

## Between Communal Survival and National Aspiration: Armenian Genocide Refugees, the League of Nations, and the Practices of Interwar Humanitarianism

In Aleppo, Syria, home to the largest community of descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide in the Middle East, a map greets visitors at the entrance of the Karen Jeppe *Jemaran* (preparatory high school), showing the boundaries of the medieval kingdom of Armenia overlaid with the borders of “Wilsonian Armenia,” a geographical construction drawn by the American president as the victors of World War I divided the Ottoman Empire among themselves. This map (fig. 1), which Wilson presented to the Paris Peace Conference in 1920, has become an epitomizing image of a lost homeland, affixed to the walls of Armenian schools, cultural centers, and churches throughout the world. For diasporan Armenians, it is a reminder of a nation-state once promised them in the wake of an attempt to destroy them as a people, then briefly established and finally lost as the principle of national self-determination was sacrificed by the League of Nations and the United States, Britain, and France in the face of the military and political ascendancy of the Republic of Turkey and its integration into the international order.<sup>1</sup> It is also a stark reminder of the real limits of American power in the interwar period, even at the very apex of that power in the early 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

While the relationship between Armenians and Armenia and the League of Nations, especially in the League’s first decade, bears out a history in which Armenian national aspirations were abandoned, shifting and evolving member states’ attitudes and League policies still affected the status, position, and even survival of Armenian refugee communities and individuals. In the face of the failure of the victors of World War I to secure the establishment of Armenia, that is, a state for Armenians—understood at the time as the preeminent vehicle for the achievement of national aspirations—the League of Nations formulated a *sui generis* humanitarianism on behalf of Armenians.

This unique humanitarian enterprise (a) asserted the national rights of the Armenians; (b) explicitly linked the League of Nations to the communal survival of that Armenian nation; and (c) sought to achieve that survival by promoting the collective and individual welfare of Armenian refugees. The emphasis on communal survival rather than just assimilation distinguished this project from the policies the League developed on behalf of Russian refugees during the same period, for example. Still, despite the unique nature of this policy, elements of it intersect with other questions relative to interwar humanitarianism, including the treatment of Jews facing *de facto*

Map showing the boundaries of Armenia as awarded by PRESIDENT WILSON.

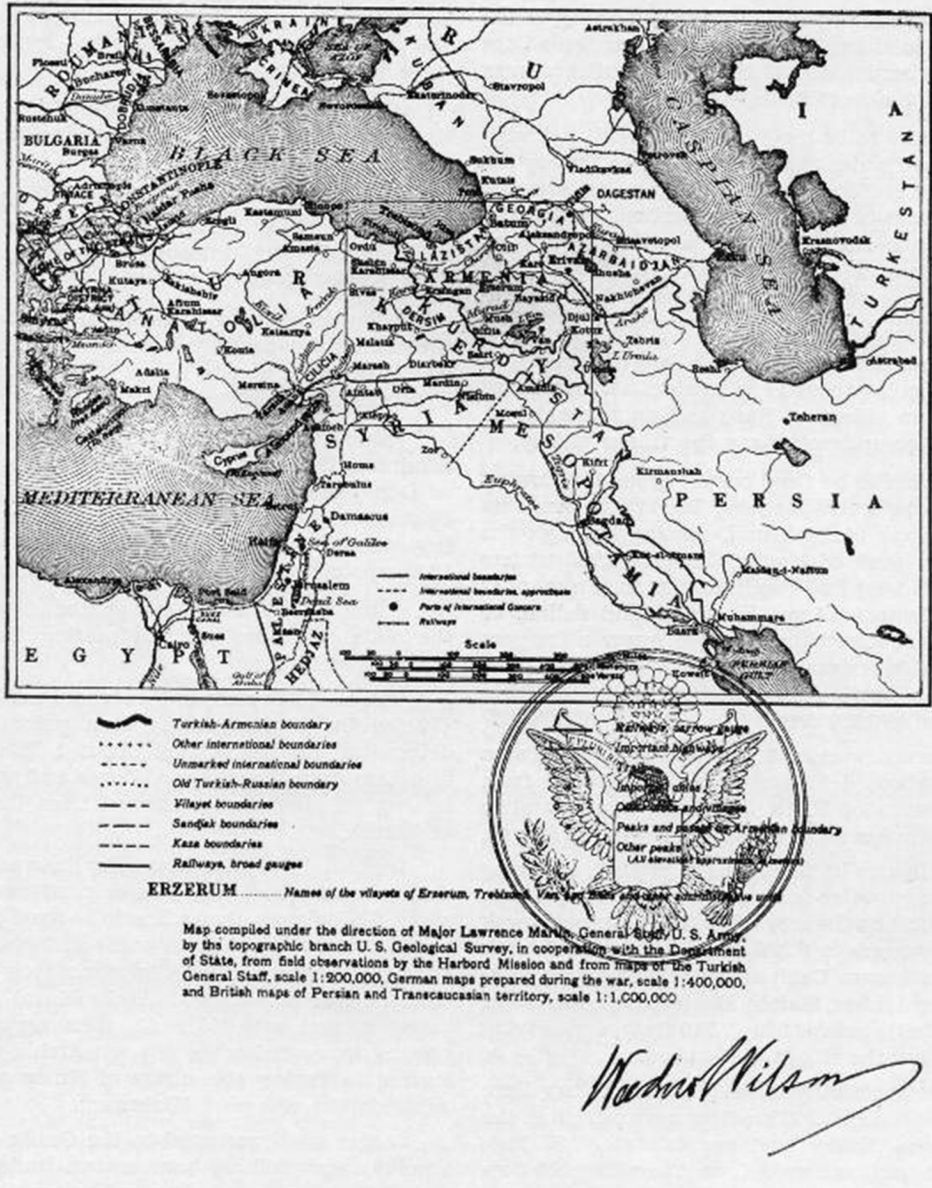


Fig. 1: "Boundary between Turkey and Armenia: As Determined by Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America," by Lawrence Martin, ca. 1920. Source: Library of Congress Map Division.

denationalization by the states of Eastern and Central Europe, the extension of citizenship to refugees or migrants in colonial states, and the relationship between international organizations and the concept of civilian protection in times of peace.

The convergence of colonialism, nationalism, and communal survival in the League's work also marks the interwar period as somewhat distinct in the genealogy

of humanitarianism itself and certainly distinguishes it from the humanitarian practices elaborated in the decades following World War II, when concepts like national self-determination were absent altogether and a regime of individual human rights had some influence on the ambit of humanitarianism. More broadly, what the history of humanitarianism in the 1920s and 1930s confirms is that modern humanitarianism as an ideology and a collection of practices cannot escape the prevailing cultural norms, moral economies, and politics encircling it. It is shaped by the forces that act upon it, and consequently it can exert minor force, perhaps only in the form of resistance by its practitioners or its subjects. In the end, while this early humanitarian response was marked by unique departures from previous forms of relief and assistance and is at odds with elements of the form of contemporary practices, what happened to the Armenians is an early example of what contemporary relief or development workers would call the substitution of humanitarianism for politics.

