

Humanitarian Protection for Prisoners of War and Refugees in the Long Aftermath of the First World War



FRANCESCA PIANA

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HUMANITARIAN
PROTECTION FOR PRISONERS
OF WAR AND REFUGEES IN
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THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Francesca Piana

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Abbreviations

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
ACICR	Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross
ACPO	Advisory Committee of Private Organizations
AILO	Archives of the International Labour Organization
ALON	Archives of the League of Nations
ANB	The National Library of Norway
ARA	American Relief Administration
ARC	American Red Cross
ASC	Armenian Sub-Committee of the ACPO
BIT	International Labour Office (Bureau international du travail)
CCRAR	Central Committee for the Relief of Armenian refugees
CSAR	Commission for the Settlement of Armenian refugees
HA	Hoover archives
HCR	High Commissariat for Refugees
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IEC	International Emigration Commission
ILO	International Labour Organization
LON	League of Nations
LRCS	League of the Red Cross Societies
NA FO	The National Archives of Great Britain, Foreign Office
NBKR	The papers of Baron Noel-Baker
NER	Near East Relief
POW	Prisoner of war
RCICR	Review of the International Committee of the Red Cross
SCF	Save the Children Fund
UISE	Union internationale de secours aux enfants
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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¹ Davide Rodogno, "Histoire des associations internationales et des organisations internationales non-gouvernementales humanitaires en Europe occidentale au 19ème et 20ème siècle (1800-1945)", financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (PP0011_118875).

² Francesca Piana, "'Parallel Lives': Women, Imperialism, and Humanitarianism, ca. 1880-1950," financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (P2GEP1_148355 and P300P1_158445).

³ "Per una storia visuale della sicurezza sociale in Italia, 1919-1978", MIUR "Dipartimenti di Eccellenza", bando 2017, Classe di lettere e filosofia, Scuola Normale Superiore, Prof. Ilaria Pavan.

⁴ "Political Repression and International Solidarity Networks (PRISON). The Transnational Mobilization on Behalf of Political Prisoners in the Interwar Period (1918-1939 ca.)", MUR - Ministero Università e Ricerca, MUR_PRIN 2022, Università degli Studi di Trento, Prof. Umberto Tulli, and Università "Ca' Foscari" Venezia.

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An early version of the material included in chapters 3 and 4 was published in the following article, which I use with the journal's permission. "Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione. Le negoziazioni e l'assistenza tecnica del Bureau international du travail a favore dei rifugiati russi (1919-1925)," *Studi Storici* 4 (2021), 857-887.

Introduction

Russian Colonel Alexandre V., former commandant of the 74th Poneveschki regiment, was captured by the German army during the first campaigns of WWI and endured long years of internment.¹ The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, which ended the war between Russia and the Central Powers, gave him high hopes as “prisoners of war of both parties [should] be released to return to their homelands.”² However, repatriation turned out to be strenuous. Left by the German authorities at the border with Poland, Colonel Alexander V. could not count on the assistance of Russia, where the civil war was unfolding. Hence, he traveled to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes where, in his own words, he was “deprived of all help, of material and moral assistance, [...] crippled and disabled.” In August 1921, Colonel V. addressed a letter to the newly appointed high commissioner for Russian refugees of the League of Nations, the Norwegian explorer and politician Fridtjof Nansen, asking to be repatriated to his native Vladivostok.³

Colonel Alexander V. was yet one of the many persons displaced by WWI and its consequences. Because of the hostilities, millions of prisoners of war and civilians experienced forced displacement and internment, which peacetime did not stop but exacerbated.⁴ The Treaty of Versailles that was signed between Germany and the Allied Powers on June 28, 1919 authorized the immediate repatriation of Allied POWs and interned civilians, yet it postponed the repatriation of POWs from the

¹ Many of the places that this book studies have undergone changes in their names under different governments and administrations. While being consistent, I try to use the contemporary names of places at the time of writing. To respect the privacy of prisoners of war and refugees, I refer to them by their first name and by the capital letter of their family name, when the information exists. Translations from French to English are mine. Helena Ratté translated letters and reports from German, and Barbara Martin translated a poster from Russian. My gratitude goes to them both.

² Article VIII of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 3, 1918. According to article XII, “the reestablishment of public and private legal relations, the exchange of war prisoners and interned citizens, the question of amnesty as well as the question anent the treatment of merchant ships which have come into the power of the opponent, will be regulated in separate treaties with Russia which form an essential part of the general treaty of peace, and, as far as possible, go into force simultaneously with the latter”.

³ Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ACICR), B MSB/iF 8 à 12, box 7, Requête de V. au Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations pour des affaires relatives aux réfugiés russes, August 30, 1921.

⁴ Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

defeated countries after its ratification.⁵ Waiting to return home, prisoners of war and interned civilians from Russia and from the Central Powers became pawns in the fragile postwar setting.⁶ Peacetime also created millions of “new” refugees.⁷ The crumbling of empires brought the redrawing of borders, and the new international order adopted the nation-state paradigm as its cornerstone. While Bulgarians, Germans, Ottoman Greeks, Hungarians, and Romanians made their way “home,” hundreds of thousands of Russians, mostly the followers of the defeated white generals, and of Armenians, who had survived the genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman authorities, took the road of exile. Soon to be denationalized, Russians and Armenians would become the “scum of the earth,” to quote the poignant words of philosopher Hannah Arendt.⁸ Unable to repatriate, except for a small number, Russian and Armenian refugees stayed in the place of first asylum or underwent a difficult resettlement. This was complicated by the approval of anti-immigration laws and by passports being made compulsory.⁹

Colonel Alexander V.’s path embodies the dramatic geopolitical changes which shaped the transition between war and peace. And yet, this story reveals much more. Faced with the inaction of the Russian authorities, Colonel V. seized the opportunity to interact with the League of Nations, which had just made its appearance into international relations. His letter suggests that the new organization offered marginalized persons a place to be heard: while the Covenant embedded petitions into the minority protection and into the mandate system, other groups spontaneously did the same, including former prisoners of war and refugees.¹⁰ On which ground did Colonel V. appeal to Nansen? He stressed being a victim as a legitimate basis to receive material and moral assistance; he also reiterated that he had fought for Russia and endured a long internment, a condition which gave him the right to be repatriated under the terms of international humanitarian law. According to Colonel V., beneath the social hierarchy were only refugees, referring to those

⁵ Part VI on Prisoners of War and Graves of the Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919.

⁶ Richard B. Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

⁷ Dzovinar Kévonian, “Les réfugiés de la paix. La question des réfugiés au début du XX^e siècle,” *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 36, no. 1 (1994): 2–10.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951).

⁹ John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Jane K. Cowan, “Who’s Afraid of Violent Language? Honour, Sovereignty and Claims-Making in the League of Nations,” *Anthropological Theory* 3, no. 3 (2003): 271–291. Susan Pedersen, “Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, 2 (2012): 231–261. Natasha Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,” *Past and Present* 227, 1 (2015): 205–248.

Russians who had been pouring into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes after the defeat of the White armies, and who were left “in charge of the state and the society.”¹¹ His words also hint at the letter’s receiver. Nansen came across as a powerful agent, able to negotiate between ex-enemy states, as well as a caring one, who could protect fragile men to return home and to restore their hurt sense of self.

This book illuminates the interactions of institutions and agents which designed and implemented political, humanitarian, and legal solutions to the forced displacements of two groups: prisoners of war and refugees. Our understanding of the international refugee regime has been shaped by legal scholars who have situated its emergence in coincidence with the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1950 and with the approval of the 1951 Geneva Convention.¹² In contrast, this book argues that contemporary humanitarian protection and refugee politics were born out of the geopolitical interests, moral imperatives, and the urge to restore peace through the reenactment of civilizational categories, gender norms, and aspirations for ethnic homogeneity at the end of WWI. The book’s temporal scope extends from 1918 to 1930, linking the immediate aftermath of the war with the period of relative stability that followed, at least until the economic depression, new international conflicts, and the rise of fascism in Europe and in the Far East which darkened hopes for world peace.¹³

Tracing the early reasons for making specific groups of prisoners of war and of refugees a concern of international politics breaks new ground. In order to study the emergence of humanitarian protection and refugee politics, the book frames together three Geneva-based organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the League of Nations (LON), and the International Labour Organization (ILO), as well as their officers, delegates, lawyers, and experts. The three emergencies that the book connects and compares, the displacement of

¹¹ ACICR, B MSB/iF 8 à 12, box 7, Requête de V. au Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations pour des affaires relatives aux réfugiés russes, August 30, 1921.

¹² The Convention defines a refugee as a person who “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it,” Article 1.2 of the 1951 Refugee Convention. For international lawyers, see Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (London: Penguin, 2017). For a history of the convention, see Irial Glynn, “The Genesis and Development of Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 1 (2012): 134–148.

¹³ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919 – 1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

POWs, Russian refugees, and Armenian populations, have seldom been studied in concert with each other.¹⁴ In the early 1920s, international programs were extended from the repatriation of POWs to the protection of Russian refugees; the case of Armenians complicates the story, as it only partially builds from the programs addressed to displaced Russians and rather draws on a different understanding of humanitarian aid.¹⁵ By looking at the transnational work being performed by the three organizations, we can pay attention to their competing or mutually informing agendas and to the multitude of actors engaged in humanitarian aid and refugee protection, including the local and refugee staff, as well as prisoners of war and refugees. We can also illuminate the range of discourses that they formulated as well as the crises where they intervened.¹⁶

The book pays attention to the spaces of displacement and intervention, such as refugee camps or agricultural colonies, and observes that displaced prisoners of war and refugees were often located “at the doors of Europe,” in countries which were undergoing a delicate post-imperial transition and nation-building processes. There, the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization not only experimented with populations’ politics—in terms of local integration, repatriation, or resettlement plans—but also made sure that refugees would not resettle *en masse* to the West, hence endangering the fragile postwar peace. The plural fragmented governance which emerged at the end of WWI had many ends: it protected the refugee, it concurred to creating her identity and needs, it transformed the refugee into a cheap, badly protected, laborer, and it attempted to contain the perceived threats that might come from forced displacement.

¹⁴ Francesca Piana, “L’humanitaire d’après-guerre : prisonniers de guerre et réfugiés russes dans la politique du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et de la Société des Nations,” *Relations internationales* 151, no. 3 (2013): 63–75.

¹⁵ Keith D. Watenpaugh, “Between Communal Survival and National Aspiration: Armenian Genocide Refugees, the League of Nations, and the Practices of Interwar Humanitarianism,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 5, no. 2 (2014): 159–181. Keith D. Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927,” *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1315–1339.

¹⁶ For transnational history, see Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux,” *Genèses* 57, no. 4 (2004): 110–126. Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Sandrine Kott, “Une « communauté épistémique » du social?,” *Genèses* 71, no. 2 (2008): 26–46. Patricia Clavin, “Defining Transnationalism,” *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 04 (2005): 421–439. Patricia Clavin, “Time, Manner, Place: Writing Modern European History in Global, Transnational and International Contexts,” *European History Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 624–640.

The politics of humanitarianism

The case of prisoners of war and refugees allows reflection on the reasons why international humanitarian organizations decided to intervene and what refugee politics meant on the ground in the complex post-imperial Central Eastern Europe, as well in the South Caucasus, in the Middle East, and in Latin America. The book joins the literature on humanitarian aid, a lively field which has developed out of transnational, global, and imperial history.¹⁷ Discussions have been taking place about the nature of humanitarian aid, which aims to meet urgent needs, including the provision of food, shelter, clothing, and medical assistance, and which engages in medium-term programs such as vocational training, education, and employment.¹⁸ The literature has suggested that the drive to assist distant others originated in the nineteenth century from national, missionary, and colonial projects in the case of human-made or natural catastrophes.¹⁹ Studies on WWI and its long aftermath have argued that, due to the pressing and massive needs of military and civilians alike, national war charities expanded and, in doing so, affected social policies,

¹⁷ Matthew Hilton et al., "History and Humanitarianism: A Conversation," *Past & Present* 241, no. 1 (2018): 1–38. On international history and internationalism(s), Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Historians have reflected on defining humanitarian aid. See Johannes Paulmann, "Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4, no. 2 (2013): 215–38. Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century* (Corby: Oxford University Press, 2016). Fabian Klose (ed.), *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Kevin O'Sullivan, Matthew Hilton, and Juliano Fiori, "Humanitarianisms in Context," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 23, no. 1–2 (2016): 1–15.

¹⁹ Michael N. Barnett and Thomas George Weiss, *Humanitarianism in Question Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). The book of Michael N. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011) has the merit to be the first to offer a longer chronology. However, historians have largely criticized the periodization offered by Barnett, who divides the modern period into the age of imperial humanitarianism, the age of new humanitarianism, and the age of liberal humanitarianism. For a more nuanced understanding of continuities and changes in humanitarian aid, see the work of historian Silvia Salvatici, *Nel nome degli altri: storia dell'umanitarismo internazionale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015). Norbert Götz, Georgina Brewis, and Steffen Werther, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World: The Moral Economy of Famine Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For the connections with capitalism, see Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (1985): 339–361. Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 547–566.

transnational exchanges, and international organizations.²⁰ Meanwhile, recent publications have stressed how imperialism needs to be added to the equation, as it explains the underlying motives of institutions and their agents.²¹

Taken together, the Great War, the crumbling of empires, the creation of new states, and the experiment of the postwar internationalism shaped the context where the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the International Labour Organization engaged in humanitarian aid and refugee politics.²² And yet, why so? While the urge to assist distant others fell within the ICRC's mandate, the humanitarian commitment of the LON was not granted, and it was even more remote in the case of the ILO. With regard to the ICRC, at the end of the Great War, the organization experienced one of the toughest phases of its whole existence: created in 1863 by Henry Dunant and the circle of Genevan reformers who gravitated around him in order to assist wounded and sick soldiers in the battlefield, the organization greatly expanded during wartime thanks to the work of its delegates for both prisoners of war and interned civilians.²³ However, once the war was over, the ICRC was almost bankrupted, on top of competing with a growing number of private charities, voluntary associations, and philanthropies within and outside the Red Cross movement.²⁴ A first step out of the deadlock was the release of the 174th circular on November 27, 1918, which was addressed to the signatory states of the Geneva Convention, where the ICRC made itself ready to expand its mandate from wartime to peacetime. The assistance to prisoners of war and refugees became an opportunity to help needy people and to regain a prominent place within the Red Cross movement.

²⁰ Heather Jones, "International or Transnational? Humanitarian Action during the First World War," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 16, no. 5 (2009): 697–713. For a recent volume on humanitarian aid in the Great War era, see Elisabeth Piller and Neville Wylie (eds), *Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914–24* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

²¹ Michelle Tusan, *The British Empire and the Armenian Genocide: Humanitarianism and Imperial Politics from Gladstone to Churchill* (I.B. Tauris, 2017). Emily Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022). Davide Rodogno, *Night on Earth: A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East, 1918–1930* (United Kingdom; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

²² Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (eds), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²³ David P. Forsythe, *Humanitarian Politics: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

²⁴ John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996). Irène Herrmann, *L'humanitaire en questions: réflexions autour de l'histoire du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge* (Paris: Cerf, 2018).

The League of Nations and the International Labour Organization were new organizations that emerged from the Treaty of Versailles, and which were barely operational when they engaged in refugee politics.²⁵ The LON was an inter-governmental organization charged “to promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security” by recurring to international law. The Covenant mentioned the cooperation with the Red Cross on “the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world.”²⁶ Nevertheless, the road from the Covenant to the LON’s engagement in humanitarian aid was not linear but negotiated. Differently from the Red Cross, the LON was not interested in assisting all victims of war, but only in protecting distinctive groups. The establishment of the High Commissariat for (Russian) refugees emerged from the French and British responsibilities towards exiled Russians, the followers of the white generals whom they supported during the civil war, as well as towards Armenians, the survivors of the genocide, towards which the West had turned a blind eye. In creating the High Commissariat for refugees, the LON also wished to share the burden with the states of Central Eastern Europe and of the Middle East that, until that point, had been disproportionately responsible for refugee work. Humanitarian aid was a matter of compassion and power; it embodied the failure of statecraft and the innovations which came from it.

The decision-making process behind the ILO’s refugee work was even more contested.²⁷ The Labour Organization aimed and still does to achieve universal peace by means of social justice, thanks to its unique tripartite structure, since each member state is represented by the government, by the employers, and by workers’ organizations.²⁸ The ILO refused to intervene on behalf of prisoners of war, as humanitarian aid exceeded its competences. Between late 1920 and early 1921, it also rejected the Red Cross’s appeal to protect Russian refugees, as they did not fit into the organization’s main target, meaning industrial workers. Yet, the ILO offered its technical expertise in international migration and unemployment, and, from 1925 to 1929, joined the LON in negotiating resettlement programs. In doing so, the ILO interpreted a wider trend according to which refugees should become self-supportive, yet it also conflated the refugee and the labor question, bridging them both with the global fight against unemployment. The ILO resettlement plans in the Middle East and in Latin America were based on the idea

²⁵ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, 4 (2007): 1091–1117. Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁶ The Covenant of the League of Nations, Geneva, 1920.

²⁷ Daniel Maul, *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy* (Berlin-Geneva, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, International Labour Office, 2019).

²⁸ The International Labor Office, *The Labour Provisions of the Peace Treaties*, Geneva, 1920.

that refugees should not compete with local workers in fragile European markets and rather contribute to the economic growth of underdeveloped areas situated “at the doors of Europe.” These experiments became a test case for the Labour Organization, which later transferred the knowledge acquired to its migration and unemployment programs.²⁹

This book provides a discussion of the negotiations at the organizations’ headquarters in Geneva and of key moments and of the spaces where aid workers engaged in humanitarian programs for prisoners of war and refugees. In Part I, I explain why the repatriation of forgotten groups of POWs was internationalized. In Chapter 2, I shift back and forth between Geneva and the Narva region, on the Estonia–Russia border, where prisoners of war from Russia and from the Central Powers were exchanged. In Part II, I move to the Russian refugee question. Chapter 3 shows the reasons why international humanitarian organizations saw continuities in the conditions and in the responses to the needs of prisoners of war and Russian refugees. Chapter 4 presents the main innovations in refugee politics, examining why and how private organizations were associated with inter-governmental politics, describing fundraising strategies, tackling the emergence of international refugee law, and highlighting the involvement of the ILO as of 1925. In Chapter 5, I move back and forth between Geneva and Constantinople to investigate the solutions adopted for Russian refugees, against a delicate context shaped by the interallied occupation, the implosion of the Ottoman Empire, and the establishment of Turkish institutions. In Part III, I revisit how the conditions of post-genocide Armenians were understood by international humanitarian organizations, and I juxtapose several reports from the field where a range of experts advanced different solutions for their rescue and resettlement. In Chapter 7, I move the focus to Constantinople, Aleppo, Beirut, the Syrian countryside, the South Caucasus, and Latin America where settlement or resettlement plans were implemented.

A rich literature on the history of humanitarian aid at the end of the Great War foregrounds this book. Bruno Cabanes has singled out a few prominent humanitarians, including Nansen and the director of the ILO Albert Thomas.³⁰ Another strand has focused on the Middle East, with Dzovinar Kévonian’s pioneer work infusing meaning into the concept of “humanitarian diplomacy,” Keith Watenpaugh arguing for a clear shift into postwar humanitarian practices, and Rebecca Jinks

²⁹ Francesca Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione. Le negoziazioni e l’assistenza tecnica del Bureau international du travail a favore dei rifugiati russi (1919-1925),” *Studi Storici* 4 (2021): 857–887.

³⁰ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

attaching a deeper interpretation of the concepts of biopolitics and modernity.³¹ Lately, Davide Rodogno has significantly suffused postwar humanitarian aid with nationalistic and imperial motives, where nineteenth-century racist discriminations, reproducing the language of civilization, continued to shape international relations well into the interwar period.³² Meanwhile, the historiography of aid in Central and Eastern Europe, in Russia, and in the South Caucasus, has tackled the connection linking humanitarian with the anti-communist coalition.³³ Attention has been given to the role of international and local initiatives in the state-building processes.³⁴ Historians of the British Empire—Michelle Tusan, Tehila Sasson, and Emily Baughan—have seen humanitarian aid as a tool of benevolent imperialism, which reproduced gendered, classist, religious categories of domination.³⁵

The selection of case studies, the methodology adopted, and the tensions that they produce with the literature on humanitarian aid and on refugee studies lay the foundation to the book's contributions. While the literature has stressed the imperial origins for humanitarian attitudes to refugees, this book enriches "origin stories". It shows that the Red Cross, the LON, and, to a lesser extent, the Labour Organization, equated the needs of displaced military and civilians, and that the expertise that

³¹ Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004). Keith D. Watenpugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). Rebecca Jinks, "'Marks Hard to Erase': The Troubled Reclamation of 'Absorbed' Armenian Women, 1919–1927," *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 1 (2018): 86–123.

³² Rodogno, *Night on Earth*.

³³ For Central, Eastern Europe, and Russia, see Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Kimberly A. Lowe, "Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty: Red Cross Intervention on Behalf of Political Prisoners in Soviet Russia, 1921–3," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 4 (2014): 652–674. For Armenians, see Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* (Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Friederike Kind-Kovács, "The Great War, the Child's Body and the American Red Cross," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 23, no. 1–2 (2016): 33–62. Andrea Griffante, *Children, Poverty and Nationalism in Lithuania, 1900–1940* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Doina Anca Cretu, "Nationalizing International Relief: Romanian Responses to American Aid for Children in the Great War Era," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 27, no. 4 (2020): 527–547.

³⁵ Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide, and the Birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Tehila Sasson, "From Empire to Humanity: The Russian Famine and the Imperial Origins of International Humanitarianism," *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 3 (2016): 519–537. Baughan, *Saving the Children*. Looking at humanitarianism in imperial settings, see J. P. Daughton, "Behind the Imperial Curtain: International Humanitarian Efforts and the Critique of French Colonialism in the Interwar Years," *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (2011): 503–528. Amalia Ribí Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880–1940* (Oxford Historical Monographs, 2015).

flourished around captivity was crucially transferred to the protection of refugees. The creation of the High Commissariat for (Russian) refugees at the LON embodied the failure of governments to protect citizens and/or foreigners, yet it also constituted a major innovation in international relations. The book also aspires to integrate the history of institutions, which the literature has privileged, with a focus on the “doers,” i.e., those who implemented daily actions of care, from the international to the local staff, as well as with an attention for the agency of prisoners of war and refugees.³⁶ Without being exhaustive, a focus on the agents of care shows how they were not simply executors and that they renegotiated on the ground the decisions made in Geneva.³⁷ Moreover, enlarging the range of the agents involved in humanitarian aid offers the opportunity to examine the gendered discourses that they formulated on each other. Through the interplay of gender with ethnicity and race, we can start unpacking the reasons why international humanitarian organizations constructed humanitarians as heroes and prisoners of war and refugees as victims.³⁸

What is at stake in the emergence of humanitarian agendas is the organizations' claim to international legitimacy, their capacity to shape relations between states and aid organizations, and to attract financial support. Across the three organizations under scrutiny here, protection materialized in a plurality of ways, from the provision of direct assistance to advocacy, from working towards the physical safety of POWs and of refugees to the negotiations and the implementation of settlement, resettlement, or repatriation plans.³⁹ Far from being straight-forward,

³⁶ Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

³⁷ Daniel Laqua, “Inside the Humanitarian Cloud: Causes and Motivations to Help Friends and Strangers,” *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 2 (2014): 175–185. Francesca Piana, “The Dangers of ‘Going Native’: George Montandon in Siberia and the International Committee of the Red Cross, 1919–1922,” *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 02 (2016): 253–274. Rebecca Jinks, “‘Making Good’ in the Near East: The Smith College Relief Unit, Near East Relief, and Visions of Armenian reconstruction, 1919–1921,” in Jo Laycock and Francesca Piana (eds), *Aid to Armenia. Humanitarianism and Interventions from the 1890s to the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 83–99.

