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Embedded Turkification: Nation Building and Violence within the Framework of the League of Nations 1919–1937

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Abstract

This article traces intersections between Turkey's relations with the League of Nations and violent homogenization in Anatolia in the two decades following World War I. It advances the argument that the strife for creating a homogenous population—a core element of Turkish nation building—was embedded in the international order. This is explained on two levels. First, the article stresses the role of international asymmetries on the mental horizon of the Turkish nation builders. The League's involvement in the allied plans to partition Turkey had the organization wrapped up in a mélange of humanitarian concerns, civilizing doctrine, and imperialist interests. Turkish nationalists wanted to avoid those imperialist pitfalls and overcome international minority protection by means of Turkification. They saw international humanitarianism as an obstacle to their nationalist line. Second, the article highlights the ways in which the League itself supported the Kemalists' drive for Turkification, either directly, especially in the case of the “population transfer” between Greece and Turkey, or indirectly through prioritizing Turkey's sovereignty over minority concerns.

Keywords: genocide; League of Nations; minorities; nationalism; Turkey

In a meeting with the director of the League of Nations Minority Section in November 1930, Turkey's Foreign Minister Tevfik Rustu (Aras) declared that all minority issues in his country had now been solved.¹ He explained that bilateral agreements with Greece had settled the situation of the remaining Orthodox population in Istanbul. The Kurds, he went on, fell anyway outside the League's competence because internationally agreed minority rights with Turkey applied to non-Muslim minorities only. Much to the same effect, he mentioned the Jewish citizens, whose situation he described as completely unproblematic and thus negligible. When Director Pablo de Azcárate inquired about the Armenians, Tevfik Rustu replied that those Armenians living abroad had lost their Turkish citizenship and therefore no longer counted as minority. The Armenians still living in Turkey he left completely unmentioned. To put it briefly, in the eyes of the Turkish government minority issues simply had ceased to exist and with them the League of Nations' reason to interfere.

Having clarified his stance on minorities, Tevfik Rustu directed the conversation toward the question of Turkey's participation in the League of Nations. Arguing that the Treaty of Lausanne had confirmed Turkey's equality with the Great Powers, he reiterated his government's persistent demand for a seat on the League's exclusive Council. The treaty gave Turkey the right, he thought, to attend the Council's meetings, at least those dealing with minority issues. He also declared that a seat on the Council, permanent or at least “semi-permanent,” was a condition for joining the League as an official member. The Council acted as the League's main body for decisions on minority complaints. Thus, Tevfik Rustu's two concerns—noninterference in minority matters and Council membership—were interconnected. Moreover, both objectives dovetailed with the Kemalist quest for equal and sovereign internationalization. In marked contrast to the Ottoman experience of asymmetrical internationalization and imperialist

¹Pablo de Azcárate, meeting with Tevfik Rustu Bey, 19 November 1930, National Archives, Foreign Office, London (hereafter FO), 371/14578.

infiltration, “new Turkey’s” Kemalist government aspired to become a self-determined navigator of internationalization processes instead of their passive liege.

The present article focuses on relations between Turkey and the League of Nations during the interwar decades. It suggests reading those relations against the background of the broader history of violent population politics and Turkification from the late Young Turk era to the early Kemalist period (1913–38).² The decisive link between both issues at hand—population politics and international relations—was the transformation of an ethno-religiously diverse society into a homogenous, modern nation-state determined to acquire a sovereign position in the international system. The key focus of this article is how Turkish nation building, in the form of state-driven population politics, interacted with structures and ideas at the level of international organization.

In 1913, for the first time in its history, the Turkish population of the Ottoman Empire had reached a majority. The main cause behind this development was the loss of the Balkan territories and the consequent violent expulsion of Muslims and Turks to Anatolia.³ At the same time, an exclusive Turkish Muslim nationalism was on the rise and the Young Turks’ seizure of power in 1912–13 gave it its break.⁴ The state leadership slowly shifted from ruling heterogeneity to eradicating it. The genocide of Armenians and Syrians organized by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) during the war as well as their resettlement programs in Eastern Anatolia bear witness to this. However, physical Turkification did not end in either 1918 or 1923, as the Greek-Turkish “population exchange,” the denaturalization of former citizens, and the forced assimilation of Kurds in the republican era showed. All these developments before and after World War I were, as Hans-Lukas Kieser and Ugur Umit Ungor have stressed, part of a connected process of (post-)Young Turk violent nation building.⁵

Against this background, the League of Nations comes into play. After World War I, the League developed several bodies that became actively involved in humanitarian missions in the Middle East, namely the Refugee Commission, the mandate system, and the minority system. The minority system guaranteed protection clauses for certain minorities in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and Turkey. A range of excellent studies from recent years has revealed specific intersections between these League machineries and population politics in Turkey. The chapter on Turkey in Martin Scheuermann’s meticulous study of the League Minority Section is most revealing and concludes that due to the government’s reluctant behavior in no other country did international intervention on minority issues remain “as weak and ineffective as in Turkey.”⁶ Sarah Shield’s and Umut Ozsu’s works on the so-called population exchange between Greece and Turkey stand out due to their explicit focus on the League’s role in the “exchange”

²Turkification may be used to describe two different aspects of nation building. On the one hand, it denotes the republican project to create a secular citizenship that would make every citizen a Turk regardless of his or her ethnic or religious background, a project that was accompanied by state-led assimilation policies and identity building. On the other, it means policies and processes that changed the country’s demographics, like deportation, resettlement, killing, or denaturalization. Although the two aspects are intertwined, this article focuses on the second aspect, i.e., physical Turkification. On the first aspect, see Rifat N. Bali, “The Politics of Turkification during the Single Party Period,” in *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, ed. Hans Lukas Kieser (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 43–49; and Yesim Bayar, *Formation of the Turkish Nation-State, 1920–1938* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³Erik-Jan Zürcher, “From Empire to Republic: Problems of Transition, Continuity and Change,” in *Turkey in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Erik-Jan Zürcher (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2008), 15–30, quote on 20. On migration and nation building, see Ahmet İcduygu, Sule Toktas, and Ali B. Soner, “The Politics of Population in a Nation-Building Process: Emigration of Non-Muslims from Turkey,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 358–89.

⁴Ugur Umit Ungor, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 170.

⁵Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Modernisierung und Gewalt in der Gründungsepoche des türkischen Nationalstaats (1913–1938),” in *A Quest of Belonging: Anatolia beyond Empire and Nation (19th–21st Century)*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2007), 338–54; Ugur Umit Ungor, “Seeing Like a Nation-State: Young Turk Social Engineering in Eastern Turkey 1913–50,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 1 (2008): 15–39. On Turkification under the CUP, see Erol Ulker, “Contextualising ‘Turkification’: Nation-Building in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908–18,” *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 4 (2005): 613–36.

⁶Martin Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den Zwanziger Jahren* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2000), 261, 345, 370.

and its contribution to Turkish nation building.⁷ In terms of the League's humanitarian actions for Armenian refugees and genocide survivors, Keith Watenpaugh's research is essential. He highlights the paternalistic and ideologically contested nature of early Western humanitarianism in the Middle East and touches upon Turkish nationalist opposition to humanitarian interventionism as well.⁸ The Turkish viewpoint is at the center of Lerna Ekmekcioglu's article about discourses on identity and citizenship in the context of the League minority protection regime.⁹ Focusing on the case of Turkey's Armenian citizens, she shows how policymakers in Turkey created a hierarchy of citizenship that exposed those citizens to paradoxical modes of discrimination and assimilation. Her thoughts on how national citizenship-making was shaped by interactions and clashes between regional and international actors and their conflicting narratives about the Ottoman past underline the potential of an entangled history of nation building and the League. In her discussion, however, the League itself remains in the background, figuring as a guarantor of minority clauses rather than a dynamic factor.¹⁰

I hope to enter the discussion with a broader perspective on dynamics between homogenizing processes on the one hand and structures, ideas, and policies of the League on the other. What I can offer in this article is not further in-depth coverage of a specific minorities-related topic like that found in these studies. Nor do I claim to deliver a comprehensive account of either the League's activities or nation building in the Kemalist period. Rather, my aim is to synthesize and outline a scheme for a common analytical framework. I suggest that if we put the League in the center of the wider history of Turkification in the late Young Turk and Kemalist era, we gain insights into the interrelations between regional or national transformation and international organization.¹¹ My core argument is that the violent creation of a homogenous population, a key element of Turkish nation building, was embedded in the League of Nations order, however this in no way relativizes the agency of Turkish decision makers.