Beyond exemplifying how modern humanitarianism began to take shape in the interwar period, the multifaceted relationship between the League and the Armenians constituted a proving ground where prevailing ideas about minorities, refugees, and concepts of cultural and national survival played out in the wake of World War I and the colonial division of the Middle East into League of Nation mandates. At the same time, as the League elaborated a series of novel projects to address Armenian suffering, the ideological content of interwar modern humanitarianism becomes clearer. Critical to that understanding is showing where the humanitarianism of that moment intersected with prevailing and evolving conceptions of human dignity and shared humanity, as well as how it was ultimately subordinated to the demands of twentieth-century nationalism and the persistence of late colonialism.

Based on archival materials from the League of Nations, reports by League officials, archives of the French Mandate for Syria, and contemporary legal writing, this essay follows the relationship between the League and the post-Genocide Armenian communities of the former Ottoman Empire. Beginning with the construction of the Armenians as the objects of humanitarianism *sine qua non*, it continues by focusing on three critical episodes in that relationship: the Rescue Movement, the grant of the Nansen Passport to Armenian refugees, and the “Final Settlement” of Armenian refugees in French Mandate Syria and Lebanon. The last issue is framed by the League’s diverse plans to solve social conflict through the resettlement of peoples, a policy that shaped the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, the resettling of other groups of Armenian refugees in southeastern Europe and Soviet Armenia, and its unrealized scheme to move Iraq’s Assyrian refugees in the 1930s to the jungles of South America.<sup>3</sup> While the focus here is primarily on the League’s engagement with the Armenian survivor communities of the Middle East, rather than the engagement of Armenians worldwide with the League, it is critical to note that Armenians as individuals and through international organizations like the Armenian General Benevolent Union shaped and reshaped their relationship with the League and asserted a degree of agency that is often missing from the accounts found in the League’s own archives.<sup>4</sup>

This periodic silence in the archive of the League reveals that despite its origins in an international organization, it is still very much a colonial archive. As a colonial

archive, it tends to flatten the historical experience of the peoples in the Middle East toward whom its programs and policies were directed. Often, studies of the League's work in the region, as a consequence of a failure to employ local sources—Turkish, Armenian, Arabic, and Kurdish—also fail to grasp how the League functioned to facilitate European domination of the non-West.<sup>5</sup> This approach tends to ignore the League's sometimes overt and sometimes subtle paternalism, as well as the role it played in legitimizing and perpetuating colonialism. Critically, as a “new history” of the League of Nations emerges, it should interrogate, and where necessary reverse altogether, the way in which the archive constructed its own reality. In addition, as the League's archive is vast, better preserved, and more accessible than other “indigenous” archives (sometimes as a function of colonialism), we should be conscious of how that might skew the way we formulate basic historical questions.

### **The Armenians as Universal Humanitarian Object**

In concluding his discussion of the relationship between the Armenians and the Great Powers of Europe in his *La Société des nations et les puissances devant le problème arménien* (1926), André Mandelstam, an émigré Russian jurist and former diplomat who had become the leading European critic of the League's abandonment of Armenian national aspirations, argued that the Armenians had “earned” the right to a national home following years of oppression by the absolutist Ottoman Empire and through the support of the international community:

The humanitarian interventions undertaken by the Powers in Turkey in the course of the nineteenth century created, without any contradiction, a customary *right* in favor of the oppressed nations of the Ottoman Empire, a right, so to speak, that persists. In the case of this particular oppressed [Armenian] nation, this right, which at first was to protect the primordial interests of man [*le intérêts primordiaux de l'homme*, life, liberty, and equality], was with time, because of the incorrigible tyranny of Turkey, transformed into a guaranteed right to autonomy and the right to secession.<sup>6</sup>

Mandelstam was representative of a large group of European and North American politicians, writers, and diplomats who expressed profound disappointment at the collapse of the prospects for an Armenian national home in the decade following World War I. The cause of the Armenians, which had been relatively popular in the West starting in the late nineteenth century, continued through the war years and into the immediate postwar period. During World War I, European and American civil society had mobilized on behalf of the Armenians, raising money for relief and exerting pressure on governments to provide assistance. In the period after the war, the Armenians loomed large in an emerging Western humanitarian consciousness, so much so that even in the increasingly isolationist United States, proposals for an American mandate for Armenia had much more support than the League of Nations itself. As a consequence, the Armenian cause became emblematic of the larger goal of establishing a just world order, and Armenians themselves the prototypical object of humanitarianism. Concern for Armenians translated into how the League and its bureaucracy would conceptualize Armenian suffering, and also how much effort

would be exerted on behalf of Armenian issues. Simply put, the Armenians were not the only people who entered the interwar period without a state; they were unique in the degree to which their cause mattered in Geneva, Washington, and the capitals of member states.

For Mandelstam, the Armenians had been the object of humanitarianism for quite some time, and his observations on both their national rights and the failures of the international community to act on their behalf were shaped by his experiences as first dragoman at the Russian Embassy in Istanbul in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire. In that capacity he had tried to negotiate the last in a series of autonomy plans for the six predominantly Armenian eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the separate noncontiguous province of Adana (Cilicia). Known as the Mandelstam Draft (1913), the plan for autonomy included sectarian-based forms of representation first implemented following the brutal Western “humanitarian intervention” in Mt. Lebanon (1860) and the establishment of a unique administrative form, the *Mutasarrifiyya*. The Draft echoed as well the political and administrative reforms imposed by European states on the Ottoman Empire’s Balkan provinces over the course of the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The accord included many features that became commonplace elements in various “minority treaties” in the interwar period, for example, the emphasis on access to legal services and education in minority languages. Beyond political reorganization in favor of greater Armenian political participation and administrative control, the elimination of the irregular tribal cavalry (the *Hamidiye* corps), the creation of a gendarmerie made up of Turks and Armenians led by European officers, and the relocation of newly settled Muslim refugees from the Balkans and Caucasus, the Draft also addressed cultural elements. Thus the proposed agreement added Armenian and Kurdish to Turkish as the official languages for administration; it gave each community (here meaning Armenians, Kurds, and Turks) the right to create their own schools, publicly financed through taxes. The European Powers would enforce compliance.<sup>8</sup>

While the Ottoman government did agree to the plan, the onset of the war several months later made it a dead letter. Altering the demographic makeup of the provinces at the heart of the Mandelstam Draft was among the motives for the Armenian Genocide as it unfolded in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1922. The rationale was that if Armenians were no longer concentrated in significant numbers—or were eliminated altogether—in those particular provinces, Western and Armenian calls for autonomy would be a nonissue after the war.<sup>9</sup> The process outlined in the 1913 Draft seemed to have achieved implementation in the division of the Ottoman Empire as outlined by the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). That treaty acknowledged the establishment of the Republic of Armenia and the creation of Cilicia as a predominately Armenian French client state.