³⁸ Abigail Green, “Humanitarianism in the Nineteenth Century Context: Religious, Gendered, National,” *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 04 (2014): 1157–1175. Esther Möller, Johannes Paulmann, and Katharina Stornig (eds), *Gendering Global Humanitarianism in the Twentieth Century: Practice, Politics and the Power of Representation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Anthropology of gender and humanitarian aid has been useful. Miriam Ticktin, “The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence,” *Gender & History* 23, no. 2 (2011): 250–265, and on Róisín Read, “Embodying Difference: Reading Gender in Women’s Memoirs of Humanitarianism,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 3 (2018): 300–318.

³⁹ Elizabeth G. Ferris, *The Politics of Protection the Limits of Humanitarian Action* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2011). Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007).

protection was selective, contradictory, and ambiguous.⁴⁰ Not all the persons displaced by the Great War and its aftermath became a political and legal concern for the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization.⁴¹ As we have seen, co-ethnic refugees such as Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, and Romanians who returned “home” were soon naturalized and often turned into second-class citizens.⁴² Protection was also embedded with contradictions, as it oscillated between voluntariness and coercion. While prisoners of war and refugees were encouraged to freely express whether and where they wanted to repatriate or resettle, humanitarians were often annoyed by forms of resistance, as they arrogantly believed to “know better”. Last, protection was uneven, as it largely depended on the resources that humanitarian actors possessed at a given time and place, on the personal initiatives of the relief workers, as well as on the degree of “sympathy” that a specific group raised with the Western public opinion.

Despite their different mandates, the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization found common ground in articulating humanitarian aid beyond the sphere of politics. This declined in manifold ways: for Western governments which were signatories of the Geneva Convention, or which were members of the LON and the ILO, it offered a way to instrumentalize aid for political purposes, such as to fight against communism or, more broadly, to contain what was perceived as social and political unrest. For international organizations, it meant being able to negotiate with all the parties involved, especially with the outsiders of the international liberal order, including Soviet Russia, Germany, and Kemalist Turkey. For the US, which ended up not ratifying the Covenant of the League of Nations, it was a way to participate in a new international order from the outside

⁴⁰ Joan C. Tronto, *I confini morali: un argomento politico per l'etica della cura* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2015).

⁴¹ The work of Pamela Ballinger on the difficult debates which took place after WWII to decide how to classify displaced populations across and beyond Europe is quintessential. Pamela Ballinger, “Entangled or ‘Extruded’ Histories? Displacement, National Refugees, and Repatriation after the Second World War,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 366–86. Pamela Ballinger, “Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 4 (2016): 813–38.

⁴² For the forced displacements between Greece and Turkey, see Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger: How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey* (London: Granta Books, 2006). Onur Yildirim, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922-1934* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Elisabeth Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia the Rural Settlement of Refugees 1922-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Renée Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). Dimitri Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact on Greece* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002).

in, by pouring in massive financial donations, offering logistics, and sharing the scientific and professional skills of its missionaries, relief workers, and experts.⁴³

The case studies analyzed here also contribute to the discussions about the professionalization of aid.⁴⁴ A focus on the agents of care suggests that women and men experienced transnational activism differently.⁴⁵ Women were called to assist Armenian women and children, alongside a separatist view of women's work for women and a traditional understanding of care. Issued from American and Scandinavian missionary movements, Americans, Caris E. Mills and Emma Cushman, in Constantinople, and Danish Karen Jeppe in Aleppo had already been assigned to the Ottoman Empire prior to WWI and brought their experience to the LON. These women were educated, independent, and resourceful: they managed missions on their own, and they adapted to the political changes of the Middle East.⁴⁶ In assisting surviving Armenians, Mills, Cushman, and Jeppe all embodied forms of traditional care and scientific maternalism, and they also experienced professional opportunities and personal growth that were often denied to them in their countries of origin.⁴⁷

With regard to men in humanitarian aid, they were normally university educated or had a military training. The delegates were doctors, lawyers, university professors, or military, who took a break from their liberal professions in Switzerland to work for the Red Cross. Only for one of them, Georges Burnier, did humanitarian aid transform into a profession, as he moved from one mission to another throughout the interwar period. For all men, international aid was a place

⁴³ For the US, see Ian R. Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010). Branden Little, "An Explosion of New Endeavours: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 1–16. Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Ludovic Tournès, *Les Etats-Unis et la Société des Nations (1914-1946): le système international face à l'émergence d'une superpuissance* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016).

⁴⁴ For contemporary writings, see David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in an Age of Genocide* (Vintage, 2002). Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ Ethnographies of humanitarian agents: Pascal Dauvin and Johanna Siméant, *Le travail humanitaire: les acteurs des ONG du siège au terrain* (Paris: Presses de sciences po, 2002). Liisa H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015). Julie Billaud, "Masters of Disorder: Rituals of Communication and Monitoring at the International Committee of the Red Cross," *Social Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2020): 96–111.

⁴⁶ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (S.I.: Taylor & Francis, 2016). Francesca Piana, "Maternalism and Feminism in Medical Aid. The American Women's Hospitals in the United States and in Greece, 1917-1941," in Möller, Paulmann, Stornig, *op. cit.*, 85–114.

⁴⁷ Margaret R. Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

in which to emphasize their skills and male ethos, hence reproducing patriarchal notions of gendered inequality and of a strong masculinity.⁴⁸ Above all, Nansen came across as a “celebrity humanitarian,” a selfless hero who devoted his life to assist the most unfortunate ones.⁴⁹ This gendered construction was heavy in consequences: humanitarian aid created cleavages between the ones who made decisions and those upon whom these decisions were enforced; it obscured that men could care too, as they coordinated feeding, clothing, or sheltering programs, which would normally be associated with domesticity; and it eclipsed a plethora of other agencies and contributions. This book observes that, for both men and women in international relief, humanitarian aid was a space of both liberation and oppression, where gendered identities were confirmed and challenged.

The professionalization of the aid industry where daily practices tended towards accountability and standardization portrayed a highly scientific and technical field. Postwar humanitarian aid was soaked in middle-class values of hard work, self-discipline, and respectability. Far from being secular, a religious understanding of morality and compassion infused daily actions of care. These clearly emerged from the words and actions of those humanitarians who used to be missionaries in the Ottoman lands. Yet, a protestant morality and rightfulness permeated the actions of the Red Cross delegates not only in the Eastern Mediterranean region but also in Central and Eastern Europe, or in Latin America where religion borrowed the language of civilization.⁵⁰

Refugee politics

“By no means a novelty”—writes historian Amir Weiner—“the mass deportation at the turn of the century [...] featured new developments which set them apart from earlier eras when the state’s reluctance to lose large numbers of its indigenous subjects or allow political and religious aliens into the domain, and the simultaneous inability of the refugees to sustain themselves for a long time, worked to keep the numbers relatively low.”⁵¹ The Great War and its long aftermath took forced displacement to a whole other level, while millions of people were on the road. The problem with prisoners of war, and Russian and Armenian refugees was not only

⁴⁸ Bertrand Taithe, “Humanitarian Masculinity: Desire, Character, and Heroics, 1876-2018”, Möller, Paulmann, Stornig, *op. cit.*, 35–59.

⁴⁹ Ilan Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁰ Rodogno, *Night on Earth*.

⁵¹ Amir Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 9.

their sheer number but also that they were displaced into disrupted regions. Europe, the Middle East, and the South Caucasus were prostrated by warfare, political turmoil, revolutions, famine, and epidemics. The idealized nation-states that emerged in Central and Eastern Europe from the Versailles settlement underwent lengthy state-building processes.⁵² Little money was left to repatriate former combatants held captive in faraway lands, let alone to assist needy strangers.⁵³ Moreover, the diplomatic recognition between the new Central European states and Soviet Russia was not uniform and complicated the POW settlement. This intersected with a widespread fear of Bolshevism, which was a catalyst for humanitarian aid.

In the Near East, the disruption of the Ottoman Empire and the Greco-Turkish War, followed by the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed on July 24, 1923, had long-lasting consequences.⁵⁴ Turkey emerged as an independent state which abolished Ottoman capitulations and rejected foreign interferences.⁵⁵ Post-Ottoman Greater Syria, which includes Syria and Lebanon, as well as Iraq and Palestine, were put under French and British mandates, respectively.⁵⁶ In turn, the South Caucasus experienced long years of inter-imperial rivalry, internal tensions, and massive refugee flows. The short experiment of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, where Eastern Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia attempted to bond, was followed by the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia in May 1918.⁵⁷ Soon enough, the Allied promises over the “Wilsonian Armenia” were crushed by Turkish military forces and by a Soviet invasion. In March 1922, Armenia was incorporated into the URSS.⁵⁸

As Peter Gatrell has stressed, despite the crucial importance of the topic, historians have been newcomers in refugee history, at least for a while.⁵⁹ The first

⁵² Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty* (Princeton University Press, 2023).

⁵³ Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities History: Population Transfer in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁴ Michelle Tusan, *The Last Treaty: Lausanne and the End of the First World War In the Middle East* (Cambridge New York (N.Y.): Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁵⁵ Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Charlie Laderman, *Sharing the Burden: The Armenian Question, Humanitarian Intervention and Anglo-American Visions of Global Order* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵⁹ Philip Marfleet, “Explorations in a Foreign Land: States, Refugees, and the Problem of History,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2013): 14–34. Peter Gatrell, “Refugees—What’s Wrong with History?,”

studies were published contemporary to the events under scrutiny: according to John H. Simpson, Joseph S. Roucek, and others, several processes concurred in the making of refugees, including the Russian Revolution, imperial collapse, the creation of new artificial states in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Middle East, the presence of minorities, as well as famine and epidemics.⁶⁰ We had to wait until the end of the Cold War for new studies to be published.⁶¹ Over the past two decades, the prism of forced migration has been increasingly applied to European history, where Russia's post-imperial transition, post-WWII reconstruction, or the Hungarian revolution have received attention.⁶² In the Middle East, anthropologists

Journal of Refugee Studies 30, no. 2 (2017): 170–189. Dan Stone, "Refugees Then and Now: Memory, History and Politics in the Long Twentieth Century: An Introduction," *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 2–3 (2018): 101–106. Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak, and Peter Gatrell, "What Is Refugee History, Now?," *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 1 (2022): 1–19. Pamela Ballinger, "Refugees as Resources: A Post-War Experiment in European Refugee Relief," *Contemporary European History*, 2024, 1–20.

⁶⁰ John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem: Report of a Survey* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1939). Joseph S. Roucek, "Minorities-A Basis of the Refugee Problem," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (1939): 1–17. Eugene M. Kulischer, *Europe on the Move, War and Population Changes, 1917-47* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948). Joseph B. Schechtman, *European Population Transfers, 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

⁶¹ For early most notable exceptions, see Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Aristide R. Zolberg, "The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 467 (1983): 24–38. Gérard Noiriel, *La tyrannie du national: le droit d'asile en Europe, 1793-1993* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991). For the most recent studies, see Tony Kushner and Katherine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National, and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1999). Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (eds), *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶² Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: A.A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1999). On Central and Eastern Europe, Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia, 1918-1924* (Anthem Press, 2004). 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* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1313–1343. Peter Gatrell and Liubov Zhvanko (eds), *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017). Kamil Ruszała (ed.) *Refugees and Population Transfer Management in Europe, 1914–1920s* (New York: Routledge, 2024). For post-WWII in Europe, see Jessica Reinisch, "'We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation': UNRRA, Internationalism and National Reconstruction in Poland," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (2008): 451–76. Jessica Reinisch, "'Auntie UNRRA' at the Crossroads," *Past & Present* 218, no. 8 (2013): 70–97. G. Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (eds), *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-9* (Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made:*

have been the first to inaugurate a new interest in forced migrations.⁶³ Recently, historians Laura Robson and Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky have argued that the current international refugee regime has its oldest antecedent in the state's responses for Muslim refugees pouring into Anatolia from the Balkans and from the Caucasus.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, histories of displacement and aid have started refining our understanding of migrations in the South Caucasus.⁶⁵

Poignantly, political scientists more than historians have analyzed the international refugee regime during the interwar period, understood as “implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge,” in the words of political scientist Stephan Krasner.⁶⁶ Yet, different interpretations have been offered on the topic. In her seminal book, Claudena Skran has stressed how refugee politics originated from the successful compromise between national interests and humanitarian compassion; the emergence of the refugee regime fits into the “problem-solution” narrative.⁶⁷ In “States and Strangers,” Nevzat Soguk has contested traditional views of statecraft and has

Decolonization and the Foundations of PostWar Italy (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2020). On Hungarian refugees, see Isabelle Vonèche Cardia, *Hungarian October: Between Red Cross and Red Flag: The 1956 Action of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 1999). Johanna C. Granville, *The First Domino: International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

⁶³ Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Dawn Chatty, “Refugees, Exiles, and Other Forced Migrants in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2013): 35–52. Riccardo Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2009): 229–252.

⁶⁴ Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017). Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024). See also Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009). Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). Jordi Tejel and Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “The Special Issue ‘Forced Migration and Refugeeedom in the Modern Middle East’ Towards Connected Histories of Refugeeedom in the Middle East,” *Journal of Migration History* 6, no. 1 (2020): 1–15.

⁶⁵ For the South Caucasus, see Peter Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I* (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 2005). Peter Holquist, “The Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia, 1915-February 1917,” in Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (eds), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 151–174. Asya Darbinyan, “Humanitarian Crisis at the Ottoman-Russian Border: Russian Imperial Responses to Armenian Refugees of War and Genocide, 1914-15,” in Laycock and Piana (eds), *Aid to Armenia*, 66–82.

⁶⁶ Stephen D. Krasner, *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 2. Robert D. Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston, Little Brown, 1977).

⁶⁷ Claudena M. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1995). For a similar argument, see Phil Orchard, A

rather suggested that refugees can be both “disruptive” and “recuperative,” hence reinforcing and transgressing the state–citizen nexus.⁶⁸ For Emma Haddad, refugee protection is not only meant to respond to the needs of displaced persons but also to protect the national sovereignty and world peace.⁶⁹

The book builds on these valuable precedents, yet it also goes beyond the strict political and legal boundaries of the international refugee regime. It presents a multi-layered and multi-actor approach to the history of refugee politics, shifting back and forth between the discussions taking place at the headquarters of international organizations in Geneva and the places “in the margins” where practices of protection were implemented.⁷⁰ The examination of humanitarian responses to parallel emergencies in a localized global geography allows tracing lessons learnt and gives meaning to the concept of “refugeedom,” or in the words of historian, Peter Gatrell, governance.⁷¹ This resulted from a dynamic and reciprocal process, shaped by the negotiations at the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization in Geneva and in key sites of displacement and intervention, where decisions were often *ad hoc* and not the result of a comprehensive response to an emergency, and where the local and refugee staff, as well as prisoners of war and refugees equally contributed to shaping the governance.⁷²

The Red Cross, the LON, and the Labour Organization offer a preferential lens into the history of the global governance of refugee protection. Here, I acknowledge that the international refugee regime has older origins, but I am rather inclined to highlight the distinctive ideas, policies, and narratives that shaped the post-WWI period.⁷³ First, there was nothing inevitable in the emergence of the global

Right to Flee: Refugees, States, and the Construction of International Cooperation (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶⁸ Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 15.

⁶⁹ Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society. Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ For a reflection on localized global history, see Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁷¹ Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking*.

⁷² Peter Gatrell and Rebecca Gill in Gatrell, Peter, Gill, Rebecca, Little, Branden, Piller, Elisabeth: Discussion: Humanitarianism, in 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2017-11-09. Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For interesting reflections on the governance of refugee protection, see Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

⁷³ In Robson’s words, “the new ‘General Administrative Commission for Refugees’ sought explicitly to renationalize Balkan and Caucasian refugees as Ottoman subjects, in service of both refugee

governance of refugee protection: national, bilateral, or regional regimes could have been valid alternatives. Opting for a multilateral solution resulted from several elements: the unprecedented size of displacements, the widespread crises of statecraft, the approval of anti-immigration policies, and the innovative role of international organizations. Second, among the novelties was the invention of the Nansen passport and the legal definition of a refugee.⁷⁴ On this, Mira Siegelberg has attributed to statelessness “the possibility of legal and political identification beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of states.”⁷⁵ In other words, the emergence of refugee law was both nationally bounded, hence limited, while it also created possibilities to challenge the “national order of things.”⁷⁶ Third, repatriation appeared to be the best solution, since social cohesion would likely result from the alignment of ethnicity and nationality. However, Russia and Turkey hastened to denationalize their citizens, denying the possibility of return, whereas international humanitarian organizations infused ethnic homogeneity with an anti-communist twist; Russians who did not want to repatriate were allowed to stay behind. Fourth, by the mid-1920s the global governance of refugee protection settled on the question of employment, which became central to politics of local integration and resettlement. Echoing legal scholar, B. S. Chimni, who has analyzed the Cold War period, the governance which emerged in the 1920s was similarly eurocentric, racist, and patriarchal.⁷⁷ Rather than pushing Western governments to revise their anti-immigration policies, it worked towards resettling Russian and Armenian refugees in areas out of Europe where they could contribute to the economic development, mainly by providing man-labor (and male-labor) in agriculture.⁷⁸ Last, the interwar period witnessed the emergence of a distinctive iconography, which was meant to

and imperial interests. In other words, this was a first instance of a formal legal and political regime that understood refugeedom as a condition not just of displacement but also of statelessness.” Laura Robson, *Human Capital: A History of Putting Refugees to Work* (London: Verso, 2023), 17. See also, Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking*. Hamed-Troyansky, *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ Roger Zetter, “Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4, no. 1 (1991): 39–62. Roger Zetter, “More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007): 172–192.

⁷⁵ Mira L. Siegelberg, *Statelessness: A Modern History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020): 14–15.

⁷⁶ Liisa H. Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: From ‘Refugee Studies’ to the National Order of Things,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523.

⁷⁷ B. S. Chimni, “The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11, no. 4 (1998): 350–374. See also the pivotal work by Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷⁸ Robson, *Human Capital*.

communicate, emotionally engage, and push the audience to donate. Old and new media—including “humanitarian movies”—characterized public campaigns.⁷⁹

The emergence of the refugee governance concurred into the internal development of the three organizations at the core of the book. The Red Cross ran a Commission of missions (*Commission des missions*), charged to monitor the work of its delegates. The League of Nations established the High Commissioner for Russian refugees in 1921, which spurred from the joint work accomplished by the LON and the ICRC on the repatriation of POWs, headed by Nansen. Created specifically to deal with Russian refugees, it would extend to Armenian refugees in 1924 and to Assyrians, Assyro-Chaldeans, and Turkish refugees in 1928, yet never became a permanent organization. In 1925, when refugee work moved from the LON to the Labour Organization, the latter created a Refugee Section attached to the Diplomatic Division, which closely worked with the Migration Department until 1929 when refugee work returned to the League. Moreover, thinking in terms of governance also offers the opportunity to return to the historical processes behind the separation of the migrant and refugee regime.⁸⁰

Another actor concurred into the emergence of the governance of refugee protection, i.e., private, voluntary organizations, philanthropies, or missionary organizations.⁸¹ Institutions like the Russian Red Cross, the American Red Cross, the Near East Relief, Save the Children, the *Union internationale de secours aux enfants*, or the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*—just to quote the main ones—concurred in the

⁷⁹ Denis Kennedy, “Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery—Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action | The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance,” accessed August 9, 2022. Heather Curtis, “Depicting Distant Suffering: Evangelicals and the Politics of Pictorial Humanitarianism in the Age of American Empire,” *Material Religion* 8, no. 2 (2012): 153–82. Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno (eds), *Humanitarian Photography. A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Peter Gatrell, *Free World?: The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956–63* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism & Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn, 2019).

⁸⁰ Dzovinar Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales. Le Bureau International du Travail et les réfugiés (1925–1929),” *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, no. 3 (2005): 95–124. Rieko Karatani, “How History Separated Refugee and Migrant Regimes: In Search of Their Institutional Origins,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 17, no. 3 (2005): 517–541. Jérôme Elie, “The Historical Roots of Cooperation between the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration,” *Global Governance* 16, no. 3 (2010): 345–360. Katy Long, “When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection,” *Migration Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 4–26. Jayne Persian, “Displaced Persons and the Politics of International Categorisation(s),” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 58, no. 4 (2012): 481–496.

⁸¹ In this book, I replicate the way in which organizations referred to themselves. The non-governmental umbrella (NGO) would not do justice to the high diversity of the organizations, of their mandates, and of their funders. John Boli and George M. Thomas, *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

making of humanitarian protection and refugee policies from the “outside in.”⁸² They did so in manifold ways, by sharing the information that they had collected in various places of displacement and intervention; by producing expert knowledge out of empirical observations; by lobbying, creating coalitions, or struggling for resources.⁸³ Moreover, they also contributed to transforming informal transnational exchanges and circulations into more or less formalized practices and venues. This happened with the establishment of the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations, which was attached to the HCR at the League of Nations, and with the International Committee of Emigrant Protection Organizations at the ILO.⁸⁴

The trends described above allow one to critically appraise the state–citizen–refugee relationship.⁸⁵ While the literature broadly agrees that international officers endorsed both nationalism and benevolent imperialism, the most original analysis comes from political scientist, Soguk. Instead of taking the citizen–nation–state relationship for granted, he has observed that such paradigm, more aspirational than concrete, contributed to the rearticulation of statecraft. Displaced persons both challenged the state, which, in regimenting and controlling them, was called to rearticulate its power.⁸⁶ By participating in the exchange of POWs, the newly created Estonian state tested the thin line between international cooperation and national sovereignty. The presence of Russian refugees in Constantinople allowed Turkey, an outsider of the Versailles system, to have the last word on whom was worthy of staying. The fragmented exile of Armenians, where they intersected with manifold nation-building processes, turned them into political and economic stabilizers.⁸⁷ Generally, all governments which were associated with refugee work in some capacity—either because they were countries of first asylum or of (re)settlement, or because they denied refugees the possibility to enter their territories—were shaped

⁸² Irwin, *Making the World Safe*. Jaclyn Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism in the Age of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Daniel Maul, *The Politics of Service: American Quakers and the Emergence of International Humanitarian Aid 1917–1945* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2024).

⁸³ Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

⁸⁴ Linda Guerry, “Dividing International Work on Social Protection of Migrants. The International Labour Office and Private Organizations (1921–1935),” in Fabio Giomi, Célia Keren, and Morgane Labbé (eds), *Public and Private Welfare in Modern Europe: Productive Entanglements* (London and NYC: Routledge, 2022): 159–181.

⁸⁵ On the relationship between forced migrations and the nation-state, see Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch, “Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe, 1919–59,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (2014): 477–490.

⁸⁶ Soguk, *op. cit.*, 116–122.

⁸⁷ Benjamin T. White, “Refugees and the Definition of Syria, 1920–1939,” *Past & Present* 235, no. 1 (2017): 141–178.

by the negotiations with international organizations: government representatives made their way to Geneva to participate in meetings; various national ministries were associated with refugee work; and special divisions were charged to negotiate employment and resettlement plans. In Soguk's words "it was at [the] historical juncture where the crises of statecraft was the most intense that the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees emerged"⁸⁸.

