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Standardizing Movements: The International Passport Conferences of the 1920s

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2017

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kalm, S. (2017). *Standardizing Movements: The International Passport Conferences of the 1920s*. (pp. 1-38). (STANCE Working Papers Series; Vol. 2017, No. 8).

Total number of authors:

1

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State-Making and the Origins of Global Order
in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond

Standardizing Movements: The International Passport Conferences of the 1920s

Sara Kalm

Working Paper Series, 2017:8
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Standardizing Movements: The International Passport Conferences of the 1920s

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Abstract

The First World War is usually conceived as a turning point in the history of migration policy. Before the war, borders were largely open, passports were in most places abolished, and the movement of people as well as capital and traded goods was understood through an optimistic and liberal institutionalist lens. At the outbreak of the war, states reinstated passport controls, presumably as a temporary measure, but they were never again dismantled. In this paper, I suggest that in order to comprehend this general norm change, it is useful to approach these developments in a piecemeal manner to uncover changes in governmental thought and practice. The focus is the International Passport Conferences, that were organized by the League of Nations in the 1920s, and which laid the groundwork for the modern passport regime. The argument is that the work of these conferences can be aptly analyzed as a process of standardization – a technology of government which was widespread at the time, that has particular characteristics as concerns forms of governing, the status of knowledge and the construction of identities. Among other things, this approach allows us to detect linkages to international technical standardization, and to states domestic attempts at homogenizing and making legible their own populations.

I Introduction

The First World War is often understood as a turning point in the history of migration controls. Before the war, movement was largely unregulated and most states had since a few decades abolished passports and exit restrictions. With the outbreak of the war, states reinstated controls, both in order to control the inflow of possibly dangerous individuals, and to prevent the outflow of potential soldiers. Controls were never dismantled after the war, but instead came to be seen as a legitimate and indeed necessary element of international relations. The contemporary Italian diplomat Egidio Reale explained in 1931 that the passport question had been “entirely settled” in the early 20th century – it was then deemed a “despotic and unnecessary barrier to the freedom of communications”. After the war, all “reasonable persons” expected the soon revival of the pre-war regime, but, deplorably, the compulsory passport system was not abolished but instead strengthened (Reale 1931). Thus, the war and its aftermath – including the newly established passport regime – is often interpreted as indicating a shift in policy paradigm, from liberal internationalism to a more realist model (Strikwerda 1999).

The question is how such a change occurs. Constructivist scholars in international relations doubt that sudden policy diffusions, whereby many countries adopt similar measures at about the same time, can be explained by domestic factors only. They are instead indicative of a change in international norms for state behaviour, to which states adjust their actions through the “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1998). The mechanisms whereby this norm change may occur include learning, mimicry, persuasion and sometimes coercion. In the longer run, a successful process of norm change makes states internalize the norms, leading to socialization and identity change (Checkel 2005; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). But what sets this process in motion? Here is a bone of contention for constructivists. Some refrain from ascribing identifiable agents with the power to incite norm change, and instead point at broad discursive developments and historical contingencies. Others however argue that actors play a decisive role, and that the initiation of norm change can be attributed to their conscious efforts to influence state behaviour. Non-state actors, such as transnational activist networks, NGOs and social movements are especially important, and many studies have identified the mobilization

among such actors as instrumental norm change in for instance the human rights field (Brysk 2013; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Such influence is possible in our days, when non-state actors mobilize across borders and when international institutions give them access to consultation. But it seems more questionable if we go a bit back in time.

My approach is slightly different. I will concentrate on one particular process in the post-war reorientation of migration controls, namely, the International Passport Conferences of the 1920s. These conferences were organized under the auspices of the League of Nations and gathered experts and state representatives to debate and negotiate the usage of passport and migration controls. I argue that the efforts of these conferences can fruitfully be analysed as an instance of *standardization*. This is to some extent to state the obvious: the conferences are known for having initiated the standardization of modern international passports. But what I propose here is to take standardization seriously and bring it into the analytical exercise on its own terms. Processes of standardization are ubiquitous and occur in the spheres of technology, economy, management, health, education, as well as bureaucracy. They tend to fall into the category of “dull things” of mundane and technical regulations, and therefore often pass unnoticed and unscrutinised although they often have far-reaching implications for power and democracy (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 71). The standardized passport is one example; it works well for millions of people and therefore meets with little opposition. Nevertheless, it is a source of anxiety for stateless people or those with otherwise unclear nationality status (Star and Lampland 2009: 7 11). I take standardization to be one element of norm change, but not the norm change as such. My suspicion is, moreover, that it merits more attention within the study of norm change in international relations than has so far been the case. The literature that approaches standards as social regulations pertains mainly to sociology, management and organization studies (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000; Bowker and Star 1999; Star and Lampland 2009; Timmermans and Epstein 2010; Thévenot 2009). Much less has been written about standardization from a perspective that directly concerns matters that are of concern to international relation scholars, such as international norms (but see Peña 2015; Loya and Boli 1999; parts of Ponte et al 2011 and Higgins and Larner 2010).

In this paper, I understand the standardizing efforts at the International Passport Conferences from the point of view of a framework inspired by Michel Foucault. Standardization is then seen as

a “technology of government” which has particular and recognizable characteristics but can be invested with different rationalities and be used in different contexts and for different purposes (Rose and Miller 1992; Higgins and Larner 2010). This allows me to trace the roots of the studied standardization to other practices of standardization, rather than (only) to pre-existing norms, state interests or advocacy by different groups. It also allows me to historicise the efforts of the conferences, and to consider the constructive and exclusionary practices on which they progressively erected their passport standards (cf. Ewald 1990; Higgins and Tamm Hallström 2007).

The focus on standardization also distinguishes my effort from existing studies of the history of the passport. That scholarship has investigated how states use the passport for state making purposes, and I use many of their insights in my analysis (Torpey 2000; Caplan and Torpey 2001; Salter 2003; Robertson 2010; Lloyd 2005).

The next section expands on the notion of standardization as a governmental technology. It is followed by a section on two main forms of standardizations that were influential at the time and that are particularly relevant for the present case. We then turn to the policy background in the League of Nations and its other engagements with international movements of people, which is followed by the case study of the Passport Conferences. The material that I use for the investigation consists mainly of the League of Nations’ documentation from the Conferences and the in-between work by related bodies, but also of secondary sources. The paper ends by a summary.