Embeddedness, as I use the term here, describes the international framework of national processes, that is, the ways in which structures and premises of the League influenced regional change. The structural nationalism of the League, by which I mean its prioritization of state sovereignty and the concept of the nation-state, played into the hands of the Turkish elite, who were determined to consolidate a Turkish nation state on the remnants of a heterogeneous Empire. Referring to Eric Weitz's lucid paper about the cornerstones of the post-1919 global order, one could even go so far as to say that the League, by practically defining homogeneous nation states as the international norm, supported nationalist exclusivism and majoritarianism.¹² This was the case in Turkey as well as in other parts of the Middle East, specifically in the Mandates.¹³ Unlike in the mandated territories, however, the League's influence in

⁷Umut Ozsu, *Formalizing Displacement: International Law and Population Transfers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Sarah D. Shields, "Forced Migration as Nation-Building: The League of Nations, Minority Protection, and the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange," *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016): 120–45.

⁸Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

⁹Lerna Ekmekcioglu, "Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey's Step-Citizens," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 657–79.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 661.

¹¹This approach draws inspiration from global historians who conceptualize international organizations as a "form of interaction across borders that produces footprints and patterns characteristic of the time frame concerned" (Madeleine Herren, "Introduction: Towards a Global History of International Organization," in *Networking the International System: Global Histories of International Organization*, ed. Madeleine Herren (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014), 1–2.

¹²Eric 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. The works of Sarah Shields on the contested borders in Mosul and Hatay support this argument. As she points out, the League commissions for Mosul and Hatay initially made national identity the deciding factor, hence ignoring the much more complex patterns of local belonging. Her conclusion that "European political ideologies required the nation," and that the Turkish government conformed to this logic by insisting on the Turkishness of those areas, illustrates the local repercussions of the League's structural nationalism. See Sarah D. Shields, *Fezzes in the River: Identity Politics and European Diplomacy in the Middle East on the Eve of World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9; and her article, "Mosul, the Ottoman Legacy and the League of Nations," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3, no. 2 (2009): 217–30.

¹³On nationalization and population politics in the mandated Middle East see Lauren Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship, 1918–1947* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 3, 53; Laura Robson, *States of Separation Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 4, 6; Benjamin

independent Turkey surfaced more indirectly.¹⁴ The new state's conflictual position between the rejection of international influences and international integration makes Turkey an interesting case for our understanding of the tension-filled interplay of national sovereignty and internationalism.

It is important to note that the notion of embeddedness implies neither a static context nor a merely structural understanding of the League. Rather, it refers to dynamic influences. As recent research on the League and its Geneva-based international Secretariat has stressed, the organization's various subdivisions took an active interest in a great many transborder issues and state affairs, including refugee aid and minority protection.¹⁵ As I show throughout the next sections of this article, the League and its actors in different ways—some direct, some indirect—backed Kemalist Turkification. The decision makers in Ankara, on the other hand, saw the elimination of international minority concerns as a crucial step toward Turkey's international integration and League membership. Homogenizing Turkey's population was thus not solely a part of nation building. I suggest that it was at the same time a governmental policy directed at Turkey's internationalization: Turkification served the goal of an unimpeded and sovereign existence as a homogenous nation-state in the global community.

Minority Concerns at the Threshold, 1919–20

Faced with the ruins of the lost war, Ottoman Turkish elites placed great hopes in the Wilsonian dream of a new, egalitarian global community and the foundation of the League of Nations as the new center of international relations.¹⁶ As all over the Middle East and Asia, high expectations quickly turned to sour disappointment with the realization that the League would not only fail to implement the new ideas about international order, but would safeguard earlier imperial designs as well. Reading the Geneva daily press in early spring 1919, Ahmet Resit (Rey), former Ottoman minister of interior and liberal Young Turk in exile, learned that the League might oversee Greek and Italian mandates in Asia Minor, a United States mandate over Armenia, and a scheme for transforming Istanbul into an internationally administered city.¹⁷ Like most of his compatriots, no matter what their political color, he was utterly outraged. In an open letter to President Woodrow Wilson, he accused the League of supporting the partition of Turkey and lamented over "Armenian intrigues and Greek machinations" in the peace-making process. Although he did not deny the "tragic events during the war," meaning the massacres and deportations of Armenians, he lay all the blame on the former Unionist (CUP) leaders.¹⁸ In the context of the Paris Peace Conference, the notion of responsibility for humanitarian crimes was directly linked to the planned dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

Two American-led expert commissions, the Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey and the Harbord Commission, were sent to Turkey in 1919, and both suggested creating an independent Armenian state in Anatolia and putting Turkey itself under a US mandate. "As far as the Armenians are concerned, the Turk has had his day," the Harbord report concluded, arguing that the chance of the Turkish government "being able to accomplish reforms from within which will satisfy modern

Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 50–52.

¹⁴On the limits of international humanitarianism in sovereign Turkey, see Davide Rodogno, "Non-State Actors' Humanitarian Operations in the Aftermath of the First World War: The Case of the Near East Relief," in *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Fabian Klose (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 185–207.

¹⁵See Madeleine Herren, "International Organizations, 1865–1945," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Organizations*, ed. Jacob Katz Cogan, Ian Hurd, and Ian Johnstone (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91–112; Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–117.

¹⁶Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Cabir Dogan shows that early opinions about the League in the Istanbul press were carefully optimistic: Cabir Dogan, "Cemiyet-i Akvam'ın Kuruluşunun İstanbul Basınına Yansımaları," in *Osmanlı Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 3 (2016): 33–47.

¹⁷Ali Cankaya, *Yeni Mulkiye ve Mulkiyeliler*, vol. 3 (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1969), 52–58.

¹⁸Ahmed Réchid, *Lettre Ouverte à M. W. Wilson, Président des Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (Genève: Imprimerie du Journal Genève, 1919), 19, 26.

requirement and perhaps make amends for past crimes” was to next to zero.¹⁹ Despite the fact that the commissions’ proposals ultimately did not materialize, they do reflect the inclination of the peacemakers to solve the humanitarian situation in the Ottoman Middle East by the dual means of transforming minorities into national entities and installing international protection. The Allies, who were also founders of the League of Nations, connected minority concerns to their geopolitical schemes for Asia Minor and the larger Middle East.²⁰ This was a connection that Ahmet Resit (like many other Turkish intellectuals) sought to dissolve by pursuing relativizing strategies and anti-minority discourse.

