement and Monsieur Arrighi of the 18th arrondissement in, respectively, H. Flamenc, "Procès-verbaux: Séance du Conseil d'Administration du jeudi 23 juin 1932," *BSA*, no. 119 (15 October 1932): 2, in APHP, B/3675/91; *ibid.*, "Rapport de la Commission de contrôle," *BSA*, no. 122 (15 July 1933): 13, in APHP, B/3675/94.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un français: histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), chap. 3; Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic*, 127-154; Linda Guerry, "(S') exclure et (s') intégrer. Le genre de l'immigration et de la naturalisation. L'exemple de Marseille (1918-1940)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Avignon: Université d'Avignon et des Pays de Vaucluse, 2008).

immigrant women also provided a small window for female-headed households in their quests to obtain naturalization.<sup>18</sup> But on the whole, naturalization was a long, expensive, and highly selective process that not every foreign man or woman could reasonably undertake.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, by the 1930s, naturalization was harder to come by as the French state's attitude towards foreigners took a decidedly xenophobic turn.<sup>20</sup> That said, certain foreigners successfully pursued naturalization in their efforts to turn the pronatalist orientation of the state to their own advantage and, in so doing, extracted the welfare benefits they so urgently needed.

To begin with, many foreign men in France had fought in the Foreign Legion during the First World War. For those who survived, naturalization was their reward according to the provisions under article 3 of the 5 August 1914 Law and, thanks to the "*l'effet collectif*," the "favor" (as French naturalization was called by state officials) was extended to the entire family. Those foreign men who did not survive the war, however, often left behind foreign widows who, like their French counterparts, demanded the widows' pension owed to them.<sup>21</sup> But this task proved difficult, as war widows' pensions remained the province of French women alone. Consequently, foreign women often sought French naturalization as a means of ensuring their access to this pension. This was the situation that Rachel G., a Russian merchant in Paris, found herself in when her husband died on the battlefield at Neuville Saint Wast in May 1915. Although she ran a small haberdashery, officials noted that she made barely enough to support herself and her daughter – a little more than 2,000 francs per year. She sought naturalization in order to "regularize her situation as a war widow" and the benefits that entailed.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, naturalization resolved the inherent contradiction between simultaneous eligibility for French war widows' pensions and ineligibility on the basis of foreign nationality. WWI, then, opened up

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<sup>18</sup> Guerry, "(S') exclure et (s') intégrer," pt. 3.

<sup>19</sup> After meeting the proper conditions of age, residency, health, and "morality," foreigners went to open their dossier at the local commissariat at which point they became the subject of an official inquest. They also had to amass no fewer than 18 requires documents for the successful completion of their file. Their dossiers then required the approval of their neighborhood Police Commissioner, the municipal Police Prefect, the prefect of every department where he or she previously resided, and, finally, the ministerial representative at the Bureau de Sceau, an arm of the Ministry of Justice. Between 1925 and 1940, the fees ranged between 1075frs and 2000frs for each naturalization request, though poorer foreigners were often accorded some sort of reduction.

<sup>20</sup> Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un français*, 82–91.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Lanthier, "War Widows and the Expansion of the French Welfare State," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 31 (2003): 255-270; Stéphanie Petit, "La pension de veuve de guerre de 14-18: une pension de fidélité?" in *1914-1918, Combats de Femmes: les femmes, pilier de l'effort de guerre* (Paris: Autrement, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Rachel G. née S., 16875x14, AN. For more examples see Marguerite M. née S., 4820x20, AN; Colette D. née B., 2386x19 AN; Catherine P. née P., 7093x19 AN; Anna B. née G., 1368x20 AN.

a new domain of eligibility for French benefits to foreign women and, in this case anyway, lingering contradictions were easily resolved by making foreign women French.<sup>23</sup>

Foreign families in France were also becoming increasingly eligible for family allowances based on large family size.<sup>24</sup> Whether single male-headed, single female-headed, or nuclear in form, foreign families in the interwar years exceeded their French neighbors in relative size.<sup>25</sup> In 1926, the average French family had .96 children aged 21 years or younger whereas foreign families had 1.5 children in the same age range.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, since 1911, the number of foreign families consisting of 3 or more children was proportionately greater than the number of French families consisting of 3 or more children.<sup>27</sup>

According to their reciprocity treaties, Italian, Polish, and Belgian families were entitled to large family pensions, so long as they could prove at least 5 years of residence in France; however, they received only half of what a French family was entitled to.<sup>28</sup> For those foreigners who were not covered by treaties, they, like foreign war widows, sometimes sought naturalization as a means of becoming unequivocally eligible for these benefits. Both Selig G., an Austrian canner and father of 5, and Isaac T., a Russian cabinet-maker and also father of 5, sought naturalization in 1914 and 1922, respectively, to secure family allowances for their large households. In fact, their “avowed motives of assistance” so imperiled their naturalization requests that they received “decidedly unfavorable recommendations” from both the Police Commissioner and the Police Prefect of Paris.<sup>29</sup> That said, the Bureau de Sceau, the ministerial branch with whom the final decision rested, disregarded police counsel on both occasions, opting to naturalize precisely on the basis of the postulants’ large families.<sup>30</sup> While these examples point

<sup>23</sup> cf. Rosental’s claim that the development of social protection in Europe necessarily entailed the rejection of immigrant populations. “Migrations, souveraineté, droits sociaux,” 336.

<sup>24</sup> On the development of the system of family allowances in France, see Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State*, chap. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Statistique Générale de France, *Statistique des familles en 1926* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1932), 34, 40, 54, 65.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> Statistique Générale de France, *Statistique des familles et des habitations en 1911* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1911), 25.

<sup>28</sup> French families of 4 or more were entitled to 50frs per month, or 600frs per year, whereas benefits accorded to Italian, Polish and Belgian families were capped at 300frs per year. (“Des Bureaux de bienfaisance à Paris: Conférence de M. Chiselle, Délégué Général,” *BSA*, no. 120 (15 January 1933): 7, in AHPH, B/3675/92.)

<sup>29</sup> Demande de Naturalisation, 2 March 1914 in Selig G., 2639x14, AN; Avis du Préfet de Police, 20 March 1922 in Isaac T., 41812x14, AN.

<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of civil servants’ discretionary powers in their dealings with foreigners at different levels of the bureaucratic machine in wartime and postwar France, see Alexis Spire, *Etrangers à la carte: l’administration de l’immigration en France, 1945-1975* (Paris: Grasset, 2005); Laurent Joly, *Vichy dans la “Solution finale”: histoire*

once again to the populationist logic that informed ministerial decisions to naturalize large foreign families during the interwar period, they also reveal something else: ministerial preference for prolific foreigners unwittingly helped large immigrant families in their own efforts to enroll in state and municipal assistance programs. Here again, foreigners used the pronatalist orientation of state officials to extract concessions of citizenship that guaranteed welfare access.

If foreigners in France boasted bigger families than their French counterparts, widowed foreign women's households were even larger than those of most foreigners.<sup>31</sup> While the average foreign household in 1926 consisted of 2.17 children, widowed foreign women's households consisted of 2.5 children.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, foreign widowed women in Paris seeking naturalization often had large families of 3, 4, and 5 children to recommend them.<sup>33</sup> If it is true that state officials preferred female-headed households with children to those without,<sup>34</sup> it is no less certain that some foreign women with many charges came to the French state to make claims on it, recognizing in naturalization an opportunity to improve their economic and social situation. This was what Marguerite C. did after her husband François died in 1928. An Italian feather-seller who made only 25 francs a day, Marguerite also supported three young children.<sup>35</sup> As a widow with several charges, French citizenship opened her up to a world of family allowances. This was also true of Liba S., a 41-year old Russian linen merchant whose husband Moïse had passed away in 1913. She sought naturalization, "So that she and her children may enjoy the rights and privileges accorded to the French."<sup>36</sup> But what rights and privileges could a foreign woman in France hope for in an era predating even Frenchwomen's right to vote? Considering she made just 10 francs a day and had 2 young children to provide for, it is exceedingly likely that she, like Marguerite, would have hoped to avail herself of the benefits available to single, female-headed households in France.

That foreign women would look to the state for financial assistance is the logical outcome of their concentration in the least remunerative professions, a fact that left them in fragile

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*du Commissariat général aux questions juives, 1941-1944*, 1 vols. (Paris: le Grand livre du mois, 2006).