Connected geographies

As we have seen, most studies have singled out one region, e.g., Eastern and Central Europe or the Middle East, or one group, such as Armenians or Jews. On the contrary, this book offers a much larger geographical scope, including Europe, the Middle East, the South Caucasus, and North and Latin America. This integrated geopolitics allows both to scale up and down and to question assumptions about the "center" and the "periphery." When we look closer, prisoners of war and refugees appeared to be stuck at what liberal internationalists believed to be "the doors of Europe." More than merely physical, these boundaries were political, ideological, and moral, building on imperial and colonial mindsets, as well as on the "clashes" between the Christian, believed to be superior, and non-Christian, mostly Muslim, considered to be inferior world. While outside the West all were deemed to be uncivilized, the population of the post-Ottoman Empire was placed on an even lower scale.⁸⁹

Racist biases explain the solutions that were designed and implemented for refugees. By the end of WWI, countries that had traditionally welcomed massive migrations from Europe, such as Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, approved quota measures based on limited numbers and specific ethnic origins.⁹⁰ Only France opened a discretionary door to refugees as it needed cheap labor, at least until its market did not become saturated. Different was the situation in Syria and Lebanon, where the French mandatory power preferred Christian Armenian refugees to settle as they helped control the territory over Arab claims, they supported the French authorities in the elections, and they concurred in the country's economy. This book argues that the "cordon" that extended from Central Eastern

⁸⁸ Soguk, *op. cit.*, 118.

⁸⁹ Rodogno, *Night on Earth*, 5–12.

⁹⁰ Alison Bashford and Jane McAdam, "The Right to Asylum: Britain's 1905 Aliens Act and the Evolution of Refugee Law," *Law and History Review* 32, no. 2 (2014): 309–350. Jared Porter, "No Rebels Allowed: The Subversion Bar in Canada's Immigration Legislation," *Saskatchewan Law Review* 81, no. 1 (2018): 25–51. Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2008). Linda K. Kerber, "The Stateless as the Citizen's Other: A View from the United States," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 1–34.

Europe to the Balkans, from the South Caucasus to the Middle East was a stagnant one, from which refugees were with difficulty allowed to leave. “Border regions” offered the opportunity for international projects in populations’ politics to be implemented due to the weakness of national institutions. There, prisoners of war and refugees not only were assisted, but they were also contained and surveilled, making migrations towards the West difficult.

Similarly, the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization fueled the “solutions” to the “refugee problem” with ideas of gender, class, racist, and moral hierarchies. For instance, Russian refugees, who were white and Christian, had a better chance of being resettled in France because able-bodied men were needed and because pronatalists believed that white migrants could be more easily naturalized, alongside Italians or Poles, than other groups from the French colonies.⁹¹ Once the French labor market stopped being receptive, the ILO targeted Latin America; driven by a colonial mindset, international officers wanted to avoid a massive movement from the “peripheries of Europe,” mainly the former Ottoman territories, to the West; hence, they favored the Latin American solution. Meanwhile, the British Empire refused to settle Russians in the Dominions and Colonies, as they would not contribute to uplifting the “natives” alongside the civilizing mission and preferred to pay money to the Balkan states to open the doors to Russians who were deemed to have better chances of assimilating due to their religious and language proximity. Canadian governmental authorities, missionaries, and activists had a racialized understanding of Armenians, which was exacerbated by the approval of laws restricting immigration.⁹² These examples suggest that the global governance aimed at resettling refugees as cheap laborers outside of the West, purposely creating a racialized and gendered labor regime.

When we think in terms of geography, there is another element which is central to this book: the refugee camp. Despite the fact that the twentieth century is often referred to as the century of camps, the spatial turn has just begun being applied to the history of forced migrations.⁹³ Other disciplines have nourished the reflections about camps being a “a state of exception,” as in the work of philosopher, Giorgio

⁹¹ Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁹² Daniel Ohanian, “Sympathy and Exclusion: The Migration of Child and Women Survivors of the Armenian Genocide from the Eastern Mediterranean to Canada, 1923–1930,” *Genocide Studies International* 11, no. 2 (2017): 197–215.

⁹³ For a history of camps, see Benjamin T. White, “Humans and Animals in a Refugee Camp: Baquba, Iraq, 1918–20,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32, no. 2 (2019): 216–236. Jordanna Bailkin, *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Multicultural Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Julie Peteet, “Camps and Enclaves: Palestine in the Time of Closure,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 2 (2016): 208–228. More broadly on camps in history, see Adam R. Seipp, *Strangers in the Wild Place:*

Agamben, or as camps being global devices for the circulation of ideas and practices, alongside social anthropologist Michel Agier.⁹⁴ In between the two extremes of containment and protection, I rather detect interactions and exchanges across the walls of the fortress of Narva, in the extended urban space of Constantinople, in the houses hosting Armenians, and in the colonies and city's neighborhoods of Syria, Lebanon, Argentina, or Bolivia.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the refugee camp was not the only space of protection and control: trains, boats, shelters, houses, colonies, and cities' neighboring areas were equally spaces of displacement and intervention.

Through humanitarian protection and refugee politics, Europe emerges as a continent with malleable, porous frontiers, where "border" regions were meant to protect the peace at its "heart."⁹⁶ Yet, the same border regions were also dynamic places which participated in the plural and often discordant making of humanitarian protection and refugee politics, which was multiple and partial, generated by various institutions with different agendas, interests, and resources as well as by individuals, both the provider and the "recipient" of aid in the delicate phase of post-WWI reconstruction.

Archives and agents

As the book creates a bridge between several historiographies, as it does across different archives, mainly the archives of the Red Cross, the archives of the League

Refugees, Americans, and a German Town, 1945-1952 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London; New York: Verso, 2012).

⁹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Michel Agier and Clara Lecadet, *Un monde de camps* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014). Simon Turner, "What is a Refugee Camp? Explorations of the Limits and Effects of the Camp," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 2 (2016): 139–148.

⁹⁵ Anna Holian, "The Ambivalent Exception: American Occupation Policy in Postwar Germany and the Formation of Jewish Refugee Spaces," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 452–473. Marion Fresia and Andreas Von Känel, "Beyond Space of Exception? Reflections on the Camp through the Prism of Refugee Schools," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 2 (2016): 250–272. Gaim Kibreab, "Eritrean and Ethiopian Urban Refugees in Khartoum: What the Eye Refuses to See," *African Studies Review* 39, no. 3 (1996): 131–178. Laura Robson, "Towards a Shared Practice of Encampment: An Historical Investigation of UNRWA and the UNHCR to 1967," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2023, fead045. Laura Robson, "UNRWA in North Africa: A Late Colonial History of Refugee Encampment," *Past & Present* 261, no. 1 (2023): 193–222. Doina Anca Cretu, "Child Assistance and the Making of Modern Refugee Camps in Austria-Hungary during the First World War," *Central European History* 55, no. 4 (2022): 510–27.

⁹⁶ Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (eds), *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press; Chesham, 2012).

of Nations, and the archives of the International Labour Organization, in addition to a few others.⁹⁷ I stayed with the archival sources long enough to dare a reflection on two aspects, one connected to the other: First, despite their differences in terms of organization and access to the sources, the archives of international (humanitarian) organizations have something in common: not only do they contain the overwhelming rich amount of material that the organizations had produced, but they ended up being the repositories of documents in provenance of the many institutions, associations, governments, and individuals with which they interacted.⁹⁸ This explains why, through the LON archives, that one can understand the positions of states (both members and non-members) towards the repatriation of prisoners of war or the solutions of the Russian refugee problem. This also explains why one can write a history of non-state action using the sources of an inter-governmental organization.

Second, a refreshed reading of the archival sources is instrumental to question the power relations in the red tape. When I started my research a few years ago, I had already come across a few letters and petitions that prisoners of war and refugees wrote to the Red Cross and to the League of Nations. By then, I was really excited about these “findings” as anyone who has worked in the LON archives before the digitalization era—and in the ICRC archives for that matter—knows how intense and time consuming the process was.⁹⁹ Since when the material has been searchable through a click bite, a larger number of letters penned by prisoners of war, Russian and Armenian refugees, as well as by their associations, have emerged and enriched my understanding of this history. In the case of Armenians, I also rely on mediated voices, meaning on the paths which emerged from the red tape: reports, statistics, interviews, questionnaires, and individual registration documents describing the suffering, struggles, and hopes of many persons. To make meaningful use of these sources, I explain the context where they emerged, the reasons why they were created, and the different meanings that actors attached to them.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Other archives include the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge; Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford; the Houghton Library, Harvard University in Boston; the National Archives of Great Britain in London; the National Library of Norway in Oslo; and the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, NY.

⁹⁸ A very useful example of this has been the database, LONSEA, which building on source material collected by the League of Nations, offers the possibility to search through organizations, people, places, topics, and connections. See <http://www.lonsea.de/> (last seen, July 7, 2024). Davide Rodogno, Shaloma Gauthier, Francesca Piana, “What does Transnational History Tell Us about a World with International Organizations? The Historians’ Point of View,” in Bob Reinalda (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of International Organizations* (London: Routledge, 2013): 95–104.

⁹⁹ For the LONTAD, there is total digital access to the League of Nations Archives, <https://library-resources.unog.ch/lontad> (last seen, July 7, 2024).

¹⁰⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). David Zeitlyn, “Anthropology in and of the Archives:

Such close and refreshed reading of the archives has allowed to focus on four groups: the decision makers at the headquarters of the organizations in Geneva, who included international officers, national representatives, and lawyers; the “doers,” the humanitarians, the social workers, the missionaries, and the experts “in the field”; the local and refugee staff; and prisoners of war and refugees. While agencies will not come across evenly, due to the abovementioned inequalities of the red tape, it is essential to draw a more inclusive picture, where the role of the local and refugee staff finds its way into the oblivious words of the chiefs of the missions, and where refugees regained the correct place in a history, which they shaped intellectually or practically.¹⁰¹

The expansion and the diversification of the agents is instrumental to understanding how they looked at each other. For that, I apply a gendered lens, at the intersection of class, race, and ethnicity.¹⁰² International officers elaborated overlapping discourses around prisoners of war and refugees, who were alternatively depicted as silent sites of intervention, sites of physical or ideological danger, and as sites of reconstruction.¹⁰³ If a helpless refugee needed protection, a dangerous one, meaning someone who would be the carrier of reactionary political ideas or of epidemic diseases, had to be further neutralized in order not to endanger the host societies. There were also instances when POWs and refugees were seen as stabilizing elements in uncertain situations: Russian refugees in Latin American were considered as an economic and racial stabilizer; nationalized Armenians in Syria politically supported the French mandatory power against Arab nationalism.

A mixture of trust and suspect characterized the way in which prisoners of war and refugees saw international organizations.¹⁰⁴ As we have seen for Colonel V.,

Possible Futures and Contingent Pasts. Archives as Anthropological Surrogates,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2012): 461–480. Jake Hodder, Michael Heffernan, and Stephen Legg, “The Archival Geographies of Twentieth-Century Internationalism: Nation, Empire and Race,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 71 (2021): 1–11.

¹⁰¹ Peter Gatrell et al., “Reckoning with Refugeeedom: Refugee Voices in Modern History,” *Social History* 46, no. 1 (2021): 70–95.

¹⁰² Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion: Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). Dolores Martín-Moruno, Brenda Lynn Edgar, and Marie Leyder, “Feminist Perspectives on the History of Humanitarian Relief (1870–1945),” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 36, no. 1 (2020): 2–18. Jean H. Quataert, “A New Look at International Law: Gendering the Practices of Humanitarian Medicine in Europe’s ‘Small Wars,’ 1879–1907,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2018): 547–69.

¹⁰³ Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (Urbana, Ill.; Chesham: University of Illinois Press; 2006).

¹⁰⁴ As for examples of refugee agencies across times and regions, see Renée Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1989). Rosemary Sayigh, “Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27,

people in need capitalized on the ambiguity of the discourses produced by international organizations to maximize their chances of being protected. They did so by using the language of rights, by stressing their victimhood, or by expressing the willingness to become self-supporting.¹⁰⁵ The archives of international organizations contain numerous seeds of resistance. Russian colonies in the Balkans opposed repatriation plans, as they feared for their safety, and they did not want to be resettled in Brazil, where they risked becoming “white slaves” on the coffee plantations. Both Russian and Armenian associations contested the resettlement of their unaccompanied children in France, as they were concerned that they might be exploited and that they might lose sight of their national identity. A few Armenian women and children, saved by the rescue movement, refused to leave behind their Turkish or Kurdish families. This book claims that, beyond the hero-victim conundrum, where the humanitarian actor is powerful and the refugee a helpless victim, other discourses emerged.¹⁰⁶ These discourses were unstable and malleable; they created deadlocks, perpetuated violence, but also opened up unexpected possibilities for action.¹⁰⁷

Gender, class, and racist biases also explain the silences around another understudied agent: the local staff.¹⁰⁸ Compared to the reduced number of humanitarians who traveled from Geneva to the “field,” there was a much larger cohort of local staff, including military, doctors, nurses, cooks, guardians, drivers, clerks, and low-skilled personnel who undertook daily practices of protection. However, their contributions to refugee work is underrepresented in the archives, where institutional documents are self-referential and celebratory. Again, a close look into the sources has been productive. From a photograph in Narva, the bodily corporality

no. 2 (1998): 42–58. Ritu Menon, *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India & Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004). John Chr Knudsen, *Capricious Worlds: Vietnamese Life Journeys* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005). Truong Thanh Nguyễn (ed.), *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* (New York: Adams Press, 2018).

¹⁰⁵ For examples of petitions addressed by refugees to international organizations, see Anne Irfan, “Petitioning for Palestine: Refugee Appeals to International Authorities,” *Contemporary Levant* 5, no. 2 (2020): 79–96. Katarzyna Nowak, “‘To Reach the Lands of Freedom’: Petitions of Polish Displaced Persons to American Poles, Moral Screening and the Role of Diaspora in Refugee Resettlement,” *Cultural and Social History* 16, no. 5 (2019): 621–642.

¹⁰⁶ Liisa H. Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Loizos, “Misconceiving refugees?,” in Renos K. Papadopoulos (ed.), *Therapeutic Care for Refugees No Place like Home* (London; New York: Karnac Books, 2002), 41–56.

¹⁰⁸ Sharon Abramowitz and Catherine Panter-Brick (eds), *Medical Humanitarianism: Ethnographies of Practice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

of the local staff emerges with eyes and faces which break the silence;¹⁰⁹ from a hint in a report written by a Red Cross delegate in the exchange camp, where we read that a guard was accused of illicitly exchanging items across the walls, we can imagine people colloquing and sneaking in the darkness. In Constantinople, the letters exchanged around the “Lemtiougov case” open rifts in the running of the HCR office: a Russian refugee who turned into a provider of aid, Lemtiougov, denounced the disparity of salary with the international staff, suggesting that refugee work imposed a heavy toll on local employees. This was even more dramatic for Krikor Haygian and Vasil Sabagh, two Armenian men who assisted Jeppe in the rescue work in the Syrian countryside. Both of them died during a mission, months apart from one another. For others, including the rescued Armenian children who took care of the mundane practices of protection in the two houses managed by the League of Nations in Constantinople and Aleppo, humanitarian aid became an opportunity of self-help and a pathway towards receiving a Western education.

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This book not only offers a privileged window into the past, but also resonates with our troubled present. One century later, humanitarian protection and forced migrations continue to be crucial topics of our societies. However, as a historian, I feel unease in drawing quick comparisons, parallels, or linear origin stories. As others have stated, “each refugee crises has a context.”¹¹⁰ This is something that I constantly remind the students who attend my courses. The first class of my refugee history seminars is usually dedicated to explaining that history, as a discipline, has its own dignity and it is not simply instrumental to understanding the present. Yet, there are also scientifically grounded ways in which we can venture parallels. In historicizing the mass migrations that happened in the summer of 2015 towards Europe and in putting the displacements of Ukrainians in a longer perspective, I try to offer the students virtuous examples.¹¹¹ With this book, I hope to rigorously contribute to a much needed discussion about the opportunities and malfunctioning of the current global governance of refugee protection.

¹⁰⁹ Melanie Schulze Tanielian, “Defying the Humanitarian Gaze: Visual Representation of Genocide Survivors in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 14, no. 2 (2023): 186–211.

¹¹⁰ Jessica Reinisch, “History Matters... but Which One? Every Refugee Crisis Has a Context,” Policy Papers, History and Policy, September 25, 2015 (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/history-matters-but-which-one-every-refugee-crisis-has-a-context>, last seen April 2, 2017).

¹¹¹ Jo Laycock, “Ukraine: Histories and Boundaries of a Refugee Crisis” (<https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/migration/ukraine-histories-and-boundaries-of-a-refugee-crisis/>, last seen, February 20, 2023).

PART I

The return of forgotten
prisoners of war from
Russia and from the
Central Powers

CHAPTER 1

Humanitarian diplomacy for prisoners of war: compassion, politics, and money

Abstract

This chapter asks why the repatriation of forgotten groups of prisoners of war, those from Russia and from the Central Powers, was internationalized through the arena of the Red Cross and of the League of Nations. It argues that the failure of successor states of the former European empires to repatriate their own citizens left international humanitarian organizations space for intervention. The ICRC and the LON both connected humanitarian aid to the war and its consequences, mixing compassion with anti-communism. By a joint cooperation, both organizations pioneered political and financial negotiations which saw ex-enemy states sitting at the same table and strengthened their role in international relations.

Keywords: humanitarian aid, prisoners of war, international organizations, repatriation, Fridtjof Nansen.

It is important to remember that since the beginning of the repatriation, the principle has been strictly observed that only prisoners who express the desire to return to Russia will be brought back. Those declaring that they would not return to Soviet Russia would be entitled to remain in Germany, regardless of the conditions that would be imposed by the authorities.
—de Watteville to the ICRC¹.

The miserable conditions and the difficult repatriation of prisoners of war was a *cause célèbre* of reformist and humanitarian circles. During the Great War, numerous eyewitnesses produced pamphlets and gave public speeches where they denounced cases of mistreatment and abuses, in breach of international humanitarian law.² The Red Cross delegates were among the few to possess the “full

¹ Archives of the International Labour Organization (AILO), R102/2, de Watteville to the Commission for missions, October 26, 1921, translated from French.

² Heather Jones, “A Missing Paradigm? Military Captivity and the Prisoner of War, 1914-1918,” in Matthew Stibbe (ed.), *Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration in Europe during the First World War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 11–48.

picture,” as they accessed internment camps on all fronts, they gathered precious data, and they interacted with several authorities and with POWs. Based on its full-hand experience, the organization pressured the belligerent nations to show compassion by starting repatriation plans before the ratification of peace treaties, at least for the most fragile categories. The appeal only had a limited impact and left millions of men waiting for the end of the war to repatriate.

The Red Cross was quick to realize that the Armistice signed on November 11, 1918 would maybe end warfare but not violence. Even if prisoners of war should have been immediately repatriated, the reality was different: their nationality and place of internment determined whether they would be repatriated in a few weeks, in a few months, or in a few years. While the Allied and Associated Powers hastened to organize repatriation plans for their interned soldiers, they postponed the repatriation of POWs from the defeated powers until after the ratification of the peace treaties.³ For the latter group, repatriation varied according to the places of internment: prisoners of war detained in the West, particularly in France and in Great Britain, were allowed to return to their homes in Central and Eastern Europe from 1919 to 1920. Those in the East—namely prisoners of war from Russia and from the Central Powers, who were detained in Germany and in Russia, respectively—experienced a much longer captivity which, for the least fortunate, ended in 1922.⁴

Chapter 1 deals with the reasons why the repatriation of forgotten groups of prisoners of war was internationalized through the arena of the Red Cross and of the League of Nations. In contrast, the Labour Organization did not play a part in this story, as it made clear that the question exceeded its mandate.⁵ The chapter starts by setting the context on the politics of captivity and on repatriation. It then

³ Article 221 of the Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919, “the Allied and Associated Governments reserve the right to make the repatriation of German prisoners of war or German nationals in their hands conditional upon the immediate notification and release by the German Government of any prisoners of war who are nationals of the Allied and Associated Powers and may still be in Germany”.

⁴ Martyn Housden, “When the Baltic Sea was a ‘Bridge’ for Humanitarian Action: The League of Nations, the Red Cross and the Repatriation of Prisoners of War between Russia and Central Europe, 1920–22,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 61–83. Hazuki Tate, *Rapatrier les prisonniers de guerre : la politique des alliés et l’action humanitaire du Comité international de la croix rouge (1918-1929)* (Dissertation: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2015).

⁵ The ILO played no role in the repatriation of POWs. It only stumbled into the question in the fall of 1921, when the *Fédération Internationale Syndicale*, based in Amsterdam, lobbied for the Labour Organization to protect a group of former Russian POWs who refused to be repatriated from Germany and Czechoslovakia back to Russia. This group, who still lived in captivity, despite the fact that they stopped being military men, lamented a disparity of salary with other workers outside the camp. AILO, R102/2, Letter by Oudegeest to BIT, September 5, 1921. AILO, R102/2, Comité Executif de la Conférence des Membres de la Constituante de Russie, sous-section des prisonniers de guerre et des internés, mémoire sur les prisonniers de guerre et les internés russes à l’étranger par Joseph Minor, October 24, 1921.

singles out each organization, the ICRC and the LON, in order to explain why they engaged in repatriation plans for prisoners of war. This is instrumental to examining the nature of their joint programs, as well as the interplay of the political and financial negotiations that followed. Through the case study of prisoners of war, we start observing the multiple ways and overlapping reasons why international humanitarian organizations and their agents alternatively constructed them as victims, as dangers, and as harbingers of peace. We also have a better understanding of the specific geopolitical and ideological context which made international humanitarian organizations opt for framing aid as a non-political entity. What the Red Cross and the League of Nations learnt with prisoners of war would soon be transferred to the protection of Russian refugees.

1.1 The politics of captivity and repatriation

During WWI, out of 71 million conscripted men, an estimated number of 8 to 9 million were captured, for the greater part at the beginning of the war on the Eastern front.⁶ Not only combatants, but also enemy aliens experienced internment.⁷ As the literature argues, during the Great War, captivity was embedded in military and political strategies.⁸ Holding an enemy soldier increased the chances of victory, as a fewer number of combatants were sent to the battlefield. Captured soldiers could contribute to war economies by means of labor on the home front, in agriculture and factories, or behind the trenches.⁹ Furthermore, the conditions of detention varied, depending on the resources of the capturer, the geography of captivity, the

⁶ Heather Jones, "Prisoners of War," in 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. Iris Rachamimov, "World War I – Eastern Front," in Jonathan Franklin William Vance, *Encyclopedia of Prisoners of War and Internment* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2000).

⁷ Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War: 1914-1918* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2010). Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War: A European and Global History, 1914–1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019). Daniela L. Caglioti, *War and Citizenship: Enemy Aliens and National Belonging from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁸ Rotem Kowner and Iris Rachamimov (eds), *Out of Line, out of Place: A Global and Local History of World War I Internments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).