II Standardization as a technology of government

Modern everyday life is dependent on multiple standards that streamline, regulate and assess. We meet standards as consumers, in the form of manufactured commodities; as students and teachers in the forms of standardized tests and assessments of education; as patients and as medical personnel, in the shape of standardized treatments and diagnostic manuals; as travellers in the size of standardized airplane seats; and as citizens in the myriad registration systems and forms facing us in different periods in life. The ubiquity of standardization makes it “a central feature of social and cultural life in modernity” (Star and Lampland 2009: 10). Nevertheless, standards tend to be invisible, and

subject to very little critical scrutiny. They “have a way of sinking below the level of social visibility, eventually becoming part of the taken-for-granted technical and moral infrastructures of modern life” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 71).

Standardization can be defined narrowly, as an industrial norm. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online defines it as “... the development and application of standards that permit large production runs of component parts that can be readily fitted to other parts without adjustment”. But standardization is and has been used in multiple spheres beyond industrial production, including in state bureaucracy. A broader definition therefore seeks to cover many potential usages. Timmerman and Epstein define it very generally as “a process of constructing uniformities across time and space, through the generation of agreed-upon rules” (2010: 71). Ponte et al refer to a standard as: “... a model by which people, objects or actions (including government regulation itself) can be judged and compared, and which provide a common language to evaluators, the evaluated, and their audiences (Ponte et al 2011: 1). The way that I use the term here has more in common with the second, broader, version.

I understand standardization as a particular technology of government. That term refers to the “means, mechanisms and instruments through which governing is accomplished. [It emphasises] ... the practical features of government which might include forms of notation, ways of collecting, representing, storing and transporting information, forms of architecture and the division of space, kinds of quantitative and qualitative calculation, types of training and so on” (Dean 1999: 212). “Technology” is therefore understood in a much wider sense than in common usage, referring basically to all practical aspects of governing. It is the technologies of government that allow the thoughts and ideals of government (governmental rationalities) to become operative. Foucault studied the practices of division and enclosure in the context of prisons, schools and hospitals, and paid attention to techniques of training, ranking and observation of individuals (Foucault 1979). Other technologies are instead directed at oneself, as when one seeks to make one’s behaviour conform to a specific order, and at a deeper level identify with that order (Foucault 1985: 25–32). “Government” should not be understood as synonymous to “*the* government”, involved in the governing of the state as a whole. Instead, government can be practiced on particular institutions, on morals, on children, on households, on oneself. Foucault interpreted this rise of

multiple authorities and multiple aims of governing as integral to the emergence of modern society. He traced the first expressions of this new mentality of government in the anti-Machiavellian literature of the fifteenth century. Beginning then and intensifying successively, the traditional concern with submission to sovereignty and the preservation of territory was complemented with the manifold objectives related to the management of populations. This occurred concurrently with the rise of diverse knowledges – economics, statistics, demography, psychiatry, sociology – that participated in defining appropriate ways of intervention (Foucault 1991).

One important aspect of this is that the conception of power is widened from one only concerned with domination and coercion: there are power relations at work also when such measures are absent. The emerging new conceptualization of the population required an expanded set of governing interventions that set out not only to subdue it but to discipline, regulate, nurture, arrange and distribute it. Therefore, the population was no longer only an object for government but also its subject, as people became complicit in their own governing. Of course, there were still coercive measures, direct control and confrontation, but those older (“sovereign”) forms of governing were complemented with the new, more indirect forms of exercising power “at a distance” through different forms of self-regulation (Rose 1999). A distinctive feature is that government is practiced over and through people that are seen as formally free. Government does therefore not just work by suppressing, it is to an important extent “productive” and co-creating identities and different social spheres. People are governed, for instance, as members of a flock to be led, as legal subjects with rights, as children to be educated, as a resource to be exploited, or as elements of a population to be managed (Veyne 1997). Although government does not determine them, it fosters and facilitates the formation of certain identities by either presupposing them or trying to bring them about. And a constant worry among governors is that one may be governing too much. Foucault argued that “The exercise of power is a conduct of conducts and a management of possibilities”, and emphasised that conduct should be understood both in the sense of “leading someone”, and of “behaving” (Foucault 1994: 341). Over time the new form of governing developed into different variants, among them liberal and neoliberal types of rule.

Another important aspect is that, in this understanding, governing does not emanate from one single centre. Instead, it can also be

practiced by religious authorities, international organizations, the market, NGOs, legal and medical associations and so on. Foucault believed that technologies of government were not usually diffused from the central state, but rather spread from the margins to the centre (Foucault 1991: 103). In his analysis, therefore, it is the technologies and the rationalities of governing that is primary – not who it is that exercise it. Forms of government may “travel”, as they are applied in different contexts and with different aims, and the state is hence not necessarily at the centre¹.

Next, we will look at some of the characteristics of standardization, seen as a technology of governance. It allows us to specify what distinguished standardization as a general technology of government, which enables us to compare with the case of the Passport Conferences. I rely on others that have developed Foucauldian accounts of standardization (particularly Ewald 1990; but also Higgins and Tamm Hallström 2007; Higgins and Larner 2010a, b; Henman and Dean 2010; Gibbon and Henriksen 2011).

Voluntary adherence and soft methods

Although standards can be both voluntary and enforced, there is a tendency in the literature to regard standards as a voluntary form of social rule (Brunsson and Jakobsson 2000: 12–13). In contrast to direct regulation it moulds and harmonizes behaviours and activities from afar and through persuasion. To the extent that standards are voluntary in character, the standardizers do not have the capacity to sanction those that do not comply. The parties therefore need to become willing to adopt the standard, through persuasion or other soft measures. It is therefore an example of governing at a distance, which epitomizes liberal forms of rule. Standardization is often pursued when coercion and direct orders are not an option, because there is no central organization that can carry them through. Such situations are very common in the international realm, since it precisely lacks a supreme authoritative power. In such decentralised context arise both a need for standards, and an opportunity to promulgate standards, since there is no competition from other types of control (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000: 32). The implementation of standards often requires “an army of technicians, auditors, monitors and

¹ For instance, disciplinary techniques in the 19th century were practiced in many contexts – prisons, schools, hospitals, factories and so on – and by many different authorities besides the state (Foucault 1979).

consultants” to enforce and evaluate them (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 80). This means that the work is not completed when a standard is negotiated or adapted, but instead requires continuous efforts to be upheld. Higgins and Lerner therefore talk of “standardization work” as an ongoing and never finished process (2010b: 205). Current research on standardization tends to see it as an example of neoliberal governmentality. Along with certification schemes, auditing and accounting systems, standards are a prominent method for governing “free” agents, and shaping appropriate subjectivities and behaviour for that purpose (Higgins and Tamm Hallström 2007).