The key discursive element that the allied peacemakers as well as public voices used to create this causal connection between minority protection and curtailments of Ottoman sovereignty and territorial integrity was the concept of civilization. The term *minorities* in its modern political sense entered the world stage in the postwar years.²¹ Opinion makers in the West used the treatment of ethno-religious minorities as a criterion to identify a people outside Western Europe as uncivilized.²² However, the concept of minorities requiring protection seized on ideas about governance and rights dating back to the Westphalian system. Those ideas took an increasingly imperialist shape in the 19th century, particularly in the context of European politics in the Middle East.²³ As Janne Nijman puts it, the 19th century saw the rise of the paternalistic idea that Europe needed to protect Ottoman minorities from their government and that their treatment was “a yardstick for the ‘standard of civilization’ required to enter the European Family of Nations.”²⁴ The “standard of civilization,” the notorious justifier for European exclusivism and colonial governance in 19th century international law, was mirrored in the post-1918 era and the League of Nations.²⁵ It resonated in the paternalist layout of the League Minority System that regarded minority protection as an issue in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the Middle East, but not in the United States or in European countries and colonies.²⁶

Its clearest expression, however, was in the League Covenant, Article 22, regarding the mandate system, with its claim that some peoples were “not yet able to stand by themselves,” thus forming “a sacred trust of civilization.” According to this civilizing logic, such peoples required the tutelage of an “advanced nation” to guide and govern them on behalf of the international community of civilized states.²⁷ Liberal internationalism became the child of both Wilsonianism and Great Power interventionism, as the chiefly Anglo-American founders of the League found a way to bridge the gap between the two.²⁸ It propagated a universal community of sovereign nations, while at the same time withholding or undermining national independence in the semi-colonial peripheries in the name of civilizational development.²⁹ On this basis,

¹⁹James G. Harbord, Conditions in the Near East: Report of the American Military Mission to Armenia, 13 April 1920, Senate Doc. No. 16–266, 11–12.

²⁰Taner Akcam, “Another History on Sèvres and Lausanne,” in *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, 2nd ed., ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (Zurich: Chronos, 2002), 281–99.

²¹White, *Minorities*, 21. See also Carole Fink, “Minority Rights as an International Question,” *Contemporary European History* 9, no. 3 (2000): 385–400.

²²Mark Mazower, “An International Civilization: Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *International Affairs* 82, no. 3 (2006): 553–66 (quote on 560); Mark Mazower, “Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe,” *Daedalus* 126, no. 2 (1997): 47–63 (quote on 53).

²³On European imperialism and humanitarian intervention in the Ottoman Empire see, Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914*; *The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Davide Rodogno, “European Legal Doctrines on Intervention and the Status of the Ottoman Empire within the ‘Family of Nations,’” *Journal of the History of International Law* 18 (2016): 5–41 (quote on 41); Umut Ozsu, “Ottoman Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of International Law*, ed. Bardo Fassbender and Anne Peters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 429–48 (quote on 440).

²⁴Janne E. Nijman, “Minorities and Majorities,” in Fassbender and Peters, *Oxford Handbook*, 95–119.

²⁵Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1984). On the post-1918 era, see Mazower, “Civilization.”

²⁶Mark Mazower, “The Strange Triumph of Human Rights 1933–1950,” *Historical Journal* 47, no. 2 (2004): 379–98 (quote on 382).

²⁷Covenant of the League of Nations, *League of Nations Official Journal* 1, no. 1 (February 1920), 9.

²⁸Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2012), 118–120, 128–133.

²⁹Nathaniel Berman, *Passion and Ambivalence: Colonialism, Nationalism, and International Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 315–16; Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2–3, 403–405.

the League offered the Allies much needed structures and a legitimized solution to the Eastern Question through the internationalization of Ottoman territories and sovereign rights.³⁰ Not only did the mandate system allow the British and French to acquire new colonies in former Ottoman Arab provinces, but the Allies, including the aforementioned American expert commissions, also considered turning Anatolian Turkey itself into a (possibly US) mandate. Furthermore, they involved the League in their schemes for internationalizing certain parts of Turkish affairs, including finance, health, and minorities, as well as the Turkish Straits and the city of Istanbul.³¹ The League Secretary General Eric Drummond himself, who agreed that “the Turk should no longer [sic] be allowed to remain in Europe,”³² suggested making Istanbul a free city under the protection of the League. Although the Treaty of Sèvres ultimately ruled that Istanbul would remain the capital of Turkey, it threatened to change this status if Turkey did not faithfully abide to its clauses, “particularly as regards the protection of . . . minorities.”³³

In the context of the peace conference, sincere sorrows about wartime atrocities against Christians mixed with supportive calls for territorial transformation and Western mandates.³⁴ Generalized accusations against the uncivilized and cruel nature of Turkish rule and conclusions about the unfitness of Turkey to become a member of the League were common. The Western press was full of opinion pieces stating things like “cruelty is always a sign of incompetence,” “so long as the Turk rules there will be atrocities,” or simply “get rid of the Turk.”³⁵ Alongside the press and public, targeted political agitation took the same line. “Can the Turks enter the League of Nations?” asked a propaganda publication authorized by the Greek delegation to the conference. A rhetorical question, since its authors portrayed the Turks as a “barbaric race” that was incapable of a functioning government, oppressed Christian minorities, and opposed civilization and progress. The publication presented a destructive history of anti-Christian violence, depicting the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the siege of Vienna, the Greek war of independence, and finally the Young Turk atrocities in 1915: “Where the Turk has passed: everything becomes ruins and grief!” In their conclusion, the authors even demanded that, for the sake of civilization and humanity, Turkey should cease to exist as a sovereign state.³⁶ Such propaganda seized on stereotypes about Turks and Muslims that had meandered along the European imagination ever since the “Turkish menace.”³⁷ Beyond their general role in delimiting the contours of Christian/European identity, such enemy images came to play a very specific role in 1919. On the one hand, they helped to explain recent genocidal violence by framing it as the climax of a well-known story about the evil Turk; on the other, they justified immediate geopolitical goals like European mandates, Greek expansionism, and the vision of Greater Armenia in Anatolia.³⁸

Considering the vital association between minority protection and international asymmetries, the diplomatic strategy of the Ottoman envoy to Paris, Grand Vizier Damat Mehmet Ferit Pasha, is anything but surprising. Like Ahmet Resit, who had become minister of interior again and took part in Damat Ferit’s delegation, he put all blame for the Armenian genocide—“misdeeds which are such as to make the

³⁰On the imperialist dimension of international administration, see Carsten Stahn, *The Law and Practice of International Territorial Administration: From Versailles to Iraq and Beyond* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ralphe Wilde, *International Territorial Administration: How Trusteeship and the Civilizing Mission Never Went Away* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³¹See Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919–1920* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1974), 111–126; Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History 1913–1923* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 231–36.

³²Eric Drummond to Philip Kerr, 13 December 1919, (hereafter League of Nations Archives) R564–11–2432–2432.

³³“Treaty of Sèvres,” in *The Treaties of Peace, 1919–1923*, ed. Lawrence Martin (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924), 789–941; quote on 799.

³⁴Watenpaugh rightly warns that we should not simply dismiss humanitarianism “as another facet of imperialism,” but rather “investigate the relationship between colonialism and humanitarianism” (*Bread from Stones*, 129).

³⁵“The Plight of Armenia,” *London Times*, 2 May 1919, 13. “Christians Unsafe Where Turk Rules,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 March 1920, 2. “Get Rid of the Turk,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1920, 12.

³⁶*Les Turcs Peuvent-ils entrer dans la Ligue des Nations? Appréciations, Documentations, Récits* (n.p., 1919), 14, 35.

³⁷Felix Konrad, “From the ‘Turkish Menace’ to Exoticism and Orientalism: Islam as Antithesis of Europe (1453–1914)?,” European History Online, Institute of European History, 14 March 2011, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/konradf-2010-en> (accessed 30 August 2019).