Regrettably, we still know little of the bureaucratic cultures in charge of naturalization during the interwar years.

<sup>31</sup> Statistique Générale de France, *Statistiques de familles*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. This compared to the average size of French families (1.98 children) and the average size of families headed by widowed Frenchwomen (consisting of 2.06 children).

<sup>33</sup> Of the 29 widowed immigrant women that feature in this study, 19 (nearly 2/3) had families of 3 or more children.

<sup>34</sup> Guerry, "(S') exclure et (s') intégrer," 3, ch. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Marguerite C. née V., 1049x30, AN.

<sup>36</sup> Demande de Naturalisation, 21 May 1920 in Liba S. née N., 4387x20, AN.

economic straits.<sup>37</sup> This was true of young women with children to care for, like Marguerite and Liba above, as well as those women past child-bearing age. For instance, Marie M., a 57-year old Swiss widow and corsetmaker, applied for naturalization when her husband Jules passed away. In 1926, she explained to the Police Commissioner that she wished to “avoid the trouble [*ennuis*] of keeping her foreign papers in order.” But the Police Prefect perceived a shiftier motive; as he put it, “Finding herself in a precarious financial situation, her request seems to be motivated by her desire to obtain Public Assistance aid.” This was entirely possible. After all, Marie lived with her daughter in a small apartment and made 5 francs a day – a situation that even the police commissioner likened to “a state bordering on destitution.”<sup>38</sup> In the end, the existence of a Franco-Swiss convention convinced administrators to naturalize her – or rather, that they could hardly do otherwise.

While options may have been scarce for older widows, young foreign women of child-bearing inclination had far more state resources available to them. Still, access to those resources ebbed and flowed. As late as 1933, most pregnant foreign women, regardless of nationality, were eligible to receive *secours de grossesse*, or pregnancy benefits, from local welfare bureaus. Like French women, foreign women needed only to be in their 5<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy and to prove 1 year of uninterrupted residence in Paris; however, it is likely that this situation changed as the 1930s wore on and municipal resources evaporated. Evidence suggests that women of “certain nationalities” became subject to more stringent residency requirements.<sup>39</sup> For instance, apart from Polish women, many Eastern European women in Paris in the 1930s were permitted neither pregnancy benefits nor family allowances.<sup>40</sup> But if they were denied state entitlements, they still had a number of municipal hospitals, maternities, shelters, and convalescence homes to turn to. These institutions were remnants of the vast maternalist aid networks that had developed in Paris over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> By the interwar period, few public hospitals in Paris had nationality restrictions though most, like local welfare bureaus, had some sort of residency

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<sup>37</sup> In 1931, Italian, Polish, and Spanish women were especially concentrated in agriculture, the textile industry, and domestic service. Javier Rubio, *La Emigración Española a Francia* (Esplugues de Llobregat: Editorial Ariel, 1974), 159.

<sup>38</sup> Avis du Préfet de Police, 27 May 1927 in Marie M. née L., 24229x27, AN.

<sup>39</sup> Delegate Chiselle made this observation, but without further explanation, in “Des Bureaux de bienfaisance à Paris: Conférence de M. Chiselle, Délégué Général,” *BSA*, no. 120 (15 January 1933): 6-7, in AHPH, B/3675/92.

<sup>40</sup> Docteur Henry A. Victor, *La Maternité de l'Hôpital de Rothschild: son fonctionnement jusqu'en 1930* (Paris: Imprimerie spéciale de la Librairie Le François, 1930), 86.

<sup>41</sup> Rachel Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

requirement. This was also the case for other municipal establishments geared toward helping pregnant women and new mothers, such as the Asile Michelet, Asile Pauline Rolland, Asile George Sand, and the hospitals Baudeloque, Hotel Dieu, Boucicaut, and Rothschild where many foreign women delivered.<sup>42</sup>

The Rothschild Hospital was unique in its markedly foreign clientele as compared to other municipal institutions. Founded in 1852 expressly for the city's Jewish inhabitants, it nevertheless served people of all religious backgrounds. In 1914, the renovated Rothschild opened its doors on rue Santerre in the 12th arrondissement, not far from the large foreign Jewish populations in the neighboring 11<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissements. Indeed, Rothschild became a popular destination for the city's burgeoning foreign Jewish population in need of medical assistance during the interwar years. After the war, it was also equipped with a brand new maternity.

In a 1930 report on the maternity's operations, Doctor Henri A. Victor made some astute observations regarding the shifting demographics of the maternity's clients. He wrote, "Before 1914 and the war, our clientele was constituted almost exclusively of Jews [*Israélites*] residing in France for generations, a large proportion were of Alsatian origin...[and] those Jews having lived in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, even North Africa and Turkish Asia." But the war had dramatically transformed the capital. He continued, "We know how numerous, after the war, were the emigrations from Poland, Russia, Hungary, [and] Salonica. Many of these emigrants settled in France, and particularly in Paris."<sup>43</sup> In this "new generation," Dr. Victor perceived what he called "*l'élément 'douleur,'*" or a sorrowful element. While he believed this "sorrowful element" to be partly endemic to the culture of these new foreign women, he observed that their pitiable living and working conditions in Paris exacerbated it. He noted, "Often they lead a difficult existence [full of] want, that lowers their resistance," producing an overall impression of "physiological misery."<sup>44</sup> The doctors' observations on a pervasive sense of privation are significant. As we will soon see, economic fragility, social instability, and poor living conditions experienced by poor foreign families and especially poor foreign women in the capital rendered these municipal institutions, maternalist aid networks, and state entitlements indispensable to their survival.

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<sup>42</sup> A full description of these establishments and others can be found in *Ibid.*, chap. 5 and 6.

<sup>43</sup> Victor, *La Maternité de l'Hôpital de Rothschild*, 80–81.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

“*Trop peu d’enfants, donc trop peu de Français*”: Foreign Families, Immigrant Women, and Private Charitable Associations<sup>45</sup>

A rich network of associations buoyed foreign families and women in the interwar period and served as a safety net when the state started to pull away from them in the 1930s. These organizations fell into three broad categories: those run by foreigners and divided along national lines; those run by French philanthropists and divided along confessional lines; and those run by French philanthropists without regard to religion or nationality. The first group, those initiated by foreigners to provide for their own ethnic communities, is a worthy topic but falls outside the purview of the present paper.<sup>46</sup> For now, suffice it to say that those immigrant communities with long-standing migration patterns to France, notably Italians, had the most well-developed assistance structures that families could turn to.<sup>47</sup> As for the second group, Emily Machen has recently written on Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish charitable initiatives underwritten by middle-class Frenchwomen looking to provide for the moral, material, and spiritual welfare of migrating women.<sup>48</sup> The rest of this paper shall therefore concentrate on the last group of initiatives, those led by French philanthropists without regard to confessional or national distinction. It focuses on two organizations: the Foyer Français, an early immigrant aid society, and the League for the Protection of Abandoned Mothers, a maternalist organization that served all women in France. Through an exploration of both these organizations, I will elaborate on the circumstances that pushed foreign families and women to seek out assistance; demonstrate how they used these organizations to their material advantage; and finally, without disregarding the populationist politics that inspired them, show how such associations made a real and positive difference in the lives of foreigners in Paris.

Founded in February 1924 by radical leftist Paul Painlevé, the Foyer Français<sup>49</sup> boasted an executive board featuring some of the period’s most ardent pronatalists, among whom were Roger Olchanski, Paul Raphael, and the indefatigable André Honnorat, co-founder and president

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<sup>45</sup> From André Honnorat’s opening remarks in Foyer Français (hereafter FF), *Compte rendu*, 1926, 11, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>46</sup> An entire chapter, entitled “International Institutions, Works in Favor of Foreigners, and Foreign Associations,” provides a detailed list of all charitable societies of the capital in the 1936 edition of *PCBS*, chap. 10.

<sup>47</sup> On Italian aid networks in Paris, see *Les italiens en France de 1914 à 1940* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, Palais Farnèse, 1986), 407–430, 515–518.

<sup>48</sup> Emily Machen, “Traveling with the Faith: The Creation of Women’s Immigrant Aid Associations in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century France,” *Journal of Women’s History* 23, no. 3 (2011): 89–112.