State and non-state standardization

In the political and legal research on standardization, it is precisely its non-state variants that have attracted a great deal of interest. Standards are seen as one instrument for advancing “private authority” in different sectors of global governance (Ponte et al 2011: 4). The main standard-setting bodies are both non-state and international in character, and have since the 1970s overshadowed national bodies. The most important one is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (Murphy and Yates 2009; Loya and Boli 1999). But processes of standardization may occur in state contexts, as well as in market and NGO contexts. Murphy and Yates argue that “standardization, *per se*, need not be seen in opposition to the state (or to the market); standardization can be accomplished by institutions that lie anywhere along the line between ‘market’ and ‘hierarchy,’ whether the hierarchy be that of a firm or of the state” (2011: 160). Moreover, even the presumably non-state bodies are often in intricate relationships with the state. Governments often initiate them, fund them, and/or set representatives on their boards (Higgins and Tamm Hallström 2007: 693).

The technical standard

The character of standardization as a technology of government derives from how it first came to widespread usage in the 19th century. The term “standardization” dates from this time when it was first used in the contexts of measurements (such as the metre) (Alder 2001), science (standardized conditions for experiments) and industry (standardized parts) (Williams 1985: 296). The first promoters were the mechanical and electrical engineers and their associations of the late 19th century, handling the many technical transformations that accompanied the industrial revolution. François Ewald argues that its origins were both

technical and sociological sociological because at this point industrialists realized that they formed a “society”, and therefore needed their own regulations and codes. Standardization is not imposed but instead “the group’s observation of itself” (Ewald 1990: 155). Standardization is about constructing a system of communication, “constituting a society of producers and consumers and providing it with a common language and common institutions” (Ewald 1990: 149). The idiom of standard is therefore to a degree artificial. It stands out in its preciseness, the absence of stylistic figures, and its aim to erase ambiguities. It also needs to be understandable to a larger audience than those directly involved, since a standard is always related to and “nested” within other standards, and needs to be able to communicate with them (Ewald 1990: 151, 154; Star and Lampland 2009: 5).

The standard provides a structure for exchange and production across large distances and across country borders. François Ewald underlines that the character of a standard² distinguishes it from other governing technologies of the same era, for instance the disciplinary “panoptic” models related to utility and docility, and the probabilistic models related to risk (Ewald 1990: 154). It functions by *simplification* (reducing the number of models for objects), *unification* (establishing fixed characteristics to ensure compatibility), and *specification* (reaching a precise understanding). In industry, the overarching objective is to rationalise production, which means that one of the aims of standardization “is to gain a certain measure of control over time” (Ewald 1990: 150).

Producing identity and society

The standard only makes visible the “sheer phenomenality of phenomena”, it stays at the surface level and does not attempt to reach into the deeper property of things. What counts are the recordable facts in themselves, and how they relate to other such facts, not how they came to be or what their natures are. Also, standards do not involve perfection or utopias. What is conceived of as “good” in this context does not have to do with morals or ideals, but merely with adequacy: a standard is good if it adequately serves the purpose it was meant for (Ewald 1990: 152, 155–156). Standardization therefore articulates identities

² Ewald uses the terms “technical norm” and “normalization”, in a way which is synonymous to “standard” and “standardization”.

and distinctions in a way that purports to be value-neutral; “mere facts”. This is a main reason why standardization has right from the start had a derogatory quality, as its application across many social fields have led critics to worry about its dehumanizing qualities and its suppression of difference. “People cannot be standardized” has been a common objection (Williams 1985: 296–298).

In any case, facts are never “just there” in this way, which is particularly evident in social science. “Every standard necessarily elevates some values, things, or people at the expense of others” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 83). Standardization always build upon some kind of classification, but since there are more classifications than standards, to produce a standard necessarily involves a selection, which renders some things relevant and others irrelevant (Bowker and Star 1999: 15). Standards therefore contributes to producing categorisations with which we order social reality: they “are involved in the classification, categorization and constitution of social worlds, interacting with, as well as modifying, those objects which they seek to govern” (Higgins and Larner 2010b: 208). And “To standardize transportation is inevitably to standardize the perceptions and tastes of travellers...; to standardize policies is to standardize those that are administered by them” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 78)

To standardize can therefore be seen as “giving form” (Thévenot 2009: 794), creating distinctions between “normal” and “abnormal” (Henman and Dean 2010: 81). This involves on the one hand *equalization*, bringing together entities that were not necessarily connected before and make them comparable to each other (Ewald 1990: 154). But it also involves rejection of other options. Although this may have been far from the objective, the boundary-drawing that standardization necessarily entails can become “a weapon of exclusion” (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 83). For instance, Star (2009: 33) describes how migrants, that arrived to Ellis Island in New York in the era of mass migration, were categorized as “standard” or “substandard”. An inspector spent on average eight seconds on a person, in order to detect illness, mental defects, pregnancy etc. They then chalk-marked the immigrant’s clothes with the symbol of his condition.

So, standardization produces sameness and difference, but at the same time it can “enact inequalities which exclude the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of particular groups” (Higgins and Larner 2010: 210). One example is when people that do not conform to binary gender categories are repeatedly forced to choose between M and F

when filling in forms. Standards are also experienced very differently. Star and Lampland exemplify with the practice of presenting one's passport – a standard gesture that works for millions of people, but that may be terribly painful for those that are stateless or in some other way question in regard to their nationality and motives (2009: 7–8).

We have now discerned some characteristics of standardization as a general technology of government, which can be usefully compared to the findings of the Passport Conferences.

III Standardization around the turn of the century

One of the suggestions that I do in this paper is that the governmental technology of standardization “travelled” between different areas of application, and that the efforts at the International Passport Conferences can be seen in this light. In this section, I will present two different areas of application of standardization that are of relevance for the present case.