³⁸Akcam, “Another History,” 283.

conscience of mankind shudder with horror forever”—on the former Unionist rulers. In his memorandum to the Allies in June 1919, he insisted that not only Christian minorities but also the entire Ottoman society had fallen victim to the CUP and their decision to enter the war. Hoping to persuade the Allies of milder peace conditions, he further pointed to the ongoing Istanbul court-martials against war criminals. In his eyes, these trials had already called the true culprits to account, thus rendering his country “rehabilitated in the eyes of the civilized world” and ready “to become a useful factor in the League of Nations.”³⁹ Since the founders of the new international order linked matters of sovereignty, recognition, and membership to arguments about the humanitarian and civilizational capacity of a state, Damat Ferit had good reason to emphasize the Ottoman share in civilization. The allied political leaders, however, insisted that the “capacity to rule over alien races” did not rank among the qualities of “the Turk.”⁴⁰ They used this alleged incapacity to legitimize the partition of the Ottoman Empire, and they also stipulated a strict minority protection regime; both were enshrined in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres.

For the rising oppositional Turkish National Movement in Ankara, orchestrated by Kemalist Turkey’s future leaders, the lesson from Sèvres seemed clear. After their successful military campaign against allied occupation and the peace treaty, they found themselves in a position to renegotiate international humanitarian interference. At the renewed peace talks in Lausanne (1922–23), they declared it their “legitimate desire to prevent minorities in Turkey becoming weapons in the hands of foreigners, capable of being utilised for subversive purposes.”⁴¹ İsmet (Inonu), the leading delegate in Lausanne, openly expressed his suspicion of international minority politics, stating, “nothing would prevent Powers having designs on Turkey from secretly inciting the minorities and profiting as formerly by the troubles which would result from it provoking the intervention of the League.”⁴² In the eyes of the Ankara leadership, international minority protection formed one of the greatest obstacles to their principal aim: Turkey’s sovereignty.⁴³ To make his point, İsmet Pasha referred to the Capitulations and the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. Both had enabled Europeans to act on behalf of minority interests. For him, they proved that minority concerns were a tool for creeping de-sovereignization, and he charged that their history was essentially imperialist in nature. The Turkish position in Lausanne came down to a struggle against the ghosts of the Ottoman past.⁴⁴

As the episode cited at the beginning of this article (Tevfik Rustu’s meeting with de Azcárate in 1930) underlines, the government continued to worry about international minority protection even after establishment of Turkey’s formal independence in 1923, and even though the Treaty of Lausanne left the League itself with no power to enforce protection. Notwithstanding its lack of binding powers, the League wielded normative authority. As Antony Anghie stresses, it represented the principles of international law (including sovereignty), community, and civilization.⁴⁵ The Turks aspired to become an accepted member in this sphere of principles, irrespective of the question of immediate League membership. They perceived minority protection as a barrier at the threshold to their acceptance into this sovereignty-based international community.

As we will see later, the Turks saw the sheer existence of ethno-religious minorities in the country as a threat to sovereignty, because it potentially opened the door for interference, intervention, and imperial infiltration. The conclusion drawn by the leaders of the National Movement was as logical as it was radical: on the way to the Lausanne Conference in 1922, they consolidated their conviction that the sine qua non for overcoming international power asymmetries was consolidating an ethno-religiously homogeneous nation-state.

³⁹“Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the Supreme Council of the Allied and Associated Powers Held in the Salle de l’Horloge, Quai d’Orsay,” 17 June 1919, from Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Paris Peace Conference 1919, vol. 4, Document 30, US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv04/d30> (accessed 30 August 2019).

⁴⁰“Allies Reject Turkey’s Plea,” *New York Times*, 27 June 1919, 3.

⁴¹Territorial and Military Commission, *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs: Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace* (hereafter *Lausanne Conference Records*), 13 December 1922 (London 1923), 207.

⁴²*Lausanne Conference Records*, 12 December 1922, 202.

⁴³Ozsu, *Formalizing Displacement*, 77.

⁴⁴Ekmekcioglu, “Republic of Paradox,” 661, 666.

⁴⁵Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 126.

Lest they Persist: Normalizing Past and Present, 1920–23

In the previous section, I have highlighted how right after World War I the Allies linked the thorny issue of minority concerns to the exclusion of the Ottoman state from a sovereign position in the emerging League of Nations order, exposing it to partition and de-sovereignization by the League instead. This is not to say, however, that Turkification in the years to follow was a mere reaction to the imperialist premises of the postwar order. It is vital to take into account that violent population politics had been underway since the late Young Turk era. Postwar international minority concerns were thus not only a catalyst for population politics yet to come. As this section goes on to show, they did disturb the nationalists' aim to normalize the political and demographic changes caused by the violent events of the recent past, namely the Armenian genocide and the (then still ongoing) expulsion of Christians from Turkey.⁴⁶

The punishment of mass violence committed against Armenians during the war became a central issue in the peace negotiations regarding the Middle East. With the League designated to play a significant role in its implementation, the Treaty of Sèvres set a comprehensive legal framework for prosecution, restoration, and protection. Superseding the former Ottoman court-martials against war criminals summoned under allied occupation, the treaty compelled the sultan's government to surrender defendants directly to a tribunal "competent to deal with the said massacres"⁴⁷ established either by the League or, in case it failed to do so in due time, by the allied powers themselves. Furthermore, the treaty obliged the Ottoman authorities to recover displaced survivors, restore their homes and abandoned properties, and reestablish their businesses. It attributed assets formerly belonging to genocide victims to the local minority communities instead of the state. In order to push these measures, the League Council was to appoint mixed commissions that would receive complaints of victims, inquire regarding whereabouts, help release kidnapped persons, intervene in recusant property sales, facilitate asset transfers, recruit local labor for reconstruction, and seize persons reportedly involved in massacres or deportations.

In short, the peace treaty included the League in a scheme for full clearance of the crimes, including their economic dimension.⁴⁸ From the perspective of the National Movement, whose members fought against the Treaty of Sèvres, the outlook of some sort of Armenian restitution posed a direct political and material threat: many CUP members involved in organizing expropriation, deportation, and murder found themselves in the ranks of the National Movement after the war.⁴⁹ What is more, the treaty combined the pursuit of legal action with political and territorial demands. For example, it enshrined minority rights under guarantee of the League, confirming not only the equal status of all citizens but also certain autonomy rights for religious communities, such as a proportional representation of ethno-religious minorities in the electoral system. Furthermore, it provided for the international recognition of an Armenian state, including the Anatolian provinces of Bitlis, Erzerum, Trabzon, and Van. In all these points, the League was in conflict with the National Movement's geopolitical aims for sovereignty and noninterference.⁵⁰

The League, the guardian of the peace treaties, confirmed the borders of an Armenian state in Anatolia. In autumn 1920, due to the advance of Turkish nationalist forces on the Armenian border, government representatives of the Republic of Armenia filed several petitions to the League demanding an international intervention and a joint enforcement of the Sèvres treaty.⁵¹ During the first League Assembly, in December 1920, Lord Cecil, one of the League's founding fathers, appealed to the delegates to take the necessary steps "to free it [Armenia] from the tyranny of the Turk."⁵² Fridtjof Nansen, the

⁴⁶Levon Marshlian, "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 (quote on 124).

⁴⁷"Treaty of Sèvres," 863, Art. 230.

⁴⁸On economic motives, see Christian Gerlach, "Nationsbildung im Krieg: Wirtschaftliche Faktoren bei der Vernichtung der Armenier und beim Mord an den ungarischen Juden," in Kieser and Schaller, *Armenian Genocide*, 347–422.

⁴⁹Marshlian, "Finishing," 124.

⁵⁰National Pact (Misak-i Milli) adopted 28 January 1920, published in modern Turkish by Serafettin Turan, *Türk Devrim Tarihi*, vol. 2 (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992), 88.

⁵¹Edita Gzoyan, "The Turkish-Armenian War of 1920 and the League of Nations," *Central and Eastern European Review* 5 (2011): 2–15.

⁵²League of Nations, *League of Nations Records of the First Assembly, Plenary Meetings* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1920), 96.

