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

Carole Fink, "Louis Marshall: An American Jewish Diplomat in Paris, 1919" in *American Jewish History*, vol. 94, No. 1-2 (March-June 2008), pp. 21-40.

Carole Fink, "The Palestine Question at the Paris Peace Conference" in *Peacemaking, Peacemakers and Diplomacy, 1880-1939: Essays in Honor of Professor Alan Sharp*, edited by Gaynor Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 122-134.

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Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Holly Case**, Cornell University

The Berlin Congress in 1878 saw the creation of an independent Serbia overseen by the Great Powers of Western Europe. Yet, as Carole Fink writes in her book *Defending the Rights of Others*, "The congress maintained the precept that Serbia's entry into the community of nations required satisfying the Great Powers' conditions." (p. 27) It is difficult to avoid comparisons with our own time, in which Serbia's accession to the EU has hinged on turning over major indicted war criminals—above all Ratko Mladić, arrested in Serbia in May—to the Hague tribunal to stand trial. And indeed, Fink herself sees parallels between the interwar reinvention of the European state system and the post-communist transition.

With the arrest of Mladić we may seem to be witnessing an episode of *mutatis mutandis* in European diplomacy; nevertheless some things did change after the Berlin Congress. In December of 1912, following the outbreak of the First Balkan War, the leader of a prominent Jewish organization in the US, Louis Marshall, received a letter from a friend lamenting the fact that "we Jews with all our power are not as strong today as Montenegro, the entire population of which is not half as large as the Jewish population of New York City." The exchange made clear the author's sense that territorialized nationhood was at the root of power and influence in the emerging international system, and new nation states in the Balkans meant new forces to be reckoned with for Jewish groups in the West who sought to

prevent the geopolitical reshuffling of the East from resulting in the mass disenfranchisement and persecution of their brethren in those states.

The three works by Carole Fink under consideration here document how the Great Powers, eastern European statesmen, and Jewish organizations sought to shape territorial settlements following the collapse of empires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Her focus is primarily on Jewish groups' advocacy of minority/national rights in international diplomacy. Together the three contributions offer a disheartening and familiar picture of western diplomacy's historical incapacity to clearly articulate and effectively defend minority rights.

Carole Fink is one of the most prominent historians of modern European diplomatic history working in the United States. Her work is consistently detail-rich and multi-archival, and *Defending the Rights of Others*, drawing on an impressive array of state and institutional archives and private collections, is no exception. The variety of sources it encompasses speaks not only to Fink's considerable skill as a researcher, but also to the nature of the topic itself, which promptly overflows the most insistent attempts to contain it within the history of nation-states alone. Fink's work offers a refreshingly broad foundation for the study of minority rights advocacy, one that future researchers will find difficult to match and impossible to ignore.

Defending the Rights of Others encompasses many of the themes addressed in the two articles, which were published several years after the book, but show a clear family resemblance to their heftier ancestor. In her article on "The Palestine Question at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919," Fink seeks to move beyond the earlier historiography's focus on personalities—specifically "the arrogant and inscrutable Woodrow Wilson; the cynical, but also beleaguered Georges Clemenceau; and the cunning military conqueror and Zionist partisan, David Lloyd George" (p. 126)—toward a discussion of the "deeper causes for the impasse at Paris" (p. 128). Her analysis zeroes in on the relationship of the "Palestine Question" to other matters concerning the Great Powers at the time, namely their imperial holdings and the fate of eastern Europe. Facing a variety of conflicting and overlapping claims and agreements, the end result was a "semblance of a plebiscite" of the local population in Palestine, but no decisive action that would ameliorate the tumultuous future that awaited the region.

In the article "Louis Marshall: An American Jewish Diplomat in Paris, 1919," written for an issue of *American Jewish History* dedicated to Marshall's life and work, Fink returns to the Paris negotiations from a different, more character-oriented perspective. In 1906, Louis Marshall had been among the co-founders of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), whose mission was to combat "foreign persecution and domestic anti-Semitism." (p. 22) Just over a decade later, Marshall played a role in drafting a "bill of rights" for the Jewish people that asserted "a distinctive national identity for the millions of Jews of eastern Europe." (p. 25) As president of the AJC in 1919, Marshall attended the Paris Peace negotiations, where he sought to broker a compromise between the various Jewish groups vying for a voice at the conference. Fink presents the outcome as "an unprecedented minority treaty" (p. 21), for which Marshall deserves at least some of the credit. But in the end it seems neither Marshall's nor the other Jewish groups' visions were realized. As Fink points out, by the time the treaties

were drafted and signed, “American Jews—including Louis Marshall—had revealed their many weaknesses in the international arena,” such as “personal and political divisions” and “tactical naiveté.” (p. 37)