Elements of the Ottoman state and military resisted the occupation and division of the empire, a movement that culminated in what is remembered in modern Turkey as the *Kurtuluş Savaşı*, or “War for National Salvation” (1919–22). Best characterized as a combined anticolonial and civil war for Anatolia, it pitted nationalist Turkish forces against Armenian, French colonial, and Greek armies. The conclusive Turkish victory prevented the division of Anatolia: France withdrew from Cilicia, evacuating

the hundreds of thousands of displaced Ottoman Armenians who had been resettled there to camps in and around Aleppo and Beirut; the Republic of Armenia ceased to exist, and its residue was absorbed into the Soviet Union.

The political reality created by the Turkish military victories was recognized first by the Treaty of Ankara (1921), sometimes called the Franklin-Bouillon Agreement, and then later the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The latter included several provisions protecting non-Muslim religious minorities (it eschewed any ethnonyms, most notably “Armenian”), in particular property, religious rights, and communal education, but these fell far short of anything resembling political autonomy and, certainly, of ensuring a national home. Moreover, Turkey had become in practice a religiously, though not ethnically, homogeneous state as a combined result of the war, the Genocide, and then the League-administered exchange of populations with Greece; later, official Turkish policy prevented Ottoman Armenians from returning home. Those Armenians who remained in the new republic lived in small pockets in major cities or were isolated in tiny provincial towns, and they faced terrible forms of informal and formal discrimination.<sup>10</sup>

Mandelstam viewed these developments as the triumph of politics over law, which he also considered contrary to the spirit of the League of Nations: “Indeed, the attitude of the Powers toward Armenia appears to be an accidental and momentary deviation from the great principles of the Treaty [of the League of Nations].”<sup>11</sup> For him, the various humanitarian projects of the League on behalf of the Armenians through the early 1920s were evidence that

while at the League’s beginning it did not respond to the ardent hopes of Armenia, . . . since then, on the strength of the continual increase of its prestige and influence in the world, it has not ceased to raise its voice high in favor of this needlessly sacrificed nation, in other words, in favor of the triumph of rights [or law] over misguided politics.<sup>12</sup>

The humanitarian activities on behalf of the Armenians took on a certain urgency after the absorption of the Republic of Armenia in 1920 by the nascent Soviet Union, an urgency impelled by the sense that the moral authority of the League, in its commitment to international law as well as to idealism, had been compromised by what happened to the Armenians at Lausanne, and that its future success in other fields hinged on rescuing, repairing, or perhaps just preserving what remained of the Armenian nation. As my discussions later in this essay of race and cultural assimilation show, this sense of mission implicated in the League’s discourse emphasized the success of Christian civilization over putative Muslim barbarism on the one hand and of interwar racist ideologies on the other, which viewed the Armenians as white “Europeans” who needed protection from the masses of Semitic and Turkic Muslims among whom they were now living.

This sense of mission likewise stemmed from how the League understood the plight of the Armenians after the war. It viewed them not merely as civilian victims of war or survivors of massacres but rather collectively, as a nation that had faced (and continued to face) extermination. A consistent narrative of what the Armenians had endured emerged early in the League’s history, based primarily on accounts by two

diplomats: *Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation* (1916), by Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975); and *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (1918), by Henry Morgenthau Sr. (1856–1946). The scientific nature of their reporting met the standards of proof and “fact-finding” on which the League—and the Secretariat in particular, constituted as a deliberative body—rested, and that narrative was reinforced throughout the period by “minority petitions” to the League but also by accounts provided by Armenian ecclesiastical leaders and organizations, including the Armenian National Delegation and the Armenian General Benevolent Union as part of their ongoing advocacy efforts.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, the League, and in particular its Secretariat, understood the cause of the Armenians in the most paternalistic terms possible. The Armenians were a stateless but “deserving” people, comprising primarily widows, orphans, and young women. The rescue of the Armenians was entwined with the success of the League itself on a number of levels. For some, these goals even defined the broader humanitarian purpose of the League, whose moral authority was at stake and depended on redressing the wrongs inflicted on the Armenians during the Genocide *and* as a consequence of postwar diplomacy.

### **League Humanitarianism and Armenian Communal Survival**

The fact of Armenian statelessness in the interwar period meant that any relationship between Armenians, the Armenian “nation,” and the League perforce fell outside its usual sphere of activity at the intersection of states and came instead under the rubric of humanitarianism.<sup>14</sup> As noted above, critical to this particular form of humanitarianism was the underlying resolve not just to ease the suffering of individual Armenians but also to prevent the further erosion of the Armenian nation by forestalling the effacement of that nation through dispersal and cultural assimilation. As these plans and programs unfolded during the League’s existence, they registered changing attitudes about intervention—especially in the shadow of the British and French occupation of the Middle East—refugees, and the persistence of colonialism.

### **The Rescue Movement**

Among the earliest acts of the League of Nations was the establishment of the Fifth Committee.<sup>15</sup> Its final report, *Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey, Asia Minor and the Neighbouring Territories* (1921), stands as one of the most comprehensive reckonings of the situation facing post-Genocide Armenians.<sup>16</sup> The poet and folklorist Hélène Vacaresco, who was the delegate from Romania, delivered it at the seventeenth plenary meeting of the League in September 1921. The committee’s work was seen as a step toward implementing the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres between the victors of World War I and the Ottoman Empire, in particular Article 142 of the treaty, which vacated all conversions to Islam in the period 1914–18, presuming them to be coerced, and required the Ottoman Empire to cooperate with the League of Nations in the recovery of displaced people and generally to “repair so far as possible the wrongs inflicted on individuals in the course of the massacres perpetrated in Turkey during the war.”<sup>17</sup> In addition, the League formed the committee as a response to agitation from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and similar groups, which



equated the cause of displaced women and children with the repatriation of male prisoners of war.<sup>18</sup>

In brief, the Rescue Movement was a loosely coordinated attempt by Armenian individuals and groups, the American Near East Relief, and later the League to recover Armenian women and children who had been taken or sold against their will during the Genocide and integrated with various levels of status into Muslim households, or forced to work in sweatshops, state factories, farms, or brothels.<sup>19</sup> The mass forced transfer of children and women was an integral part of the process of destroying the Armenians as a people.<sup>20</sup> This interpretation of the role of the kidnapping and sale of children and women during the Genocide was shared by League officials in the field, who had direct interaction with survivors, and those who viewed the situation from Geneva and European capitals. Near East Relief and other groups, and even individual families, “re-bought” those taken or rescued them by persuasion, force, or subterfuge, and they created a system of rescue homes in the region to which women and children could flee, and in which information about them would be collated and disseminated in the hope of achieving family reunification.