⁹ Gerald H. Davis, "Prisoners of War In Twentieth-Century War Economies," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 4 (1977): 623–634. Gerald H. Davis, "The Life of Prisoners of War In Russia, 1914-1921," in Samuel R. Williamson Jr and Peter Pastor (eds), *Essays on World War I: Origins and Prisoners of War* (NYC: Columbia University Press, 1983): 163–196. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999). R. A. Radford, "The Economic Organisation of a P.O.W. Camp," *Economica*,

development of the hostilities, as well as the military rank and the nationality of the prisoner.¹⁰

With the end of the war approaching, the repatriation of prisoners of war should have been a natural step.¹¹ However, as historian Richard B. Speed writes, “repatriation, which was envisioned as a simple, straightforward, humanitarian act, was subject to complex and powerful political forces.”¹² The repatriation of Allied POWs, some of whom had already been exchanged during the war, was quickly put into motion, along the stipulations of The Hague Conventions and by means of clauses included both in the General Armistice of November 11, 1918 and in the Versailles Peace Treaty with Germany, signed on June 28, 1919.¹³ This was made possible through bilateral agreements as was the case for the one signed between Great Britain and Russia and thanks to the work of the Berlin-based Inter-Allied Commission for POWs established in April 1919 within the framework of the Peace Conference.¹⁴ The commission, composed of a representative from France, Italy, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States, was charged with examining “measures appropriate to ensure the repatriation of German prisoners and to the questions raised by the captivity in Germany of Allied and Associated nationals who have been repatriated.”¹⁵ After an initial reluctance to repatriate prisoners

New Series 12, no. 48 (1945): 189–201. Peter Gatrell, “Prisoners of War on the Eastern Front during World War I,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 3 (2005): 557–566.

¹⁰ Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, and the Politics of Prisoners of War, 1939-1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Sarah Kovner, *Prisoners of the Empire. Inside Japanese POWs Camp* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

¹¹ Iris Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002). Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre: humanitaire et culture de guerre, 1914-1918: populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris: Ed. Noësis, 1998). Bruno Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée: la sortie de guerre des soldats français, 1918-1920* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

¹² Speed, *op. cit.*, 170.

¹³ Speed, *op. cit.*, 171, 174. “After the conclusion of peace, the repatriation of prisoners of war shall be carried out as quickly as possible.” Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, October 18, 1907, Article 7. “Immediate release of all Allied prisoners of war and interned civilians, without reciprocity,” General Armistice, November 11, 1918. “The repatriation of prisoners of war and interned civilians shall take place as soon as possible after the coming into force of the present Treaty and shall be carried out with the greatest rapidity,” Treaty of Peace, June 28, 1919, Part IV, art. 214.

¹⁴ Great Britain also engaged in transporting Russian refugees from camps in Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland. The National Library of Norway (ANB), Ms. fol. 1988, F8D-F8X, Accord entre la RSFSR et la Grande Bretagne sur l'échange des prisonniers, conclu à Copenhague le 12 septembre 1920, signé par James O'Gready pour la Grande Bretagne et Maxim Litvinoff au nom du Gouvernement des Sovièts.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Supreme Council, Vol. XVI, Secretary's notes of a conversation of the Foreign Ministers, held in M. Pichon's room at the quay d'Orsay, Paris, on Saturday, April 26, 1919, at 3:00

of war who were exploited as cheap labor, France, Great Britain, and the United States authorized their return before the peace treaties were ratified.¹⁶ In reality it took much longer: as historian Heather Jones writes, German POWs repatriated from Britain towards the end of 1919, whereas those in France left in 1920, as they were employed to demine the battlefields, despite this activity being in breach of international law.¹⁷

Far more dramatic were the conditions of prisoners of war from the defeated powers who were detained in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Russia. At first, peacemakers disregarded the repatriation of Russian POWs detained in Germany, as they should have returned after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between the Central Powers and Russia on March 3, 1918. However, while the respective Red Cross societies organized the first repatriations, the situation quickly changed.¹⁸ During the last months of the war, Germany proved reluctant to repatriate Russians, as they were pivotal in agriculture and in the war effort.¹⁹ In turn, Russia attempted to enlist prisoners of war from the Central Powers in the Red Army to fight in the civil war and, when it did them send back, it selected those who had been won over by Bolshevism.²⁰ Against all the odds, prisoners from the Central Powers in Russia began spontaneous travels home, while further waves benefited from the repatriation plans organized by national committees whose work though was restricted to European Russia, as the territories east of the Urals were under the control of the White armies or the Allies.²¹ A much smaller number of Russians were repatriated from Germany.²²

Clearly, prisoners of war were trapped in a highly ideological context, where "... the Bolsheviks, the White armies, and the Entente all attempted to use [them] for

p.m., 142. David Hunter Miller, *My Diary at the Conference of Paris [1918-19]* (New York: printed for the Author, 1924).

¹⁶ Speed, *op. cit.*, 174–175. Brian K. Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War In the First World War: Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ RCICR, Renée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer, "Le rapatriement des prisonniers du front oriental après la guerre de 1914-1918 (1919-1922)," 26, no. 309 (1944): 700, 700–729.

¹⁹ Speed, *op. cit.*, 170.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170–171. Arnold Krammer, "Soviet Propaganda among German and Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War In Russia, 1917-1921," in Williamson Jr. and Pastor (eds), *op. cit.*, 239–264.

²¹ Reinhard, Nachtigal, Lena Radauer: *Prisoners of War (Russian Empire)*, in 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08.

²² Reinhard Nachtigal, "The Repatriation and Reception of Returning Prisoners of War, 1918-1922," in Stibbe (ed.), *op. cit.*, 157–184.

their own end in the context of the unfolding Russian Civil War.”²³ When Germany was eventually ready to repatriate Russian POWs, not out of humanitarian compassion but because the ongoing blockade complicated feeding plans, the Allies stopped the process, fearing that the repatriates would enlist in the Red Army, and instead attempted to instrumentalize the repatriation to strengthen the White armies.²⁴ However, the Allied interest for Russian prisoners of war proved short-lived: a few months later when it was clear that the Red Army was about to win, the Allies left the responsibility of feeding, clothing, and sheltering POWs to local German authorities.²⁵ From the other end of the captivity, POWs in Russia, particularly those who were in Siberia and Turkestan, experienced dramatic political changes. As historian Gerald H. Davis writes, “... when the tsarist government collapsed, the POWs, being wards of that government, were utterly helpless. When revolution swept across Russia, it pervaded the prisoners’ lives. When civil war divided and confused the Russian people, it drew Russia’s captives into its many conflicts. When foreign states intervened, prisoners of war became engaged in many capacities on every side.”²⁶

The political context was volatile, at times for the better. In March 1920, the Conference of the Ambassadors, the inter-Allied body of the Entente, allowed the liberation of prisoners of war of all nationalities detained in Siberia. This was much-awaited news that did not tackle, however, a crucial question: who would organize and finance the repatriation? On paper it was the responsibility of the prisoners’ governments for which they had fought and endured years of captivity, but the successor states were in dire conditions, with the exception of Germany which was relatively quick in collecting the necessary funds. Russia was undergoing a civil war, and the states that emerged from the collapse of the German and the Austro-Hungarian Empire prioritized demobilization and postwar reconstruction over the return of their former combatants. To make things worse, already during the early phases of spontaneous and organized repatriation, Central and Eastern European states had shown a preoccupation with the political inclination of their returning compatriots, some of whom had been won over by Bolshevism during the Russian captivity, for which they were put into “a political and physical quarantine” at home.²⁷

²³ Oxana Nagornaja, “United by Barbed Wire: Russian POWs in Germany, National Stereotypes, and International Relations, 1914–22,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 3 (2009): 475–498, 490.

²⁴ Speed, *op. cit.*, 172.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 173. Nachtigal, *op. cit.*, 169.

²⁶ Davis, “The Life of Prisoners of War In Russia, 1914–1921”: 163–164.

²⁷ Nachtigal, *op. cit.*, 161. On the funds from the German government to be used for the repatriation of POWs, see Feltman, *op. cit.*, 154–155.

1.2 The Red Cross and prisoners of war in peacetime

Faced with a political vacuum, the Red Cross entered the scene and eased the dialogue between ex-enemy states. In spring 1920, the ICRC, which had considered Russia “responsible for the delay in bringing back to their homes thousands of Russian citizens,” was ready to negotiate.²⁸ Russia declared itself to be ready too, despite being suspicious of the real motives behind the actions of Western institutions. Hence, the ICRC organized a conference in Berlin in April 1920, where Germany and Russia signed an agreement for the reciprocal repatriation of prisoners of war and interned civilians. The two countries also committed to feeding the repatriates on their way home, while it fell to the Red Cross to negotiate the transit and transport of POWs across Central Eastern Europe.²⁹ As the number of Russians in Germany was higher than the number of Germans in Russia, the ex-citizens of Austria-Hungary would also be repatriated.³⁰ Moreover, Germany entrusted the Red Cross to control the cost that non-German POWs engendered in terms of bathing, disinfection, and feeding, as advanced money should be paid back.³¹

The choice to mandate the Red Cross with the repatriation of POWs might appear somehow natural. Yet, we need to take a few steps back to more fully grasp its significance. One of the oldest and well-known humanitarian organizations, the ICRC had been created in the mid-nineteenth century to assist and protect the wounded and sick on the battlefield. Its founding myth recounts that the Swiss citizen, Henry Dunant, reached northern Italy in 1859 to discuss with Napoleon III about his possessions in French Algeria and coincidentally witnessed the suffering of the soldiers at the bloody battle of Solferino.³² Faced with the lack of medical

²⁸ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.15, ICRC to Bagothy, delegate of the Russian Red Cross in Moscow, January 2, 1920.

²⁹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F8x, Accord entre la RSFSR et l'Allemagne au sujet du renvoi dans leur patrie des prisonniers de guerre et civils des deux côtés, conclu à Berlin le 19 avril 1920, signé par Stücklen, Administration Central du Gouvernement aux affaires des prisonniers de guerre et des civils, et Kopp, représentant de la RSFSR à Berlin. ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F8x, Accord supplémentaire entre la RSFSR et l'Allemagne sur la rentrée dans leur patrie des prisonniers de guerre et internés conclu à Berlin le 7 juillet 1920 signé par Stücklen et Kopp. In July 1920, it was decided that a mission in Berlin and one in Moscow would defend the interests of POWs and interned civilians in both countries.

³⁰ Archives of the League of Nations (ALON), R1574, Une mission du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge pour les prisonniers russes en Allemagne, 40.4388.2792.

³¹ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/389 bis, Nansen to Ador, May 3, 1920. ACICR, B MIS 33.5/E.N., Mémorandum à la Société des Nations sur l'état actuel de la question du rapatriement des P.G. russes en Europe occidentale; allemands, autrichiens, hongrois, tchèques, polonais, roumains, Tchécoslovaques en Russie et en Sibirie, May 12, 1920.

³² Recent work has proved that, even without ever possessing a formal territorial empire, colonialism permeated the history of Switzerland through ideas, practices, representations, and knowledge.

aid in wartime, Dunant suggested the creation of national relief organizations, affiliated to the armies, and the organization of a congress where an international common ground would be discussed and agreed upon.³³ Dunant's ideas were welcomed by the Genevan aristocracy which, inspired by the reformist movement *Réveil* based on an intimate relationship with God, had already created local philanthropies including the Society of Public Utility. Moreover, the same social group had lost its political power as a result of the Radical Revolution of 1846 in favor of lower classes: lawyers, doctors, or university professors hoped to regain political influence by engaging in international humanitarian aid.³⁴

In 1863, the International Committee for the Relief of the Wounded was created, followed by the signing of the First Geneva Convention in 1864 (Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field). The Convention decided that any wounded or sick soldier would be assisted disregarding his nationality according to the principle of impartiality. It equally claimed that the healthcare staff on the battlefield and in the hospitals would be neutral, protected by what would become the emblem of the Red Cross, a red cross on a white flag. Legally, the ICRC is neither an inter-governmental nor a non-governmental organization but situates itself between the two; it is grounded on Swiss Civil Law and receives its mandate from the signatory governments. As for its structure, the ICRC had a president in command and a Geneva-based Committee where decisions were made, and it was composed of a few professionals coopted among the Genevan élites. An increasing number of national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were scattered globally and met for international conferences every four years.³⁵ Financially, the ICRC survived and still does so on the annual contributions by states and on private donations.

The outbreak of WWI made the Red Cross grow exponentially.³⁶ Due to the immense humanitarian needs that the conflict brought, the organization extended

Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, and Patricia Purtschert, "Colonialism without Colonies: Examining Blank Spaces in Colonial Studies," *National Identities* 18, no. 1 (2016): 1–9.

³³ Henry Dunant, *Un Souvenir de Solferino*, 1863.

³⁴ Herrmann, *L'humanitaire en questions*, 25–58. Daniel Palmieri, "An Institution Standing the Test of Time? A Review of 150 Years of the History of the International Committee of the Red Cross," *International Review of the Red Cross* 94, no. 888 (2012): 1273–1298.

³⁵ Herrmann, *L'humanitaire en questions*, 36–37.

³⁶ Cédric Cotter, (*S'*)*Aider pour survivre: Action humanitaire et neutralité suisse pendant la Première Guerre mondiale* (Chêne-Bourg: Georg, 2017). François Bugnion, "Genève et la Croix-Rouge," *Colloque historique et al., Genève et la paix – acteurs et enjeux: trois siècles d'histoire: actes du Colloque historique tenu au Palais de l'Athénée, les 1-2-3 novembre 2001* (Genève: Association "Genève: un lieu pour la paix," 2005).

its work from the wounded and the sick to the assistance of prisoners of war and interned civilians, anticipating the codification of international humanitarian law.³⁷ It also weaved diplomatic relations between enemy states, sent its delegates to check the conditions of the prisoners of all fronts, and set in motion efforts to expedite the exchange of wounded and invalid POWs. Such an expansion was in part the result of its visionary president, Gustave Ador, a Swiss politician who served as a member and the president of the Swiss Federal Council between 1917 and 1919 and who acted as the third president of the ICRC from 1910 to 1928.³⁸ The ICRC's major achievement during the war was the creation of the International Prisoners-of-War Agency which established contacts between prisoners of war and their families through the exchange of letters, postcards, parcels, and cash.³⁹ Due to the multiplication of missions across Europe, a Commission of missions (*Commission des missions*) was created to coordinate the work of the delegates.⁴⁰ More generally, at the end of the war, "the aim of the International Committee of the Red Cross [was] to maintain the fundamental and unchanging principles which [were] at the basis of the Red Cross organization, that [was] impartiality, political, religious and economic independence, the universality of the Red Cross and the equality of its members."⁴¹

With regard to prisoners of war, before 1918, the Red Cross had already engaged in a few exchanges and repatriations, by opening roads and feeding points throughout Europe, and by facilitating the spontaneous returns of ca. 10,000 POWs.⁴² Towards the end of the War In Europe, the ICRC adopted two parallel strategies. At the diplomatic level, it sent an appeal to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies explaining the conditions of Austrian and Hungarian POWs in Siberia, and it pressured for the liberation and repatriation of prisoners of war of all nationalities. On November 25, 1918, Eduard Frick, the general delegate for the repatriation of POWs, also opened a direct communication channel with the French government, stressing that 200,000 Russian POWs in Germany were awaiting repatriation. This

³⁷ Matthew Stibbe, "The Internment of Civilians by Belligerent States during the First World War and the Response of the International Committee of the Red Cross," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1 (2006): 5–19. Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

³⁸ Frédéric Barbey, *Un homme d'état suisse: Gustave Ador: 1845-1928* (Genève: Edition J.-H. Jeheber, 1945).

³⁹ Stibbe, "The Internment of Civilians by Belligerent States during the First World War," 10. L'Agence internationale des prisonniers de guerre. Le CICR dans la Première Guerre mondiale (Genève: CICR, 2007).

⁴⁰ Brigitte Troyon and Daniel Palmieri, "The ICRC Delegate: An Exceptional Humanitarian Player?," *International Review of the Red Cross* 89, no. 865 (2007): 97–111.

⁴¹ See Article 3 of *La Croix-rouge internationale: le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et les Conférences internationales*, 5th edition, (Geneva: ICRC, 1925): 67.

⁴² ACICR, *Rapport Général du Comité International sur son activité du 1912-1920 présenté à la Dixième Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge* (Genève): 111–116.

brought the immediate unblocking of a contribution of 500,000 French francs to be used for their relief. At a practical level, the ICRC continued to organize the repatriation of small groups of prisoners of war and sent its delegates in Europe and beyond to collect information, check their conditions in the camps, and make preliminary arrangements to repatriate them.⁴³

The frantic activities undertaken by the Red Cross at the end of the war might let us picture a solid organization. Nothing was further from this. Despite its wartime expansion, peacetime hit the ICRC hard: not only it had meager financial resources, but it also acted in a highly competitive field, where an increasing number of humanitarian organizations alleviated the suffering of postwar societies, stricken by epidemics, forced migration, and famine.⁴⁴ This explains the timing of the 174th circular which was addressed to all the signatory states of the Geneva Convention on November 27, 1918, only a few days after the General Armistice in Europe. Faced with the changed circumstances of the postwar period, "...the international committee wondered how its work should change and what task it would now have to perform".⁴⁵

The language of the 174th circular is highly gendered. The ICRC self-represented as a powerful masculine agent, which dispatched letters to the families, shared information with national institutions, and checked that prisoners would be fairly treated. The organization acted like a loving mother too, who, alongside images of the Christian *pietas*, "soften[ed] the evils of war," by offering protection to frail men. Poignantly, what the Red Cross allowed to itself, being both strong and caring, it denied to the beneficiaries of aid, who emerged most and foremost as powerless victims. The combatants were "unfortunate people, whom a perfected medical art no doubt wrestle[d] from death" only to be left "mutilated and often reduced to impotence." Prisoners of war were mutilated, helpless, disabled, and exposed to epidemic diseases, while civilians were widowers, orphans, and parents who could

⁴³ RCICR, Cramer-Frick, *op. cit.*, 702–703.

⁴⁴ Gerald H. Davis, "National Red Cross Societies and Prisoners of War In Russia, 1914–18," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 1 (1993): 32, 31–52. Irène Herrmann, "Décrypter la concurrence humanitaire : le conflit entre Croix-Rouge(s) après 1918," *Relations internationales* 151, no. 3 (2013): 91–102. Davide Rodogno, "The American Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross' Humanitarian Politics and Policies in Asia Minor and Greece (1922–1923)," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 83–99. Lowe, "Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty." On American organizations, Patenaude, *op. cit.* Little, *op. cit.* Davide Rodogno, "Beyond Relief: A Sketch of the Near East Relief's Humanitarian Operations, 1918–1929," *Monde(s)*, no. 6 (2014): 45–64. Jaclyn Granick, "Waging Relief: The Politics and Logistics of American Jewish War Relief in Europe and the Near East (1914–1918)," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 55–68.

⁴⁵ RCICR, *La mission du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge pendant et après la guerre*, 174^{ème} circulaire, signed by Edouard Neville, Adolphe D'Espine, Dr. F. Ferrière, and Alfred Gauthier, Geneva, November 27, 1918.

not rely on their husbands, fathers, and sons.⁴⁶ Here, we start to see that the Red Cross instrumentalized cultural constructions of masculine strength and feminine nurture to legitimize its activities against the setting of the postwar struggle for authority in the international humanitarian realm.

The 174th circular hinted a crucial actor of our book, the delegate.⁴⁷ During the Great War, the ICRC, which had previously only a few chances to be operational, expanded beyond all expectations. Between 1914 and 1918, 41 delegates were sent to all fronts, and their number increased to 110 in the postwar period.⁴⁸ These delegates—all men with a few exceptions—put on hold their personal lives and professions, where they acted as physicians, engineers, or professors, or members of the Swiss army, to engage in humanitarian aid.⁴⁹ After the end of the war, their work ranged from the fight against typhus to feeding programs addressed to hungry children, and from the exchange of prisoners of war to the protection of refugees.⁵⁰ Upon selection, delegates normally signed a contract and received a pamphlet where the organization's principles were explained; they were asked to contain expenses, to maintain neutrality, to act confidentially, and to avoid divulging any aspects of their work.⁵¹ The vagueness of the instructions, the personalities

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ The ICRC has a track record of delegates publishing memoirs. One of the most famous is by Marcel Junod, *Le troisième combattant: De l'ypérite en Abyssinie à la bombe atomique d'Hiroshima* (Genève: Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, 1989).

⁴⁸ Delegates were sent to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, after the insurrection in Bosnia-Herzegovina of 1875 with the creation of the Montenegrin Red Cross and with the relief provided to refugees, and during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. Troyon and Palmieri, *op. cit.*, 98-99.

⁴⁹ During the interwar period, there were only four women members in the ICRC Committee: Pauline Chaponnière-Chaix, Renée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer, Suzanne Ferrière, and Lucie Odier. While men were appointed as members of the ICRC on the basis of their professional achievements and humanitarian feelings, three of the four women were related to men in the organization; the exception was Pauline Chaponnière-Chaix. Renée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer was married to Eduard Frick, the general delegate to the repatriation of POWs; Suzanne Ferrière was the niece of the celebrated Dr. Frédéric Ferrière; and Lucie Odier was the niece of Eduard Odier, the vice-president of the ICRC. While these women possessed skills in nursing, social work, diplomacy, and women's work, and were zealous, committed, and polyglot, they had a hard time having their voices and opinions heard and taken into consideration in the organization's meetings. In contrast, from the mid-nineteenth century, women played increasing and sometimes leading roles within other contemporary international organizations. For the four women bios, see Diego Fiscalini, *Des élites au service d'une cause humanitaire: le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge* (Dissertation, Université de Genève, 1985): 134, 142, 162, 225.

⁵⁰ For a list of the principal delegates of the ICRC between 1918 and 1925, see *L'expérience du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge* (CICR, Geneva, 1925): 54-60. The same formula is used in every contract between the ICRC and its delegates. ACICR, B, MIS 33.1 box 16, Officiers G, Gallati, Convention entre le CICR et Monsieur Gallati concernant sa première mission en Allemagne, June 7, 1920.

⁵¹ I developed the case of Montandon in the following article, Piana, "The Dangers of 'Going Native'".

of the delegates, and the slowness of the correspondence created space for abuses. For instance, in 1919, George Montandon, a physician and an ethnographer, was charged to organize the repatriation of prisoners of war from Siberia.⁵² While on a mission, he found it perfectly reasonable to undertake unofficial anthropological research and to collect objects, thanks to which he later boosted his academic career.⁵³ Once back to Geneva, Montandon even published his mission's report, which was meant for the ICRC only.⁵⁴ Understandably, the situation created a huge embarrassment within the organization. It was only after the end of WWII that the Red Cross became more systematic in the selection and in the preparation offered to its agents: a first manual containing precise instructions was published in 1953, and, since the 1970s, delegates had been receiving codified training, which would better equip them for the challenges ahead.⁵⁵

When the Red Cross distributed the 174th circular in November 1918, little did it know that the most pernicious competition would emerge within the Red Cross movement. One of the unexpected consequences of the war effort was the expansion of several national Red Cross Societies, which had been pivotal in assisting military and civilians thanks to the financial resources of their respective governments. The most important one was the American Red Cross (ARC), which had undertaken massive relief work across Europe. It is no surprise then that the seeds of dissensus germinated precisely within the ARC, which overtly criticized the ICRC for its inefficiency and provincialism. After months of rumors and talks, the disagreement became evident to all, when, in April 1919, on the occasion of the Cannes conference where national Red Cross Societies discussed questions of public health, a brand-new organization, the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), was created.⁵⁶ Henry Davison, the former president of the War Council of the American Red Cross, acted as executive chairman, and David Henderson, a British Lieutenant

⁵² On Montandon's mission, Blaise Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, droit humanitaire, dollar et paix des vainqueurs: l'organisation du rapatriement des prisonniers de guerre centraux détenus en Sibérie après la première guerre mondiale, par la Mission Montandon du CICR (1919-1921), les Croix-Rouges nationales et la Société des Nations* (Dissertation: University of Lausanne, 2001).