League's High Commissioner for Refugees, was also in favor of an intervention. Disunity between the League members, doubts as to whether such an intervention would be covered by the Covenant, and objection that the Turkish nationalist troops did not belong to any recognized state but were irregular and thus outside the jurisdiction of the League left the debates unresolved. However, the debates did have the lasting impact of increasing the Turkey's distrust of the League.

In the run-up to the peace negotiations in Lausanne, the Turks turned to Nansen and requested a confidential meeting, with the intent of clarifying the government's position on the League and minority support. Hamit (Hasancan), official representative of the Ankara National Assembly in Istanbul, met with two envoys representing Geneva: Georges Burnier, who worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Asia Minor and co-operated with Nansen's office, and Erik Colban, then director of the Minority Section in the League Secretariat. According to Colban's report about the gathering, which took place in Istanbul in late October 1922, Hamit Bey assumed a firm, almost hostile attitude.⁵³ Although he expressed his government's high hopes of the League of Nations, he conceded that, so far, its activities had given little reason for optimism. He explicitly complained about Lord Cecil's position in the Assembly and expressed his concerns about anti-Turkish sentiment and British ascendancy in the League. On top of this was another cause for distrust, namely the League's humanitarian action. After the nationalist army had regained all territory that the Allies had allocated to Armenia, the League's efforts shifted from securing an Armenian homeland to humanitarianism.⁵⁴ In February 1921, the League Council created an expert commission and initiated humanitarian aid on the ground. In occupied Istanbul, the Commission placed an orphanage under its authority. The main goal was to reclaim displaced Armenian women and children who had survived the genocide and were absorbed into Muslim households.⁵⁵ During the meeting in Istanbul, Hamit Bey, in the name of the Ankara government, complained about those activities, dismissing them as illegitimate foreign interferences. Hamit Bey left Erik Colban with anything but a sympathetic impression. He described him as a "wholehearted Turkish nationalist," "hateful," "brusque," and "violent." Clearly, Colban's negative opinion mirrors the general disagreement between the two parties: Colban was trying to convince Hamit Bey that the League's efforts were "purely humanitarian" and had nothing to do with political questions.⁵⁶ Hamit Bey by contrast insisted on the rightful claim of his government against international interference in minority affairs in Turkey, which for him constituted a domestic and thus highly political affair.

Indeed, as Watenpugh's groundbreaking research on the topic has shown, the League's humanitarian efforts on behalf of Armenian survivors were far from being apolitical. The simple fact that the ability of Western humanitarians to operate unilaterally and relatively undisturbed on Ottoman territory depended on allied occupation highlights the contested political nature of the whole undertaking.⁵⁷ Moreover, as I have outlined in the previous section, international humanitarian concerns encompassed biases against "the Turk" as the uncivilized other. Although members of the Turkish elite attacked this image, most of them had an equally ideological take on international humanitarianism, depicting it as a conspiracy by Western imperialists and alleged internal enemies, that is, Christian minorities. In their view, the rescue operations not only undermined Ottoman sovereignty, but also posed an outright threat to national cohesion and Turkishness.⁵⁸ They portrayed their imagined nation—the Muslim-Turkish population—as the actual victim. In a cynical twist, they blamed the minorities for their own fate.⁵⁹ They did so very officially at the Lausanne Conference, where Ismet Pasha and his delegation in Lausanne (including Hamit Bey)

⁵³Erik Colban, memorandum, 27 October 1922, LONA R1596-40-24661-24661.

⁵⁴Watenpugh, *Bread from Stones*, 67.

⁵⁵Vahram L. Shemmassian, "The League of Nations and the Reclamation of Armenian Genocide Survivors," in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 81–111.

⁵⁶Erik Colban, memorandum, 27 October 1922, LONA R1596-40-24661-24661.

⁵⁷Watenpugh, *Bread from Stones*, 129.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 146. During the war, Halide Edip had expressed content about the "ridding" of Armenians in the eastern provinces; see Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 295.

⁵⁹The British High Commissioner in Istanbul complained about the ever-same excuses from Turkish officials: Horace Rumbold to Lord Curzon, 21 January 1922, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, part 2, vol. 3, ed. Robin Bidwell (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1985), 34–36.

externalized all responsibility, blaming European imperialism and alleged Armenian disloyalty for the “sufferings of the minorities in Turkey,” in order to delegitimize humanitarian interventionism and reject any interference by the League on behalf of minorities.⁶⁰

With Turkish obstinacy on this topic and allied priorities lying elsewhere, silence was the outcome: the Lausanne peace treaty neither mentioned an autonomous Armenian territory in Anatolia, nor did it contain clauses regarding prosecution, legal autonomies, or humanitarian care. In fact, it did not even mention the crimes. Genocide scholars and historians of modern Turkey have often evaluated the Treaty of Lausanne as international amnesty and indirect acceptance of “deportations or even murderous ethnic cleansing as a potential solution to population problems.”⁶¹

What does this assessment mean with regard to relations between “new Turkey” and the League of Nations? Whereas, according to the Treaty of Sèvres, an enforced coming to terms with the crimes against Armenians would have significantly shaped these relations, the new treaty neutralized the role of the League. Moreover, although the peace treaty formally confirmed Turkey’s intended break with its violent past, in practice the League normalized the demographic and political outcomes of this past, as the following examples illustrate. Before Turkey finally entered the League in 1932, various Armenian diasporic groups petitioned the League in sharp protest. They were anxious that Turkey’s admission to the League would be “tantamount to an exoneration of the crimes” and secure “an international guarantee against the just claims of the Armenians.”⁶² In their view, “the Armenian question was not solved by the Treaty of Lausanne,” but only adjourned.⁶³ Petitioners from the Central Committee of Armenian Refugees in Paris expected the international organization to do what the Allies in Lausanne did not, namely to insist on legal consequences and reparations. If the League failed to do so, they warned, it would approve the injustice done to the Armenians.⁶⁴ Discussing the letter, members of the League Minority Section, the Refugees Office, and the Political Section unanimously arrived at the decision to ignore its claims. Ivan Kerno, who worked for Nansen’s commission, stated that “the *political* aspirations of Armenians . . . obviously form a completely different chapter,” and that it was not for the Refugees Office to comment on such political points.⁶⁵ His colleagues felt equally incompetent.

Unlike the Treaty of Sèvres, the Treaty of Lausanne, and with it the League Secretariat, included humanitarian concerns separate from political interference in the realm of Turkish state sovereignty. In the conflict between the former Ottoman minorities still clinging to the voided Treaty of Sèvres and the Turkish government with its claims based on Lausanne, the Secretariat clearly positioned itself on the latter side. For instance, after 1923, Turkish officials did not tolerate international humanitarians in Istanbul or elsewhere.⁶⁶ The League acquiesced. It relocated its entire humanitarian network for Armenians outside Turkey. Due to Turkey’s refusal to be involved and the lack of a sovereign Armenian state, the League of Nations Secretariat cooperated with Armenian diaspora groups to manage the refugee situation. Armenians and Syrians who had been expelled from Turkey were refused reentry to the country and finally expatriated. They resettled in mandated Syria with the help of the League or received stateless persons passports issued by the Nansen Office.⁶⁷ Without doubt, post-1923 humanitarian measures of the League helped genocide survivors in sore distress. However, they also freed the Turkish government from its responsibility for its former citizens and contributed to the consolidation of the Lausanne status quo and the violently altered population structure of Turkey.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Ismet Pasha, *Lausanne Conference Records*, 12 December 1922, 190–204 (quote on 201–02).

⁶¹ Suny, *Desert*, 367–68. See also Ekmekcioglu, “Republic of Paradox,” 66; Ungor, “Seeing,” 29.