At the core of the Fifth Committee’s report lay the conclusion that the Ottoman state as then constituted was incapable of or unwilling to address the situation, while Ottoman society itself either ignored or supported the practice. Among its proposals was a call to expand rescue through League intervention, including unrestrained license to inspect Muslim homes and institutions, with the backing of the military if necessary.<sup>21</sup>

League officials in Geneva and in the field, primarily in occupied Istanbul and French Mandate Syria (namely, Aleppo and Upper Mesopotamia), conceived this work as a humane act and drew analogies between their efforts and those of nineteenth-century abolitionists. From the modern humanitarian perspective, the enslavement of these women and children had greater meaning: it was the obvious basic cause of their suffering, regardless of the actual material reality of the conditions in which they may have lived. It both confirmed the League’s corporate sense of Ottoman society’s rejection of modern legal and moral norms and justified the League’s intervention on behalf of vulnerable populations and their rehabilitation. League experts and others also objected to the forced conversions and marriages that accompanied the transfer of the women and children. To them, the restoration of a proper racial order was at stake, alongside the prevention of any further mixing between “white” Armenians and “Asiatic” Turks. It is telling that there is no evidence to suggest that the League at the time entertained any concerns about Muslim women and children, primarily Kurds, in the same or similar conditions. Critical to understanding this choice of serving only Armenians was the consensus that they were the only ones who were stateless and completely rejected by any state at this time; by the same token, the League concluded that the Kurds and Turks should be the responsibility of the Turkish state, as constructed in both racial (Turk) and religious (Muslim) terms.

This need to serve the stateless explains some of the content of the work of Karen Jeppe (1876–1935), a former Danish missionary and the League’s commissioner in Aleppo, who oversaw the rescue house in that city and the processing of thousands of



young women and children.<sup>22</sup> Jeppe's understanding of why Armenian women and children should be located and rehabilitated also reflected her strong conviction that in the wake of the war, modern social reform in the West would be exported to the eastern Mediterranean. She expected that the League's modern humanitarianism would empower it as a moral agent of change and reverse the calamitous impact of the war on the Armenians as a people, rather than just provide immediate aid.<sup>23</sup> The humanitarian act transcended the bounds of a traditional relief project and was instead a key feature of restoring the very humanity of those rescued *and* their integrity as national (Armenian) subjects, and by extension society to a proper moral ordering:

The standard of civilization of the Armenians . . . is on a higher level than that of those beings with whom the young people are forced to associate. Their race is far more developed, which will be most evident from the fact that the Armenian nation never could sink to Islam but stucked [*sic*] to the Christianity even [when] subjected to the most incredible sufferings . . . There are two things which attract these young people [religion and ethnic identification], even if it is not quite clear to their consciousness. The purer and stronger the character is, the more powerful the attraction. Weak or degenerated individuals yield more easily and become Mahometens [*sic*].<sup>24</sup>

While this may read like the traditional denigration of Muslims observed in missionary literature of the prewar period, it was somewhat different, because in this moment Jeppe's sense of religious identification was strongly bound up with national identification and shared civilization. In other words, unlike missionaries of the nineteenth century, she was not working to convert the Armenians to her form of Protestant Christianity but rather actively supporting the integrity of their own traditional religion, which to her was part and parcel of their national identity and the basis for their humanity.

The sense that the rescue of Armenian women and children was essential to the survival of the Armenian nation and was its very symbol was encapsulated in a fiery speech given by Vacaresco: "You all know the story: women withering in their youth in the degrading languor of the harem, children torn from the bosom of their family and cast violently from one race into another, trained to serve those who are bent on the extermination of their own race."<sup>25</sup> Here as elsewhere familiar orientalist tropes are yoked to the logic of national survival, a rhetorical tool that proved extremely effective at the time.

Vacaresco's speech, the report, and other projects by the League all indicate that repairing the injuries caused by the war and the Genocide was an imperative that the League considered its mandate. Tellingly, the moral content of that decision by the international community in the form of the League had concluded that the Turks—again both an ethnic designation and a code for Muslims—were implicated in an ongoing crime against humanity and that their collective responsibility had placed them beyond the pale of civilization.

The evolving military situation on the ground soon rendered this grand moral vision moot. The proposed expansion of the Rescue Movement, which met fierce opposition from the rump Ottoman government and the Muslim elite of Istanbul,

fell victim to the diplomatic fallout from the military victories of the Turkish military. Few if any rescues took place in the Republic of Turkey, and rescues in French Mandate Syria had ended by 1927.

For the human rights theorist Barbara Metzger, the work of Jeppe at the rescue home in particular constitutes evidence of a practical implementation of human rights theory prior to the formal elaboration of that theory.<sup>26</sup> This observation is drawn from an anachronistic conclusion about how Jeppe saw her work. In imagining Jeppe as a proto-human rights activist, Metzger's discussion obscures the fact that Jeppe was not anticipating a future human rights regime; rather, her work was a manifestation of the basic terms of modern humanitarianism itself. Where Jeppe might have agreed in a general sense that her duty to humanity was universal, her own description of why she assisted Armenians but not other groups signals a profound particularity. For Jeppe, and more broadly for modern humanitarians, the purpose of humanitarianism was to end suffering; but equally important to them, practically and by choice, was the conviction that some people or groups were simply more eligible for and deserving of assistance than others. The object of humanitarianism in this case was not the universal but the particular.

### **The Nansen Passport**

In 1922, as the international community was assessing the implications of the success of the Kemalist movement in Turkey, League High Commissioner for Refugees Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) received the Nobel Peace Prize. His laureate lecture, titled “The Suffering People of Europe,” encapsulated the polar-explorer-turned-humanitarian's distress over the unprecedented levels of suffering in the wake of World War I. In the course of the speech, he issued a humanitarian challenge that was simultaneously a précis of the programs in which he was involved: “This is not the struggle for power, but a single and terrible accusation against those who still do not want to see, a single great prayer for a drop of mercy to give men a chance to live.”<sup>27</sup>

At war's end, the League of Nations had charged Nansen with overseeing the repatriation of prisoners of war, primarily in Eastern Europe. He was among the first Western humanitarians to grasp the full extent of the unfolding Russian refugee crisis. War, revolution, and food shortages had displaced 1.5 million subjects of the former Russian Empire—Russians, Poles, Latvians, Ukrainians, Turkic Muslims, Jews, and Caucasian Armenians—as well as so-called white émigrés. With the redrawing of boundaries, the Soviet government passed legislation denaturalizing large portions of that displaced population, producing thereby a large and heterogeneous mass in various forms of statelessness. In particular it was his encounter with 120,000 Russian refugees in Istanbul that first indicated to Nansen the gravity of the situation.

With the collapse of the repatriation provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres, the multiple failures to establish an independent Armenian state, and the rise of Kemalist policies denying Armenians the right of return to their homeland and denaturalizing those living outside the borders of the newly constituted state, the survivors of the Armenian Genocide living in southeastern Europe and the Middle East became in effect stateless as well (1920–22). Not counting those Armenians who had emigrated to the United States or who were living in the Soviet Republic of Armenia, the League

estimated the number of Armenians in this situation to be approximately 340,000, with roughly half living in refugee camps, orphanages, or shantytowns near the big cities of the Levant.

Nascent international aid organizations—sometimes, but not always, in concert with the League—were undertaking monumental relief work for these displaced populations. The American Relief Administration delivered food aid to Russia and the post-Ottoman eastern Mediterranean, as did Near East Relief. However, neither organization had the authority to address the legal status of displaced peoples.<sup>28</sup> Food, shelter, and sanitation were certainly critical to these displaced populations, but with the passage of time, the sense that these refugees were never going home grew, given that these populations faced legal or extralegal denationalization. The next-most pressing challenge was the lack of an internationally recognizable legal framework to deal with their statelessness in the war's immediate aftermath. As these stateless persons lacked identity papers (or if they did possess them, these had been issued by states that no longer existed), they were perceived as an economic burden, a health risk, and a security threat to their host societies; equally they were vulnerable to expulsion, exploitation, or trafficking.

