

Bio

Hrag David Yacoubian is an assistant professor at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. He holds a Master of Nursing Sciences and is a PhD candidate at University of British Columbia. His research focuses on the history of North American humanitarian organizations and nurses' involvement in relief efforts during and in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. Hrag explores ways nurses practiced humanitarianism, highlighting the complexity of their work defined by modernity, political engagement, and human rights.

Summary of Research

This research project is exploring the complexities and particularities of humanitarianism in the Near East between 1890 and 1930 through an analysis of relief nurses' involvement in humanitarian work before, during and after the Armenian Genocide. This study aims to investigate how nurses' role in relief work was shaped by and shaped humanitarianism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular, the project is exploring whether a stance on humanitarian neutrality or political engagement and human rights activism can be traced in nurses' participation in relief work. There is a dominant discourse that traces modern, politically engaged humanitarianism and human rights advocacy to the Second World War, the international reaction to the Holocaust of the Jews and the Roma and the founding of the United Nations. However, Keith David Watenpaugh, a renowned human rights scholar, has challenged this discourse by arguing that politically engaged humanitarianism originated in the Near East with the rescue of victims of the Armenian Genocide by the League of Nations, founded in January 1920. This study is probing these discourses on modern humanitarianism through an analysis of nurses' work.

On another front, there are two main schools of thought of what humanitarians ought to accomplish by their relief related work. The first school suggests that humanitarians ought to promote human rights and engage politically to solve world problems like hunger, poverty, and war. A leading scholar of this school is Michael Ignatieff. In contrast, others argue against the idea of solving the problems of the world and favor neutrally focusing on the relief of suffering and saving lives. My study is also analyzing nurses' involvement in relief work within the contexts of these two schools of humanitarianism. In particular, I am exploring which motivations were more evident in nurses' case. Using a historical approach, I am gathering historical evidence by looking into relevant published sources.

For this study, I am analysing *the Globe* (A Canadian newspaper), *the Missionary Herald* (a newspaper series published in Boston by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions), *the New Near East Magazine* (the official monthly publication of the Near East Relief) and *the American Journal of Nursing* to understand the complexities and particularities of humanitarianism and humanitarian nursing in the Near East. I am particularly looking into the initiatives and actions that nurses were undertaking and what were the motivations behind these actions. In addition, I am focusing on the thoughts, ideas, and perspectives that nurses had publicly expressed about humanitarian work and humanitarianism.

This focused study has so far found evidence suggesting nurses took on roles such as rescuing of trafficked genocide survivors, advocating the international community to intervene, denouncing child marriages, child transfers and forced conversion to other religions, as well as advocating to protect the Armenian nation linking the suffering of individual Armenians to collective cultural and ethnic annihilation. These actions categorically fall under the very definition of modern humanitarianism and promotion of human rights. Using a historical methodological approach and analyses of social, cultural, and political histories these findings will be further analysed to contribute to the larger discourse on humanitarianism and humanitarian nursing.