<sup>49</sup> Its full title was Foyer français: Association for the settlement and instruction of Foreigners residing in France.

of the *Alliance pour l'accroissement de la population française*.<sup>50</sup> Its stated goals were to ease the assimilation process of foreigners by advocating on their behalf in their dealings with the French state, particularly in the filing of naturalization requests, and by providing free French language classes. Although it was dissolved a mere 11 years later,<sup>51</sup> the Foyer Français was extremely active for the decade or so that it was in operation, functioning, in theory, as an early immigrant aid society. In practice, of course, it was an advocate network that sought to “*franciser*,” or make French, those foreigners considered most useful and desirable: that is, large families and young foreign men on the verge of both military service and marriage with French women.

Honorat often framed the Foyer’s mission in pronatalist terms. In 1926, he explained to members the work that lay ahead of them: “You all know that among the problems that exist in France, the most grave is that of population: on the one hand we have, for extremely unfortunate reasons, too few children, thus too few Frenchmen, and, on the other hand, because many foreigners came to replace our dead and unborn, they came precipitously and they will have trouble assimilating if the Foyer Français does not help them.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, the Foyer Français had two objects: to combat French demographic decline and to alleviate the difficulties of assimilation experienced by foreigners. And there was no reason that both could not be resolved at once – for example, through the naturalization of large families. As Honorat himself pronounced in his opening remarks at the members’ first meeting in 1925, “They are whole families who disembark at the frontiers and head towards the large city centers, and it is these families that we must make French [*franciser*].”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, in regard to their naturalization services, Secretary General René Lisbon once boasted, “We have the satisfaction of dealing with families with 10 or more children: these are notably Italians, Turks, and Poles; often we have families of 6, [but] families of 3 are rare.” He added too, “We concern ourselves frequently with

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<sup>50</sup> Roger-Angel Olchanski was an industrialist who used his small fortune to finance not only the Foyer Français, but other philanthropic ventures such as the Rothschild Foundation. Paul Raphael belonged to a prosperous Jewish banking family. A radical-socialist, Raphael had little success in his senatorial campaigns, though he was twice elected municipal councilor, first in Frénonville then in Bourgébus (both in Calvados). Raphael was also an active member of the Ligue Française d’Enseignement. Both Olchanski and Raphael were close friends. (Jean Charles Bonnet, *Les Pouvoirs publics français et l’immigration dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Lyon: Centre d’histoire économique et sociale de la région lyonnaise, 1976), 77–78.)

<sup>51</sup> The Foyer français was formally liquidated in 1935. (Anonymous letter to René Lisbonne, 26 February 1936, in AN, 50 AP 62.)

<sup>52</sup> André Honorat, *Compte-rendu*, 1926, 11 in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>53</sup> FF, *Compte rendu* 1925, 11, in AN, 50 AP 62.

single men who impatiently await their naturalization to be able to contract marriage with a young French girl.”<sup>54</sup> Essentially, the Foyer Français and its members were populationists who showed a very clear preference for large foreign families and the family-minded.

Not only did Foyer members demystify the rather impenetrable naturalization process, helping foreigners to compile dossiers and complete forms, but the organization even subsidized, in whole or in part, the fees associated with the naturalization itself. In the early days of their operations, they attended to nearly 160 naturalization dossiers per week so that by January 1926, they had prepared 1,307 dossiers representing 5,712 foreign men, women, and children.<sup>55</sup> It helped, too, that they held the ear of bureaucrats in high places. The organization guaranteed that any naturalization dossier assembled by them and submitted to the Minister of Justice and the Paris Police Prefect would be “studied with great interest and resolved as soon as possible.”<sup>56</sup> In 1926, realizing the great boon the Foyer represented, officials at the Ministry of Justice even began referring foreigners loitering about its headquarters at the Place Vendôme to one of several Foyer Français offices in the capital.<sup>57</sup>

To get the word out, Foyer Français members engaged in active, even aggressive, campaigns of self-publicity. From the start, the organization took great pains to, as one member put it, “seek out foreigners among themselves [*chez eux*].” Olchansky elaborated, “We have, for every nationality, councilors who know in which quarter of Paris the Italians dominate, in what other quarter the Armenians, etc.” Indeed, advertisements for language classes presented a promising pedagogical opportunity in and of themselves. Olchansky described, “We have drafted leaflets in the respective languages of these foreigners, taking care to print just opposite the French translation, so as to allow them the opportunity to translate the leaflet themselves; they see thusly which word of their own language corresponds to which French word.” But this was only the beginning. Foyer members went to foreign religious leaders in Paris; they publicized themselves in the foreign-language press; they posted advertisements in the cafés and bars that foreigners were known to frequent; they distributed pamphlets outside of synagogues patronized

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<sup>54</sup> M. René Lisbonne, “Le Foyer français en 1925,” *Compte rendu*, 1926,15, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>55</sup> FF, *Compte rendu* 1925, 14; FF, *Compte rendu*, 1926, 14, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>56</sup> FF, *Compte rendu*, 1925, 13, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>57</sup> FF, *Compte rendu*, 1926, 13-14, in AN, 50 AP 62.

by Polish immigrants on religious holidays – all in an effort to advertise their organization to a broad spectrum of immigrant communities.<sup>58</sup>

In keeping with principles of rationalized labor, Foyer members divided themselves into nationality-specific “sections,” teams that were geared toward outreach among specific communities, whether Russian, Polish, Romanian, or other Eastern European “Israelites.”<sup>59</sup> In 1926 the association even requested and was granted approval from the Prefecture of the Seine to put up posters advertising its free services in all 20 *mairies*, or town halls, of Paris.<sup>60</sup> The Garde de Sceau, seeing in the fledgling organization an opportunity to lighten his load, wrote to the Prefect of the Seine, “[The Foyer Français] renders precious services, avoiding, most of the time, the Bureau de Sceau, so encumbered with affairs at the present, in giving necessary information to those interested.”<sup>61</sup> The Foyer Français, in other words, acted in concert with, and with the tremendous support of, those in power to aggrandize the French nation one foreign *famille nombreuse* at a time.

And there is evidence that they were successful in their endeavors, both in getting their name out and in advocating on behalf of immigrants. In the working-class quarters of the 11<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, the Foyer Français established an office they called, rather optimistically, an “assimilation center.”<sup>62</sup> Immigrant families in the neighborhood were aware of its services and sought recourse there when displeased with the sluggish ministerial response to their naturalization requests.<sup>63</sup> In 1927, Bassi T., a Russian housewife and mother of 6 went to the Foyer Français to follow up on her application, which she had submitted on behalf of her husband and herself over 2 years ago. Unsurprisingly, it was her dire economic circumstances that moved her to act after the long years of ministerial silence. She explained in a letter to the Minister of Justice that her husband could no longer work, having succumbed to a work accident that left him blind and unable to work for the last 4 years.<sup>64</sup> This left only her eldest son, Simon,

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<sup>58</sup> “Foyer Français, procès verbal de la reunion du samedi 5 décembre 1925,” in AN, 50 AP 62; Paul Raphael, “L’Enseignement et la propagande,” *Compte rendu*, 1926, 28, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>59</sup> Ch. Neide, “Le Foyer Français,” *La Nouvelle Aurore* 3, no. 15 (15 December 1924): 4.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, 1 April 1926 from Prefect of the Seine to mayors of the 20 arrondissements of Paris, in Archives de Paris (hereafter AdP), D3M9/8.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, 11 March 1926, Garde des Sceaux to Prefect of the Seine, in AdP, D3M9/8.

<sup>62</sup> By 1928, there were 3 such assimilation centers in Paris. (Paul Raphael, “L’Enseignement,” *Compte rendu*, 1929, 23, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, Léon and Luna L., 32329x27; Joseph and Nelly A., 16509x14; Isaac and Bassi T., 41812x14; and Froïm and Clara V., 8741x25 (all AN).

<sup>64</sup> Demande de Nat, 24 June 1926 in Bassi T. née M., 41812x14 (AN).

as the sole financial provider for the family and he was away completing military service. Simon could not be liberated from his military obligations until he could present “a paper proving that we have become French.” She ends her letter, “Since my son’s absence, which is to say for the last year, I can hardly manage to feed my small family, finding myself in very great need, and I assure you, Monsieur le Ministre, that you would do me a great service if you could help me in these punishing circumstances.”<sup>65</sup> The Foyer Français successfully intervened on Bassi’s behalf and she and her family were naturalized just three weeks later. Undoubtedly, her “small family” of 8 motivated, at least in part, the Foyer’s speedy efforts.