⁵³ On anthropology, see Serge Reubi, *Gentlemen, prolétaires et primitifs: institutionnalisation, pratiques de collection et choix muséographiques dans l'ethnographie suisse, 1880-1950* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2011). Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013). On his later life, see Marc Knobel, "L'ethnologie à la dérive: George Montandon et l'ethnoracisme," *Ethnologie Française*, nouvelle série, 18, no. 2 (1988): 107–113.

⁵⁴ George Montandon, *Deux ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques pour la Croix-Rouge de Genève (1919-1921)* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1923).

⁵⁵ *Manuel du délégué* (Genève: Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, 1972).

⁵⁶ Now the League of the Red Cross Societies is the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Colonel, was appointed director-general.⁵⁷ Davison, who could count on the support of President Woodrow Wilson, believed that there was a need for “new blood, new methods, a new and more comprehensive outlook.”⁵⁸ To achieve this, in rupture with the Red Cross’s universalism, the LRCS would be composed exclusively of the Red Cross Societies from the victorious countries and was charged with coordinating and promoting health issues in peacetime.⁵⁹ Differently from the “custodians of the sacred fire,” the League was meant to be effective and business oriented.⁶⁰

How did the International Committee of the Red Cross react to the establishment of the League of the Red Cross Societies? The responses were mixed. A few in the Committee, the decision-making body, were in favor of a tighter collaboration with the Americans; yet the majority were against it—a dynamic which put the two organizations at odds.⁶¹ The effects were immediate. In February 1920, the LRCS wished to play a greater role in the humanitarian aid for prisoners of war, yet it seemed to be hindered by the ICRC’s monopoly.⁶² “It would almost seem that as soon as they [the ICRC] hear of our undertaking any activity, they immediately follow this up with independent action along the same lines,” said Henderson.⁶³ Soon enough, the two organizations realized that they lacked the necessary financial resources for major humanitarian interventions, as the LRCS only received a fraction of the American money that it was promised, and the ICRC was bankrupt in the first place.⁶⁴ It was precisely around the lack of money that the ICRC and the LRCS settled: a Mixed Commission (*Commission mixte*) came about to create a common ground and to normalize their relations.⁶⁵ All in all, the ICRC maintained

⁵⁷ *Proceedings of the Medical Conference: held at the invitation of the Committee of Red Cross Societies*, Cannes, France, April 1-11, 1919 (Geneva: The League of Red Cross Societies, 1919).

⁵⁸ Letter, Davison Harvey Gibson, November 22, 1918, League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies archives, Geneva, quoted in Caroline Moorehead, *Dunant’s Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross* (London: HarperCollins, 1998): 259.

⁵⁹ Hutchinson, *The Champions of Charity*, 280. Julia F. Irwin, “Connected by Calamity: The United States, the League of Red Cross Societies, and Transnational Disaster Assistance after the First World War,” *Moving the Social* 57, no. 0 (2017): 57–76.

⁶⁰ John F. Hutchinson, “Custodians of the Sacred Fire: The ICRC and the Postwar Reorganisation of the Red Cross,” in Paul Weindling (ed.), *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 17–35.

⁶¹ Herrmann, “Décrypter la concurrence humanitaire,” 91.

⁶² ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, K1, Nansen overtar arbeidet (“Krifa”), legg 2, de Watteville to British Ministry in Berne, Geneva, February 18, 1920.

⁶³ ALON, R642, Henderson to Drummond, July 13, 1920, 10.5358.5358.

⁶⁴ Hutchinson, *The Champions of Charity*, 312. Herrmann, “Décrypter la concurrence humanitaire,” 96.

⁶⁵ ALON, R642, Relief work in Eastern Europe. Note presented by the Secretary-General and approved by the Council, June 21, 1921, C.71.M.91.1921.IV.

the role of principal intermediary within the Red Cross movement, since the LRCS failed to coordinate aid in Eastern Europe.⁶⁶ Later, the LRCS carved out its niche in the responses to natural catastrophes, in education, and training programs.⁶⁷

Taken together, the transition from war to peace, the crises within the Red Cross movement, and the fragility of postwar reconstruction shaped the context where the ICRC extended its mandate to prisoners of war. The organization did not waste time and drew a web of routes that connected Siberia and Turkestan with Central Europe through the Baltic region, the Black Sea, and via the city of Vladivostok. Yet, it soon realized that POWs would not be allowed to cross Central and Eastern Europe in both directions due to the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet War and because of the Russian Civil War.⁶⁸ The ICRC then privileged two routes: the first connected Europe with Russia through the Black Sea, bridging Trieste or Hamburg with Odessa or Novorossiysk; the second route crossed the Baltic Sea in both directions, connecting Estonia and Germany by boat and train. A third route would be opened by the flamboyant George Montandon, one which connected Europe with the Russian harbor of Vladivostok by sea.⁶⁹

In addition to managing logistics, humanitarian diplomacy was a matter of both politics and money.⁷⁰ The ICRC observed that overlapping political reasons hindered the repatriation of prisoners of war in the East, including successor states' broken finances, the uncertain status of Russia, the widespread fear of Bolshevism, and regional wars over the determination of states' borders. This explains why the organization acted in a semi-governmental capacity, restarting the dialogue between ex-enemy countries, which had not yet diplomatically recognized each other. Indeed, in early 1920, only Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had officially recognized Russia, and the other way around. Western states would follow later.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Francesca Piana, "Humanitaire et politique, in medias res : le typhus en Pologne et l'Organisation internationale d'hygiène de la SDN (1919-1923)," *Relations internationales* 138, no. 2 (2009): 23–38. Kimberly A. Lowe, "The League of Red Cross Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross: A Re-Evaluation of American Influence in InterWar Internationalism," *Moving the Social* 57, no. 0 (2017): 37–56.

⁶⁷ Irwin, "Connected by Calamity".

⁶⁸ RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 706-707.

⁶⁹ ALON, R1574, Text of a letter from Nansen submitted to the LON, May 15, 1920, 40.4427.2792.

⁷⁰ See the dissertation by Sebastian Balzter, (aus Fulda), *Repatriierung 1920-1922. Zur Rückführung der Kriegsgefangenen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Magisterarbeit zur Erlangung des Würde des Magister Artium der Philologischen, Philosephischen und Wirtschafts – und Verhaltenswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2003-2004).

⁷¹ Germany and Russia recognized each other in 1923; Austria in 1924; Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania in 1934. Jean-François Fayet, "En l'absence de relations diplomatiques et de puissance protectrice : la protection des intérêts soviétiques durant la période dite de transition," *Relations internationales* 143, no. 3 (2011): 75–88.

The ICRC equally needed financial support, which came less from European states, weakened by the war, and more from Switzerland, which did not participate in the hostilities. While, in the past, the Red Cross had feared for its independence and the Swiss government was concerned that the organization might challenge the country's neutrality, the aftermath of the war witnessed an alignment of interests.⁷² Hence, Switzerland asked the Supreme Economic Council, an Allied body whose task pertained to Europe's economic reconstruction, to use a small part of its budget for the repatriation of prisoners of war, as a much needed pathway towards the reconstruction of Europe. The small country also donated one million Swiss francs (approximately £48,000) to support the ICRC. Although the Supreme Economic Council did not approve the Swiss proposal, the request paved the way for the insertion of the question of POWs into the agendas of Allied and Associated governments. Moreover, in February 1920, the Supreme Economic Council agreed to relieve and repatriate westwards 2,500 Czechoslovakian civilians, as well as 6,000 POWs whom the Allied Powers had already interned in Vladivostok in 1918.⁷³

It was again the Supreme Economic Council that, on February 7, 1920, suggested the intervention of the League of Nations, particularly on behalf of prisoners of war at the hands of the Soviets.⁷⁴ "An organization on a considerable scale should be set up whose personnel [was] above suspicion of political or national motive, and which [had] behind it an authority sufficient to secure the willing cooperation of the various governments concerned." The League of Nations seemed to have "the necessary authority" to avoid being trapped in the problems that governments had undergone.⁷⁵ As Renée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer of the ICRC Committee correctly wrote, "the problem of the repatriation of prisoners of war could not be resolved quickly without an international action led by a neutral body, treating all interns on the same footing and without any political bias, nor any spirit of propaganda."⁷⁶ Was it wishful thinking? Now that we know the end of the story, it is easy to be assertive. Yet, contemporaries, or at least some of them, were skeptical. De Watteville, the secretary and delegate of the ICRC in Germany, cynically wrote that the League of Nations would need more than "platonic resolutions" to ensure Russia's participation in the general repatriation plan.⁷⁷

⁷² Herrmann, *L'humanitaire en questions*, 40–51.

⁷³ ALON, C1119, Siberian prisoners of war, folder 1, International Committee for Relief Credits, Austrian and Hungarian Prisoners of War, June 5, 1920.

⁷⁴ ALON, C1119, Siberian Prisoners of War, folder 1, Council Document No. 34, Repatriation of Prisoners in Siberia, Memorandum by the Secretary General.

⁷⁵ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.69, Memorandum on the question of the repatriation of German, Austrian, Hungarian, Romanian, Serbian, Czechoslovakian, and Polish prisoners of war, March 1, 1920.

⁷⁶ RCICR, Cramer-Frick, *op. cit.*, 702.

⁷⁷ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.141, de Watteville to Commission des Missions, Berlin, April 12, 1920.

By looking at the Red Cross alone, before examining the joint programs undertaken with the League of Nations, we have a sense of what protection meant for the oldest humanitarian organization in the specific context of the post-WWI period. Thanks to its wartime experience, the organization and its delegates had acquired sophisticated diplomatic skills, by which they negotiated with all the parties involved, including governments, the military, private organizations, and the representatives of civil society. The ICRC started protecting prisoners of war from the moment when the members of the Committee in Geneva used a red pencil to draw repatriation routes crossing the European continent to the moment when its delegates checked the number of prisoners of war entering the trains which would bring them home. Thinking about alternative routes when the old ones were not safe anymore and preparing the camp of Narva, as we will see in Chapter 2, was yet another way to protect POWs. Protection declined in manifold ways, some of which were specific to the Red Cross and its mandate, and some others which emerged from the collaborations and the encounters which happened along the way.

1.3 The League of Nations and the question of prisoners of war

“A new world” had just begun—this is what Léon Bourgeois, the French representative to the LON, announced at the first meeting of the organization, which took place on January 16, 1920 in Paris, days after the entering into force of the Covenant of the League.⁷⁸ The LON was only a few months into being when the Supreme Economic Council and the Red Cross lobbied for internationalizing the protection and repatriation of POWs. Humanitarian aid fell within its mandate. According to Article 23 of the Covenant, the LON was to “secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labor for men, women, and children,” supervise “the execution of agreements with regard to the traffic in women and children,” and was called to “take steps in matters of international concern for the prevention and control of disease”; according to Article 25, it would “encourage and promote the establishment and co-operation of duly authorized voluntary national Red Cross organizations having as purposes the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world.”⁷⁹ However, the decision whether to engage in the relief and repatriation of POWs was anything but natural and rather resulted from internal negotiations and external lobbying.

⁷⁸ 1 League of Nations O.J. 13 1920. Procès-verbal de la Première Réunion du Conseil de la Société des Nations, tenue à Paris au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères le vendredi 16 janvier 1920.

⁷⁹ Covenant of the League of Nations.

Contrary to the hybrid status of the ICRC and to the tripartite nature of the ILO, the League of Nations was composed of states.⁸⁰ The first members were Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, the British Empire, France, Guatemala, Italy, Japan, Poland, Peru, Siam, Czechoslovakia, and Uruguay.⁸¹ More states would join in the following years, particularly Hungary (in 1922); Germany (in 1926 until 1933 when Hitler came to power; Turkey (in 1932); and the Soviet Union (in 1934 only to be expelled in 1939). As for its structure, the LON was composed of a permanent secretariat, chaired by Eric Drummond, a British diplomat who would be the first secretary of the organization from 1920 to 1933; by a Council that met four times a year, composed of a restricted number of permanent and non-permanent states, upon which fell the most important decisions concerning the activities of the organization; and by the Assembly, which met every September and in which each member state participated.⁸² Over time, special committees, commissions, and agencies would be created. This was the case for the Health Organization, the predecessor of the World Health Organization.⁸³ And this was also the case for the High Commissariat for Russian Refugees of the LON, which was created in September 1921 under the leadership of Fridtjof Nansen.⁸⁴

We have seen that the Supreme Economic Council pushed for the League of Nations to engage in repatriation plans for POWs. Yet, Gustave Ador, who was an experienced diplomat, did not hesitate to play the personal card. While inter-institutional negotiations were ongoing, Ador corresponded with Eric Drummond, calling for the LON's moral compassion and commitment to implement "the principle of justice between the nations." Ador even ventured to claim that the principles of peace and solidarity, upon which the LON was built, were the direct continuations

⁸⁰ For a classic study, see F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952). The historiography of the LON is huge. Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations." Some examples are Andrew Webster, "The Transnational Dream: Politicians, Diplomats and Soldiers in the League of Nations' Pursuit of International Disarmament, 1920–1938," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 04 (2005): 493–518. Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Madeleine Herren, "Gender and International Relations through the Lens of the League of Nations (1919–1945)," in Carolyn James and Glenda Sluga (eds), *Women, Diplomacy, and International Politics* (London: Routledge, 2015), 182–201.

⁸¹ 1 League of Nations O.J. 12 1920.

⁸² G. F. Kohn, "The Organization and the Work of the League of Nations," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 114, no. 1 (1924): 5–77.

⁸³ Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921–1946* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

⁸⁴ Magaly Rodríguez García, Davide Rodogno, Liat Kozma (eds), *The League of Nations' Work on Social Issues: Visions, Endeavours and Experiments* (Geneva: United Nations, 2016).

of the Red Cross's efforts since 1863.⁸⁵ Advocacy bore fruit. There, the ground was favorable for programs which would foster cooperation as a foundation for world peace. In the words of the British social reformer, Rachel Crowdy, the head of the Social Section, "no effort [was] too great" to repatriate "wretched" prisoners of war.⁸⁶

In April 1920, the LON Council, which met in Rome, tackled the question of prisoners of war.⁸⁷ For the LON, protecting displaced former military men fell into the broader plans of postwar reconstruction and of international stability.⁸⁸ The organization decided to appoint a commissioner to elaborate measures for the relief and repatriation of POWs: the selected person should inquire, coordinate, and encourage the valuable work already being performed by governments and private voluntary organizations, especially the ICRC, report to the Council, and make any recommendations that he might consider desirable both in terms of action and credit.⁸⁹ Soon after, Drummond announced to Ador that the position had been offered to Fridtjof Nansen, who had accepted it and who hoped to rely upon the "advice, assistance, and cooperation..." of the Red Cross.⁹⁰ From the outset, thanks to a tight cooperation, the ICRC and the LON offered a unique arena to states, both members and non-members, as well as to private organizations, transnational networks, and experts to find a doable solution. The division of tasks was clear: while the LON would take charge of political and financial negotiations, the Red Cross would implement programs on the ground.

When he was appointed as high commissioner for POWs, Nansen was 60 years old. Decades earlier, he had explored the Arctic region and had engaged in neuro-anatomy and oceanography that consolidated his reputation as an explorer and a

⁸⁵ ALON, R642, Ador to Drummond, July 3, 1920, 12.5358.5358.

⁸⁶ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/251, Rachel Crowdy to Renée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer, London, April 29, 1920.

⁸⁷ 1 League of Nations O.J. 80 1920. Procès-verbal of the Fourth Session of the Council of the League of Nations, held in Paris on April 9, 10, and 11, 1920.

⁸⁸ Kimberly Lowe, "Reassessing the League of Nations' Humanitarian Assistance Regimes, 1918–1939," in James Retallack and Ute Planert (eds), *Decades of Reconstruction: Postwar Societies, State-Building, and International Relations from the Seven Years' War to the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 293–314.

⁸⁹ ALON, C1120, Registry, Sunderland House, Documents concerning Dr. Nansen's appointment as High Commissioner for prisoners of war and proposal League of Nations work toward prisoners of war repatriated from Soviet Russia, folder 1, Resolution of the Council.

⁹⁰ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.250, Drummond to Ador, April 28, 1920. See ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Cramer and Brunel, folder 5, Mémorandum à la Société des Nations sur l'état actuel de la question du rapatriement des P.G. russes en Europe occidentale, allemands, autrichiens, hongrois, tchèques, polonais, roumains, tchécoslovaques en Russie et en Sibérie, 14 May 1920. ALON, R642, Ador to Drummond, July 3, 1920, 12.5358.5358.

scientist.⁹¹ In keeping with the eclecticism that was inherent among the ruling élites, later in life, Nansen engaged in politics: he mediated the separation of Norway from Sweden; in 1906, he was appointed as Norwegian ambassador to England; and, in 1918, he served as one of the Norwegian representatives to the League of Nations. When he was contacted by secretary general Drummond to become the high commissioner for prisoners of war, Nansen did not have any previous experience in humanitarian aid.⁹² He accepted the task, thinking that it would be a short one; at the moment of his appointment, Nansen could not possibly have known that he would dedicate his last years to humanitarian work and refugee politics. Unsurprisingly, due to his active past, Nansen was not an armchair humanitarian: living in Lysaker near Oslo, not only did he regularly travel to Geneva, but he went to Russia, Greece, and Armenia, where major emergencies happened. From his trips, numerous books were published, including “Russia & Peace” in 1924, and “Armenia and the Near East” in 1928.⁹³

There is an aura of heroism attached to Nansen, which has been cultivated by a wealth of uncritical biographies.⁹⁴ To be true, Nansen was partially responsible for his own heroization. The high commissioner presented himself as a stubborn negotiator, a passionate advocate, and a selfless speaker who committed to protecting the needy, alongside cultural constructions of an active masculinity.⁹⁵ His discourses and actions were soaked in patriarchal notions of inequality, which stressed ideas of courage and of entitlement versus passivity and dependency. This clearly emerges in the talk entitled “The suffering people of Europe” that Nansen pronounced in Oslo when he accepted the Nobel Prize in 1922 for his humanitarian engagement, in which he emphatically wrote:

They call us romantics, weak, stupid, sentimental idealists, perhaps because we have some faith in the good which exists even in our opponents and because we believe that kindness achieves more than cruelty. It may be that we are simpleminded, but I do not think that we are dangerous. Those, however, who stagnate behind their political programs, offering

⁹¹ Francesca Piana, “Nansen, Fridtjof” in IO BIO, *Biographical dictionary of secretaries-general of international organizations*, eds. by Bob Reinalda, Kent J. Kille and Jaci Eisenberg, www.ru.nl/fm/iobio.

⁹² ACICR, B MIS 33.5.210, Baker to Dr. Rotten, April 26, 1920.

⁹³ Fridtjof Nansen, *Russia & Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1924). Fridtjof Nansen, *Armenia and the Near East* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928).

⁹⁴ Several biographies have been written on the work and life of Nansen. Fritz Wartenweiler, *L'aventure d'une vie: Fridtjof Nansen. Le Viking intrépide* (Genève: Ed. Labor et fides, 1962). Chr. A. R Christensen, *Fridtjof Nansen; a Life in the Service of Science and Humanity* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1961). Tim Greve, *Fridtjof Nansen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1973). Liv Nansen Høyer, *Nansen, a Family Portrait* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, 1957). Roland Huntford, *Nansen: The Explorer as Hero* (London: Duckworth, 1997).

⁹⁵ Carl-Emil Vogt, “Fridtjof Nansen et l'aide alimentaire européenne à la Russie et à l'Ukraine bolcheviques en 1921-1923,” *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 95, no. 3 (2009): 5–12.

nothing else to suffering mankind, to starving, dying millions – they are the scourge of Europe.⁹⁶

Far from being alone in fostering notions of active masculinity, Nansen also emerged as the ultimate champion in the League of Nations' circles. Why so? Why did the LON need a "hero" to act as the high commissioner? The inter-governmental organization attempted to politically instrumentalize Nansen's renown and commitment to secure governments' political, financial, and logistical support. This strategy became even more evident in the early 1920s, when signs of compassion fatigue were already on the horizon.⁹⁷ As we will see, there were dangers in such a construction: while other agencies were downplayed, international refugee work underwent a backlash when Nansen prematurely died in 1930.

1.4 The cooperation between the Red Cross and the League of Nations

Nansen's first move was to secure the cooperation of the Red Cross, which shared the information at its disposal.⁹⁸ There were 250,000 POWs from the Central Powers detained in Russia and the same number of Russian POWs kept in Germany.⁹⁹ In May 1920, to ease Nansen's work, Eduard Frick and Bernard Bouvier for the ICRC organized a conference in Berlin where representatives of Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Russia were in attendance.¹⁰⁰ Two issues were high on the agenda: whether prisoners of war would be free to decide where to repatriate and what would be the role of the Soviet government. If, on paper, all the governments were to "affirm their agreement on the fundamental principle that the prisoner of war [had] the right to be repatriated where he wishes[ed]," in practice this meant that those Russian POWs who did not want to repatriate to a communist country could

⁹⁶ Nobel lecture by Fridtjof Nansen, pronounced on December 19, 1922, translation (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1922/nansen/lecture/>, last seen November 6, 2020).

⁹⁷ Bertrand Taihe, "Horror, Abjection and Compassion: From Dunant to Compassion Fatigue," *New Formations*, no. 62 (2007): 123–136.

⁹⁸ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/389 bis, Nansen to Ador, May 3, 1920.

⁹⁹ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/E.N., Mémorandum à la Société des Nations sur l'état actuel de la question du rapatriement des P.G. russes en Europe occidentale; allemands, autrichiens, hongrois, tchèques, polonais, roumains, Tchécoslovaques en Russie et en Sibirie, 12 mai 1920. See also, ACICR, B MIS 33.5/537, Liste des pays qui ont encore dans leurs territoires un nombre assez considérable de Prisonniers de guerre étrangers, May 10, 1920.

¹⁰⁰ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.332, Frick to Nansen, May 15, 1920. See also, ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Nansen, folder 2, Baker to Nansen, May 15, 1920.

stay in Germany.¹⁰¹ The negotiations between Western institutions and the Soviet government turned out to be complex. On the one side, the ICRC described Victor Kopp, the Russian delegate, as a troublemaker, someone who was "...adept at constantly combining politics with the application of humanitarian principles."¹⁰² On the other side, Russia lamented that German POWs in Siberia were repatriated against their will and in favor of the anti-Bolshevik coalition.¹⁰³

To be true, most of the Red Cross documents produced in the early 1920s were soaked in anti-Bolshevism. In June 1920, the Red Cross delegate in Berlin, Bernard Bouvier, penned a long report where he made a direct connection between the bad living conditions of Russian POWs in Germany and the possibility that they might cause political "troubles." He reported that almost 70% of Russian POWs in Germany moved in and out of the camps to work on the surrounding farms. This allowed them to buy extra food as well as weapons that they might use in support of German communists. Hence, Bouvier deemed it necessary to buy extra flour and an increased portion of bread for the benefit of the incarcerated men so that they could have enough to eat. Moreover, he urged the Red Cross to be dissociated from any unwanted political actions that might happen.¹⁰⁴ Events had proved Bouvier's preoccupation right: the communist uprising in Berlin of January 1919, Béla Kun's regime in Hungary, the episodes in Vienna and Munich, in addition to the Bolshevik aspiration for world communism were looming realities.