⁶² Telegram sent by the Democratic Liberal Party of Armenia, District Committee, Boston, to the League, 22 September 1926, LONA R1447 28–54259–276.

⁶³ Central Committee of the Democratic Liberal Party of Armenia to the Secretary General, 30 June 1932, LONA R1877 1B–37821–36492.

⁶⁴ Comité Central de Réfugiés Arméniens to the Secretary General, 5 July 1932, LONA R1877 1B–37821–36492.

⁶⁵ Ivan Kerno to Gerald H. F. Abraham, 14 July 1932, LONA R1877 1B–37821–36492.

⁶⁶ Davide Rodogno, “The American Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross’ Humanitarian Politics and Policies in Asia Minor and Greece (1922–1923),” *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 83–99 (quote on 92).

⁶⁷ The League’s Refugee Commission and Fridtjof Nansen introduced international passports for stateless refugees; see Watenpugh, *Bread from Stones*, 169.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 160, 162, 174.

Preparing for the Future: Homogenization under the Aegis of Lausanne, 1923–37

With regard to the role of the Treaty of Lausanne in linking Turkish nation building to the League, my argument is twofold. In the previous section, I emphasized that the treaty's silence on past crimes lent tacit credence to Turkey's intended break with the Ottoman past. It allowed the nation builders to remove the question of justice and restitution from the international realm, normalizing the status quo and Turkey's future relations with the League. In this section, my focus shifts to the additional thesis that Lausanne also prepared future ground for continued Turkification within the League of Nations framework. The results of the Lausanne Conference rendered the League a supportive rather than a critical factor in this regard.⁶⁹ The following three considerations support this claim.

To begin, the Treaty of Lausanne included the convention concerning a mandatory "exchange" of populations between Greece and Turkey. Scholars stressing the international dimension of this "exchange" argue that the whole undertaking was in fact an ethnic cleansing backed up by the Allies, the League's High Commissioner for Refugees Fridtjof Nansen, and the League Secretariat.⁷⁰ The peace treaty authorized the League Council to create a mixed commission that organized the forced transmigration of Muslim citizens from Greece and Greek Orthodox Ottoman nationals. Moreover, the League Minority Section assumed responsibility during the process, turning the League into an active catalyst for homogenization in the Aegean region.⁷¹ Next to its practical contribution, the League also provided legitimacy. Among others, Umut Ozsu and Sarah Shields have pointed to the fact that Nansen and League experts supported the widespread assumption that ethno-religious disentanglement would bring regional stability and peace.⁷² This fits the general conception that the League itself embodied a world order that treated clearly separable homogenous nation-states as the accepted norm.⁷³ Following this logic, diversity posed a potential problem, and individual rights counted less than collective solutions.⁷⁴

Hamit Bey as well as Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) himself had signaled consent to the idea in confidential talks with Fridtjof Nansen in the run-up to the Lausanne Conference. Turkish decision makers not only accepted the proposal as part of the peace settlement, they insisted on it. They even demanded that it be mandatory (unlike the voluntary exchange provided for by the Sèvres treaty). When the topic finally appeared on the conference agenda, Ismet Pasha, the head of the Turkish delegation in Lausanne, voiced misgivings. He did not question the idea itself, however. Quite the opposite: he objected to the fact that the "population exchange" proposal figured on the same agenda as the exchange of POWs, whereas in his view it belonged to the agenda on minority protection.⁷⁵ His objection may seem pedantic, but it is very telling: the Turkish approach to minority protection considered the simple removal of minorities as best practice. The Turkish government's plan to negotiate a further "population exchange" with the Armenian government is a case in point.⁷⁶ As Bayar and Ekmekcioglu have shown, the majority of parliamentarians in Ankara had even suggested that their government should settle for a general deal that ensured the "exchange" of all non-Muslim minorities.⁷⁷ Considering this proactive mindset, Karl Marius Widding, neutral member of the Mixed Commission, noted, "the Turks appear to be by far the best prepar[ed] from a theoretical point of view and they appear to be desirous of carrying out the Convention to the full."⁷⁸ These cited examples illustrate that the political leadership in Turkey welcomed the internationally coordinated "population transfer" as a positive contribution to nation building.

⁶⁹Kieser, "Modernisierung," 347.

⁷⁰Caglar Keyder, "The Consequences of the Exchange of Populations for Turkey," in *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, ed. Renée Hirschon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 40–52; Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "The Greek-Turkish Population Exchange," in Zurcher, *Turkey in the Twentieth Century*, 255–70.

⁷¹Mads Drange, "Supervisor, Facilitator and Arbitrator: A Study of the Involvement of the Minority Section of the League of Nations in the Forced Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923," (MA thesis, University of Oslo, 2017).

⁷²Ozsu, *Formalizing Displacement*, 2–3; Shields, "Forced Migration," 2, 4–5, 49.

⁷³Weitz, "Paris System," 1334.

⁷⁴Mazower, "Minorities," 51.

⁷⁵*Lausanne Conference Records*, 1 December 1922, 117. The issue was also addressed in internal communication: Ismet Pasha to Huseyin Rauf, 2 December 1922, in *Lozan Telegraflari*, vol. 1, ed. Bilal N. Simsir (Ankara: TTK Basimevi, 1990), 156.

⁷⁶See the following telegrams: Huseyin Rauf to Ismet Pasha, 28 November 1922; Huseyin Rauf to Ismet Pasha, December 4, 1922; and Huseyin Rauf to Ismet Pasha, 7 December 1922, in Simsir, *Lozan Telegraflari*, vol. 1, 143, 162, 174.

⁷⁷Yesim Bayar, "In Pursuit of Homogeneity: The Lausanne Conference, Minorities and the Turkish Nation," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 1 (2014): 108–25 (quote on 116f). Ekmekcioglu, "Republic of Paradox," 657f.

⁷⁸Karl Marius Widding to Helmer Rosting, 20 October 1923, LONA R82 2–31412–31152.

Second, since the nationalist vision of a wholesale removal of Christian minorities did not materialize, minority protection remained on the agenda in Lausanne. However, compared to the encompassing nature of protection mechanisms specified by the Sèvres treaty, the Ankara government managed to keep minority protection at bay. At the insistence of İsmet Paşa's delegation, the new treaty—unlike Sèvres—did not provide for any visibility or protection regarding Muslim, non-Turkish minorities. This gap served the Kemalists' aim to monopolize all Muslims in Turkey under the hegemonic construct of the Turkish nation. It facilitated both the imposed assimilation of Kurdish citizens, most of whom counted as Muslim, and the stern suppression of Kurdish and Alevi protests rising against the assimilationist line of the government.⁷⁹ Already, during World War I, the CUP had pursued population politics with regard to the Kurdish regions in Eastern Anatolia, forcefully resettling great number of Kurds to abandoned Armenian settlements in the West. In turn, Muslim refugees from the Balkans were resettled in the Dersim region (today's Tunceli) where many Armenians and Kurds had lived.⁸⁰ The Kemalists adopted a similar policy. A series of regional uprisings led by Kurdish and Alevi chiefs beginning in the mid-1920s challenged Kemalist rule and its secular, modernist, and Turkish nationalistic thrust.⁸¹ The radical reaction of the Turkish government in the years between 1926 and 1934, which included systematic executions, several laws systematizing state deportations, and a restructuring of demographic conditions in Eastern Turkey, did not escape international notice. In 1930, the British ambassador to Ankara questioned whether the "recent policy of stern repression" would really bolster the "process of the 'Turkification' of the Kurds."⁸² Comments like this seemed to reflect pragmatic rather than ethical doubts. Already, at the peace conference, the Turkish move to exclude Muslim minorities from the protection agenda had met with little resistance on the part of allied negotiators. In fact, the British delegation only advocated for Arabs and Kurds when it served their own claims in the region, especially regarding Mosul.⁸³ Turkish officials, and even Foreign Minister Aras himself, did not hide their social Darwinist and inimical attitudes toward the Kurds. Addressing the director of the League Minority Section, Aras spoke openly about his vision of letting the Kurds dissolve into the Turkish majority population by means of an "intense Turkish colonization."⁸⁴ The assimilation policy itself did not evoke noticeable international reaction, even when state violence escalated in Dersim in 1937.⁸⁵