While the aid and preparation of naturalization requests for large families and family-minded foreigners was the Foyer’s primary goal, the provision of free French language courses came a close second. Since 1924, the organization provided courses at 6 schools in and around Paris.<sup>66</sup> Classes met 2 to 3 times per week in the evenings for a total of 8 to 10 hours a week. They were divided along national lines and taught by volunteer teachers, the lower levels by the most advanced students themselves or else naturalized foreigners and the higher levels by a teacher who did not speak the same language as the students.<sup>67</sup> In 1925 they counted only 250 students,<sup>68</sup> but by 1926 they had 801 enrolled students in Paris alone, and over 1600 throughout France. Most of their Parisian students were of Russian, Polish, Romanian, Armenian, Hungarian, Czech, and Greek origin.<sup>69</sup> By 1927 they expanded their services into 3 more schools in Paris so that by 1928, they could claim 1,084 enrolled students in the capital.<sup>70</sup>

Classes were held at public schools in Paris. Besides already being equipped with the necessary pedagogical accoutrements (ie: desks and chalkboards), classes held at public schools

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Bassi T. to Minister of Justice, 6 April 1927 in *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> There were located: 2 rue Fernand-Berthoud in the 3<sup>rd</sup> arrondissement; 23 rue Cujas in the 5<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; 23 Ave de St-Ouen in the 17<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; 43 rue des Poissoniers in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; 51 rue Ramponneau in the 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; and in Boulogne-Bilancourt. Additionally, they offered courses in areas of rural France with a large foreign presence: in the Nord and Pas-du-Calais for Polish miners, as well as Lyon, Reims, Marseille, and Decazzeville in the Aveyron region. (FF, *Compte rendu*, 1925, 15-16, AN, 50 AP 62.)

<sup>67</sup> While the former constituted a “special professoriate” close to the student who “understood their psychology,” the latter were meant to remain apart, “Because we figure that in order to educate them completely it is necessary to, as they say: ‘take the plunge [*les jeter à l’eau*].” Paul Raphael, “Foyer Français, procès verbal de la reunion du samedi 5 décembre 1925,” 4, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>68</sup> FF, *Compte rendu*, 1925, 15-16, AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>69</sup> Despite the large number of Italians in the capital, they were not well-represented in these language classes. Paul Raphael, Secretary-General in 1925-6, opined, “The linguistic similarities between French and Italian hinder their attendance of our classes.” (FF, *Compte rendu*, 1926, 24-26, AN, 50 AP 62.)

<sup>70</sup> Jane Misme, “Augmentons le nombre des Bons Français,” *Minerva* 3, no. 120 (27 November 1927): 3; Paul Raphael, “L’Enseignement,” *Compte rendu*, 1929, 23.

yielded other unforeseen benefits in the quest to make as many immigrants French as possible. Foyer representatives found themselves “in close contact with the school directors and teachers who then familiarized themselves with our policy relative to naturalization.” Foyer members were shocked to find that, “Many of them were ignorant of the disposition permitting foreign parents, by simple declaration before a judge of the peace, to renounce in the name of their French-born children the right to opt, at the age of adult, for their country of origin.” This was a reference to the practice of French naturalization by declaration, whereby parents guaranteed that their children born on French soil could not reclaim his or her foreign nationality at the age of 21. By informing foreign parents and applying a subtle pressure, French public school teachers could join the ranks of the Foyer Français army, fighting “to enrich this country with intelligent and industrious future citizens,” one child at a time.<sup>71</sup>

French language classes also promoted the Foyer Français’ familialist politics in another way. Members often waxed philosophic on the indispensability of the French language in assuring harmony and promoting friendship between French and foreign, thrown suddenly together in the same neighborhoods of Paris. In an interview published in a Jewish newspaper, Olchansky contended that learning French “removes between them and the inhabitants of France all the barriers that separate them.”<sup>72</sup> Besides greasing the harmonic wheels of neighborhood life, speaking French opened immigrants up to a world of romantic opportunity. As Raphael put it, through language instruction, foreigners increased their opportunities “to frequent our compatriots” and, “in orienting the instruction of single foreign men in this direction, we provide them access to French families.”<sup>73</sup> That is, foreign men who spoke French could woo in French and wooing Frenchwomen begat evermore French families, or so the logic went.

Although there was much ado made about single foreign men, the Foyer Français did reach out specifically to foreign women in at least one known campaign. In April 1925, Madame Justin Mayer spearheaded and organized an Assistance Committee that worked in conjunction with Paris Public Assistance. This Committee was composed of female social workers and supervisors borrowed from Public Assistance as well as foreign female students who served as interpreters. Together, they paid regular visits to the maternities in Paris where they endeavored to convince pregnant foreigners “that they can and should make their children French, by simply

<sup>71</sup> Paul Raphael, “L’Enseignement et la propagande,” *Compte rendu*, 1926, 27-28, AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>72</sup> Ch. Neide, “Le Foyer Français,” 4.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Raphael, “L’Enseignement et la propagande,” *Compte rendu*, 1926, 27, in AN, 50 AP 62.

signing before a Justice of the Peace from their neighborhood a renunciation in their children's name, to decline French nationality in the future." In 1926, these "*equipes de femmes*," or women's teams, as they called themselves, expanded the scope of their operations to the private maternities in Paris. Their first year, they credited themselves for assuring the French nationality of 90 children born on French soil of foreign parents and initiating at least 15 naturalization requests through their solicitous engagement with foreign women.<sup>74</sup>

While the existence of women's teams is intriguing in itself, it is all the more fascinating that middle-class French philanthropists and social workers would seek out foreign women in, of all places, maternities. Firstly, it serves as a reminder of the Foyer Français' populationist politics. While women's teams may have targeted foreign women, it was their French-born children that they sought to irrevocably *franciser* by declaration. Secondly, rather than seek foreign women out in their homes, neighborhoods, or workplaces, the Foyer's *equipes* preferred rather to look in maternities where foreign women would undoubtedly be unburdened by the presence of others – family, friends, co-workers, neighbors. In fact, recovering from recent childbirth at a hospital maternity was probably one of the few times that foreign women were separate from their familiar attachments. Perhaps recognizing this fact, Foyer members believed they could be more easily persuaded – or manipulated – into submitting the necessary forms for the naturalization of their newborns. Finally, the choice of locale implies that Foyer members looked upon foreign women as prolific, reproductive agents, likely to be discovered in a maternal institution.<sup>75</sup> As we will now see, foreign mothers *were* a fast-growing population in the capital and they were fast becoming visible in the maternalist aid networks that shot through Paris.

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<sup>74</sup> René Lisbonne, "Remarques," *Compte rendu*, 1925, 16; *ibid.*, "Le Foyer français en 1925," *Compte rendu*, 1926, 19-20, in AN, 50 AP 62.

<sup>75</sup> The notion of immigrant women as particularly fertile females accords with prevailing discourses on foreign women in France produced by Third Republican men. See Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), chap. 1.

“En aidant la mère abandonnée, c’est à l’enfant que vous permettez de voir le jour”: Foreign Women and Maternalist Organizations<sup>76</sup>

As in Great Britain, Germany, and the United States, middle-class Frenchwomen were the first to identify the needs of women and children as worthy of social welfare initiatives.<sup>77</sup> They set themselves to the elaboration of those welfare programs, developing over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century an overlapping web of maternal aid societies throughout France. These private charitable organizations did indeed improve poor mothers’ lives, though as part of a wider effort to lower infant mortality and increase birthrates.<sup>78</sup> The League for the Protection of Abandoned Mothers belongs to this maternalist genealogy. Founded the same year as the Foyer Français, in 1925, the League was the brainchild of Germaine Besnard de Queslen. Unlike the Foyer Français, however, it enjoyed over 50 years of uninterrupted activity before being dissolved in 1978.