Defending the Rights of Others begins the story of minority rights advocacy much earlier, taking as its starting point the Berlin Congress of 1878. It was there that the Great Powers sought to remake the European state system to create viable and independent nation-states in southeastern Europe as successors to the Ottoman Empire. Fink’s interest in the Berlin Congress concerns the successes and failures of various Western European Jewish groups—most notably the Alliance Israélite Universelle—in their attempts to insert provisions for the protection of their ethno-religious kin in the new states into the final draft of the treaty. Fink charts the publicity campaigns, the push-back on the part of the new states’ representatives (most notably Romanian statesmen, who fiercely resisted interference on behalf of Romania’s numerous and largely disenfranchised Jewish population), and the trajectories of various hoped-for outcomes. In the end, the Treaty of Berlin did include minority protection clauses. Though weak and with little or no provision for enforcement, these clauses set an important precedent that subsequent Great Power negotiators would either have to follow, revise, or reject outright.

Part Two of Fink’s book opens with a discussion of the publicity and propaganda campaigns of various groups and newborn states around episodes of violence and persecution of minorities (particularly Poles and Jews around the anti-Jewish violence in Lemberg, Pinsk, and elsewhere) during and after the First World War. One of the major themes of this section—and indeed of the book as a whole—is the infighting and disagreements among Jewish groups on matters of platform and tactics. In these conflicts Western European Jewish organizations were frequently at odds with their American and eastern European counterparts, despite numerous attempts (on the part of Marshall in particular) to bring them together.

In her article on Marshall—some of the material from which appears in *Defending the Rights of Others*—Fink details the AJC leader’s efforts to negotiate a compromise between old-guard Western European Jewish organizations and their more nationally insistent eastern European counterparts. She notes that, “In an ironic political twist, the western Jews claimed leadership because of their elite status, diplomatic experience, and political connections, while the spokesmen for the endangered masses of eastern Europe insisted on ‘democracy.’”¹ Not only did the Western European Jews fear the Eastern Europeans were pushing too hard too fast, they also feared an anti-Semitic backlash in the new states that would send streams of *Ostjuden* refugees into their assimilationist midst.² The extent to which minority protection—above all for Jews—was tied to immigration anxiety in the US and Western Europe is made abundantly clear in Fink’s work.

¹ Carole Fink, “Louis Marshall: An American Jewish Diplomat in Paris, 1919” in *American Jewish History*, vol. 94, No. 1-2 (March-June 2008), p. 29.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23; Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 53.

Fink's treatment of Jewish groups' concern with the remaking of the international system is informative and refreshing. In the last section of the book on the interwar period, she expands the scope of her analysis to include other minority rights advocates as well, examining tensions and alliances between various advocacy groups and their critics (Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Jews, Romanians, etc.). This section highlights another challenge to minority rights advocacy; namely the problem of alliances and strange bedfellows. During the interwar period, for example, Jewish rights groups found themselves sharing platforms with revisionist Germany and Bolshevik Russia, which did not serve to enhance the credibility of their claims in the eyes of the Great Powers of the West.

There are many tantalizing and suggestive details in Fink's work that open up questions for international historians working on Europe's nineteenth and twentieth centuries to consider. One is the aforementioned lumping of interests and goals, such that in 1919, for example, the women's movement lobbied for Polish independence. There were also a number of cases of state leaders binding the issue of railway investments to the matter of minority rights protection, or the the peace settlement in eastern Europe after WWI to the mandates system applied to the Middle East. The linkage of the social and geopolitical, the economic and the geopolitical, and of distinct geographical regions to one another deserve much greater attention from diplomatic historians and Fink's work points to many opportunities for future research.³

Another area that deserves closer attention is the relationship between minority rights advocacy and foreign aid. Fink briefly touches on the aid initiatives of Herbert Hoover (who "expressed 'impatience' with the unending reports of pogroms and massacres, preferring to concentrate on 'feeding a starving population'"⁴) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). As recent work has shown, the distribution of aid was not an ethnically neutral enterprise and often became a point of friction between Czechs and Germans, or between Poles and Jews, who wanted to make sure aid was channeled to "their own" people rather than distributed in an ethnically blind fashion.⁵ Future historians might thus fruitfully consider the relationship between foreign aid and the effectiveness of international minority rights advocacy.