At this time, the League Secretariat received two petitions concerning the situation in Dersim. Their author was Mehmet Nuri Dersimi, a well-educated Alevi Kurd who was born in Dersim. He had been one of the early proponents of an autonomous Kurdistan, joined rebellious activities in the 1920s and 1930s, and fled to French Aleppo during the invasion of Dersim.⁸⁶ The petition texts obscured his authorship, instead carrying the signatures of Kurdish clan leaders.⁸⁷ The letters called upon the League to help the Kurdish "nation" and to send an inquiry commission that would investigate the suppression of the Kurdish press and language as well as forced emigration, air strikes, and the use of chemical weapons. Members of different sections within the Secretariat evaluated the petitions and came to the unanimous decision to take no action.⁸⁸ In addition to doubts regarding the authenticity of the texts, the Secretariat pointed to the fact that the minorities clauses in the peace treaty with Turkey excluded Muslim minorities.⁸⁹ Abiding by the limits of international agreements and letting forced assimilation of Kurds go unchallenged, the members of the League Secretariat contributed to Turkification indirectly. Treaty

⁷⁹ Bayar, "In Pursuit of Homogeneity," 114–15; Bali "Politics of Turkification," 43–49.

⁸⁰ Ungor, *Modern Turkey*, 110–22.

⁸¹ Özcan Yılmaz, *La formation de la nation kurde en Turquie* (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, 2013), 61, 64–65; Ungor, *Modern Turkey*, 122–123, 138.

⁸² George R. Clerk to Arthur Henderson, 29 December 1930, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, part 2, vol. 32, ed. Bulent Gokay (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1997), 159–61.

⁸³ *Lausanne Conference Records*, 23 January 1923, 356–57.

⁸⁴ Pablo de Azcárate, meeting with Tefik Rustu Bey, 19 November 1930, FO 371/14578.

⁸⁵ Kieser, "Modernisierung," 350; Yılmaz, *Nation kurde*, 63.

⁸⁶ Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Mehmet Nuri Dersimi: Ein Asylsuchender Kurde," in *Kurdistan und Europa: Einblicke in die Kurdische Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (Zurich: Chronos, 1997), 187–210.

⁸⁷ Mehmet Nuri Dersimi, *Kurdistan Tarihinde Dersim* (Aleppo: Ani Maatbasi, 1952), 295–96.

⁸⁸ Notes on the petition from Seyid Rıza, Dersim, Kurdistan, 30 July 1937, LONA R3640 1/12279/12279.

⁸⁹ Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz*, 345.

observance was one reason for the neglect of the Kurds; the ideological underpinnings of humanitarianism might form another. The exclusion of Muslim minorities reflects the downside of international minority protection, which was neither free of political interests nor unreservedly universal and equally concerned with all minorities.⁹⁰

The third consideration follows. Compared to Muslim minorities in Turkey, who were practically invisible in the League system, the situation of non-Muslim citizens fell under League responsibility, since the Lausanne treaty granted them nondiscrimination as well as certain positive rights.⁹¹ However, the courage of Armenians and other non-Muslim persons inside Turkey for petitioning the League was weak, in view of the threat of repression.⁹² In addition, with the 1926 civil law reform, the Ankara government effectively undermined international minority protection through the primacy of state civil rights. With the adaptation of the Swiss civil law in Turkey, the government pushed representatives of the various non-Muslim communities to renounce their minority rights. The Minority Section received an official declaration from those representatives, who stated that they regarded the new Turkish civil code as sufficient. Although the responsible League commission stressed that they would not tolerate any retrospective change of the peace treaty, they did accept the minorities' freedom to not exercise their rights. In fact, the Turkish government had itself appointed the so-called representatives, a maneuver that remained unchallenged by the League. A case from the late 1920s illustrates the effectiveness of the Kemalist strategy: the League minority commission in charge decided to forward complaints of Catholic Armenian bishops in Turkey to the government in Ankara and demanded a statement from the latter. The complaints made accusations regarding cases in which non-Muslim minorities were denied the ability to acquire or sell real estate and had restrictions placed on their rights to education in their own language, concessions in family law, and so on. As with almost all minority complaints received via Geneva, the officials in Ankara engaged in filibuster, which in this case lasted for six months.⁹³ Despite one member's effort to exert pressure, the League commission closed the case without putting it on the agenda of the League Council. There followed the Turkish government's belated statement that denied all allegations and insisted on the de facto lapse of minority rights due to the Turkish Civil Code. The League of Nations ultimately put the claim of a government to guarantee the equality of all citizens under its sovereignty above its role as guarantor of contractually agreed minority rights.

Although very few petitions came from Turkey, the Secretariat received numerous petitions from outside Turkey, especially from the Armenian diaspora. The petitioners demanded a right to return and the restitution of property by the Turkish authorities. In fact, in late 1922 Armenians were still being urged to emigrate from Turkey.⁹⁴ A law of April 1923 stipulated that all possessions of non-Muslims who had left Turkey prior to the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne fell under government control. In 1927, another law denaturalized all Ottoman citizens abroad who did not participate in the National Movement and had not returned to the country in the interim.⁹⁵ The Minority Section suspected a violation of the antidiscrimination clauses enshrined in the minority stipulations. However, in the end the Turkish government was able to assert that the denaturalization law did not discriminate against non-Muslim persons. After all, the government claimed, the wording (unlike the common application) of the law was general and affected Muslims, too.⁹⁶ The case is paradigmatic, as Scheuermann shows. Even in the few cases where the Secretariat actually did forward minority complaints to the Turkish government or the

⁹⁰Mazower, "Strange Triumph," 382; Rodogno, "European Legal Doctrines," 39–40.

⁹¹In contrast to Christians and without any state that considered itself their protector, Jews fell in the eyes of the Turkish government "under the category of children who could be tolerated and assimilated," Bayar, "Homogeneity," 118. However, anti-Semitism and discrimination were on the rise in the 1930s.

⁹²Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz*, 346, 362.

⁹³Pablo de Azcárate to Mehmet Munir, 22 May 1930, Republic Archive, Ankara, (hereafter Basbakanlik Cumhuriyet Arsivi) 30.10.0.0, 222.497.14.

⁹⁴Marashlian, *Finishing*, 136. Also, Icduygu, Toktas, and Soner, "Emigration," 367.

⁹⁵Ekmekcioglu, "Republic of Paradox," 671; Marashlian, "Finishing," 138. This law not only affected Armenians. The late 1930s to 1940s saw a wave of denaturalization of Jews living abroad. See Corinna Guttstadt, "Depriving Non-Muslims of Citizenship as Part of the Turkification Policy in the Early Years of the Turkish Republic: The Case of Turkish Jews and its Consequences During the Holocaust," in Kieser, *Turkey Beyond Nationalism*, 50–56.

⁹⁶Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz*, 361, 369–70.

League Council, the Minority Section eventually yielded to nonbinding pledges of the Turkish government and obstructionism, and thus to policies of denaturalization and economic nationalization.