The League first opened its doors in a tiny “barrack” along 2 boulevard des Lannes on the far western outskirts of the city at the edge of the bourgeois 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. By 1928, it had moved to a more central location, 154 rue du faubourg Saint Honoré along Place Philippe du Roule in the 8<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, rendering it more accessible to the working women it served.<sup>79</sup> Officially, the League had three defined goals: to provide immediate aid to all pregnant women and new mothers, regardless of nationality or religion; to help these women find jobs that would allow them to keep and provide for their children; and to undertake the guardianship of abandoned children. Not long afterwards, the League expanded its range of activities to include an adoption section and a service to place children with wet-nurses in the provinces.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> League for the Protection of Abandoned Mothers (hereafter LPAM), “Première Assemblée générale sous la présidence de M. DURAFour, Ministre de Travail de l’Hygiène et de la Prévoyance sociales, Représenté par M. Wenceslas HUET, Attaché au Cabinet au Ministre,” *Compte rendu*, 1926, 6 in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>77</sup> Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, “Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920,” *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1990): 1076-1108; Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, *Associations féminines et Catholicisme XIXe - XXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1990); Evelyne Diebolt, “Les femmes engagées dans le monde associatif et la naissance de l’Etat providence,” *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 53, no. 1 (1999): 13-26; Evelyne Diebolt, *Les femmes dans l’action sanitaire, sociale et culturelle, 1901-2001: les associations face aux institutions* (Paris: Femmes et associations, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Rachel Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant*, chap. 3.

<sup>79</sup> LPAM, *Compte rendu*, 1926, 8. There was also a bus stop just in front of the door and a metro stop “just nearby [tout proche].” (LPAM, *Compte rendu*, 1930, 32, in AdP, D84Z/228.)

<sup>80</sup> On 8 June 1945 Public Assistance formally withdrew the League’s mandate to serve as an intermediary for adoption services.

Like the Foyer Français, the League was unabashedly pronatalist in its ambitions and enjoyed the support of those in power of a similar mind. At the first meeting in 1926, Wenceslas Huet, a representative from the Ministry of Labor, commended League volunteers on “coming together and working to remedy the most distressing crisis that exists for the future of a country such as our own: that of natality.”<sup>81</sup> And this was indeed the vision of its founder, Besnard de Quelen, who rallied her volunteers with the following maternalist battle cry: “Let us do everything possible, to help the mothers, so that the children will not be abandoned. Let us help [mothers] during pregnancy, let us help them during childbirth. Let us protect the child even at his mother’s breast, just as we will protect him, afterwards, so that he can grow up and become a man.”<sup>82</sup> But mothers were more than simply vehicles by which the French nation would enrich itself with new citizens. They were deserving of assistance in their own right. Quelen reasoned, “We no longer want a mother, in this epoch, to wander the streets, to sleep on the sidewalks, with a tiny babe in her arms, or for a young girl [to be] terrified by what she considers a catastrophe, all because no one is there to help her...” In lending succor to new mothers, it was true that the League would thwart a more formidable opponent, “the decline in birthrates”,<sup>83</sup> but the League was also driven by an imperative to improve women’s lives and foreign women numbered among its foremost beneficiaries.

The wide-ranging assistance offered made the League a very popular destination for poor French and foreign women during the interwar years. By 1930, the League’s secretary declared that the League was in the throes of “such rapid development,” its numbers swelling with “unfortunate creatures” arriving daily “from Paris, from every corner of the provinces, and even from abroad ... worn out by material and moral suffering.”<sup>84</sup> From the moment it first opened its doors in 1925 until 1935, the League had already assisted as many as 12,781 women in Paris – both French and foreign. Of the 8,800 whose nationality was recorded, 822 were foreign-born women. Aside from the first year of its operations (1925) when foreign women represented nearly 14 percent of the League’s clientele, the greatest numbers of immigrant women patronized

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<sup>81</sup> Wenceslas Huet, “Première Assemblée générale sous la présidence de M. Durafour, Ministre de Travail de l’Hygiène et de la Prévoyance sociales, Représenté par M. Wenceslas Huet, Attaché au Cabinet au Ministre, *Compte rendu*, 1926, 5 in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>82</sup> G. Besnard de Quelen, “Compte rendu moral de l’Exercice 1929,” *Compte rendu*, 1929, 18 in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>83</sup> G. Besnard de Quelen, *Compte rendu*, 1926, 9 in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>84</sup> LPMA, *Compte rendu*, 1930, 32, in AdP, D84Z/228.

the League in 1933 and 1934.<sup>85</sup> Why these years in particular? First of all, these years roughly correspond to foreigners' highest concentration in the capital. The foreign population of Paris reached an all-time high in 1926, accounting for 10.34 percent of the city's total inhabitants, and only dipped slightly in 1931 to 9.8 percent.<sup>86</sup> Secondly, and as the first part of this paper argued, the French state was pulling away from foreigners by the 1930s, forcing them to turn to charitable organizations, like the League, for assistance. These years, which coincide with the deepening of the Depression, reflect the growing need of foreign families, and especially foreign women, in the capital.

In general, my findings correspond with the League's own statistics on the foreign women most served.<sup>87</sup> According to League records, between 1925 and 1935, they had assisted 191 Poles, 83 Belgians, 82 Italians, 74 Swiss, 46 Algerians, 45 Russians, 35 Romanians, and 35 Spaniards, among others. In my own analysis, these were more or less the nationalities most represented.<sup>88</sup> What is striking immediately about those figures is the large number of Polish women assisted by the League as compared to all other foreign women. Polish women accounted for more than twice as many Italian or Belgian women, the next largest groups of foreign women patronizing the League. The image of the poor, struggling Polish mother must have been so commonplace to League volunteers that she soon featured in the lightly-fictionalized accounts of "*pauvres mères*" come to find solace at League headquarters. In this rendering, she was described as "a large, ruddy red-headed girl" who "spoke French with some difficulty." Come to Paris on her own to make her way as a domestic servant, she was soon led astray by a compatriot who seduced her with promises of marriage. Trusting his honeyed words, she quit her job, took up with him, then proceeded to give birth to one child after another. Pregnant once more, she awoke one day to find herself in the following circumstances: "The father, weary of the rapid

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<sup>85</sup> During these years, they accounted for 10.1 percent and 9.3 percent of women assisted by the League, respectively.

<sup>86</sup> "Ville de Paris. Recensement de 1926," *Annuaire Statistique de la Ville de Paris* (1927), 296; "Recensement de la Population de 1931," *Annuaire Statistique de la Ville de Paris* (1932), 139-142.

<sup>87</sup> The following data is derived from a sample of 440 foreign women who patronized the League on a randomly-generated list of dates between 1 February 1925, when the League first opened its doors, and 10 May 1940, the beginning of the Occupation.

<sup>88</sup> The precise breakdown is as follows: 1 African, 2 Algerians, 17 Germans, 1 American, 3 South Americans, 3 Englishwomen, 10 Armenian women (and 1 Armenian man), 7 Austrians, 40 Belgians (and 1 Belgian man), 3 Bulgarians, 1 Danish, 24 Spaniards, 1 Estonian, 8 Greeks, 1 Guadeloupian, 1 Haitian, 1 Dutch, 11 Hungarians, 55 Italians, 2 Lithuanians, 4 Luxembourgers, 3 Martiniquan, 125 Polish women, 4 Portuguese, 16 Romanians, 25 Russians (and 1 Russian man), 1 Serbian, 28 Swiss, 1 Syrian, 18 Czechs, 1 Tunisian, 12 Turks, 3 Yugoslavs, and 3 not indicated but foreign-born.

and incessant pregnancies, tired of these mouths to feed and the cries, the tears [that] exasperate him when he returns home exhausted from his punishing work as a mason, leaves her.”

According to this tale, for some 6 weeks she wandered throughout Paris with her children at her side, living off the charity of strangers until she at last learned of the League.<sup>89</sup> Though this dramatized account may have exaggerated certain details, many elements actually ring rather true.