This precarious status prompted what has since become a question lying at the heart of modern humanitarianism: who is responsible for displaced and stateless peoples? For Nansen and others at the League, the answer suggested itself: there was an international responsibility to “do something” about refugees.<sup>29</sup> But the form this responsibility ought to take was a complex and vexing issue. It also prompted the reverse question, namely, whether this meant that as a refugee one had an individual right to protection by the international community. Clearly, however, notions of rights at that moment adhered more closely to national citizenship, and it is hard to identify with any certainty a recognizable legal body of rights outside that framework. In other words, as the underlying theory of the Nansen Passport regime showed, the individual's access to protection was predicated on that individual's membership in a specific national group rather than as an individual.

The international management of the refugee crisis prompted the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, which eventually became the Nansen International Office for Refugees. Among its earliest acts was the creation of a League-administered travel document called the Nansen Passport, first for displaced subjects of the erstwhile Russian Empire in July 1922, and then for formerly Ottoman Armenians in May 1924. Fifty-four states agreed to recognize travel documents issued to Russians, and thirty-eight later also acknowledged those held by Armenians.<sup>30</sup> By May 1926, the League had further defined the refugee in accordance with Nansen's proposals, formalizing the eligibility requirements of the travel documents:

The Conference adopts the following definitions of the term “refugees”:

Russian: Any person of Russian origin who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics and who has not acquired another nationality.

Armenian: Any person of Armenian origin formerly a subject of the Ottoman Empire who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the

Government of the Turkish Republic and who has not acquired another nationality.<sup>31</sup>

During the same interval, the United States Congress passed legislation extending refugee status to Ottoman Armenians.

The ideological and theoretical dimensions of the interwar refugee regime were further elaborated in the *Convention of 28 October 1933 Relating to the International Status of the Refugee*. Like the humanitarian efforts of the Rescue Movement, the language of the document is redolent with what appears to be the shibboleths of shared humanity and universality present in Nansen's Nobel speech. Its preamble notes several aspirations:

Desirous of supplementing and consolidating the work done by the League of Nations on behalf of the refugees;  
Anxious to establish conditions which shall enable the decisions already taken by the various States with this object to be fully effective, and desirous that refugees shall be ensured the enjoyment of civil rights, free and ready access to the courts, security and stability as regards establishment and work, facilities in the exercise of the professions, of industry and of commerce, and in regard to the movement of persons, admission to schools and universities.<sup>32</sup>

But then the document shifts from the universal to the particular: "The present Convention is applicable to Russian, Armenian and assimilated refugees, as defined by the Arrangements of May 12th, 1926, and June 30th, 1928."<sup>33</sup> These measures taken at the League confirm what the term "refugee" meant at that moment in the evolving framework of international humanitarian law: that is, "a refugee is a member of a group that has no freedom of international movement because its members have been effectively deprived of the formal protection of their government."<sup>34</sup> And the only states to which this applied were the former Ottoman Empire (functionally the Republic of Turkey) and the Soviet Union. What is also important is that the definition turned exclusively on state protection and not on the kinds of conditions that tend to inform contemporary definitions of the refugee, and certainly not on any acknowledgment of the human rights of the refugee.<sup>35</sup> With these distinctions in mind, it is critical to avoid conflating our understanding of the limited nature of the measures taken to care for and manage vast populations of refugees in the post-Ottoman Middle East and post-Imperial Eastern Europe with the kinds of refugee policies that took shape after 1948.

It was precisely the inherent and intentional limitation of the Nansen Passport that rendered it appealing to League members. The Nansen Passport promised to free host countries of the social and economic burden of sheltering refugees by allowing the free flow of their labor, as well as the mechanism of the market and liberal economics to ameliorate or improve their condition. The document, issued by member states, was basically a travel document that provided minimal anthropometric data, a photograph, information about place of origin, date, and place of issuance. Visas, entry stamps, and the like could be affixed to it. According to the international agreements worked out between the League and member states, holders of the

document had the ability, *not the right*, to (1) travel from their place of refuge to a second country, generally in search of work, without the fear that they would not be able to return to their country of refuge, and without refoulement; and (2) possibly move on to a third country.<sup>36</sup> For the countries through which the refugees circulated, the documents constituted a de facto temporary residence permit—far less than citizenship—which meant, among other things, that refugees could be easily deported in times of economic stress or in the face of political upheaval. Nevertheless, the extension of the ability to travel established for Armenian refugees a modicum of legal status at the intersection of states and at the behest of an international organization. This meant, however, that in a narrow window of activity the League had become a virtual state for refugee Armenians. In retrospect, that act provided a modicum of dignity in the sense suggested by Nansen in his Nobel lecture, but it also provided a way for Armenians to participate in economic (though not political) structures with relative ease. It allowed them to regain some control over their own lives, letting them connect to the “market” with recourse to some social and legal guarantees.

Onnig Isbenjian’s Nansen Passport and its visa stamps (fig. 2) tell his story as a refugee. It confirms that Armenians from the Ottoman Empire could make a successful transition to Western Europe and beyond, where they often, but not always, managed to become naturalized citizens. Born in Izmir in 1907, Isbenjian was issued a passport by Belgium, which faced severe labor shortages after the war. He used it to travel to Great Britain and then eventually to Manhattan, where he attended Columbia University. He died in 1988. Nevertheless, as Michael Barnett concludes of the inherent weakness of the Nansen Passport and the work of the High Commission: “It was wholly dependent on states to carry out its recommendations; when states did not want to cooperate, little happened.”<sup>37</sup>

What the humanitarian practice of the Nansen Passport brings into stark relief about the interwar refugee regime, and the level of the League’s commitment to Armenians in particular, is how limited it was in its reach. Efforts to expand its coverage to other stateless refugees, including Jewish refugees in Romania and Roma and Hungarians scattered throughout Europe, generally failed. Before 1938 the only groups to receive recognition similar to the Armenians and Russians were Assyrian and Chaldean refugees in Syria and Iraq. In the case of those European groups considered for the extension of this kind of protection, the affected European states made the argument that they had not been legally denationalized, despite their inability to benefit equally from citizenship in those same European states in which they resided. This was, of course, also a result of the kind of ethnicity and location of the European refugees.

Pointedly in this regard, it was easier, from the perspective of colonial mandate authorities in the Middle East, to make room for non-Muslim/non-Arab refugees as a way to alter demographic realities in favor of their style of rule. In the Levant, the Nansen Passport became less relevant as Syrian and Lebanese citizenship was extended to Armenian residents by 1928, whereupon Armenian men voted in that year’s constituent elections. Since the Nansen Passport was generally not extended to new groups of refugees, the Nansen Office for Refugees turned its attention to refugee development schemes, microcredit, and educational programs. Nansen Passports continued to be used in Europe through World War II.