Interestingly, Bouvier's description of POWs was in stark contrast to the discourse of helplessness and victimhood that emerged from the 174th Red Cross circular. In Bouvier's words, Russian POWs in German camps lacked "freedom, authority, and order," while they were social, political, and ideological threats that undermined the stability of Germany and, more generally, the peace on the continent.¹⁰⁵ According to the delegate, diplomatic negotiations and food distribution were necessary to neutralize the dangers spurring from the concentration of many former enemies, as well as to protect the integrity of fragile German institutions. The Red Cross needed protection too, as the organization should not be found responsible for the political troubles that POWs might cause. By examining side by side the gendered discourses that emerged from the 174th circular and Bouvier's report, we observe a key element of postwar humanitarian aid: the organization

¹⁰¹ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/670, Memorandum by Frick, May 24, 1920. AILO, R102/2, de Watteville, October 26, 1921.

¹⁰² ACICR, B MIS 33.5/915, Rapport de Monsieur Bernard Bouvier, membre du C.I.C.R. sur sa mission à Berlin, 16-22 mai 1920, June 1, 1920.

¹⁰³ ALON, R1702, de Watteville to Commission of missions, July 4, 1920, 42.5440.5213.

¹⁰⁴ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/915, Rapport de Monsieur Bernard Bouvier, membre du C.I.C.R. sur sa mission à Berlin, 16-22 mai 1920, June 1, 1920.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

and its agents saw no contradiction in referring to prisoners of war alternatively as innocent victims or potential dangers. They could be one or the other, or one and the other at once. Moreover, after being repatriated, prisoners of war could also integrate into their long-lost family, hence contributing to the processes of nation-building and postwar reconstruction.

Other actors framed POWs as both victims and dangers. In September 1920, Dr. Erich Wucher, a former POW who spent several years in captivity in the Siberian camp of Krasnoyarsk and a medical doctor by profession, stated that POWs from the Central Powers in Russia lacked food, shelter, and appropriate clothing. Many of them who had contracted typhus risked infecting civilians in Siberia, in Russia, and from there, in Europe.¹⁰⁶ In both reports, i.e., the one penned by Bouvier and the one penned by Wucher, POWs were told to be in danger and to endanger societies. While the threats were both real and exaggerated, once more humanitarian aid not only addressed the distress of victims but was also called upon to prevent the instability that poverty and suffering might cause. Spreading anxiety was yet another way to mobilize political and financial resources.

Meanwhile, it took a few weeks for the Red Cross and the League of Nations to agree on a division of tasks. The ICRC would continue directing general repatriation plans and monitoring logistics. It was responsible for protecting POWs in the trains, boats, and exchange camps.¹⁰⁷ “[Nansen] had entrusted to the competent hands of the International Committee everything connected with the organization of camps, the organization of train services, the exchange of prisoners, the keeping of the accounts to be presented to the governments whose prisoners were repatriated.”¹⁰⁸ As for the LON, it was in charge of diplomatic and fundraising campaigns.¹⁰⁹ The organization was expected to provide boats, food both during the trip and in the exchange camp, and to advance the money that non-German POWs would require.¹¹⁰ In the words of Lucien Cramer, a member of the ICRC Committee: “If the League of Nations was the financial backer of this considerable enterprise, the international committee for its part was the technical executor, since it agreed to

¹⁰⁶ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/2777, Rapport de l'ancien prisonnier de guerre, médecin autrichien, Dr. Erich Wucher, au Comité International de la Croix-Rouge Geneve, section de Berlin, Tiergartenstrasse, Vienne, 3 septembre 1920. It is useful to read the document from Wucher against the research carried out by Gerald H. Davis on the history of the camp of Krasnoyarsk. Gerald H. Davis, “Prisoner of War Camps as Social Communities in Russia: Krasnoyarsk 1914-1921,” *East European Quarterly* 21, 2 (1987): 147–163.

¹⁰⁷ RCICR, Cramer-Frick, *op. cit.*, 712.

¹⁰⁸ ALON, R642, Ador to Drummond, July 30, 1920, 12.5358.5358.

¹⁰⁹ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.1043, PV de la séance tenue le 21 juin 1920 au Comité International de la Croix-Rouge.

¹¹⁰ RCICR, Cramer-Frick, *op. cit.*, 712–713.

ensure the completion of the repatriation that it had carried out until then, with the only funds of the governments concerned.”¹¹¹

The collaboration between the two institutions went through shifts and turns. Frick of the ICRC expressed frustration to the LON for not providing the promised funds and for not covering the delegates’ salaries.¹¹² Another delegate, de Watteville, complained that Nansen took personal initiatives without previously consulting with the ICRC.¹¹³ Miscommunication reached its peak as soon as June 1920, when, according to de Watteville, Nansen was not aware that the British Ministry of Shipping had granted three boats to be used for the repatriation process. Of the three boats, one was under construction, while another was in Sicily.¹¹⁴ However, there were instances where the ICRC and LON successfully collaborated. Their respective officers in Geneva were in close contact. Frick was the general delegate for the repatriation of POWs at the ICRC as well as Nansen’s assistant at the LON: he reported to the ICRC and advised Nansen, building on the expertise that he had gained from the implementation of the ICRC’s early repatriation plans. One of Frick’s closest collaborators was de Watteville, based in Berlin. In addition to his work for both the ICRC and the LON, de Watteville was mandated to coordinate the purchase of goods and supplies for POWs in Siberia from Berlin during the winter of 1920-1921 under the humanitarian “flag” of the so-called “Nansen-Hilfe.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, the ICRC delegates sent on various missions in Europe and beyond worked for both organizations at the same time.

Due to difficult negotiations with Russia, in July 1920, Nansen went to Moscow.¹¹⁶ Different from the prevalent views in the West, Nansen supported Russia’s inclusion

¹¹¹ RCICR, Lucien Cramer, “L’achèvement du rapatriement général des prisonniers de guerre par le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge,” no. 41 (1922): 384.

¹¹² ACICR, B MIS 33.5.2814, Conférence du 12 octobre 1920 à la présence de Baker, Frick, Brunel, Sutter, Ehrenhold.

¹¹³ “It is absolutely necessary for us to maintain in Geneva the centralization of documents and their disposition, all the more so because if this were not the case, we would sometimes make false moves caused by ignorance of things we would like to be the first to know about [...]”. ACICR, B MIS 33, volume 5, Letter to de Watteville, June 18, 1920.

¹¹⁴ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.1040, de Watteville to Commission of missions, June 19, 1920.

¹¹⁵ The name, “Nansen-Hilfe,” was given by the ICRC delegate, Moritz Schlesinger. The so-called “Nansen-Hilfe” was established by Nansen thanks to the reports from the Scandinavian Red Cross societies (Danish and Swedish), the ICRC, and the YMCA, which had been active in Siberia since 1915. This organization aimed to reduce the mortality of POWs as much as possible, while waiting for the repatriation plans to be implemented. This occurred through the centralization of the work of all of the organizations that were active on behalf of POWs in Siberia and the distribution of foodstuff, clothing, and medical supplies during the winter of 1920-1921. ACICR, B MIS 33, volume 21, de Watteville to the Commission des missions, September 18, 1920.

¹¹⁶ On the encounter between Europeans and Americans with the political, ideological, and social experiments of interwar Soviet Russia, see the work of Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great*

in Europe as a stabilizer of peace, a position for which he was often accused of having pro-Bolshevik feelings.¹¹⁷ In Moscow, Nansen interacted with Georgy Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and Lev Kamenev, chairman of the Moscow Soviet and member of the Politburo. The high commissioner was preceded by his scientific fame—something on which the LON had staked upon his appointment. Kamenev even ventured a parallel between Nansen and the Soviet revolution: the energy that Nansen had put into his polar explorations was comparable to the energy that the Bolsheviks were putting into spreading communism internationally.¹¹⁸ However, there was more than admiration in Kamenev's words. First of all, the Soviets agreed to negotiate with Nansen in his personal capacity and not as a representative of the LON, an institution that they refused to recognize, as two of the League's member states, Britain and France, were supporting the counter-revolution. Moreover, international communism was not compatible with the nature of the LON, a league of capitalist powers that, on paper, promoted ideas of peace and security, but, in reality, favored only bourgeois states united in their hostility to the first workers' state.¹¹⁹ Second, the Soviet government wished to establish direct contacts with other governments on repatriating POWs. Therefore, while in Moscow, Nansen cabled all the interested governments in order to obtain authorization for continuing negotiations with the Bolsheviks.

1.5 Financial negotiations

While patient political negotiations between ex-enemy states were about to succeed, the question of money had not been settled yet. As Nansen knew that the LON could not pay for the repatriation plan, he thought of other possibilities.¹²⁰ Three

Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to Soviet Union, 1921-1941 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Nansen, *Russia & Peace*.

¹¹⁸ ACICR, B MIS 33.51619, Rapport sur la mission en Lettonie et Esthonie par Frick, July 17, 1920.

¹¹⁹ An early study of the attitude of the Soviet government towards the institutions of Western liberalism refers to a "hostile boycott" for the period ranging between 1919 and 1934, when the Soviet government joined the LON. Christopher Osakwe, *The Participation of the Soviet Union in Universal International Organizations: A Political and Legal Analysis of Soviet Strategies and Aspirations inside ILO, UNESCO and WHO* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1972). More recent research tends to attenuate the dichotomy between the two systems and rather stresses the connections and exchanges taking place, especially in the field of public health. Jon Jacobson, "The Soviet Union and Versailles," in Manfred Boemeke, Gerald Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser (eds), *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 451–468.

¹²⁰ ALON, R1709, Summary of Dr. Nansen's accounts in respect of repatriation of war-prisoners 15/9 1920 – 31/12 1921. 42.17959-17959X.

main venues were mobilized: the International Committee for Relief Funds (hereafter Relief Funds), which covered repatriation expenses through the Baltic Sea; the ICRC, through states' contributions;¹²¹ and American organizations, grouped in the American Repatriation Committee that concentrated on repatriation plans from Vladivostok.¹²² Once in office, Nansen began lobbying the Relief Funds. The organization, headquartered in Paris and composed of Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, had been created to reconstruct postwar Europe. Nansen, who understood the conditions of displaced prisoners as an unexpected consequence of warfare, suggested that a small part of the money managed by the Relief Funds could be used for the repatriation of POWs. Not only had the high commissioner asked for £635,000, which corresponded to less than 2% of the total sum managed by the Relief Fund, but he also presented a detailed plan previously elaborated by a British expert.¹²³ William Goode, whom the plan was named after (the "William Goode scheme"), was a British representative at the Supreme Economic Council who designed the complex system for the appropriation of funds from the Relief Funds for the purposes of repatriation.¹²⁴

At first, the answer of the Relief Funds was negative. Nansen had to adapt the strategy: each state whose nationals were to be repatriated would independently apply for credits to the Relief Funds; moreover, the high commissioner made it clear that these credits were to be considered a loan.¹²⁵ Austria and Hungary applied for £200,000 each, while Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia applied for £70,000 each.¹²⁶ In order to maximize the chances of success,

¹²¹ Austria contributed £43,000, Czechoslovakia £6,000, Poland £1,000, and the Kingdom of the SHS £3,000. Moreover, the unofficial American representative to the Relief Funds, Mr. Logan, tried to get his government to contribute to the repatriation scheme. See ALON, C1111, Miscellaneous correspondence, folder 6, Notes on repatriation of prisoners, July 30, 1920.

¹²² The following societies were part of the American Repatriation Committee: ARC, Friends Service Committee, Relief Committee for Hungarian Sufferers, Relief Committee for Austrian War Prisoners, Federal Council, the Churches of Christ, Joint Distribution Committee, National Catholic War Council, YMCA, and National Lutheran Council. ALON, C1113, Folder 3, The present situation with regard to repatriation of prisoners of war, report by the Secretary General, February 16, 1921. Gaston Lichtenstein, *Repatriation of Prisoners of War from Siberia; a Documentary Narrative* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1924).

¹²³ ALON, R1702, Copy of a cablegram received from William Goode, July 21, 1920, 42.5656.5213.

¹²⁴ ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Nansen, folder 3, Notes on the use of the International Relief Credits for repatriation of prisoners of war Undated report.

¹²⁵ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.1735, Repatriation of prisoners of war, Geneva, July 28, 1920. ALON, C1111, Miscellaneous correspondence, folder 6, Crowdy to Baker, May 26, 1920.

¹²⁶ ALON, R1703, Draft telegram from the Secretary-General to the lending governments represented on the International Committee on Relief Credits, Paris, 42.5218.5214. The Relief Funds proposed

Nansen did not leave anything unplanned and relied on the financial expertise of two British experts, Thomas Lodge and John Hamilton, who worked under the auspices of the LON. Lodge was the first to be hired: a former Secretary of the Ministry of Shipping for the United Kingdom, who was based in Paris to be close to the Relief Funds.¹²⁷ It was Lodge who wanted Hamilton, a civilian, as a collaborator, this time not in Paris but in London to be close to both the British government and the LON. Lodge and Hamilton acted as a link between the governments represented in the Relief Funds and the governments whose ex-soldiers needed to find their way back home.¹²⁸ They were to keep track of the money used for the repatriation of POWs and to verify that the money provided by each country and spent by Nansen was proportional to the number of POWs from that same country, especially since the nationality of prisoners was sometimes difficult to determine.¹²⁹

It was mainly due to the business and shipping expertise of Lodge and Hamilton that the work was carried out efficiently.¹³⁰ It was no coincidence that Goode, Lodge, and Hamilton were all British, as Great Britain was central to the postwar liberal international order. Another prominent British citizen at the LON Secretariat was Philip Baker (later Noel-Baker after marrying into the Noel family).¹³¹ A member of the British delegation at the Paris Peace conference, Noel-Baker became one of Nansen's closest and most reliable collaborators.¹³² In addition to the expertise of its British collaborators, Nansen hoped that they would ease the participation of the British government into the repatriation scheme. Yet, it proved more complicated than expected. The British government claimed that the Relief Funds was not the adequate institution for fundraising, as, contrary to Nansen, it saw no connection between repatriating prisoners and the reconstruction of Europe. Not only France agreed with the British, but such positions had spillover effects on other countries, which froze their contributions and decided to negotiate directly with the LON. Fortunately, Lord Arthur Balfour, then President of the LON Council, Robert Cecil,

that the sum requested was to be divided among the interested governments as follows: Denmark £35,000, France £115,000, Great Britain £225,000, Holland £55,000, Italy £87,000, Norway £35,000, Sweden £35,000, and Switzerland £48,000. ALON, C1113, Folder 3, The present situation with regard to repatriation of prisoners of war, report by the Secretary General, February 16, 1921.

¹²⁷ ALON, R1705, Cable Drummond to Buxton, July 31, 1920, 42.5850.5850.

¹²⁸ ALON, C1113, Correspondence with Baker, folder 9, Repatriation of Prisoners of War by the Secretary General of the LON. Undated document.

¹²⁹ ACICR, B MIS 33 volume 20, Rapport sur la conférence tenue à Londres, les 19 et 20 août 1920.

¹³⁰ A special account was created at Lloyds Bank and entitled "Dr. Nansen's Prisoners' Repatriation Account." ALON, R1704, Nansen to Chamberlain, London, August 21, 1920, 42.6169.5214.

¹³¹ Philip Noel-Baker Biographical (http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1959/noel-baker-bio.html, last seen August 8, 2015).

¹³² ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Dr. Fridtjof Nansen (Mr. Baker), folder 2, Further note for Dr. Nansen, undated.

and Drummond, unblocked the situation and pushed the British cabinet to release the money.¹³³ The British government then promised the sum required provided that other European countries covered the balance. It also asked that the tensions existing between the former Central Powers and Russia owing to the signing of the exchange agreement be satisfactorily settled.¹³⁴ The French and Italian representatives had to consult their governments and hope that a favorable decision would be made.

Although five governments adhered to the scheme, the money was still insufficient to guarantee the return of POWs before the coming winter. Hence, Nansen decided to wait for the French and Italian governments to gather in October 1920, and appealed for funds to private associations, the Young Men's Christian Association and the Swedish Red Cross, due to the work that they were already implementing for POWs in Siberia. In the meantime, France granted the sum provided that all of the French POWs in Russia were released—something that Nansen ensured took place. Italy did not pay the promised money and obliged Nansen to issue a further appeal—this time addressed to Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Japan, and Spain. Worse than this, Italy's decision made it impossible for Nansen to receive the second half of the British contribution.¹³⁵

The financial side of humanitarian aid was well articulated. Nansen, supported by the LON Council, tried to push governments to unfreeze their contributions and to adhere to his plan, and, at the same time, asked the British government to urge the French and Italian parliaments to allocate the funds. The high commissioner also played the American card. "If only America could step in and save the situation, and again show the world that there [were] still men with human feelings and not merely politicians left, well, that would give some faith in the future."¹³⁶ While writing these words, Nansen was probably bearing in mind that the American Relief Administration, headed by the charismatic figure of Herbert Hoover, was carrying out relief operations on a large scale in several Central and Eastern European countries. In the early 1920s, this semi-governmental organization represented the other side of so-called American isolationism and was greatly involved in Europe.¹³⁷ Although Hoover had already expressed sympathy for the work undertaken by Nansen, he did contribute to the Relief Funds.¹³⁸

¹³³ ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Dr. Fridtjof Nansen (Mr. Baker), folder 2, Baker to Nansen, July 15, 1920.

¹³⁴ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.1735, Repatriation of Prisoners of War, July 28, 1920.

¹³⁵ ALON, C1113, Folder 3, The present situation with regard to repatriation of prisoners of war, report by the Secretary General, February 16, 1921.

¹³⁶ ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Nansen, folder 3, Nansen to Logan, August 1, 1920.

¹³⁷ Patenaude, *op. cit.*

¹³⁸ ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Cramer and Brunel, folder 5, Cable Hoover to Nansen, July 2, 1920.

Again, the United Kingdom made an intervention that had important consequences. In August 1920, the British government eventually agreed to grant 50% (£113,000) of the promised contribution in cash under the same condition: that other governments would supply the money that they had promised.¹³⁹ After months of negotiations, these were the final figures connected with the financing of the repatriation plans in cash: Denmark contributed £35,000, France £115,000,¹⁴⁰ the United Kingdom £113,000, the Netherlands £44,591, Norway £35,000, Sweden £35,893, and Switzerland £45,641. Three countries also contributed in kind: Denmark provided £26,250, Norway £17,500, and Sweden £15,000. The total amount was £324,625.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the American Repatriation Committee made a special contribution of £112,500 toward the expenses of two steamers for the repatriation of POWs from Vladivostok. The sum collected was used for the purchase and forwarding of food, the sanitary installations in the camp of Narva in Estonia, the insurance of ships upon agreement with the British Ministry, and the expenses connected with the ICRC activities, namely camp administration, the expenses of delegates, and sending a delegation to the Black Sea. There was a balance of £142,164 to be used for hiring ships until February 1921, the running expenses of ships, and sanitary installations in Riga. Although the original amount needed for the repatriation of POWs was estimated at £635,000, Lodge stated that the final sum used would not exceed £420,000. With the two additional British and French contributions, the repatriation plans could be carried out and successfully completed.

Thanks to the success of both the diplomatic and financial negotiations, the repatriation plans for POWs were successful. A map (fig. 1), produced by the LON, shows, between 1920 and 1922, thanks to the work of the ICRC and the LON, the cooperation of governments, and the relief operations undertaken by many private, voluntary organizations, nearly 427,886 POWs of 26 different nationalities were eventually repatriated.¹⁴² Of these, 406,091 were repatriated through the Baltic Sea and exchanged through the camp of Narva in Estonia; 12,191 went through the Black Sea; and 9,604 went through Vladivostok.

¹³⁹ ALON, C1111, Correspondence with Nansen, folder 3, Statement regarding the money promised by the various countries for the repatriation of prisoners of war by Nansen, August 17, 1920.

¹⁴⁰ ALON, C1116, Untitled Dossier, Statement showing present position of contributions.

¹⁴¹ ALON, C1113, Correspondence with Baker, folder 3, Gorvin to Nansen, Paris, May 30, 1921. ALON, C1113, Folder 3, The present situation with regard to repatriation of prisoners of war, Report by the Secretary General, February 16, 1921.

¹⁴² ALON, R1703, Nombre total des prisonniers de guerre rapatriés par la Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations avec l'assistance du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge de mai 1920 à juillet 1922, C.585.1922.42.22952.511213.



Fig. 1. Total number of prisoners of war repatriated by the International Committee of the Red Cross and by the League of Nations. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ ALON, LON Picture StR Cab3 Dr1 fol 9 OKS.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has proved why the repatriation of forgotten categories of prisoners of war—POWs from Russia detained in Germany and POWs from the Central Powers detained in Russia—moved from the national to the inter-governmental realm. Since their respective governments did not have the means to organize or to pay for the return of their citizens, in early 1920, the Red Cross was asked to intervene. While the expertise of the ICRC made the extension of its wartime mandate pretty “natural,” other reasons contributed to it: the organization wished to reinforce its role in the Red Cross movement and to strengthen its authority in post-war international relations. To this end, the League of Nations appeared to be a strategic ally. The organization, which had just become operational and which needed to prove itself, chose the repatriation of POWs as its first humanitarian programs, drawing on its members’ moral compassion and political responsibility, and bridging them to larger postwar reconstruction plans. The cooperation between the two organizations was successful, while it shaped each of them in specific ways: the ICRC continued to rely on the work of the Commission of missions and the LON appointed the *ad hoc* high commissioner.

This chapter offers a first analysis of the gendered discourses and representations which emerged from institutional documents and private correspondence exchanged between the “headquarters” and “field.” The Red Cross referred to itself as both a masculine-driven agent and a caring loving mother towards needy prisoners of war, whereas the beneficiaries of humanitarian protection ranged from being helpless victims to looming dangers, or vectors for postwar reconstruction. Similar discourses were formulated by the League of Nations, which appointed Nansen not because he had any experience in international relief but because his fame would help to convince the Soviets to collaborate. Nansen effortlessly bought into the perceived benefits of the self-heroization and put his fame to a greater use, which came at the expense of many other agencies. A plethora of individuals also start making their way into this story, from the Red Cross delegates to British shipping and financial experts, proving that manifold professional skills were involved in the repatriation plans.

Both organizations, their signatories and member states, cared about repatriating prisoners of war as much as they wished to instrumentalize humanitarian aid to strengthen the anti-communist coalition. The most alarming fear was that Russians in Germany might support German communists, that POWs from the Central Powers returning from Russia would bring communism to the heart of the continent, and that repatriated Russians would join the bolsheviks. This chapter claims that the specific context in which the ICRC and the LON operated explains why they stressed the non-political nature of their humanitarian programs. In the

case of POWs, claiming to be non-political allowed ex-enemy states to sit at the same table and made Nansen's trip to Moscow possible, when many other Westerners could not. At the same time, the non-political discourse weakened both the ICRC and the LON in their diplomatic and financial negotiations, since other topics, including disarmament and collective security, were considered more important. All in all, humanitarian aid molded the ICRC and the LON institutionally, created the ground for a diverse expertise to flourish, and laid the impromptu foundation for practices and policies soon to be transferred to Russian refugees.

Crossing Narva: the exchange of prisoners of war at the Estonia–Russia border

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the exchange of prisoners of war from Russia and from the Central Powers thanks to the naval bridge connecting Russia and Germany in the Baltic Sea. It pays attention to the preparation and running of the exchange camp in Narva, on the Estonia–Russia border, where Red Cross delegates interacted with representatives of local and international organizations, the local staff, and repatriated POWs. It examines the daily practices of protection and gendered constructions. It shows that civilians were at times exchanged alongside POWs.

Keywords: Narva, camp, exchange, encounters.