International technical standardization

The technical standards bodies that emerged in all industrialised states in the late 19th century quite quickly became organised at an international level. Researchers talk about a rise of an internationalist “standardization movement” at the end of the 19th century, a movement which resurged after the war, in the 1920s (Higgins and Tamm Hallström 2007: 691). The need for standards to be international is made clear in this quote from a prominent figure in this movement:

In the flow of products from farm, forest, mine, and sea through processing and fabricating plants, and through wholesale and retail markets to the ultimate consumer, most difficulties are met at the transition points – points at which the product passes from department to department within a company, or is sold by one company to another or to an individual. The main function of standards is to facilitate the flow of products through these transition points. Standards are thus both facilitators and integrators. In smoothing out points of difficulty, or “bottlenecks,” they provide the evolutionary adjustments which are necessary for industry to keep pace with technical advances (Paul G. Agnew, quoted in Murphy and Yates 2009: 1).

At the International Congress of Electricians in 1904, the International Electrotechnical Commission was formed to organize conferences at regular intervals. It set the model for other international standards bodies that later emerged, for instance in only accepting national standard bodies as members. But these bodies in turn could have members that were individuals, firms, other organizations, and governmental agencies. The International Federation of National Standardizing Associations was formed in 1926, following this model. After the Second World War, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) was formed, and, again, adopted this model (Boli and Thomas 1997: 184). The mind-set of those early international standardizers, most of whom were engineers, was far from technical disinterest. Their self-image was that they were practical, internationalist, modest, democratic and process-oriented, and that they served the common good (Murphy and Yates 2009: 14 16, cf. Loya and Boli 1999).

Standardizing concerns were at the core also of international organizations more broadly. International unions were established in the second half of the 19th century, first the International Telegraph Union (ITU) in 1865, then the Universal Postal Union³, the International Railway Congress Association, the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, the International Union for the Publication of Customs Tariffs and others (Murphy 1994: 47). Craig N. Murphy suggests that these unions played a role in the replacement of lead industries, i.e. when early cotton mills production became railroads, steel and mass production. There is hence a coevolution of interstate governing bodies and industry, in which the former arises when there is a new technology, especially communication technology, to regulate (Murphy 1994). By and large, the construction of early international organisations had to do with the rise of international trade along with technical developments in transport and communication, that both called for regulation through standardization. This form of regulation was of course explicit in the case of the need to harmonize weights and measures (Peters and Peter 2012).

³ The Universal Postal Union had among its administrators people who imagined that the union's tasks could expand and eventually provide the seed for a world government. Linked to this goal, they established an identity card service, that aimed to replace national passports with international travel documents. This idea never took off, since the general abolition of passports in this era made it superfluous (Murphy 1994: 88). Thanks to Ellen Ravndal for pointing this out.

Domestic state practices of standardizing the population

The practice of standardization travelled from the worlds of industry and science to many more areas, including state-building (Timmermans and Epstein 2010: 82). James Scott conceptualises state attempts at standardization as ways of making people “legible” (1998). The overarching aim was simplification: to turn the unknown and messy into well-ordered, understandable and administratively convenient shapes. The invention of permanent last names, cadastral surveys, the standardization of language, registrations systems, together with the organization of transport, the design of cities were all examples of when “officials took exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices, such as land tenure customs or naming customs, and created a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored” (Scott 1998: 2). All these measures of legibility and simplification were creating a “standardized gaze” on part of state authorities (Becker 2001). The state simplifications were not meant to give an accurate and thorough representation, instead they only depicted the aspects of society that were of interest to state officials – and that together with state muscles would allow that society to be remade (Scott 1998: 3). They were also of fundamental importance because they over time affected people’s perceptions so that they conformed with the state’s categorizations and divisions. An example is the demographic categories that were created for statistical use and administrative control. They were to an important extent “making up” people and groups. Yet, over time people tended to develop identities to fit the label that they had been assigned a process which Ian Hacking refers to as “dynamic nominalism”. In this way, the statistical categories tended to affect relationship within society at large (Hacking 1986).

A homogenized population was needed in order to make governing possible and effective. Charles Tilly observes that:

In a homogeneous, connected population, an administrative innovation installed and tested in one region had a reasonable chance of working elsewhere, and officials could easily transfer their knowledge from one locality to another. In the period of moving from tribute to tax, from indirect to direct rule, from subordination to assimilation, states generally worked to homogenize their populations and break down their segmentation by imposing common languages, religions, currencies, and legal systems, as well as promoting connected systems of trade, transportation, and communication (Tilly 1990: 100).

To standardize was thus a necessary requirement for extending what Michael Mann talks of as the state's infrastructural power, i.e. "the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm" (Mann 1984). A crucial prerequisite for achieving such power was that the state gained knowledge of its population and that it increased its capacity to both collect, store and analyse it. The main instruments of increasing the state's "information capacity" was the census, the statistical yearbooks, and the establishment of a governmental statistical agency (Brambor et al 2016).

A range of governmental technologies has also been developed for the purpose of telling those who belong from those who do not. A crucial development occurred with the invention of identification papers in the late 19th century. Through what Noiriel refers to as the "revolution in identity", the juridical tie between state and citizen was made tangible, and it allowed state authorities to distinguish between peoples for administrative purposes (1996: xix). John Torpey conceptualises this as the states "embracing" (rather than "penetrating") their populations thereby "calling to mind the fact that states hold *particular* persons within their grasp, while excluding others" (Torpey 2000: 12). The passport has a particularly important role in distinguishing between people of different national belonging, and it contributes to normalising the relevance of this type of categorisation. A core function is that it informs authorities of the national identity of a traveller. By so doing, the passport allows authorities to specify legal and political responsibility for a particular individual, as the nationality discloses what state that is primarily responsible for a particular individual. The passport is therefore an essential instrument for the larger government of the world population covered by the state system (cf. Hindess 2000; 2002).

We have now looked at two important fields where standardization was important at the time of the Passport Conferences. The first concerned international technical standardization, and is of interest both for the general inspiration that might have exerted in international forums at the time, and because some of the participants in the Passport Conferences came from these circles of international business and transport. The second concerned the manifold standardizations aiming at making people domestically legible, with particular attention to the passport. It is of interest since the Passport Conferences directly concerns the distribution of people, and responds to the need of making

people internationally legible. Next, we will say a few words on the international policy context set by the League.