Fig. 2: Interior of Onnig Isbendjian's Nansen Passport, issued in London in 1928 and used for travel to Belgium and Germany. Note the description of the travel document as "in conformity with the plan submitted by Dr. Nansen, High Commissioner for Refugees" in the lower left quadrant of the first image. Source: Zohrab Center Digital Collection.

As much as Nansen had hoped to restore dignity to refugees through the League's policies, the passports themselves bear witness to the moral and ethical vacuity (even uselessness) of the interwar refugee regime. This was not an intervention on behalf of political grievance or on the basis of justice claims. The Nansen Passport made no provision for the refugees to have any ability to act politically in any arena. It provided states with a reservoir of controllable workers deprived of any ability to claim political agency or civil rights; thus they could expect no legal protection from host countries, and the host countries had no binding obligations to them of any kind.

Moreover, the use of this humanitarian-bureaucratic tool relieved countries like Turkey of their responsibility to their own citizens-made-refugees. In the case of the Armenians, the Nansen Passports they received were valid for much of the world at that moment, yet with the exception of their own homeland. These Nansen Passports constituted an early international juridical notice of the permanence of their exile.

### "Final Settlement"

The largest portion of Armenian Genocide refugees was concentrated in and near the major cities of the Arab eastern Mediterranean, Aleppo and Beirut in particular. As

the discussion of the Nansen Passports indicates, by the mid-1920s it had become clear that returning home to Anatolia was no longer an option for most Armenian refugees. Immigration to Soviet Armenia had some appeal and was implemented on a limited scale; the League's Nansen Office explored developing, in cooperation with the Soviet government, large-scale programs aimed at transforming it into the Armenian national home. However, the bulk of survivors in the Middle East preferred either to stay or emigrate in search of better economic opportunities in Western Europe and North and South America.

The French Mandate was an invention of the League of Nations. However, the establishment of the French Mandate did not anticipate the massive flow of Armenian refugees to the states of the Levant. As the relationship between the League of Nations and the French Mandate evolved, the treatment of Armenians became increasingly important. This is apparent in the fact that the League closely monitored the way Mandate authorities implemented its Armenian policies, and in the fact that France used the treatment of the Armenians to demonstrate to the League and to its own public its commitment to colonial-humanitarian responsibilities. In internal discussions preserved in the French archives, however, French colonial officials increasingly came to view the Armenian refugee population in Syria and Lebanon as a community that was vulnerable to political exploitation, due to its dependent and precarious status, and which thus could be instrumentalized as a useful adjunct to colonial rule. The basic organizing principle of French politics in Syria was the identification of a cross-confessional constituency within urban society—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish—that was unwilling for various and distinct reasons to support Arab nationalist claims made by the traditional Sunni elite in the country.<sup>38</sup> The Armenians fit neatly into that construct, and in the electoral politics of the 1920s and early 1930s they were reliably antinationalist in their voting behavior.<sup>39</sup>

This process of alignment was shaped also by the League and its concerns that the Armenians be settled in a way that prevented their full assimilation with the Arab population.<sup>40</sup> In many ways, this international sanction for the persistence of cultural heterogeneity was among the few remaining residues of the League's original project for the repair and preservation of the Armenian nation. In part, "separateness" was accomplished through the establishment of agricultural installations along the Turkish border and in the province of Alexandretta.<sup>41</sup> But by far the most ambitious scheme was the transformation of entire refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut and Aleppo into modern neighborhoods and the making of Armenian refugees into a respectable urban middle class. As the French high commissioner Henri Ponsot (1877–1963) explained in 1936,

One must lend support to the real distress, which this situation [the status of refugees] creates. This is what has been done in Syria and Lebanon. This has been brought under control in material terms through loans of money, and in moral terms by a human welcome which has allowed them to acquire citizenship in the country which has opened its doors to them. It is necessary to help the refugees primarily to establish them permanently. This is what the goal is. *With the Armenians, what one fears is that as soon as they have a little savings, they will wish to go*





Fig. 3: A new home for a refugee family under construction, ca. 1930. Note the electrical service and the windows facing onto the street, both emblematic of the modern nature of this building project. Source: Armenian General Benevolent Union Nubarian Library in Paris, France.

*elsewhere*. This must be avoided, and to avoid it we must make of them small-property owners, of a house, of land or of a field. This task is underway: what has been done in the Levant towards this goal *does honor to the League of Nations*.<sup>42</sup>

The implementation of the plan included the purchase of land, the construction of homes of which the ownership was transferred to the refugees, the employment of refugees in government jobs, professional apprenticeships, and the provision of small-business and agricultural loans. Armenian organizations, Near East Relief, and other aid organizations also participated through League coordination. As these suburbs took shape, the 1936 Nansen Office report to the League acknowledged that these new neighborhoods had transformed “Aleppo and Beyrouth from Oriental into modern cities.”<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the first stage in the process of settlement (1936) in Aleppo, 2,061 new homes had been built, housing some 3,000 families, or over 15,000 people. The homes were semidetached or attached, and they had plumbing and electricity when this was still relatively rare in the rest of the city (fig. 3). Similar projects were undertaken in Beirut, Alexandretta, and Greece.<sup>44</sup> In addition, new churches and schools were built or older structures remodeled for new purposes, including the building that would become the Karen Jeppe School mentioned at the beginning of this essay. The Nansen Office opened welfare bureaus throughout the neighborhoods. The visitor to contemporary Aleppo is still struck by the form of suburban Armenian neighborhoods

like Midan, which the Armenians call Nor Giugh, “New Town.” The district’s wide avenues and its straight streets, the ubiquitous use of Armenian signs, and the sounds of Turkish and Armenian instead of Arabic mark it as a unique space and furnish evidence of the communal survival of a distinct Armenian community in Syria.

Nonetheless, the protection and promotion of a distinct Armenian community during the French Mandate had the intended effect of creating a section of the population that, as noted above, would support French rule and oppose Arab nationalist aspirations; of course, this policy had the added consequence of creating the Armenians as a subject population who were seen by the majority—and saw themselves—as not-quite-Syrians.

## Conclusion

The creation of an independent Armenian state had been a significant cause for governments and the general public that created the League of Nations, and Armenians had been constructed in the humanitarian imagination of many Western Europeans as perhaps the definitive “deserving” oppressed people in the early history of the League. However, the facts on the ground in the Middle East forestalled the creation of an Armenian nation-state in the homeland of the Armenians. Genocide, denationalization, and expulsion changed the demographic reality in Anatolia to the point that in the interwar period such a home was only aspirational, and while it may have made some sense legally or even morally, it had no real chance of success. This reality challenged the League’s self-appointed role of setting the world aright in the wake of the war, as well as the implementation of a system of international laws and global norms, with its attendant moral high ground.