³ As Eric Weitz has noted, "The drafters [of the post-WWI peace treaties] understood the intimate connection between the provisions for the colonial areas and for Europe, although historians have developed entirely separate historiographies, one for the mandates, another for the nationality issues in Central and Eastern Europe." Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 113, No. 5 (December 2008), pp. 1313-1343. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/ahr.113.5.1313> [accessed June 1, 2011].

⁴ Fink, "Louis Marshall," p. 35.

⁵ See Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 79-105.

Although Fink does a wonderful job of detailing the relationship between different state-enfranchised and Jewish groups in their efforts to shape the post-WWI minority rights arrangement, scholarly work still remains to be done on the relationship between these various nascent groups for the mid- to late nineteenth century. What kinds of rights-based alliances and rhetoric were developed *within* states and empires that later formed the basis of remaking the international system? For example, between ethnic Germans and Jews in Bohemia, between Ukrainians and Poles in the Dual Monarchy, or between Hungarians and Jews in the Hungarian Kingdom. And how did these alliances affect the remaking of the international system when empires collapsed and gave way to nation states? In other words, apart from the Jews, who were the predecessors of international minority rights advocacy and what brought them to it?

One of the main themes connecting *Defending the Rights of Others* with Fink's two articles is the question of how much power and influence the Jewish groups who sought to affect policy in the new states and in the international system more generally actually had, and whether it was wielded effectively. Fink often seems torn between presenting these groups and individuals—including colorful characters like Lucien Wolf, Leo Motzkin, and Louis Marshall—as variously paralyzed by infighting, at least partially successful, undermined by the publicity campaigns of their competitors, and unheeded by the Great Powers. She presents the events surrounding the Berlin Congress, the post-WWI Paris peace settlement, and the birth and death of the League of Nations as a series of opportunities missed. In her article on the “Palestine Question,” too, Fink sees in the deliberations an “essential flaw,” which suggests that a better outcome was possible. Yet apart from acknowledging the stalemate and inertia that characterized the proceedings, we are not made privy to what Fink believes should or could have been done differently and to what end. Similarly, in the Marshall article, Fink leaves us with the feeling that an opportunity was missed during the Paris negotiations, but again we can only speculate about what doomed these “special minorities treaties” to be “neglected by their authors and supported by Berlin” (p. 40). In fact, the path not taken even seems barred in the end, as Fink writes that “neither Marshall nor his colleagues recognized the limits of their power and the dangers that lay ahead.” (p. 40)

In the articles as well as in the book, it is hard to tell what Fink sees as an ideal solution or take-home message from this period in minority rights activism. It is clear she considers it important, setting up *Defending the Rights of Others* as offering historical background for the reconsideration of minority rights issues in the wake of the collapse of communism. But what are we to learn? That states have to give up at least part of their sovereignty for minorities to survive? That there is an acute danger of groups using minority rights rhetoric to undermine the system (like Germany in the 1930s)? That if every country signed on to the same standards of minority rights protection with the same procedure for international intervention/arbitration no interwar-type problems would recur?

In the article on the “Palestine Question,” Fink writes that “at the peace table and up to now the Great Powers have proved incapable of comprehending the conflicting aspirations of Palestine’s inhabitants or mastering the politics of the region.” (p.130) This is most certainly correct, but does it suggest the Great Powers should have kept well away, or done a better job of manipulating on-the-ground forces and actors? And if the latter, in whose interest should

they have proceeded? There is an undercurrent of proscription in Fink's work, and yet a clear, affirmative value judgment regarding what constitutes good policy is not to be found in any of the pieces under consideration.

And perhaps it must be so. After all, the advocates of minority rights represented the full gamut of political positions and geopolitical aspirations, with goals ranging from having schools in their own language to taking over whole swaths of a neighbors' territory. As a result, there is a profound confusion over whether minority rights are in fact—or should be—the same as national rights, and whether the advantages of framing them as such outweigh the dangers. In the end what it seems to come down to is the problem of universality, for there is invariably a group whom even the staunchest minority rights advocates would stop short of defending.

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