IV The League of Nations: “a thousand practical details”

The League of Nations was created by the Paris Peace conference of 1919, with the overarching mission to maintain world peace. It is often considered a failure in international cooperation because it was unsuccessful in completing that mission. Its legitimacy was also hampered by the fact that the major powers, USA and USSR, declined membership. After the Second World War, it was succeeded by the United Nations. From a different perspective, however, the League was actually quite successful. Besides its peace work, the League engaged in a broad range of other activities. It established many economic and social institutions, most of which survived the League as they were taken over by the United Nations later on (e.g. the Health Organization and the International Labour Organization). The expansion of international action that they enabled was totally unforeseen at the creation of the League (Walters 1965: 175). F.P. Walters wrote about the institutions that the League established that:

They covered every aspect of international relations: as time went on, they were concerned more and more intimately with the ordinary problems of the life of individuals as well as of nations with health, housing, nutrition, wages, taxation, emigration, education, and other matters in which the action of one State might affect the situation of others, or the experience of one serve to guide the efforts of another. The lights which guide ships up to the quays of Hamburg or Buenos Aires; the signs which warn the motorist on the roads of Italy or Sweden; the standards which allow doctors in Sydney or in Cairo to use the medical experience of Paris or New York a thousand such practical details were planned and executed by the technical agencies of the League. These manifold activities...represented in the aggregate an immense contribution to human welfare and a necessary element in the complex life of the modern world (Walters 1965: 175-6)⁴.

⁴ This work contrasted starkly with the more controversial doings of the Council. It was of the character that it appealed much more to public opinion, and experts in the different areas were recruited to serve at the international bodies. The activities of the social and economic institutions created dense networks between

The broad coverage of these institutions corresponded to the expansion of the state's reach into and intervention in more and more areas of people's life: it is their international equivalent. There was hence a felt need to approach many of these biopolitical and disciplinary matters jointly. It can also be noted that several of the mentioned areas explicitly were met through standardization (naval lights, traffic signs, health etc).

Passports and visas was one of those "practical areas" where the League was relatively successful. According to Walters, it "brought about a notable simplification of the business of passports and visas whereby the world was plagued in the years following the First World War" (Walters 1965: 180). There was a general frenzy surrounding the international treatment of migration and mobility in the period. An ILO publication at the end of the 1920s observed that "nowadays hardly a week passes without the conclusion of some new treaty" (ILO 1929: iii iv).

By way of contextualizing the passport question, we will briefly review three related areas in which the League intervened during the same period. Although related, these areas were kept apart, defined as different problem areas, and for the most part treated in different League forums. Remembering that standardization always relies on some form of categorization, the separation of these areas indicates that a first broad categorization has already been made.

Minority Treaties

The first two areas relate to the causes and consequences of nation building. The period after the First World War was marked by the dissolution of empires and the construction of nation-states in their place. A result of the new borders drawn in Europe was the appearance of minorities, i.e. ethnic groups living on the "wrong" side of the new territorial borders. The demography of Europe before the war has been described as a "crazy quilt of peoples and nationalities" (Henry Cutler Wolfe, quoted in Frank 2017: 12), as different "ethnic" or "national" groups lived scattered, side by side and intermingling, across the vast imperial spaces in East and South-East Europe. After the war, the dispersion of population groups was seen as increasingly problematic

national administrations for public health and social welfare in different countries and the League, and this mutual engagement was very different from the detached attitude of the diplomatic services (Walters 1965: 176)

both for the state and for the minorities that were exposed to the power of the majority. This is because, In the era of nation building, the ideal was that populations be nationally homogenous, so that the boundaries of the people and the boundaries of the state coincided.

The League was involved in setting up and supervising “Minority Treaties”, whereby the states agreed to take on responsibility for the minorities living in their newly demarcated national territories. The Treaties divided the population in each state into different groups: the dominant nationality that was entrusted with governing the country, other nationalities who were expected to assist in governing, and thirdly the minorities. The term “minority” rather than “nation” was meant to discourage these groups from claiming national self-determination for themselves. The minorities were in many instances not much smaller in size than the dominant group, and they had often been settled in the area just as long as them. Many were embittered because they saw the treaties as “an arbitrary rule which handed out rule to some and servitude to others” (Arendt 1967: 270)⁵. The leading people of the new states, for their part, were embittered towards the older European powers, because Minority Treaties were only required for them (ibid).

About 30 of the 100 million people that made up the population of the succession states were official minorities, and the largest groups across the continent were Germans and Jews. Through the treaties, the minorities were awarded protection of their human rights, and they were meant to safeguard them from discrimination from the majority (Motta 2013: 41 62; 253 57). But they did not have full citizenship rights, and were dependent on treaties established by an international body the League for their protection. Besides assisting the minorities, and in the longer run of greater weight, the Minority Treaties emphasised rather than challenged the nationalist ideal: “The Minority Treaties said in plain language what until then had been only implied in the working system of nation-states, namely, that only nationals could be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions... They thereby admitted... that the transformation of the state from an instrument of law to an instrument of the nation had been completed; the nation had conquered the state (Arendt 1967: 275).

⁵ Arendt provides an example: “The Russian and the Jewish minorities in Poland did not feel Polish culture to be superior to its own and neither was particularly impressed by the fact that Poles formed roughly 60 per cent of Poland’s population” (Arendt 1967: 273).

Population transfers

In the case of population transfer system, the nation-state ideal was all the more explicit. It was not even pretended to work to the benefit of the minorities themselves, but was plainly a state-centred measure to achieve national homogeneity. The idea was that “national minorities could be relocated en masse in an orderly way with minimal economic and political disruption as long as there was sufficient planning, bureaucratic oversight and international support in place” (Frank 2017: 1).

Population transfers was mainly deployed in the Near East and South-East Europe. The Lausanne Treaty of 1923 established a compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey. Between 1923 and 1925 around 192,000 Orthodox Greeks were removed from Turkey and resettled in Greece, and 355,000 Muslims in Greece were moved to Turkey (Frank 2017: 75). These people were forcibly relocated from the place where their family had lived for many generations, they were for the most part poor and illiterate, and many lost land and property as a consequence (ibid: 73, 92). The involvement of the League lent legitimacy to a project which had previously been seen as repressive and contrary to the spirit of internationalism. Partly because of the League, partly because of its apparent “success” at the time, population transfer was perceived as fully compatible with liberal internationalism: a modern, innovative, scientific and rational way of managing populations in order to achieve national self-determination and peaceful relations between nations (ibid: 47 48, 92). In the late 1930s and 1940s, the Nazi, fascist, and Communist regimes would realize large-scale population transfers, to a large degree based on the Lausanne model (ibid: chap. 3).