The absence of a state through which to act on behalf of the Armenians led the League to vest its efforts for Armenian communal survival in modern humanitarianism. In the process it expanded the scope and reach of humanitarianism itself. The new practices that were employed to care for the Armenians, including programs for rehabilitation, travel documentation, and resettlement, defined the very nature of humanitarianism in this era. Equally emblematic of this moment was the manner in which the humanitarian imagination incorporated dominant beliefs about nation and ethnicity—often couched in racist terms—into the characterization of suffering. Recognizing the extent to which nationalism, ethnocentrism, and race-thinking shaped the definition of suffering and the humanitarian response indicates the difficulty of reconciling interwar humanitarianism’s emphasis on notions of shared humanity and universalism with the reality of its implementation. As aspects of this form of humanitarian practice have persisted into the postwar era, understanding these links and how they have and have not been challenged sits at the center of any attempt to write the history of modern humanitarianism. A fundamental question to pose of this history is when, or even whether, it emerged from the paradigmatic shadows of nation and race.

By the same token, interwar humanitarianism challenged neither the dominance of the rights of states and their sovereignty—as exemplified by the Nansen Passport regime—nor the basic forms of oppression and unequal relations of power inherent to late colonialism, as in the case of the Rescue Movement and the settling of refugees

in French Mandate Syria and Lebanon. The connection between humanitarianism and the rhetoric of colonial justification, indeed the entire edifice of the League of Nations mandate system, suggests that interwar humanitarianism breathed some new life into that increasingly moribund institution. Still, echoes of the relationship between humanitarianism, colonialism, and nationalism clearly persist in the cruel logic inherent to the other eastern Mediterranean refugee crisis of the first half of the twentieth century. The preservation of post-Holocaust European Jewish identity (among other goals) achieved its success through a colonial project that in turn created the Palestinian diaspora, which has faced multigenerational statelessness. It is no coincidence that the international response to Palestinian dispossession—perhaps only until the 1990s—resembled the interwar humanitarian practices employed on behalf of the Armenians: ad hoc travel identification documents that stopped short of citizenship; the maintenance of separateness through vast urban refugee camps; and limited emigration to the West of those Palestinians with access to education and capital, while those without often exist at the very margins of the states where they live, and usually without the benefit of full citizenship.

With these observations in mind, how can we explain why the League's humanitarian discourse on the treatment of refugees, women, and minorities seems to come so close at times to asserting the role of individual human rights in the practice of humanitarian assistance? This is especially significant because, in retrospect, these projects appear to some observers to have laid the groundwork for contemporary elements of modern human rights law and action, particularly for refugees.<sup>45</sup>

As this essay shows, the interwar understanding (operative for most of the twentieth century) of why certain categories of people should or should not receive humanitarian assistance often had very little if anything to do with the protection or promotion of their human rights per se and instead usually had more to do with their ethnicity, religion, citizenship, and utility to states and ideologies. In this sense, a too-early integration of questions of human rights into the history of humanitarianism deforms rather than informs our understanding of both concepts. It can also obscure what is most interesting and provocative about modern humanitarianism, in particular what its history—when examined without being instrumentalized for the history of human rights—can reveal about the early twentieth-century understanding of concepts like shared humanity (and inhumanity); the construction of difference across the colonial divide; and the problem of empathy in a world in which media, emigration, colonialism, and commerce had transformed the very roots of those concepts.

Still, by the late 1930s ideas about universal human rights and humanitarianism were being floated by League-affiliated organizations, including André Mandelstam's own Institut de droit international, where he served as *rapporteur* for the protection of the rights of man and citizen and of minorities. Daniel Whelan, for example, argues that Mandelstam's work at the Institut contributed to the conceptual framework for the American contribution to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, Mandelstam clearly identified a series of minimum rights—life, liberty, and later conscience—to which a citizen of a state is entitled from that state, or perhaps more accurately what the state cannot interfere with. In the years before the outbreak of

World War II, Mandelstam even suggested that if states failed to protect these rights they risked military “humanitarian intervention.”<sup>46</sup>

All of this calls into question how the “rights talk” that emerged at the edges of League discourse around humanitarianism subsequently moved to the center of the formulation of human rights instruments and treaties at the United Nations. Perhaps the element of interwar humanitarianism most relevant to this question is the evolving definition of the “refugee.” But what the discussion of the Nansen Passport confirms is that the theory and practice of interwar refugee assistance exhibits a substantial difference from the contemporary refugee regime. In my thinking, the critical turn in this discussion is found in the move away from identifying collective denationalized populations as refugees eligible for assistance, toward conceptualizing the refugee as an individual victim of intolerance, tyranny, or oppression, whose circumstance are made more miserable because of war, revolution, or conflict. A poignant example of this shift is seen in Hannah Arendt’s brief 1943 essay “We Refugees,” in which she laments the status of the individual refugee as a *human being* in the face of systems and ideologies that can no longer (or were never intended to) protect them. As this line of argument expanded in her work, it would form the basis of her concept of the “right to have rights.” Tellingly, in her case, she would not have qualified as a refugee under any established refugee convention at the time of her humanitarian rescue by the U.S. diplomat Hiram Bingham and the journalist Varian Fry, a rescue that took place outside any international legal framework.

Clearly, it is possible to find individuals and groups within the working environment of the field of humanitarianism who were engaged in forms of struggle, political and otherwise, on behalf of universalizing individual rights and limiting the sovereignty of states. It is precisely this struggle on the part of individuals within and around the League of Nations that sheds light on the evolving frustration many had with the scope of interwar humanitarianism, the multifaceted failures of the limited refugee regime, and the collapse of the haphazard system of group rights that emphasized membership in national communities. Human rights as they emerged at the time of the writing of the Universal Declaration in the 1940s were in part a response to those failures. These basic question about the origins of human rights discourse and policy during World War II—and even before, in the late 1930s—should be seen as a starting point for the contemporary study of human rights history.

Finally, the humanitarian work of the League of Nations did play an ambiguous and ambivalent though critical role in the interwar survival of Armenians and an Armenian community. Its programs transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of individual Armenians, enabling some to exert limited agency over their own futures. Like the memory of betrayal evoked by the map of Wilsonian Armenia, for many Armenians the relics of the League’s work on their behalf—rescue homes, Nansen Passports, and the refugee neighborhoods—are important milestones in their own and their families’ stories of survival.

#### NOTES

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1. Donald Bloxham explores the gradual shift in support of the Great Powers away from Armenia toward the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, Kemalist Turkey, and its territorial ambitions and desire for regional influence. See Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On the larger history of the Armenian Genocide, see recent work by Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: Tauris, 2011); Taner Akçam, *The Young Turk's Crime against Humanity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012); Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question, 1878–1918* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2010); Ugur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London: Continuum, 2011); Fatma Müge Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* (London: Tauris, 2011).

2. See Lloyd E. Ambrosius, “Wilsonian Diplomacy and Armenia: The Limits of Power and Ideology,” in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1131–45.

3. Jules Pam et al., *Scheme for the Settlement of Armenian Refugees: General Survey and Principal Documents*, publication of the League of Nations, C. 699. M. 264. 1926. IV.