We appeal to the International Red Cross for urgent remedial action in order to free our comrades from distress.
—A group of prisoners of war passing through Narva to the attention of the Red Cross in Geneva.¹

In the spring of 1920, Fridtjof Nansen was busy in securing governments' financial and political support to repatriate prisoners of war, while the Berlin-based delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross was mediating between ex-enemy states. Meanwhile, on April 22, 1920, Eduard Frick, the general delegate to the repatriation of POWs at the ICRC, contacted Estonia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a precise request: he wished to use the fortress of Ivangorod –which sits on the homonymous river across from the city of Narva, meters away from the newly established border with Soviet Russia– to host prisoners of war from the Central Powers travelling home from Siberia². Built in the fifteenth century by Ivan the Great to guard against Germanic invasions, later conquered by Sweden only to be won back by Peter the Great, the fortress of Ivangorod, which is nowadays a

¹ AICRC, MIS 35.5.278, Forwarded to the Committee of the intern. R. C. in Geneva, Major F., 28/VII 20.

² ACICR, B MIS 35.5.6, Délégué général du CICR à monsieur le ministre des Affaires Etrangères de la République Esthoniennne, April 22, 1920.

museum in the Leningrad region in Russia, offered ideal conditions: it was large enough to accommodate hundreds of men; it was protected by massive walls and towers, and its only entry allowed the control of the movements of people and goods.³ Moreover, the Narva region was well connected by trains and boats westward to Central Europe and eastward to Russia, a condition which would ease the exchange of prisoners of war.

Frick's request found responsive ears⁴. Estonia, which had just become independent, was undergoing a difficult post-imperial transition; by agreeing on the humanitarian plan, its new institutions hoped to strengthen their position in world politics.⁵ Indeed, the Great War period had been particularly tumultuous for the small Baltic state. The rivalry between Germany and Russia and the Russian Revolution had created unexpected opportunities: after two centuries of Russian domination, in February 1918 Estonian nationalists proclaimed the independence. This was short-lived, as the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918, allowed Germany to occupy the Baltics, while only a few months later the General Armistice in Europe allowed Russia to take the region back. By then, Estonian nationalists embraced the armed struggle against the Russian invaders in what would be known as the Estonian war of independence. To gain support, the Estonian delegation attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and pressured Western states to recognize the country's independence, while it appealed for military and financial support.⁶ Since Western states still hoped that Russian imperial borders would be restored and paid little attention to the Estonian cause, the Baltic state signed the Peace Treaty of Tartu with Russia on February 2, 1920, by which they mutually recognized each other.⁷

Chapter 2 adopts the prism of the Red Cross and of its delegates to examine the implementation of the repatriation plan for prisoners of war, connecting the decision-making process in Geneva to the operations in the Baltic region and in

³ Kevin O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic State* (Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 2015).

⁴ Francesca Piana, "L'Estonie et l'échange des prisonniers de guerre entre Allemagne et Russie, 1918-1922," *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* 52, vol. 2 (2020): 317-340.

⁵ Vahur Made, "La conception estonienne de la politique étrangère et des relations internationales," *Revue internationale et stratégique* n°61, (2006): 175-86. For humanitarian aid and national reconstruction, see Davide Rodogno, Shaloma Gauthier, Francesca Piana, "Shaping Poland: Relief and Rehabilitation Programmes Undertaken by Foreign Organizations, 1918-1922," in Bernard Struck, Jakob Vogel and Davide Rodogno (eds), *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: the Transnational Networks of Experts (1840-1930)*, 259-278. Kind-Kovács, *op. cit.* Klaus Richter, *Fragmentation in East Central Europe. Poland and the Baltics, 1915-1929* (Kettering: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁶ Charlotte Alston, *Piip, Meierovics & Voldemaras, Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania: Makers of the Modern World* (New York: Haus Pub., 2011): 71-74, 102.

⁷ David S. Foglesong, "The United States, Self-Determination and the Struggle against Bolshevism in the Eastern Baltic Region, 1918-1920," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 26, no. 2 (1995): 107-144.

the fortress of Ivangorod⁸. The chapter starts by explaining how the Red Cross delegates prepared Ivangorod for the humanitarian operation, in cooperation with a plethora of other agents. It then takes a close look to the articulation of the practices of protection for POWs throughout the whole repatriation process and inside the camp, where the unexpected presence of women and children demanded some adaptation. A focus on both the agents and the practices allows illuminating the gendered discourses that they produced on themselves and on each other. From this close approach, the exchange camp of Narva appears to be a space where POWs were both assisted and controlled; despite the attempts to isolate the camp from the surrounding region, many interactions happened across its walls.

2.1 Preparations

After the Allies authorized the transit of POWs through the Baltic Sea, the ICRC negotiated with the countries of departure, transit, and arrival about the use of existing infrastructures, i.e., camps, trains, and boats. In the spring of 1920, Germany and Russia agreed to organize trains and transport POWs from internment camps to the borders. Russian POWs detained in Germany traveled by train northbound to the city of Stettin, where they were hosted in camps and embarked on boats directed to Narva; from there, they would board Russian trains, which had been used for the transport of POWs from Russia. In the opposite direction, prisoners of war from the Central Powers detained in Siberia and Turkestan traveled towards Moscow and St. Petersburg and, from there, to Narva, with a frequency of a train every two days, or to the Finnish camp of Björkö with a train per week.⁹ As their travel was longer, POWs from the Central Powers stayed a few days in the exchange camp of Narva before they embarked on boats to Germany. Once repatriated, they fell under the authority of their respective governments.¹⁰ From 1920 to 1922, the ICRC dispatched its delegates across the whole region.¹¹ Many were in Berlin; others were in Swinemunde and Stettin, where prisoners of war embarked and disembarked; others traveled through Germany to visit camps and organize convoys; more delegates worked in the exchange camps established in Estonia, Finland, and Latvia.¹²

⁸ Martyn Housden, "When the Baltic Sea was a 'Bridge' for Humanitarian Action". Tate, *op. cit.*

⁹ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.27, Interdulag Narwa by Ehrenhold, May 26, 1920.

¹⁰ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.536, Missions & Postes du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge s'occupant des Prisonniers de Guerre, 10/11.5.1920.

¹¹ Peter Huber and Jean-François Pitteloud, "Une puissance protectrice inédite: la « mission » Wehrin du Cizr à Moscou (1920-1938)," *Relations internationales* 143, no. 3 (2011): 89–101.

¹² *Ibid.*, 720–721. ACICR, MIS B 33.5.538, Missions & Postes du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge s'occupant des prisonniers de guerre.

Looking specifically at the maritime route, boats were chartered to go back and forth between Stettin, Narva and Tallinn, Riga (Latvia), and Björko. Since Germany could only provide four boats, the LON called upon the technical expertise of British Lieutenant Colonel L. E. Broome who, in the summer of 1920, developed a plan according to which ex-German ships would be provided to British firms, alongside the economic reparations imposed on Germany and as compensation for the ships that had been destroyed during WWI.¹³ British firms would then use German ships (their number would be increased to 16) to carry cargo and, incidentally, to transport POWs across the Baltic Sea, under the supervision of the British Military Mission in Germany and the Maritime Service of the Reparation Commission.¹⁴ The ICRC and the LON delegated to the German Maritime Authority the adaption of trains and boats to the needs of POWs: dormitories, kitchens, and infirmaries were created, which benefited from electricity and heating as well as from regular delousing.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the ICRC negotiated with the Estonian government.¹⁶ During the Paris Peace Conference, the Baltic state had already offered freedom of movement through its ports and guaranteed that the Narva region would be militarily neutral until January 1, 1922.¹⁷ Once independent, the country wished to “...render any possible service for international peace and cooperation,” in the words of Ants Piip, the important Estonian lawyer, diplomat, and politician who participated in the Paris Peace Conference and who was a member of the Estonian delegation to the Tartu peace negotiations.¹⁸ This proved true for the exchange of POWs: not only did the ICRC use the fortress of Ivangorod for almost two years, but it was also assisted by several institutions: the Estonian Army, the Health Section of the War Ministry, and the Estonian Red Cross helped prepare the fortress; local authorities and the military hospital in Narva treated sick POWs.¹⁹

However, Ants Piip’s position reached no unanimity. The Estonian Ministry of Interior expressed a “strong opposition,” as the fortress could have been transformed into a quarantine station for Estonian returnees from Russia since

¹³ On British naval interests in the Baltic region, see David G. Kirby, “A Great Opportunity Lost? Aspects of British Commercial Policy toward the Baltic States, 1920–1924,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 5, no. 4 (1974): 362–78. Annex III of Part VIII of the Versailles Treaty.

¹⁴ ALON, C1119, Siberian prisoners of war, folder 1, Note on the Shipping Requirements for the Repatriation of Prisoners of War by Nansen.

¹⁵ RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 714.

¹⁶ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/13, Letter to Frick, April 27, 1920.

¹⁷ Alston, *op. cit.*, 84.

¹⁸ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/158, Piip to Drummond, June 23, 1920.

¹⁹ ACICR, MIS B 35.5/1121, Ehrenhold to ICRC, June 27, 1920.

typhus was rampant.²⁰ Indeed, at the end of WWI, Estonia, which counted a bit more than one million inhabitants, was a crossroad of migrations.²¹ Nearly 40,000 Estonians, mainly agricultural colonists and a few war refugees, returned from Russia according to the stipulations of the Treaty of Tartu;²² and 20,000 Russian refugees, civilians displaced by the Russian Civil War, and the followers of white general, Nikolai Yudenich, crossed the border to find asylum.²³ For a few months, former prisoners, Russian refugees, and Estonian returnees happened to live side by side in (self)organized camps in the Narva region²⁴.

This, coped with the widespread fear of communism, explains why the Estonian government advanced a few reasonable conditions. The ICRC was meant to notify “the arrival of the transports with the indication of the number of prisoners” in order not to affect the country’s transport system.²⁵ It was responsible for detecting prisoners of war who were sick with typhus and transferring them to the hospital in Narva.²⁶ To that end, a sanitary cordon was specially built around the fortress, for which the Geneva-based organization agreed to pay.²⁷ Last, the Red Cross engaged to make special arrangements for Russian POWs who, won over by Bolshevism, had fought in the Polish-Soviet War. On their way back to Russia, this special group of prisoners of war were not allowed to stop in Estonia, as local authorities had concerns regarding the country’s national security.²⁸ Internal political tensions, yet not connected to the exchange of POWs, proved the concerns of the Estonian

²⁰ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.27, Interdulag Narwa by Ehrenhold, May 26, 1920. ACICR, MIS B, 35.5/613, Dessonaz to ICRC, November 15, 1920.

²¹ Dariusz Stola, “Forced Migrations in Central European History,” *The International Migration Review* 26, no. 2 (1992): 324–341.

²² Out of 200,000 Estonians in Russia, 106,000 submitted formal requests to repatriate and 81,027 were authorized, yet only 40,000 repatriated. Helen Rohtmets, “The Significance of Ethnicity in the Estonian Return Migration Policy of the Early 1920s,” *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 6 (2012): 895–908.

²³ On minority politics, see Kari Alenius, “Under the Conflicting Pressures of the Ideals of the Era and the Burdens of History: Ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918–1925,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 35, no. 1 (2004): 32–49. Kari Alenius, “Estonian Anti-Semitism in the Early 1920s,” *Zeitschrift Für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 54, no. 1 (2005): 36–55.

²⁴ Piana, “L’Estonie et l’échange des prisonniers de guerre”: 333–338.

²⁵ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/9, Ministre à Monsieur Frick, April 24, 1920.

²⁶ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.6, Délégué général du CICR à monsieur le ministre des Affaires étrangères de la République Esthonienne, 22 avril 1920.

²⁷ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/11, Frick à Monsieur le ministre de la Guerre de la République Esthonienne, April 26, 1920.

²⁸ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, K1, Nansen fil Drummond (Folkeforbundet London), Report no. 1 on the repatriation of prisoners of war by Nansen, May 8, 1920.

government to be real; in December 1924, the Estonian communist party was strong enough to organize a (failed) *coup d'état*.²⁹

In April 1920, the ICRC appointed and officially accredited delegate Otto Ehrenhold “to make all the necessary arrangements with the authorities and competent persons, to make all the necessary expenses.”³⁰ It is essential to reiterate that the Red Cross had no previous experience in building a camp, as it was normally the task of the detaining powers alongside the stipulations of international humanitarian law. This means that Ehrenhold had no precedent and enjoyed a great freedom: he immediately recruited 40 Estonian laborers from Narva, who repaired and furnished the buildings destroyed by the war of independence with doors, windows, tables, chairs, as well as electricity and a phone; and he ordered that the camp’s muddy winter soil be compacted in order to build tents, where prisoners of war could be hosted, and to install moving kitchens where food could be prepared.³¹ The postcard (fig. 2), where we recognize the signature of Major Siegrist for the Red Cross, who soon would take over Ehrenhold’s job, beautifully illustrates how the fortress of Ivangorod was transformed during the time of the exchange plan.

From the many letters and reports that he wrote, we easily understand that Ehrenhold did not work in isolation. Carl Hahn, representing the German office for interned prisoners of war and civilians, assisted the Red Cross in the registration processes and in keeping finances in order.³² The ARC, which had previously conducted anti-typhus and child relief programs in the Baltics, helped disinfect the camp, installed showers with hot water, and prepared delousing stations.³³ The Swedish Red Cross provided medicine and winter clothing.³⁴ And the YMCA dispatched two officers.³⁵ During the two years of the humanitarian operation, there was a steady turnover of delegates. Concentrating solely on the fortress of Ivangorod, Ehrenhold was followed by Lieutenant Colonel Hartmann, Major Siegrist, the one who took the

²⁹ Maurice Carrez, “L’année 1917 en Estonie : entre exaltation patriotique et conflits sociaux,” *Cahiers d’histoire. Revue d’histoire critique* 137 (2017): 75–90.

³⁰ ACICR, B MIS 35/5/8, Instructions for Ehrenhold signed by Frick, April 24, 1920.

³¹ ACICR, MIS B 35.5/1121, Ehrenhold to CICR, June 27, 1920.

³² ACICR, B MIS 35.5/12, Certificat pour Monsieur Carl Hahn, April 26, 1920. ACICR, MIS B 35.5/385, Letter to Dessonnaz, August 25, 1920. See also ACICR, B MIS 33.5.1619, Rapport sur la mission en Lettonie et Esthonie par Frick, July 17, 1920.

³³ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.5, ICRC to Kinowes of the ARC, May 17, 1920. Minaudier, *op. cit.*, 250. On the US government and institutions, see Patenaude, *op. cit.* Griffante, *op. cit.*

³⁴ ACICR, 35.5/150, Carl (prince de Suède et président de la Croix-Rouge Suédoise) et E. Stjernstedt (secrétaire general) to ICRC, June 21, 1920.

³⁵ More generally, Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Rolf Huebner, and Ian R. Tyrrell (eds), *Spreading Protestant Modernity Global Perspectives on the Social Work of the YMCA and YWCA, 1889-1970* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2022).

photograph, Major Ehrard Richter, and Georges Dessonnaz.³⁶ Dr. Woldemar Lange and Dr. Léon Rusca took care of medical work, organized the infirmary, handled the anti-epidemic work, and performed the inspections and disinfection of the POWs and civilians.³⁷ Félix Fabel and N. Fein acted as deputy delegates, while N. Ramseyer and G. Tschan worked as interpreters.³⁸



Fig. 2. Postcard illustrating the fortress of Ivangorod in Estonia. Courtesy of the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.³⁹

As we started to see in Chapter 1, the ICRC delegates were selected because of their professional and personal skills. For instance, Georges Dessonnaz was chosen on account of his previous humanitarian mission and because he spoke Russian, since his mother was a native from Narva.⁴⁰ The mission in Estonia would allow him to later

³⁶ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/1040, de Watteville to the Commissions des Missions, June 18, 1920. ACICR, B MIS 35, Instructions for Dessonnaz, September 29, 1920.

³⁷ L'expérience du Comité international de la Croix Rouge en matière de secours internationaux, 57–58.

³⁸ ACICR, B MIS 33-1, box 18, Délégations du Comité International de la Croix Rouge.

³⁹ ACICR (DR), Post World War I – Narva, Ivangorod fortress. ICRC transit point for Russian prisoners of war repatriated from Germany and German prisoners of war coming from Russia, 1921, V-P-HIST-03054-06

⁴⁰ In 2017, the artist, Agnès Geoffray, inaugurated an exhibit entitled, “Temporary Shelter,” in which she created a dialogue between a photo album that Georges Dessonnaz created on his stay in

assist Russian refugees in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and Bulgaria, as well as needy Ukrainian children.⁴¹ Yet, in Narva, Eduard Frick particularly selected Swiss military men, as they were deemed to infuse humanitarian aid with “discipline, method, and command.”⁴² He also expressed a preference for delegates from the higher ranks of the Swiss army, as he feared that prisoners of war would feel demeaned to receive orders from the lower ranks. Two elements emerge from these examples: the Swiss army had historically served as a basis of cooptation for many delegates, giving further evidence of the tight collaboration of the military and the humanitarian world; rather than marking a caesura between wartime and peacetime practices, the example of Dessonaz suggests that lessons were learnt, and experiences were transmitted from one emergency to another. What significantly changed was the geopolitical and ideological context where the Red Cross happened to intervene.

2.2 Practices of protection

Formally, the Red Cross delegates began protecting POWs in German and Russian internment camps, as well as in the trains and in the boats that brought them home across the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. As Frick-Cramer recollects, “the delegate was responsible for his convoy and had the duty to formally oppose any examination or arrest of any member when crossing the border.”⁴³ The delegate’s status gave him both privileges and responsibilities: for instance, he could refuse that local authorities and the military interfered with his protection activities, yet he was also expected to verify that only the prisoners of war whose names were on the lists would be transported. No prisoner of war was allowed to leave the convoy, as this immediately would lead to the loss of humanitarian protection and to the risk of being arrested by the local police⁴⁴.

The exchange camp was still being prepared as the first convoy of Russian prisoners of war left Stettin for Estonia on May 6, 1920, while the first exchange through Finland took place 15 days later, when the Finnish camp of Björkö was completed.⁴⁵ From the opposite side, prisoners of war from the Central Powers traveled by train to Narva, and, from the roadstead, walked a few kilometers to the fortress of Ivangorod,

Narva and other photographs held in the collections of the *Collection iconographique vaudoise* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLHvefT3nsY>, last seen June 8, 2023).

⁴¹ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.181, de Watteville to Commission des missions, June 18, 1920.

⁴² ACICR, B MIS 33.5.1619, Rapport sur la mission en Lettonie et Esthonie par Frick, July 17, 1920.

⁴³ RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 716, footnote 1.

⁴⁴ Piana, “L’Estonie et l’échange des prisonniers de guerre”: 330–333.

⁴⁵ ALON, R1709, Rapport de la mission du CICR à Berlin pour la liquidation du rapatriement, April 12, 1922, 42.20070.19014.

with invalids transported by track. The Red Cross delegates were quick to realize that Germany and Russia mobilized uneven resources. In Germany, local authorities provided food to, deloused, registered, and gave an identity document to Russian prisoners of war, while the ICRC organized feeding plans during the boat trip.⁴⁶ A rational system was put in place to make sure that repatriation would run smoothly. The authorities attributed a number to each camp and drew by lot the order of repatriation, whereas the delegates verified the number of internees.⁴⁷ In the camps, profession and regions of origin shaped the operations: “mechanics, blacksmiths, locksmiths, and miners” were prioritized in the spirit of postwar reconstruction, in addition to POWs who did not work and who had experienced a longer captivity.

For prisoners of war traveling from Russia, the ongoing civil war complicated their trip and further undermined their health and safety. This is something that the ICRC became acutely aware of when the first exchanged prisoners of war coming from Russia, who stayed in Narva for a few days waiting to join their homes in Central Eastern Europe, wrote hand-written letters and reports to their attention. We do not know whether the ICRC delegates urged them to write these reports or whether former prisoners of war took the initiative. However, the non-negligible number of hand-written documents, the majority in German, stocked at the archives of the ICRC, and the density of the information provided suggest the reasons behind this: the first convoy of prisoners of war felt responsible for the brothers in arms who were still waiting to be repatriated; they expressed outrage for the numerous abuses that they had to endure in breach of the rules of law; and they wanted to reiterate their strong anti-communist credo.

In a long report, written by two prisoners of war, Rudolf P., an Austrian citizen, and Rudolf B., a Hungarian citizen, we read about the long marches that they endured to reach the place of internment where nothing had been prepared to host them and where they had to build the tents and huts. Food provisions were lacking, and insufficient for invalid and sick POWs “As a result of poor heating of the infirmaries, malnourishment and wholly inadequate care during the typhus epidemic of 1919-1920, cases of facial erysipelas and gangrene increased in virtually epidemic fashion...” The lack of communication with their families also impacted the mental health of interned men and the cases of breakdowns increased. Further abuses happened during the long repatriation route. In their own words,

Against the order of the Russian government of 4. April 1920 that no difficulties be put in the paths of prisoners of war bound home by any authorities, it was tolerated by Russian

⁴⁶ RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 716–718.

⁴⁷ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.538, Missions et postes de CICR s'occupant des prisonniers de guerre, May 10-11, 1920.

authorities that all along the train, through the various international compartments, the traveling prisoners of war be hauled out and their documents /: certificates of invalidity, and the equivalent:/ taken away... The following circumstance, moreover, is typical of the departure process: all transports arriving in Moscow and henceforth in Petersburg will be submitted to arbitrary inspection in which the prisoners of war are divided into the 3 groups [...] k—counterrevolutionary, i—indifferent, r—revolutionary. The prisoners of war designated with k and all officers are held back irrespective of the state of their health. According to all that has been said, Russian communism, which sails under the flag of a universal love of mankind, is for the prisoners of war denoted by the words corruption, cold, hunger, and death.⁴⁸

Through this example, despite being portrayed as non-political, the repatriation of formerly fighting men was rather highly political in the eyes of both Russian authorities and repatriated POWs. The ongoing political tensions were confirmed in another letter addressed to the ICRC. Passing through Narva in July 1920, German corporal Karl S., previously detained in the Tashkent region, reported that, in late 1918, prisoners of war were pressured to mobilize in favor of the communist forces. While some of them went along and embraced the struggle, others, himself included, tried to resist. For instance, the POWs in his internment camp voted on a resolution, according to which “the mobilization of the prisoners of war was protested and it was stated that former prisoners of war could only join the Red Army voluntarily but could not be forced to do so.”⁴⁹

In another dramatic letter, Hans S. recounted the travel of nearly 500 invalid prisoners of war, almost all of them over 40 years old, who left Petropavlovsk, in Eastern Russia, directed towards St. Petersburg on their way to Estonia. The journey took nearly three months because the train was first delayed, then stopped, and prisoners of war, despite being invalid, were obliged to work in a cannery. When a new order came that authorized the POWs to continue their trip, only a smaller number continued, 40 out of 500. Eventually, the remaining men were authorized to travel to Moscow and crossed the borders by means of a provisional “prisoner-passport” on their way home.⁵⁰

Reaching Narva might have been a moment of relief. Once in the camp, prisoners of war underwent a codified *iter*: they were counted, deloused, fed, clothed,

⁴⁸ ACICR, MIS B MIS 35.5/135, Handwritten document by Rudolf P., fluv. i. k. k. I. R. 75, Salzburg, Stanffenstr. 17, and Rudolf B., Captain zug. d. Gstbe. III. Honoed Distrikt, Command.—Hungary, Narva July 2, 1920. See also the memoirs by the Austrian Pow Gustav Krist confirms this information. *Prisoner in the Forbidden Land* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938).

⁴⁹ ACICR, MIS B MIS 35.5/279, Handwritten document ‘Bericht’ by Karl S., July 25, 1920.