The way in which the population transfer model set out to homogenize the population, was through the elimination of minorities. In contrast to the Minority Treaties system, the minorities were not considered permanently settled but as movable at the will of the state. And moving them was a way of achieving national homogeneity without changing territorial borders (Frank 2017: 30).

Refugees and the “Nansen passport”

The third area of League involvement concerned refugees, and was oriented towards humanitarianism. It related to nation-building projects in the sense that refugees were often the result of such projects. But their flight was related to political as well as ethnic reasons.

About a million Russians had fled after the Russian revolution and were after the war spread across the continent. The League established the High Commissioner for Refugees in 1921 in order to deal with these now stateless refugees, and appointed the Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen, who had previously been engaged in repatriating prisoners of war. The idea was not initiated by the League itself but by civil society, especially the Red Cross, who came to have a crucial role both practically and financially. In any case, it was the first time that refugees were approached as an international issue. It was meant to be temporary, only lasting until the problem with the Russian refugees was settled, but then expanded to include other groups, particularly those from the Ottoman Empire (Barnett 2002).

Nansen proposed the “Nansen Passport” to the League, as a way of enabling refugees to travel and prevent them from deportation. Nansen’s idea was to make the refugees self-sufficient and not dependent on charity, and it was therefore important to be allowed to travel for work. The refugees’ rights were otherwise restricted and very much below state citizens. The Nansen passport was first issued to Russian refugees but then extended to Armenians, Turks, Assyrians, Syrians and others⁶. It was unique in that this passport was international rather than national. It was also the first time that stateless people came into possession of a legal identity document. More and more states agreed to recognize the Nansen passport as a valid document. But they were not obliged to receive the refugees holding such passports – a limitation of the agreement that had grim consequences when European states denied entry to Jewish refugees in the 1930s (Barnett 2002: 4).

V Standardizing the passport

We now turn directly to the international Passport Conferences, in order to see how standardization was negotiated and formulated in that setting.

An issue of communication and commerce

⁶ Nansen’s idea has continued to inspire, for instance in the recent suggestion by Heyward and Ödalen for a “New Nansen Passport for the Territorially Dispossessed”, i.e. climate induced refugees (Heyward and Ödalen 2013).

First of all, the institutional setting of the conferences is important for understanding the framing of the passport question. It was actually one of the first things that the newly established League did, to arrange a “Conference on Passports, Customs Formalities and Through Tickets”. The felt urgency of the matter is manifest in that this Conference took place even before the first Assembly. The League came into force in January 1920 and it held its first Assembly in November that same year. In-between, the Council held a series of sessions to “wrestle with the most urgent and dangerous legacies of the war” and the passport conference was one of them (Walters 1965: 98). The perceived urgency of these matters stemmed from the disarray of the transport and communication systems after the war, both in technical and administrative terms. The aim of the conference was, according to the League (1944: 3), to remove transport difficulties and re-establish freedom in the sphere of international communication. This was seen as essential for post-war reconstruction. The passport conference was joined to the larger purpose of the League, as stated in its Covenant: “to secure and maintain freedom of communications and of transit and equitable treatment for the commerce of all Members of the League” (Article 23 [e]).

The establishment of the passport regime in the post-war years was done under the auspices of the Communications and Transit Organization. The League Secretariat prepared its constitution, which was adopted by the 44 states attending the Barcelona Conference on Communications in 1921. The Barcelona conference was considered a success for the League, demonstrating its efficacy for collective problem solving through the open conference format. It was a milestone in the organization of transport and communication in post-war Europe. Besides establishing the mentioned organization, it drew up two conventions, one on Freedom of Transit and one on the Regime of International Waterways, prepared the ground for further cooperation in railways and ports (Walters 1965: 143).

The constitution of the Communications and Transit Organization guaranteed it a high level of autonomy vis-à-vis the League. Its day-to-day work was carried out by the Advisory and Technical Committee, which also prepared the recurrent general conferences (Walters 1965: 180).

Ideal and pragmatism

We have seen that standardization is not idealistic, but strives for practical suitability and adequacy. Against this background, it is interesting to note that discussions in the Passport Conferences and related forums always contained an element of idealism. There was a longing back to the pre-war decades when movement was free and uninterrupted by passport controls and other border formalities. In the second half of the nineteenth century had most countries abolished passport controls. It was an era of relatively free trade and of free movement, and it was ideologically dominated by liberal internationalism. At the outbreak of the war, passport controls were reinstated, and they were not lifted when the war ended.

The resolution of the first passport conference 1920 reads: “Being of the opinion, further, that the legitimate concern of every Government for the safeguarding of its security and rights prohibits, for the time being, the total abolition of restrictions and that complete return to pre-war conditions, which the Conference hopes, nevertheless, to see gradually re-established in the near future” (League of Nations 1925/1920). This reading legitimates current practices of border control as an adequate measure during present circumstances, at the same time as it rejects such practices from an ideological standpoint.

The reasons that prohibited an immediate abolition were several. The passport served as a security measure against entry of spies and other dangerous elements. It was also a way of containing refugees, regulating the labour market, and hinder the spread of epidemics (Salter 2003: 78).

At the time, the above idealistic remarks quoted were not considered unrealistic, but many delegates indeed believed that the world would soon go back to the “normal” state of the pre-war years. In 1922, in its reply to an international survey on the topic, France stated that it had refrained from a particular and costly change to the national passport. The argument was that it was not worthwhile “as there is ground for believing that the passport system will shortly be abolished” (League of Nations 1922: 27). Another indication that abolition was considered fully realistic in the early 1920s is a later discussion in the Subcommittee on the Passport Regime as to why the first Passport Conference had recommended a duration period of two years. Why did they not ask for five years directly, asks one of the participants. “[A]t that time it was not supposed that the regime of passports would last five years longer”, then explains another (League of Nations 1925d: 4).

The sixth Assembly of the League of Nations in 1925 pointed towards the upcoming 1926 second passport conference. It adopted a resolution where it called for increased liberalisations:

The Assembly... draws the attention of all the Governments to the special importance of the Conference on Passports to be held in 1926, which public opinion, particularly in economic circles, undoubtedly expects to take at least a step towards the abolition, to the widest extent possible, of the passport system and to mitigate considerably the disadvantages and expense which that system entails for the relations between peoples and for international trade facilities (quoted in League of Nations 1925c: 1).