The claims of former Ottoman minorities, like the League's minority protection efforts in general, took a back seat to national sovereignty. To begin with, the treaties did not cover all ethno-religious groups inside the country—in Turkey or elsewhere. Second, as Carole Fink emphasizes, those national minorities that were recognized lacked “direct access to the League.”⁹⁷ Governments of treaty-bound states like Turkey, on the other hand, could act and speak as sovereign entities on the international stage. The Secretariat members also felt bound by the principle of sovereignty.⁹⁸ The Secretariat did not see itself, in the words of Mark Mazower, as a “champion of minorities,” but as a kind of facilitator of talks that helped governments fulfill their obligations.⁹⁹ The League staff eventually respected the sensitivities and interests of the states by deliberately filing many of the arriving petitions and treating those petitions they accepted very discreetly.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the League Secretariat worked actively toward enlarging League membership, and thus treated not-yet-members such as Turkey “in the most friendly possible way,” as Undersecretary General Walters retrospectively admitted.¹⁰¹ The fact that Turkey only joined the League in 1932 also precluded possible disciplinary sanctions such as marginalization within or expulsion from the organization.¹⁰² Finally, the Council members, most of all the British government, were reluctant to shame the Turkish government at a time when they were pressing for Turkey to join the West instead of the Communist International and reckoning with Turkey about League decisions regarding the borders of their Arab Mandates.¹⁰³ All these reasons help to explain why Turkey, like no other state that signed on to minorities clauses, became immune, so to speak, from international protection efforts.¹⁰⁴ In sum, the League's Secretariat as well as its member states prioritized their relations with Turkey and its national sovereignty, rendering any concerns regarding minorities of secondary importance. The Lausanne treaty appears as the decisive moment in this regard. Its recognition of sovereign Turkey had lasting effects that essentially blocked the League's humanitarian bodies, which all adhered to the overarching principle of sovereignty.

Conclusion

Until late into the 20th century, Glenda Sluga reminds us, the history of internationalism “tended to be written as a history of political idealism above and beyond the cynical practices of nation-states.”¹⁰⁵ Many historians have altered this image by digging out the ideological, cultural, and power-related underpinnings of past international organizations. This includes Sluga herself, who assesses that “the national and international remained entwined as ways of thinking.”¹⁰⁶ However, we are still much in need of case studies offering relational approaches that challenge the analytical divide between histories of nationalism and the international sphere for the sake of revealing their complex entanglements. As one attempt in this direction, this article has advanced the notion of “embedded Turkification” and highlighted intersections between postwar Turkish nation building and the League of Nations.

General accounts on political relations between Turkey and the League of Nations often focus on multilateral politics and dispute resolution.¹⁰⁷ Conceptualizing states as the key actors, they tend to characterize Turkey's international position as a struggle for independence in an international arena dominated

⁹⁷Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 390.

⁹⁸Peter Hilpold, “The League of Nations and the Protection of Minorities: Rediscovering a Great Experience,” *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 17 (2013): 87–124 (quote on 105).

⁹⁹Mazower, “Minorities,” 51.

¹⁰⁰Fink, *Defending*, 282; Hilpold, *Protection*, 105.

¹⁰¹F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 19.

¹⁰²Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz*, 345.

¹⁰³Howard, *Partition of Turkey*, 277, 300.

¹⁰⁴Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz*, 261, 345.

¹⁰⁵Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 151.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 150. Also, Herren, “International Organizations,” 112; Mazower, *Governing*, 154–88.

¹⁰⁷Important contributions are Ozden Zeynep Alantar, “Turk Dis Politikasında Milletler Cemiyeti Donemi,” in *Türk Dis Politikasının Analizi*, ed. Faruk Sonmezoglu (Istanbul: Der Yayınları, 1994) 99–129; Dilek Barlas, “Milletler Cemiyeti'nde Türkiye: İyimserlik ve Kusku Arasında,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 14, no. 55 (2017), 93–111.

by European imperialism. As this article confirms, imperialist and exclusivist practices at the level of the League were a crucial factor and, indeed, the Kemalist insistence on a sovereign and equal place in the international community had an anti-imperialist impetus. However, nation building has both external and internal dimensions, and any criticism pointing exclusively to imperialist hierarchies at the interstate level of international organization risks a simplistic narrative.

International power asymmetries cover only one side of the coin. On the other, we find power asymmetries under Turkey's national authority. Jane Cowan, in a general essay on the League Minority System, dubs this constellation a "dynamic of mirrored asymmetry."¹⁰⁸ She argues that the non-universal implementation of the Minority System, that is, the unequal treatment of Eastern states and their sovereignty vis-à-vis the dominant Western powers, made minority concerns seem unjust and disloyal in the eyes of those states.

I hope to have pointed out how crucial this dynamic was with regard to Turkey. The history of Turkey's international integration and the struggle of its elites with the imperialist manifestations of the League interacted with the marginalization of actors in Turkey's interior. The state leadership's disapproval of the international protection regime resulted in cancellation of the League's rescue and restitution efforts toward genocide survivors, the exclusion of Muslim groups from the Lausanne minority clauses, and the blocking of petitions forwarded by the League. The Turkish government pursued these measures in order to establish national unity, prevent foreign humanitarian intervention, and strengthen its sovereignty. Ruling out international humanitarian involvement helped to normalize the results of past violence and further future politics, including the denaturalization of Armenians and the assimilation of Kurds. After all, Turkification was implemented under exactly the same sovereignty that defended against foreign interventions. Following the Treaty of Lausanne, the League, by legitimizing the "population exchange" as well as the primacy of sovereignty, facilitated Turkification as a means to forge the kind of ethno-national state that was to fit into the global community of states.

The entangled histories of minority protection, the "standard of civilization," and imperialism nurtured the conviction of the "new Turks" that the existence and international visibility of minorities formed an obstacle to the consolidation of a sovereign, modern state on par with the West. In an interview on Swiss radio aired right after Turkey's entrance into the League in 1932, the Turkish delegate Cemal Husnu proudly announced: "The heterogeneous state that was the Ottoman Empire has ceased to exist. In the present, we find an absolutely homogeneous Turkish Republic." He stressed that this republic was "based on the principle of national sovereignty" and that its foundation "has proven that the Turks not only have the ability to manage their own affairs, but also the various domains of civilization."¹⁰⁹ To be civilized and to be homogenous both seemed linked to being an approved, sovereign part of the international community.

Stressing that the conditions for Turkification arose partly from the international organization raises fundamental questions of responsibility. I have tried to make clear that a strong analytical inclusion of the global context in which national developments are embedded does not necessarily relativize decisions made on the national level.¹¹⁰ Certainly, the actions of Turkish nation builders were not simply determined by international structures. Rather, international factors influenced the formation of national interests, like the Kemalist interest in minimizing, and even eliminating minority issues.¹¹¹ At the same time, national actors were able to realize their interests, that is, the establishment of a sovereign and homogenous modern state, with the help of dynamics and structures provided at the international level—or by pushing against them. In part, the reverse argument is also true. By promoting ethnic-based nations as basic units of the new international order, the League acknowledged Muslim Turks as the national majority and declared others national minorities, or even non-nationals (the Greek Orthodox in particular). This mode of distinction drew on the history of nationalization among the heterogeneous

¹⁰⁸Jane Cowan, "Justice and the League of Nations Minority Regime," in *Mirrors of Justice: Law and Power in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Mark Goodale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 270–90.

¹⁰⁹Cemal Husnu, interview, Radio Lausanne, 20 July 1932, BCA 30.10.0.0, 222.498.1.

¹¹⁰On external influences "versus" individual agency see also, Bayar, *Formation*, 4; Donald Bloxham, "Three Imperialisms and a Turkish Nationalism: International Stresses, Imperial Disintegration and the Armenian Genocide," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002), 37–58 (quote on 38).

¹¹¹See Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

population of the Ottoman Empire, including Turkish nationalism that had existed since the Young Turks era. The quest for historiographical narratives that take into account the interrelatedness between hierarchies in international organization and those under national sovereignty remains an ongoing challenge.

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