To begin with, like the Polish unfortunate in this tale, foreign women were concentrated in “*les travaux féminins*,” or the female-dominated sectors of the French economy: domestic service, needlework and the confection trades, as well as factory work in the expanding manufacturing sector. These trades had long been the province of young women arriving new to the capital, whether from the countryside or, as in this study, from further afield.<sup>90</sup> These were also traditionally the least remunerative professions; foreign women in this sample made an average wage of just 20frs50 per day. Although they ranged in age between 11 and 68 years old, foreign protégées were about 29 years old with 1 or 2 children at their side when they arrived on League doorsteps. More than a fifth arrived pregnant, like *la Polonaise*. Unsurprisingly, they tended to live in either the poor outlying regions of the Parisian *banlieue* or else the working-class districts of northern and eastern Paris – that is, in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissements. A significant number could also be found in the 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, where they worked as live-in domestic servants for bourgeois families. Although the length of sojourn in France was only recorded for 23 foreign women, those few had been in the metropole for nearly 8 years. The length of time spent in Paris was recorded for almost half of foreign women and, on average, they had lived in Paris for slightly over 6 years when they came to the League. Then again, a handful showed up at the League having only arrived in Paris the day before or even that very morning.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> LPMA, *Compte rendu*, 1930, 33-34, in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>90</sup> Louise Tilly, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 116, 123, 155–156; Abel Chatelain, “Migrations et domesticité féminine urbaine en France (XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle- XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle),” *Revue d’histoire économique et sociale* 47, no. 4 (1969): 506-528; Rachel G. Fuchs and Leslie Page Moch, “Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home: Migrant Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1, 1990): 1007-1031; Nancy Green, *Ready-to-wear and ready-to-work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>91</sup> Yvonne L., folio 5313, carton D84Z/149 (AdP); Mme Dallot, folio 6558, carton D84Z/150 (AdP); Simone L., folio 8671, carton D84Z/153; Géliidia F., folio 11886, carton D84Z/156 (AdP); and Alexandre W., folio 13330, carton D84Z/157 (AdP).

The marital status of these women was not always recorded, but judging by the personal accounts they related to League volunteers, most of them lived in some sort of domestic arrangement for a time with their partner that was suddenly ruptured, as in the tale of *la Polonoise*. In the parlance of the period, it was called living “*en concubinage*” or “*maritalement*,” meaning as man and wife in the same household. In this sense, foreign women were similar to their French neighbors, for, since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was not unusual for working-class couples to live together for years without marrying.<sup>92</sup> The amount of time spent together, of course, was a function of each individual relationship just as the reason for rupture varied from one couple to the next. Marguerite S., a 25-year old Swiss maid who worked in the 17<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, only lived with the father of her newborn a few months before he left without explanation.<sup>93</sup> In contrast, Irène A., a 20-year old, Greek factory worker living in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, lived with her partner, a Greek tailor, for 5 years before he took up with another woman and threw her out with their son. According to Irène, she was treated “like a slave in the house,” a phrase which serves to remind that, while these accounts are moving and poignant in their own right, they are also narrative strategies used by immigrant women to get what they wanted from League volunteers inclined to help the victimized.<sup>94</sup> While they could formulate their personal histories as classic tales of seduction, broken marriage promises, abuse, and abandonment, these were not the only truths.<sup>95</sup>

Although they were termed “abandoned mothers,” the reality was less straightforward and, in some cases, they could hardly be called abandoned at all. The classic scenario is of course one in which foreign women sought to flee physically abusive relationships, and there were many such stories.<sup>96</sup> But some foreign women came to the League because their household

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<sup>92</sup> Arlette Farge, *La Vie Fragile: Violences, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1992), pt. 1; Rachel Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant*, chap. 1; Eliza Earle Ferguson, *Gender and Justice: Violence, Intimacy and Community in fin-de siècle Paris* (JHU Press, 2010), chap. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Marguerite S., folio 12965, carton D84Z/157 (AdP).

<sup>94</sup> Irène A., folio 8129, carton D84Z/152 (AdP). For more on rhetorical strategies of self-fashioning, see also Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Didier Fassin, “La supplique. Stratégies rhétoriques et constructions identitaires dans les demandes d’aide d’urgence,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 55, no. 5 (2000): 955-981.

<sup>95</sup> In her study of courtship rituals among the popular classes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as recorded at local commissariats, Arlette Farge had access to both men’s and women’s narratives, which allowed her to claim that the truth of most stories of love gone awry was something in between “seduction and the hope of marriage.” See Farge, *La Vie Fragile*, 37–54.

<sup>96</sup> For examples see: Antoinette L., folio 2417, carton D84Z/146 (AdP); Augusta S., folio 2688, carton D84Z/147; Ada D., folio 5442, carton D84Z/149; Paulette B., folio 13777, carton D84Z/157; Sura M., folio 13670, carton D84Z/157 (AdP).

simply could not survive on the male breadwinner's meager salary. In these instances, foreign women sought help in finding sufficiently remunerative jobs to buttress the household economy. In this, male partners were portrayed in both positive and negative lights, sometimes simultaneously. For instance, Zelinda D., a 22-year old Italian typist confessed that the father of her twins was "not a bad man, only that he makes too little [and] she has also to provide for her mother."<sup>97</sup> Then there was Françoise E., a 42-year old Greek factory worker, who complained to League members that not only did her husband work too little, but he refused to provide her with enough money to keep the household running properly.<sup>98</sup> Contrary to the image of victimized wives and mothers, it was sometimes these women themselves who made the decision to quit the household, again because of their partners' inability to financially support the family.<sup>99</sup> In 1938, Friedel S., a 25-year old Polish worker living in the 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, explained that although she was "not completely abandoned by her partner [*ami*], both of them are out of work and she prefers to live by herself."<sup>100</sup> The desire to strike out alone was probably more than a little informed by a yearning for one less mouth to feed. While these ruminations permit us to see these women as more than mere victims of circumstance, they also demonstrate that very real financial concerns informed foreigners' decisions to enter into and rupture domestic arrangements.<sup>101</sup>

Economic fragility, limited familial support, unstable domestic arrangements – these were the circumstances that framed the lives of foreign workingwomen in Paris and it was these circumstances that pushed them to seek out assistance. As the tale of *la Polonaise* demonstrated, foreign women often did appear on the doorsteps of the League in a pitiable state. They came hungry, impoverished, in need of medical assistance, and frequently laid low by a streak of bad health that left them no longer able to financially support their children. Upon entering League offices, women were promised basic and immediate material assistance: clothing, food, drink, even money in exceptional cases. The League also procured jobs for their protégées – waged work that would allow mother and child to remain together. Ideal occupations for unskilled, foreign women were, as before, domestic service, particularly for bourgeois families living in

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<sup>97</sup> Zelinda D., folio 1699, carton D84Z/146 (AdP).

<sup>98</sup> Françoise E., folio 1163, D84Z/145 (AdP).

<sup>99</sup> For example, Flore T., folio 2393, carton D84Z/146 (AdP), Maria D., folio 10590, carton D84Z/155 (AdP), and Julie S., folio 13757, D84Z/157 (AdP).

<sup>100</sup> Friedel S., folio 15322, carton D84Z/159 (AdP).

<sup>101</sup> Ferguson, *Gender and Justice*, chap. 1.

large homes where mother and child could likewise be housed. But other jobs, as nursery maids, cooks, or laundresses, were also common. This was in line with the League's overarching goal to permit struggling mothers without economic resources to retain guardianship of their children without having to send them away.

If, despite their best efforts, women did have to send their children away, the League provided a list of 180 wet-nurses who were regularly inspected by their own team of *dames visiteuses*.<sup>102</sup> In such cases, foreign women frequently requested that their children be placed near enough for them to still visit often. League ladies recorded with frustration the difficulty they encountered trying to convince foreign women of the wisdom of sending children away to the provinces. They remarked that, even when it was no longer economically viable for foreign mothers to keep them, many adamantly refused to surrender their children.<sup>103</sup> All this leads one to wonder whether a sort of cultural barrier was at play. After all, many of these foreign women did not hail from a culture where sending children away from the family was a common practice and even if they were familiar with the idea, they could have other reservations. Szajndla N., a 24-year old Polish vest-maker living in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, tended to a son in delicate health. She explained to a League volunteer, "She cannot work because she fears that her baby will be ill-cared for at the neighborhood nursery [*crèche*]." <sup>104</sup> Hélène G. had similar concerns after she underwent an appendectomy. During the operation, she left her baby at a maternity where he lost 3 kilos. Although suffering further medical complications, Hélène refused to undergo follow-up surgery until she knew her child would be adequately cared for in League facilities. It would appear, then, that some foreign women may have doubted the ability of French institutions to assure the welfare of their children. It is possible, too, that cultural misgivings about being separated from children were intensified by a mistrust of specifically *French* infant care-giving institutions.

Another popular service was the juridical consult. Every Monday, a lawyer came to the League to help women track down errant fathers. Foreign women, too, availed themselves of this service, enlisting the aid of League members and lawyers in their *recherches de paternité* or

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<sup>102</sup> LPMA, *Compte rendu*, 1929, 19-20, in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>103</sup> For examples see: Rebecca R., folio 1001, carton D84Z/145; Tradja W., folio 2358, carton D84Z/146; Maria J., folio 12282, carton D84Z/156 (AdP).