At the second conference, however, there was no strong support for abolition, although national delegates had differing opinions. The Polish delegate wanted all countries to agree on total abolition of passports, since all other limited measures to liberalise movement were unsatisfactory and “could only afford an imperfect solution” (League of Nations 1926: 13). Although some delegates were enthusiastic, he did not get full support. The delegate from Italy, for instance, said she appreciated the “fraternal spirit” of the proposal, but declared that she would have to vote against it, should a vote be taken. She would not agree until “every reason for the compulsory use of passports had disappeared”, but said at the same time that this was something she regretted (*ibid*: 14). The debate concerning abolition resurged several times during the days of the conference. It became quite clear that many countries did no longer wish for total abolition. This was the case for Britain, which had a couple of decades back been probably the most liberal European country in these matters. Towards the end, there was a debate concerning the formulation that the Conference recommend that “the general control of travellers at frontiers should be gradually discontinued”. The British delegation and some others strongly opposed this formulation. A vote was taken which led to the removal of these words (*ibid* 54 56).

Total abolition of passports never occurred, as we know in hindsight. In 1925, only three countries stated in a questionnaire that they had suppressed passports “entirely” (Uruguay, Cuba and Surinam) (League of Nations 1925a, b). But many countries liberalised movement in a more selective and piecemeal way. Some of the barriers to movement that were erected with the war were removed. In 1925, almost all of the investigated countries had again abolished entry visas for nationals. And the great majority had also removed exit visas, in most cases for both foreigners

and nationals. Moreover, an important development was the removal of passports and visas through bilateral agreements (ibid). The international debates on passports did not stop to call for relaxations and liberalisations of control and facilitations of travel, especially through bilateral treaties. But calling for gradual reforms is quite different from envisioning wholesale abolition. That ambition still resurfaces in the documents towards the end of the 1920s, but seemingly with less conviction and faith.

We have seen that there was an element of idealism expressed in the desire to return to pre-war conditions, a desire that never disappeared but grew fainter over time. This idealism was expressed at the same time as the conferences were doing something quite different, namely negotiating the applications of passports. Ever since the beginning was however a more modest and pragmatic goal also expressed, the goal of gradual liberalisation for the benefit of commerce and travel.

The passport holders

Were the imagined passport holders that the discussions revolved around? Here, it is suitable to remind ourselves that the “era of free movement” was never quite so free as the people working in this context described it. The level of control experienced by travellers varied quite considerably with whom you were. Regulations on basis of race and class had become quite common, not least in the USA, the major destination for European emigrants (Hirota 2013).

But the people that the League officials and the country delegates to the Passport Conferences had in mind was of a particular kind – the kind that had indeed had the possibility of free travel before. It was the upper classes that they imagined and discussed, those who travelled for commercial purposes and for tourism, the “ordinary travellers” (cf. ILO 1928: 9).

The attitude towards the passport holders was if not subservient, then at least marked by worries that they would be unhappy with the decisions that were taken. There were at the time two concerns. One was that the travelling business people would be delayed by the interference of passport controls and border formalities, which would impact negatively on their travels and hence to trade and economic integration at large. As we saw above, standardization is commonly seen as serving the common good, and this was particularly pronounced in this time period. In this case, the common good was to rebuild systems of transport and communication, and to enhance world trade. In order to

do so, the interests of these travellers had to be taken into account. As Robertson observes, debate on free trade and free movement blended into each other, and people, goods and capital were defined as “one inseparable mass” (Robertson 2010: 219).

The other concern was that passport holders would be offended. This group of people had been used to traveling freely, and to rarely need to identify themselves, as a natural dimension of class privilege. The standardization of passports meant that they were suddenly on par with common people, and required to show passports just like them. It is, as we have seen, a core effect of standardization exercises that it *equalises* and brings people (and things) together by making them comparable. Perhaps this is why many upper-class people at the time were indeed offended by passport requirements. There was lots of talk and angry newspaper articles about “the passport nuisance”, as they called the interferences that the passports controls were (Robertson 2010: 218). But perhaps another reason for their anger was that they “lost control of one aspect of the public representation of their identity”. Formal requirements of standardized passports and identification documents, they felt, “turned citizens into objects of inquiry” an experience which was new for them but not for many other social groups (Robertson 2010: 217).

Therefore, the conference legitimated the introduction of the general traveling public into a world of travel documentation that had previously been largely restricted to marginal mobile populations: immigrants and vagrants. However, it did so through a different logic to facilitate, not control although with the same practical consequences (Robertson 2010: 219).

Other border-crossers

The group of well-to-do travellers were sharply differentiated from other moving groups, such as emigrants and stateless people. In this way, the conference delegates contributed to the creation and solidifying of a particular categorisation between different movements, that was not entirely self-evident before. Both stateless people and emigrants came up in the Passport Conferences, and delegates discussed how the passport that they were discussing related to these groups and their needs for documentation (League of Nations 1926; 1944).

An interesting discussion came up in the Advisory Committee in 1927. They returned to discussions about “persons without nationality” in the 1926 passport conference, in light of a new expert investigation. They

admitted that this category of people for humanitarian reasons needed identity papers that enabled them to travel, but the participants hesitated to provide them with passports (League of Nations 1927: 29–30). They feared that this group would expand to include all kinds of people with unclear nationality status that were spread across Europe due to “far-reaching changes of the last ten years” (i.e. war, the crumbling of empires, persecutions, nation building and persecutions). There were hesitations to provide them with passports since, as one participant said, “every precaution should be taken to guard against the formation of a class of international persons”, and the provision of documents could possibly lead in this direction (ibid: 31). There are two interesting aspects of this discussion: first, that they recognize that the ascription of nationality did not function in a natural and smooth manner, but that sizeable groups lacked a firm national identity. Second, although the humanitarian consequences of this state of affairs is admitted, it is overridden by the state-centric concern to distribute nationality and avoid the rise of a group of international “in-between” people. This demonstrates Arendt’s claim that national concerns dominated (presumably nationally irrelevant) human rights concerns just when it was the most needed (Arendt 1976). Instead, the ideal of national citizenship was created and cemented in this era (Soguk 1999).