4. The archive of the Armenian National Delegation is held, in part, at the Nubarian Library in Paris. The Delegation was dominated by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, which through the course of the interwar period cooperated with the League of Nations as a quasi-state in terms of representing diasporan Armenian interests, but also as the primary collaborator in resettlement and educational projects. See Raymond Kévorkian and Vahé Tachjian, eds., *The Armenian General Benevolent Union: One Hundred Years of History*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, 2 vols. (Cairo: AGBU Central Board, 2006).

5. A recent example of this failure to employ local languages in the history of a League of Nations foray into the Middle East is Sarah Shields, *Fezzes in the River: Identity Politics and European Diplomacy in the Middle East on the Eve of World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

6. André Mandelstam, *La Société des nations et les puissances devant le problème arménien* (Paris: Pédone, 1926), 322 (emphasis original).

7. For a recent history of the European perspective on “humanitarian intervention” in the Ottoman Empire, see Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

8. Kévorkian, *Armenian Genocide*, 155.

9. Dündar, *Crime of Numbers*, 103–4.
10. Levon Marashlian, “Finishing the Genocide: Cleansing Turkey of Armenian Survivors, 1920–1923,” in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 113–46.
11. Mandestam, *Société des nations*, viii.
12. Ibid.
13. See, for example, Archives of the League of Nations, United Nations Organization, Geneva (hereafter ALON-UNOG) C.508.1929, “Protection of Minorities in Turkey.” In this complaint, the Armenian Patriarch of Cilicia, Paul Terzian, describes at length attacks on Armenians in southeastern Anatolia, including the extrajudicial execution of an Armenian Catholic priest. The penultimate sentence of Terzian’s note is suggestive of how these attacks were understood as an assault on the Armenian national community: “Nous sommes dans l’espoir que la Société des Nations, par sa haute Intervention, pourra obtenir justice des attentats et des spoliations dont sont victimes les Chrétiens, et améliorer la condition des épaves survivantes de notre Nation en Anatolie.”
14. For a largely narrative account of the League’s activities based on a close reading of the archive, see Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: Les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l’entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004).
15. Much of the following discussion is drawn from Keith David Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1315–39.
16. ALON-UNOG, 12/15998/4631, *Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey, Asia Minor, and the Neighbouring Territories: Report Presented by the Fifth Committee, Geneva, September 21, 1921*.
17. “Article 142,” in *Treaty of Peace with Turkey: Signed at Sèvres, August 10, 1920* (London, 1920).
18. Writing to the League in May 1920, the suffragist Helena Swanwick suggested, “This question [of] the enslavement and dishonouring of women and children all over the East as a result of the war is one which might well be taken up by a special Commission of the League of Nations upon which women of standing in the East would be found to take an active part.” ALON-UNOG, 638 12/4631/647, H. M. Swanwick to Robert Cecil, May 20, 1920. Writing to the League a few years later, Emily Robinson, secretary of the Armenian Red Cross and Refugee Fund of Great Britain, asked, “Will you also kindly represent the intense bitterness of feeling that has been fostered on many sides owing to the fact that many scores of thousands of Armenian women and children are still detained in Moslem houses, where they have been captive since 1915. The Armistice with Turkey provided for the release of ‘all prisoners of war.’ Only the men were released and the terms of the Armistice as regards women have not been carried out . . . The present state of things is hazardous in the extreme to the cause of peace in the East besides being a scandal and a disgrace to the civilization of the 20th century.” ALON-UNOG, R 1763 48/25899/38147, letter from Emily Robinson, secretary of the Armenian Red Cross and Refugee Fund (Great Britain), September 28, 1924.
19. On accounts of early rescue efforts and attempts at reintegration by Armenian organizations, see Vahé Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2009): 60–80.

20. See my discussion of the integral role of transfer in the genocide of the Ottoman Armenians in Keith David Watenpaugh, “‘Are There Any Children for Sale?’ Genocide and the Transfer of Armenian Children (1915–1922),” *Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 3 (2013): 283–95.
21. For a broader discussion, see Watenpaugh, “League of Nations’ Rescue.”
22. For a comprehensive description of the rescue movement in Aleppo, see Vahram L. Shemmassian, “The League of Nations and the Reclamation of Armenian Genocide Survivors,” in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2003), 81–111.
23. Karen Jeppe, “Account of the Situation of the Armenians in Syria and of My Own Work amongst Them from the 1st of May til the 1st of September 1922” (enclosure in ALON-UNOG, Records of the Nansen International Refugee Office, 1920–1947), 18.
24. *Ibid.*, 15.
25. *Deportation of Women and Children*, 360.
26. Barbara Metzger, “The League of Nations and Human Rights: From Practice to Theory” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2001).
27. See [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1922/nansen-lecture.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1922/nansen-lecture.html) (accessed September 20, 2012).
28. James L. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief, 1915–1930: An Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1930).
29. Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 88–89.
30. League of Nations, *Arrangement Relating to the Legal Status of Russian and Armenian Refugees*, June 30, 1928, League of Nations Treaty Series, vol. 89, no. 2005.
31. League of Nations, *Arrangement of 12 May 1926 Relating to the Issue of Identity Certificates to Russian and Armenian Refugees*, League of Nations Treaty Series, vol. 89, no. 2004.
32. League of Nations, *Convention Relating to the International Status of Refugees*, October 28, 1933, League of Nations Treaty Series, vol. 159, no. 3663, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3dd8cf374.html> (accessed June 22, 2012).
33. *Ibid.*
34. James C. Hathaway, “The Evolution of Refugee Status in International Law, 1920–1950,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1984): 353.
35. “It does not provide for equal treatment with citizens in regard to labor permits, social security, taxation, and other matters, but an Arrangement of June 30, 1928, recommends favorable treatment for the refugees in regard to these matters.” Louise W. Holborn, “The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (1939): 126.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 89.
38. See Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 211–308 *passim*.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Keith David Watenpaugh, “Towards a New Category of Colonial Theory: Colonial Cooperation and the Survivors’ Bargain—The Case of the Post-Genocide Armenian Community



of Syria under French Mandate,” in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 597–622.

41. MAE, Nantes, Fonds Unions Internationales 2ème versement, no. 1902, “Rapport de M. B. Nicolsky sur l’oeuvre d’établissement de réfugiés arméniens en Syrie,” June 30, 1936.

42. MAE, Nantes, Fonds Beyrouth, carton 575, “Comité de secours aux réfugiés arméniens, Procès-verbal,” June 24, 1931 (emphasis added).

43. “Rapport de M. B. Nicolsky.” See also Raymond Kévorkian et al., eds., *Les Arméniens, 1917–1939: La quête d’un refuge* (Beirut: Presses de l’Université Saint-Joseph, 2006).

44. “A total of 36,016 refugees were settled in 5,576 houses and 1,090 refugees installed in five large agricultural colonies by the end of December 1937.” Holborn, “League of Nations and the Refugee Problem,” 128.

45. See Dzovinar Kévonian, “Question des réfugiés, droits de l’homme: Éléments d’une convergence pendant l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 72 (2003): 40–49. See also Eric D. Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1313–43.

46. Daniel Whelan, *Indivisible Human Rights: A History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 50–51; Jan Herman Burgers, “The Road to San Francisco: The Revival of the Human Rights Idea in the Twentieth Century,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1992): 451–54.