<sup>104</sup> Szajndla N., folio 15837, carton D84Z/159 (AdP).

*abandons de famille*.<sup>105</sup> While some may have hoped to hunt down wayward lovers in the hopes of extracting marriage concessions, most used this legal tool to enable them to demand child support.<sup>106</sup> Some foreign women also sought guidance in procuring divorces from husbands with whom they had come to France, but from whom they now sought to separate.<sup>107</sup> This was the case for Mme Osnandi, a 19-year old Italian paper factory worker and mother of 2, who entered the League in 1931. According to Italian law, she could not initiate divorce proceedings so she came to the League's juridical consult in the hope of a solution.<sup>108</sup> The League also used juridical consultations in one very particular way in relation to foreign women and their children: to begin naturalization proceedings. In the first year of the League's operation, the juridical consult saw to the successful naturalization of 10 foreign children.<sup>109</sup> Though a modest start, naturalization became an increasingly popular tool for League volunteers in their dealings with foreign women and families.

Though rarely clear on whose initiative naturalization was undertaken, there is reason to believe that League volunteers played a decisive role. Given the expanded scope for material benefit that French citizenship entailed, as previously argued, it is probable that foreigners looked favorably upon the idea of naturalization, though perhaps only at the gentle urging of a League volunteer. In 1929 a 40-year Russian, André M., came to the League on behalf of his wife who had just given birth to their 7<sup>th</sup> child. Unsurprisingly, he came expressly to find out how to obtain a family allowance. The League informed him that, being Russian, he was not eligible for this pension, then advised him that naturalization would be a sure means of securing it.<sup>110</sup> On some occasions League volunteers did more than merely bring up the idea of naturalization. In 1932, Nathalie A., a 28-year old Russian seamstress came to the League for help in sending her sick infant to a children's convalescence home that only accepted French children. Rather than find another institution, the League telephoned the offices of the *Oeuvre de*

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<sup>105</sup> For more on these two legal actions, see Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, *Contested Paternity: Constructing Families in Modern France* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), chap. 4.

<sup>106</sup> For instance, Rebecca G., folio 958, carton D84Z/145; Natacha K., folio 9733, carton D84Z/154; Herta S., folio 12948, D84Z/157; Sarah G., folio 14897, D84Z/158 (AdP).

<sup>107</sup> See the following examples: Françoise E., folio 1163, carton D84Z/145; Leiba H., folio 2771, carton D84Z/147; Lisette A., folio 4274, carton D84Z/148; Marcelle L., folio 5125, carton D84Z/149; Marguerite L., folio 9251, carton D84Z/153; Gabrielle B., folio 13238, carton D84Z/157 (AdP).

<sup>108</sup> Mme Osnandi, folio 5678, D84Z/149 (AdP).

<sup>109</sup> G. Besnard de Quelen, "Rapport Moral exposé par Mme Besnard de Quelen, Présidente-Fondatrice," *Compte rendu*, 1926, 9, in AdP, D84Z/228.

<sup>110</sup> André M., folio 3166, D84Z/147 (AdP).

*l'Enfance* to advance her the 90 francs necessary for the child's naturalization and he was soon on his way.<sup>111</sup> While League volunteers may not always have been so proactive, naturalization was certainly a measure they advocated and facilitated.<sup>112</sup> However, if it is true that, like the Foyer Français, the League underwrote the naturalization of foreign families and children in the spirit of populationism, the League was also motivated by a genuine desire to provide relief to foreign mothers and their children. This maternalist mandate led them to petition on behalf of mothers, regardless of national or ethnic background, in their effort to secure financial assistance from the French state. Often, this mission placed them squarely at the center of foreign women's struggles with French officials.

As we have already seen, Italian, Polish, and Belgian women usually encountered the least resistance in their dealings with the French state. While many were well-served by Public Assistance, their nationality was not always enough to ensure favorable treatment, even in the years preceding economic crisis. In 1927, this was the problem Maria F. faced. Maria was a 20-year old Polish domestic servant living in the 3<sup>rd</sup> arrondissement who learned of the League via another protégée. Upon leaving the hospital with her newborn daughter Hélène, a League member noted, "She finds herself refused Public Assistance aid because she is Polish and does not know what to do now." The League recommended her to a convalescence home and meanwhile busied itself with procuring Maria's aid.<sup>113</sup> But if this was the case for protected nationals in the 1920s, the going was less easy for unprotected foreigners in the intransigent 1930s. In 1934, Anna B., a 41-year old Russian housemaid living in the 11<sup>th</sup> arrondissement first came to the League for advice on which sanitarium to send her sick children. In the ensuing years, she returned for clothing, meals, and medical consultations as well as the placement of her 3 children with wet-nurses. In 1937, after undergoing surgery at the Saint Antoine Hospital, she found herself unable to work. Though receiving 80 francs a month in unemployment from her local welfare bureau, she was denied a family allowance on the basis of her Russian nationality. To add to her problems, her foreign work papers had expired. In both matters, the League intervened, procuring her a family allowance from Public Assistance and renewing her foreign

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<sup>111</sup> Nathalie A., folio 7773, D84Z/152 (AdP).

<sup>112</sup> See the following examples: Linkard, folio 5, carton D84Z/145; Teresa B., folio 217, carton D84Z/145; Josepha K., folio 256, carton D84Z/145; Simonne C., folio 5770, carton D84Z/149; Victoria A., folio 7384, carton D84Z/151; Radka M., folio 10176, D84Z/154; Anna H., folio 12277, carton D84Z/156; Marinette W., folio 15805, carton D84Z/159 (AdP).

<sup>113</sup> Maria F., folio 1082, carton D84Z/145 (AdP).

papers to allow Anna to remain in France.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, during the 1930s, League ladies busied themselves with ensuring foreign women's access to unemployment aid, family allowances, and pregnancy benefits from a state that was less willing to provide it to foreigners, even those whose treaties supposedly protected them.<sup>115</sup>

Over the course of the interwar years, League members on the front-lines became well-versed in *ennuis de papiers d'étranger* and adapted accordingly. To begin with, the League learned to navigate the morass of procedures that foreigners were subject to in the 1920s and 1930s. As with Anna, they helped women apply for and renew their foreign identity cards and work papers – absolute necessities for any foreigner wishing to remain in France at a time when the state increasingly sought to repatriate them.<sup>116</sup> On several occasions during the 1930s, League volunteers even lobbied the Prefect of Police to prevent foreign mothers from being deported.<sup>117</sup> Alternatively, League members intervened to help foreign women and their families leave France. In 1938, Maria H., a 21-year old Czech domestic servant, arrived at League offices with one child and 5 months pregnant with another. From then until 1940, the League undertook various hospitalizations of both mother and newborn, the charges of her stay in a convalescence home, and the placement of all 3 in a *maison bourgeoise*. To help support the fledgling family, the League also pursued aid for Marie from Public Assistance and a Czech aid society, the Comité Tchèque. But when the war and Occupation came to France, Maria decided to return home and, in October 1940, she once again sought League intervention, this time to be repatriated. The League managed to secure her repatriation through the Czech legation later that year.<sup>118</sup> Throughout the interwar years, the League grew adept at navigating the intricacies (and inconsistencies) of the French state's policies towards foreigners, intervening on behalf of foreign women during a period that, overall, had turned hostile towards foreigners.

As Maria's story above demonstrates, the foreign clientele of the League forced members to work more closely and in coordinated action with foreign aid societies in Paris. Various

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<sup>114</sup> Anna B., folio 11327, carton D84Z/155 (AdP).

<sup>115</sup> For examples see: Piroška G., folio 12073, carton D84Z/156; Maria G., folio 15320, carton D84Z/159; Maria S., folio 15366, carton D84Z/159; Virginie T., folio 15827, carton D84Z/159. 428 (AdP).

<sup>116</sup> See the following examples: Marie Louise A., folio 13856, carton D84Z/157; Erna K., folio 14469; D84Z/158; Dorotea S., folio 15698, carton D84Z/159; Sebastiana C.-M., folio 16692, carton D84Z/160; Thérèse N., folio 16940, carton D84Z/160 (AdP).

<sup>117</sup> Rachel C., folio 8683, carton D84Z/153; Faiga R., folio 12516, carton D84Z/156 (AdP).