The standardization of the passport was connected to categorisations that were formed through stratificatory as well as functional and segmentary differentiations⁷. The functional dimension is seen in the division of different streams of movement according to their type and purpose. But it is overlaid with elements that arise from the hierarchical ordering on basis of class and status. The standardization did hence not just equalise, but also contributed to forming and cementing inequalities (cf. Ewald 1990). At a “deeper” level authorities were at the same time involved in the shaping what Barry Hindess talks of as the dispersed international regime of population management that was established in conjuncture with the state system (Hindess 2000; 2002). This regime, which lacks a clear centre (no world government) operates by dividing greater humanity into the distinct subpopulations of different states, and then assigning to each state the primary responsibility for “its” citizens, as one dimension of its right and responsibility to manage its own

⁷ See Buzan and Albert (2010) and Zürn and Faude (2013) on how the sociological concept differentiation might be applied to international relations.

internal affairs (Hindess 2002: 130). Establishing nationality is essential in this system, it is not only “state-centric” but a structural requirement. Against this background it becomes possible to understand the aversion to in-between categories and the fears of “a class of international persons”.

The passport

The conferences were meant to facilitate travel, but the way they did it was through regulation rather than the tearing down of borders. The 1920 conference asserted it was “Convinced that the many difficulties affecting personal relations between the peoples of various countries constitute a serious obstacle to the resumption of normal intercourse and to the economic recovery of the world” (League of Nations 1925/1920: 1). The introduction of a standardized and uniform passport across the globe, no later than July 1st 1921, was the solution they suggested, and that would facilitate movement while rationalizing control and reduce “the to a minimum the time lost on the journey” (ibid: 3).

At the time, passports differed widely between different countries. The resolution from the 1920 conference regulates how the internationally standardized passport should function and look like. It should be issued for a single journey or for two years, and the fee should not be fiscal in character. It should be bound in cardboard, contain 32 pages, and be drawn in French as well as the national language. It should include a photograph of the holder and his wife and contain detailed physical descriptions and information about children (ibid: 3 5). The design was meant to facilitate the speedy processing by state authorities, making people “legible” not only to domestic authorities but to foreign ones, too (cf. Scott 1998). The resolution also contains recommendations for instance regarding the use of visas (abolish exit and entry visas for nationals) and passport formalities (enter into mutual agreements for minimizing them (ibid: 3).

Most countries were positive to the idea of a uniform passport, and most adapted quickly to the new model⁸. The UK developed its famous blue variant that would be in production for seventy years. At the second conference, in 1926, the UK passport was held up as an ideal for others to follow which most of them did (Lloyd 2005: 128 129). The 1926 conference would also change some details in the 1920 model, for

⁸ For information of the dissenters, see Lloyd 2005: 124pp.

instance that it should be valid for five instead of two years (League of Nations 1926).

In all, evaluated as a standardization effort, it was “quite astonishing”. “It had managed by 1929 to change utterly the dace of passports worldwide, replacing some designs that had been in use with no real modification for sixty or seventy years, and this in less than a decade” (Lloyd 2005: 129 130).

How to govern

Standardization often takes the form of voluntary regulation, as we saw above. This is so for the case at hand as well. As in many cases of international action, regulations were dependent on voluntary adoption and compliance. Governing through freedom (cf. Rose 1999) is required since the subject of government are formally free and expected to freely change their behaviour without coercion. There was no hard mechanism for punishing those that dissented. The Advisory Committee relied on a softer mechanism for monitoring at a distance: repeated inquiries whereby states had to report their progress in adopting the recommendations. This information was collected, printed and distributed, which enabled states to compare their own situations with others (League of Nations 1922; 1925a; 1925b; 1929; 1937).

It seems that countries largely agreed to the need for an international standard passport, although they would disagree on details and some national deviations would continue (Lloyd 2005: 124). The need for persuasion was therefore comparatively small, as at a general level, the rationalising benefits appeared quite obvious.

Standardizing exercises in the fields of transport, industry and commerce were at the time largely led by non-state actors, and took the form of epistemic communities of engineers and other experts. In the case of passports, state representatives were dominating. However, the conferences as well as the permanent bodies had nonstate actors present. At the second conference in 1926, for instance, representatives from the following bodies had been invited: the Advisory and Technical Committee, the Committee for the International Emigration and Immigration Conference, the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Labour Office, the International Shipping Conference, the International Union of Railways, and the Passport and Postal Reform Committee (League of Nations 1926: 10 11). The selection reflects the issue-linkage of passports to matter of communication and commerce.

And interestingly, these are also the fields where standardization had become particularly prevalent.

VI Summary

In this text, I have argued for the fruitfulness of approaching political developments through a Foucauldian understanding of standardization. Such an approach allows one to explore society and politics from the point of view of measurements techniques (Ewald 1990, cf. Becker et al 2001; Alder 2001). Writes Ewald:

What did the French Revolution bring about, after all, if not an enormous transformation in systems of measurement? The introduction of the metric system, the institution of a truly national language, calendar reform, and the creation of the Civil Code are all examples of this. Similarly, the institution of constitutional democracy was a means of producing a common political standard. One might also read the history of the social sciences in the nineteenth century as the formation of so many instruments intended to furnish modern societies with social and political measurements. Thus we might well assess social modernity in terms of the transformation a given society may have experienced in its techniques of measurement (Ewald 1990: 159-160).

In this spirit, I have approached the great norm change in migration governance that followed upon the end of the First World War, suggesting that an understanding of this development in terms of piecemeal changes in and towards standardization would be a rewarding avenue for research. I have concentrated in particular on the International Passport Conferences that were organized by the League of Nations in the 1920s. Focusing on standardization allows me to draw parallels from this case to other instances of standardization, of which I find the state's domestic standardization efforts for achieving "legible" populations of particular relevance (Scott 1998).

I have found that the discussions in around these conferences are characterised by standardizing features: for instance, they rely on voluntariness and soft forms of governing, they include expert opinions on technical matters. There were clear concerns about the common good, perceived as economic prosperity through international trade, necessitating the facilitation of the movement of people. And there was a belief that this could be obtained not through idealistically tearing down

all obstacles but through rational regulation, the most important mechanism being the internationally uniform passport. The emphasis on economic rationality distinguishes these discussions from the other areas of movements that the League was involved in, that were directly linked to homogenising national populations or handling the population problems related to state building (Minority Treaties, Population transfers, and Nansen passports). The imagined bearer of the passport that was negotiated was sharply differentiated from the objects of those other projects: they were the “ordinary travellers”, the upper-class tourists and business people. But I have found that the Passport Conferences were also involved in the building of a state-centric system. The suggestion that I want to make is that the conferences were involved in standardization at two different levels: at the most obvious level were they designing the international passport, but at the deeper level they were involved in the normalization of the state system regime of population governance, by ensuring the international legibility of persons (cf. Hindess 2000).

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