<sup>118</sup> Maria H., folio 15669, carton D84Z/159. See also Luthuanian Lydie K., folio 7271, carton D84Z/151 and Chinese Charlotte Thérèse D., folio 17784, carton D84Z/161 (AdP).

charitable associations worked in concert with the League to provide a supportive infrastructure for diverse groups of foreign women in the capital: the Société hellénique de bienfaisance de Paris for Greeks; the Bienfaisance des dames polonaises for Poles; and diverse charities for both Russians and Armenians. Eastern European Jews received frequent support from the Comité israélite as well as the Association israélite pour la protection de la jeune fille.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, social workers from the Rothschild Hospital corresponded often with League members in the interest of foreign Jewish women. Finally, the League also worked in concert with other immigrant aid societies, notably the Société d'Aide aux Emigrants.<sup>120</sup> Even Roger Olchansky's wife personally referred a protégée, suggesting possible links between the Foyer Français and the League.<sup>121</sup> The picture that develops, then, is one of overlapping links, for if the League sought out certain groups, so too did these diverse charitable organizations seek out the League. Essentially, this ensemble of organizations grew close-knit and cross-referential via their dealings with foreign women.

While the League worked in concert with diverse organizations on behalf of foreign women, it is equally true that foreign women circulated widely within pre-existing maternalist aid networks in Paris. They came to the League on the advice of women volunteers of *l'Appui maternel* and *l'Abri maternel*, of nursery maids and midwives, of social workers at Public Assistance and even police officers from their local commissariat. Word about these organizations spread through informal networks, by word of mouth as information was exchanged among friends, families, and neighbors. Through the circulation and transmission of information, foreign women learned what these diverse organizations could offer them and they then availed themselves of these networks to access much-needed resources. Foreign women carved survival strategies for themselves out of the dense web of charitable societies that sought to help women, regardless of nationality, and they did so at a time when nationality increasingly marked some out for exclusion from the French state and its provisions.

Of course, it would be folly to take this thesis too far. As welfare historians have shown elsewhere, no philanthropic work is devoid of class antagonism and condescension, moralizing

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<sup>119</sup> For more on the Association Israélite pour la protection de la jeune fille, see Emily Machen, "Traveling with the Faith."

<sup>120</sup> The definitive work on the SSAE is Lucienne Chibrac, *Les pionnières du travail social auprès des étrangers: le Service social d'aide aux émigrants, des origines à la Libération* (Rennes: École nationale de la santé publique, 2005).

<sup>121</sup> This was Anna B., folio 11327, carton D84Z/155 (AdP).

sentiment and surveillance efforts.<sup>122</sup> The League was no different. Class divided benevolent French ladies of the leisure class from their foreign working charges, just as it divided them more generally from French workingwomen. This could manifest itself in a suspicion of foreign women's comportment, for instance. In 1928, a Belgian worker by the name of Léontine S. was referred to the League by the Social Service of the Paris Police Prefecture. When she arrived, League volunteers remarked that she appeared dirty and disheveled. Although Léontine claimed that with her partner's 25 francs per day and her own 13 francs a day wage she could not manage to provide enough food for her children or even pay rent, League ladies were not persuaded. They concurred, "We have the impression that there exists an absence of good conduct in this household where they cannot manage to eat despite a reasonable income." In the end, they still gave Léontine a meal ("because the woman is enfeebled by her hunger"), but the suspicion that she was not managing her household economy well prevented them from doing more.<sup>123</sup>

If foreign women sometimes experienced League members' disapprobation, they were not all content to remain passive in their suffering and, in some instances, foreign women gave as well as they got. In 1933, Béatrix F., an Irish nurse with 2 children and another on the way, came to the League "complaining about Public Assistance" and expecting the League's intervention on her behalf as well as their help in placing her children with wet-nurses. But League ladies felt she produced "a very bad impression, saying that she will not make a Frenchman of her son and that she does not like France, [the country] that shelters and nourishes her." Remarking that both she and her son were "richly dressed" and that "she does not appear to suffer much from the economic crisis," they proclaimed, "We will wait until she has better sentiments towards our country before we help her."<sup>124</sup> Indeed, while foreign women came to the League for aid and assistance, they had to walk a fine line between proper comportment and self-advocacy without appearing too pushy, lest they disrupt League members' view of them as docile protégées. After all, League volunteers saw themselves as bestowing favors on worthy charges. They, too, brought their own mix of expectations and biases to their charitable works.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> For a fascinating look at this "messier mingling of good intentions and blinkered prejudices," see Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>123</sup> Léontine S., folio 2418, carton D84Z/146 (AdP).

<sup>124</sup> Béatrix F., folio 8445, carton D84Z/152. See also Sura C., folio 14065, carton D84Z/158 (AdP).

<sup>125</sup> Of the 440 *fiches de mère* sampled, only once was there evidence of discriminatory behavior on behalf of a League volunteer. This was in relation to the potential adoption of a mixed-race infant, half French and half Algerian. The League volunteer handling the case recorded, "We spoke to the woman about our reservations concerning the adoption of the child because the father is a mulatto [*mulâtre*], consequently the child will probably

Finally, there were more everyday obstacles that League volunteers and foreign protégées had to overcome together: notably, the language barrier. Not all foreign women could communicate in French, which made it far more difficult for them to plead their case.<sup>126</sup> In 1934, League volunteers noted with dismay that Gisala F., a 23-year old Yugoslav, “cannot explain herself, [she] speaks French very badly.” In the end, they understood only that she was trying to designate the father of her child. Without understanding what she needed from them, they could do no more than send her to La Maternité for the night.<sup>127</sup> This was more or less what they did years earlier, in 1927, for Yohanna P., a 21-year old Czech girl who, besides managing to relate that she had been “abandoned by the father,” could offer League volunteers no further information. She, too, was sent to a convalescence home and League members later spoke with the Czech embassy to inquire as to Czech assistance organizations that would be more linguistically equipped to handle Yohanna’s case.<sup>128</sup> Although several foreign women braved the encounter with League volunteers without sufficient French fluency, others thought it best to bring an interpreter. In these instances, it was often female friends, family members, or French neighbors and concierges who accompanied them to the League and translated for them.<sup>129</sup>

If at times class, culture, and language divided League volunteers from their foreign protégées, in the grand scheme of things national and ethnic difference seemed to matter very little. In comparison to French protégées, only naturalization was marked out uniquely for foreign women and families. But if League members encouraged foreign women to naturalize themselves and their children, they were motivated by more than sheer populationist zeal. Most of the time, naturalization was one of a battery of weapons employed by League volunteers to enable foreign women to procure more social provisions from the French state. This is not to entirely discount the populationist sentiments that animated the League as an association and its members as individuals, but it is to give credit to their very real interest in improving the material welfare of women of all national backgrounds.

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be born black, in these conditions adoption will be very difficult.” Again, this line of thinking appears beyond the pale. (Anna B., folio 822, carton D84Z/145 (AdP).)

<sup>126</sup> For examples see: Hélène B., folio 6446, carton D84Z/150; Machia T., folio 6772, carton D84Z/150; Natacha K., folio 9733, carton D84Z/154; Malka G., folio 11607, D84Z/156; Paula B., folio 13504, carton D84Z/157 (AdP).

<sup>127</sup> Gisala F., folio 10008, carton D84Z/154 (AdP).

<sup>128</sup> Yohanna P., folio 989, carton D84Z/145 (AdP).

<sup>129</sup> For examples see: Elvire B., folio 1213, carton D84Z/145; Fayga S., folio 1558, carton D84Z/146; Faiga M., folio 4945, carton D84Z/149; Suzanne B., folio 6443, carton D84Z/150 (AdP).

In the context of the depressed 1930s and their own increasing economic and social fragility, foreigners sought recourse to an overlapping web of pronatalist aid societies and maternalist organizations in the capital, all eager to help large families and struggling mothers. Foreign mothers, an increasingly significant population within the larger foreign population, were especially supported in this period thanks to a vast, sprawling maternalist apparatus that had grown steadily in the capital since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While these organizations may have been inspired by a singularly populationist zeal, they nevertheless provided much-needed relief to poor foreign women and families in the capital. Working-class foreigners were not simply used as reproductive pawns by middle-class French women and philanthropists; they, too, availed themselves of a dense web of services and turned the spirit of populationism to their advantage. On the ground, then, the world of welfare was not always characterized by control, discipline, and surveillance; on the contrary, it could allow for women's agency and the forging of cross-class and cross-national alliances among women.