⁵⁰ ACICR, B MIS 35, Transport d’invalides Petropawlowsk-Petrograd-Narwa, by Hans S., November 18, 1920.

lodged, and registered. Daily practices of protection were implemented by local personnel, including guards, nurses, cooks, and secretaries, whereas counting and registering fell under the responsibility of the delegates and of national authorities.⁵¹ First, the delegate and Hahn for the German government double-checked the number of POWs and crossed them off the lists prepared upon embarkation and disembarkation, to make sure that nobody had escaped. Next was the sanitary and hygienic treatment, which was essential to contain epidemics. POWs were directed towards collective showering and were provided with soap, trimmers, and clean towels.⁵² In the camp there were also pit latrines and lavatories.⁵³ Meanwhile clothes were disinfected through delousing machinery using hot air, while the luggage was stored in a separate room until the moment of departure. Prisoners of war were then distributed in buildings and unheated tents where they were given beds, often without mattresses and bedding. Food distribution closely followed: delegates bought food locally or arranged for it to be sent to Narva and decided on the diet.⁵⁴ Since former combatants had experienced huge deprivation, the food ration was slowly increased not to stress their bodies. It contained 750 grams of bread, 500 grams of meat or fish, 125 grams of fat, 200 grams of wheat, 500 grams of potatoes or rice, and 25 grams of coffee.⁵⁵ To complement the food portion, the YMCA distributed chocolate, sugar, and cigarettes.

After meeting the essential needs began the most difficult task: registration.⁵⁶ International and national officers in Narva interviewed prisoners of war and verified the correspondence between the place of repatriation and the nationality that they had declared upon entrance.⁵⁷ To do so, we might imagine that the ICRC delegates often looked at a map of Central Eastern Europe whose borders had been recently redrawn. On more than one occasion, the ICRC delegates declared that "... the austrian and hungarian prisoners include many people of roumanian,

⁵¹ ACICR, B. MIS 35.5/27, Interdulag Narwa by Ehrenhold, May 26, 1920.

⁵² ACICR, B MIS 35.5.5, Ehrenhold to Kinower, April 21, 1920

⁵³ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/27, Interdulag Narwa by Ehrenhold, May 26, 1920.

⁵⁴ RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 716.

⁵⁵ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.217, Quantité de vivres nécessaires au ravitaillement des prisonniers de guerre centraux pendant leur voyage de la frontière russe a la frontière de leurs pays respectifs, July 29, 1920.

⁵⁶ Tate, *op. cit.* 310–315. On questions of belonging and identify, see Simone Attilio Bellezza, *Tornare in Italia: come i prigionieri trentini in Russia divennero italiani (1914-1920)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016). Simone Attilio Bellezza, "Choosing Their Own Nation: National and Political Identities of the Italian POWs in Russia, 1914-1922," in Judith Devlin, Maria Falina, and John Paul Newman (eds), *World War I in Central and Eastern Europe: Politics, Conflict and Military Experience* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018): 119–137.

⁵⁷ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.27, Interdulag Narwa by Ehrenhold, May 26, 1920.

polish, check, jugoslaves and other nationalities, who's home will not be within the borders of the present austrian and hungarian states."⁵⁸ De Watteville wrote that,

A Hungarian may, for example, announce himself as a Romanian on arriving at the [Narval] camp, be recognized after examination by the competent Stettin Commission, as a national of Czecho-Slovakia, and then at the border, it is established that he is actually Hungarian. These cases occur frequently.⁵⁹

Understandably, the registration was a source of tension. The first preoccupation was financial: not only Germany, through Hahn, called for a correct use of financial resources, but all the governments whose nationals were to be repatriated reiterated that they would pay only for their own citizens.⁶⁰ The ICRC, which was almost bankrupt, could not make mistakes. The second concern pertained to the fear of communism. On paper, it was up to former prisoners of war to decide whether they wanted to repatriate or to stay behind. And yet, the reality on the ground was more complex. If the ICRC took for granted that prisoners from the Central Powers would want to repatriate from communist Russia, it expected that Russian POWs in Central Europe would sign a form in which they declared that they wished to return out of their own free will.⁶¹ In a few cases, the ICRC encouraged Russian prisoners of war who had married German women to locally integrate.⁶² Interestingly, when it came to challenging the Soviet power, the Red Cross proved ready to derogate to the prevailing organizing principle of postwar international relations, according to which the alignment of ethnicity with nationality guarantees world peace.

Another typology of documents helps grasp the practices of protection that the Red Cross put in place: statistics. The delegates kept detailed accounts and lists about mostly anything that was happening during the exchange plan. So we read about the names of the boats which were chartered back and forth through the Baltic Sea; we are told about how many trips each of them took. Numbers continued to be a testament of the Red Cross delegates' work inside the camp, as well as of the lived experience of POWs. By looking at the number of calories that they were given, we have a sense of their diet. By counting the beds, we can easily say that, more

⁵⁸ ACICR, MIS B 33.5/912, Report no. 1 on the repatriation of prisoners of war by Nansen to Drummond, May 28, 1920.

⁵⁹ Tate, *op. cit.*, 314. ALON, C112, de Watteville to Bonner, May 21, 1921.

⁶⁰ ACICR, MIS B 35.5/230, les demandes adressées par les différents représentants allemands, autrichiens, hongrois et des soviets sont les suivantes par Frick, May 20, 1920. Ivan Volgyes, "Hungarian Prisoners of War In Russia, 1916-1919," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 14, no. 1 (1973): 54-85.

⁶¹ ALON, C111, Correspondence with Cramer and Brunel, folder 5, Une mission pour le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge pour les prisonniers de guerre en Allemagne. Undated report.

⁶² RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 718.

than often, Narva was overcrowded. Statistics emerged as a permanent element of postwar humanitarianism. Figure 3 illustrates the boat trips in the Baltic Sea, the number and nationality of the exchanged prisoners of war, as well as the number of civilians.

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Copie der Transportlisten vom Interdulag Narwa . . . Kgf. Zivilgefangene.

No.	Monat: Tag:	Dampfer	Total	Dtsch	Dtsch Uebl.	Ung.	Tsch.	Polen	Ru- mänen	S H S	Ita- liener	Div.	Män- ner	Frau- en	Kin- der
1	Mai 18.	Ceuta	624	398	62	74	36	26	18	10					
2	" 18.	Aamot	522	379	129	15	3	5				1 Türke			
3	" 24.	Kiew	497	492	5										
4	" 26.	Ceuta	915	410	109	186	114	58	28	7	3				
5	Juni 1.	Aamot	595	345		180	48	8	17	1	1				
6	" 4.	Rügen	796	286	145	375	3	5	1	38		1 "			
7	" 5.	Kiew	643	148	172	236	6	35	23	13	10				
8	" 7.	Ceuta	830	184	165	197	64	22	37	43	3	7 Juden	138		
9	" 11.	Regina	559	138	123	158	5	10	8	2		2 "	40	35	18
10	" 13.	Aamot	638	189	106	218	48	56		37			1	1	8
11	" 14.	Rügen	489		157	139	43	16	31	37	6		24	16	8
12	" 16.	Kiew	640	51	152	322	53	4	22	18			12	11	4
13	" 19.	Ceuta	294	87	5	175	37	3	25	25	3		14	15	5
14	" 20.	Regina	340	69	3	151	39	11	15	18	4		14	11	5
15	" 26.	Rügen	742	138	186	161	107	42	35	22	1		43	4	4
16	" 28.	Kiew	668	145	10	128	114	1	74	77	2		38	38	41
17	Juli 3.	Ceuta	607	526	61	8	87	25	18	19	12		34	13	4
18	" 4.	Lisboa	671	35	39	225	122	33	68	22	5	87 T.	18	8	4
19a	" 5.	Lisboa	487	123									38	30	31

MIS 35.5/154, Copie des Transportlisten vom Interdulag Narwa, June 16, 1920

Fig. 3. Copy of the transport list from Interdulag June 16, 1920. Courtesy of the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.⁶³

Despite being rather pragmatic men, the Red Cross delegates occasionally paid attention to the mental health of POWs. They hoped that the beauty of the fortress of Ivangorod would contribute to their healing in view of reintegrating the roles of sons, husbands, and fathers. They also organized recreational activities. An orchestra formed in Tashkent in Uzbekistan, and composed of 30 Austrian, Czech, and Hungarian POWs, organized a concert where it played Brahms and Grieg; a Polish tenor sang Rigoletto; and a dancer, a painter, and a magician also performed. On Christmas Eve of 1920, the Red Cross organized a dinner and a dance around a festive tree; on December 26 of the same year, the YMCA organized a small party for the prisoners who arrived the day before from Russia, giving them some

⁶³ ACICR, B MIS, 35.5/154, Copie des Transportlisten vom Interdulag, Narwa, June 16, 1920.

chocolate as a present.⁶⁴ It was believed that keeping spirits high was beneficial to the returning men.

2.3 Practices in becoming

Practices of protection were not fixed but becoming. A few months after the beginning of the exchange, ICRC delegates started leaving on regular inspection trips. From the outset, it appeared that the exchange camp was often overcrowded: in August 1920, it hosted 3,000 persons, while the normal capacity of the camp was 1,200.⁶⁵ This was a problem, as the presence of many POWs jeopardized practices of protection, since food and sleeping places were insufficient.⁶⁶ However, the biggest concern pertained to the dire sanitary conditions and to the risk of epidemics.⁶⁷ A report written by the medical delegate, Dr. Lange, stresses a disheartening truth: no prisoner could be forced to bath or delouse. Dr. Lange observed that the weakest and sickest POWs, those who more likely than not were carriers of diseases, often refused to undress due to the cold Baltic weather. Moreover, only one-fifth agreed to have their clothes disinfected and not all of the clothes were properly washed, as heavy, thick coats or blankets could not go through delousing machines. It was not uncommon that POWs found lice infected with typhus on their bodies only a few hours after showering.⁶⁸ The gravity of the situation can be measured by Dr. Lange being ready to discontinue his work, had the camp not been reorganized, as he did not want to be considered responsible for an epidemic outbreak.⁶⁹ The most immediate measure was the construction of a hospital within the camp.

In the fall of 1920, another major problem materialized: boats had a hard time coming closer to the coast and disembarking POWs due to the heavy sea in winter-time. To avoid POWs waiting on the boat's deck in the cold, rain, and snow, Major Siegrist designed an alternative route where travel by railway was preferred to sea transport; moreover, the harbor of Tallinn, which was bigger than the one of

⁶⁴ ACICR, B MIS 35, Rapport du camp de passage Narva, décembre 1920 par Dessonnaz.

⁶⁵ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.366 bis, Résumé du rapport demi-mensuel du Major Siegrist, August 16, 1920.

⁶⁶ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.395, Rapport au Comité International de la Croix Rouge, mission de Berlin, par Capitaine Berdez, August 28, 1920.

⁶⁷ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.2809, Rapport sur la mission du ICRC chargée d'assister à la conférence de Kowno du 12 au 14 septembre 1920, d'inspecter les camps de passage de l'ICRC en Lituanie et en Estonie, déléguées Edmond Boissier et Otto Ehrenhold.

⁶⁸ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.409, Traduction du rapport du Dr. Lange au chef du camp de Narva, September 21, 1920.

⁶⁹ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/544 bis, Légende pour l'hôpital projeté par Dr. Lange. ACICR, B MIS 35.5/596, Rapport sur l'activité du camp du 1 au 31 octobre 1920 par Dessonnaz, November 6, 1920.

Narva, offered adequate space for maneuvering. Russian trains transporting POWs from the Central Powers would arrive, as before, in Narva. Following the normal procedures, POWs would be cleaned, deloused, and fed in the fortress. Meanwhile, the trains would be disinfected and then transport POWs to Tallinn, where they were embarked directing for Stettin.⁷⁰ In general, the transport system was far from efficient: Russian trains were often late to the embarkation point only to see that the boats had already gone; 280 trips took place across the Baltic Sea in both directions which could have reduced to 201, had the trains arrived on time.⁷¹

We should not forget that, at the time of the exchange, regional wars for the determination of states' borders in Central and Eastern Europe complicated the movements of people. Returning POWs "competed" over the use of trains with Russian military who were called to serve in the war against Poland.⁷² A few months later, the ICRC exchanged Bolshevik troops that had fought against Poland and had turned out to be disarmed in German camps. To do so, it mediated between Estonians and Russians: the former authorized the transport on the condition that the Bolsheviks took down the "red badges"; the latter stressed that they were not POWs but soldiers returning from internment. It required the mediation of the ICRC to ease the tensions between Estonia and Russia and move on with the transport.⁷³

There is at least another adaptation that, at first, took the ICRC by surprise: among the exchanged persons were civilians, difficult to recognize due to the mixing and matching of civilian and military clothing. For instance, at the end of July 1920, the boat, *Ceuta*, transported 735 POWs of different nationalities and 445 civilians, of whom 443 were Germans.⁷⁴ As historian Martyn Housden writes, German civilians constituted the largest number; born in Russia from German colonists who had moved east in the nineteenth century to find available lands, they decided to return "home" as they felt increasingly unwelcomed in Russia.⁷⁵ Furthermore, among the exchanged civilians was a high number of women—who had married POWs from the Central Powers—and their small children.⁷⁶ The ICRC

⁷⁰ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.2462, *Projet d'organisation pour le rapatriement des prisonniers de guerre par l'Esthonie durant l'hiver*.

⁷¹ RCICR, Frick-Cramer, *op. cit.*, 714.

⁷² ACICR, B MIS 35.5.513, Dessonnaz to ICRC, October 5, 1920.

⁷³ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/616, Dessonnaz to ICRC, November 15, 1920.

⁷⁴ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/258, *Interdulag befördert durch "Ceuta" nach Stettin* by Siegrist.

⁷⁵ Housden, "When the Baltic Sea was a 'Bridge' for Humanitarian Action": 75.

⁷⁶ On gender and captivity, see Fabien Théofilakis, "La sexualité du prisonnier de guerre Allemands et Français en captivité (1914-1918, 1940-1948)," *VING Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 99, no. 3 (2008): 203–219. Lisa M. Todd, "'The Soldier's Wife Who Ran Away with the Russian': Sexual Infidelities in World War I Germany," *Central European History* 44, no. 2 (2011): 257–278. Iris Rachamimov, "The Disruptive Comforts of Drag: (Trans)Gender Performances among Prisoners of War In Russia, 1914–1920," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 2 (2006): 362–82. Brian K. Feltman,

then hastily adjusted the practices of protection, by providing special food provisions for babies and toddlers, and by equipping boats and trains with powdered milk and lining.⁷⁷ Inside the camp, women and children were normally hosted in brick buildings instead of in tents, and they underwent separate delousing procedures.⁷⁸ As it had been the case in wartime, where the lines between the military and civilians were blurred, as it was also in peacetime.⁷⁹

Last, proof of the embeddedness of the exchange camp in the surrounding territory is the many transactions that happened between returning men and the local population. Items, including sausages and cigarettes, were sold at high prices to prisoners of war who walked into the fortress; wood and other material were stolen from the fortress by means of holes opened in its walls. To this, the ICRC reacted by increasing the number of guards. Yet, it soon realized that containment measures had little effect, as it was often some of the camp's employees who let people into the camp after the lights went out.⁸⁰ From these petty transactions, it appears that prisoners of war were better off in the camp than the Estonian population living in Narva, where food was scarce and expensive. Hence, the fortress of Narva Ivangorod emerges as a space of exception—where a specific legal system was applied and where peculiar practices of protection were put in place—as well as a space of manifold movements and interactions.

2.4 Encounters in the camp

The history of humanitarian aid is one of persons crossing paths, talking, and observing each other. The fortress of Ivangorod was a crossroad for international officers, national representatives, military authorities, local staff, and repatriated prisoners of war and civilians. Some of the actors left written and visual sources

“‘We Don’t Want Any German Off-Spring After These Prisoners Left Here’: German Military Prisoners and British Women in the First World War,” *Gender & History* 30, no. 1 (2018): 110–130. Lena Radauer, “Wedding the ‘Enemy’. Unions between Russian Women and ‘German’ Prisoners of the First World War,” in Adrienne Edgar and Benjamin Frommer (eds), *Intermarriage from Central Europe to Central Asia: Mixed Families in the Age of Extremes* (University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 255–280.

⁷⁷ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.223, de Watteville to Commission des missions, August 4, 1920.

⁷⁸ ICRC Archives (ARR), Après-guerre 1914-1918 – Narva, forteresse Ivangorod. Station de passage du CICR pour les prisonniers de guerre russes rapatriés d’Allemagne et les prisonniers allemands venant de Russie, September 1920, V-P-HIST-03050-23.

⁷⁹ ACICR, B MIS 33.5.141, de Watteville to Commission of missions, Berlin, April 12, 1920.

⁸⁰ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.673, Rapport du camp de passage Narva décembre 1920 par Dessonnaz, January 5, 1921.

behind, which makes it easier to account for their voices. Many more appeared, as in a watermark, in the words or in the statistics written by the Red Cross delegates.

As we have started to see, the Red Cross delegates were in the privileged position to leave a wealth of sources. A common narrative emerges: the delegate who overcomes obstacles, takes risks, and shows perseverance, for which he mobilizes professional skills, as well as Christian and Swiss values. Delegates were often overworked, busy from early morning to midnight, with barely any time for themselves; being in Narva represented a break not only from their professions but also from their families, whom they did not bring along.⁸¹ Only Dessonaz traveled with his wife Zénaïde, who assisted him on a voluntary basis and, later on, with the title of “assistant delegate.”⁸² Differently from the other delegates, the couple did not stay in the camp of Narva but rented a hotel room, where there were no windows nor electricity, and where the mattress was “hard as stone.”⁸³ In a personal letter, Dessonaz shared details about his life on mission. Writing about the heavy workload, he reported:

I have to tell you that I'm not complaining about it at all, because the work is interesting since it's varied. We see a bunch of persons, some thank you, others ye... at you perfectly, it's charming! There are heads that we would like to hang, others to kiss (obviously I am talking about women's heads!). It's a real cinema.⁸⁴

Estonian authorities and civilians emerge as both cooperative and competitive from the archival sources. The Red Cross and the League of Nations often praised the enlightened attitude of Estonia's authorities which had authorized the exchange. Throughout the two years, Estonian institutions offered logistical, medical assistance, and they guaranteed the cooperation of its institutions. However, the Red Cross delegates did not spare harsh words of criticism. To de Watteville, it was “impossible to get anything in Estonia without giving bribes,” suggesting the existence of a widespread system of corruption.⁸⁵ Dessonnaz complained that the local population would steal anything, even the iron steps from the trains which transported prisoners of war.⁸⁶ These episodes reiterate the civilizing posture of the Swiss institution, for which Estonia occupied a middle position between the superior West and backward Soviet Russia.

⁸¹ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.123, de Watteville to Commission of missions, July 10, 1920.

⁸² Troyon and Palmieri, *op. cit.*, 106–107.

⁸³ ACICR, B MIS 35.5.518, Personal letter from Dessonnaz to Oberholzer and Temmel, November 17, 1920.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/159, de Watteville to Commission of missions, July 13, 1920. ACICR, B MIS 35.57694, Dessonnaz to ICRC, December 11, 1920.

⁸⁶ ACICR, B MIS 35.57694, Dessonnaz to ICRC, December 11, 1920.

The Red Cross had a similar ambivalent attitude towards the representatives of the governments whose nationals were repatriated. According to Dessonnaz, it was important “to be armed with a universal mistrust not only vis-à-vis the Russian representatives but also the Estonians and with most of the Germans.”⁸⁷ For instance, Hahn was accused of favoring the interests of the German government and to lack neutrality in his actions.⁸⁸ These rivalries convinced Dessonnaz of the necessity to hang the Red Cross logo—a red cross on a white flag—over the camp’s entrance in order to make sure that prisoners of war should be grateful to the Genevan institution and not to the German mission.⁸⁹ Other tensions also emerged from the difficult cohabitation of many institutions in such a close space.⁹⁰ During an inspection trip, Captain Berdez for the ICRC wrote that “the German organs, the YMCA and our mission [were] in rivalry.”⁹¹ The Red Cross lamented that the ARC had promised hygienic material that it was unable to deliver and that a large truck used for the transport of sick prisoners of war was taken away with no explanation.

While the Red Cross delegates intermittently interacted with national and international institutions, it was with prisoners of war that they lived shoulder to shoulder. The fact that many POWs left detailed documents behind, where they recounted the most difficult and delicate moments spent in captivity, suggests that a relationship of trust was built between the two groups. And yet, the Swiss delegate and the returning prisoner could not have experienced warfare more differently. During the war, the delegate, who was a citizen of a neutral country, did not fight, and neither experienced the trenches, the surrender, or internment; he did not fear for his family, waiting for letters that took weeks to arrive; he did not have to fight for his own survival.⁹² The delegate’s wartime “inactivity” stood in sharp contrast to the combatant’s masculinity, patriotism, and sense of sacrifice. During the repatriation plan, the Swiss delegate regained his masculinity and sense of purpose by assisting needy men, who depended on foreign relief, were tired,

⁸⁷ ACICR, MIS B 35-5/385, Letter to Dessonnaz, August 25, 1920.

⁸⁸ Ibid. See also ACICR, B MIS 33-5.1619, Rapport sur la mission en Lettonie et Esthonie par Frick, July 17, 1920. “It must be emphasized more and more on each occasion that our interdulages are not German camps and that, on the contrary, the proportion of Germans who pass there is low. The presence of a Soldatenheim is not admissible unless he is absolutely subordinate to the delegate of the C.I.C.R. and that he also deals with all nationalities”.

⁸⁹ ACICR, B MIS 35, Report by Dessonnaz, August 4, 1920.

⁹⁰ ACICR, B MIS 33-5.1619, Rapport sur la mission en Lettonie et Esthonie par Frick, July 17, 1920. ACICR, B MIS 33-5/1707, Baker to Cramer, July 20, 1920.

⁹¹ ACICR, B MIS 35-5.395, Rapport au Comité International de la Croix Rouge, mission de Berlin, par Capitaine Berdez, August 28, 1920.

⁹² Pälvi Conca-Pulli, *Soldats au service de l'ordre public: la politique du maintien de l'ordre intérieur au moyen de l'armée en Suisse entre 1914 et 1949* (Neuchâtel: Université de Neuchâtel, 2003).

undernourished, and anxious.⁹³ However, returning prisoners of war were not simply helpless victims. The report-writing suggests that some denounced abuses in captivity and on the repatriation route; others showed camaraderie towards their fellow soldiers; the majority wished to prove their anti-communist credo. These examples prove that gendered constructions were not fixed but becoming constantly mobilized, (re)negotiated, and, at times, instrumentalized.



Fig. 4. Photograph of the local staff in Narva. Courtesy of the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.⁹⁴

There is at least another actor who is worth mentioning, the local staff. It would be interesting to know how the local staff perceived the chaotic interactions of so many men, women, and children in the camp or how they navigated the babble of languages. Did they consider the Red Cross delegates to be hierarchical or cooperative? From the evidence (or the lack thereof) that we have, delegates were certainly dismissive. At the beginning of the exchange, we are left to know that they employed six guards, six persons, including nurses, to supervise the delousing procedures

⁹³ Elsa Brändström, *Among Prisoners of War In Russia & Siberia* (London: Hutchinson, 1929).

⁹⁴ AICRC (ARR), Post World War I – Narva, Ivangorod fortress. Personnel working at ICRC transit point for Russian prisoners of war repatriated from Germany and German prisoners of war coming from Russia, July 1920, V-P-HIST-03058-23.

and to provide medical assistance, one cook and four kitchen helpers, and three secretaries. The number of the local staff decreased in time. However, no contracts are left, no letters written by the members of the local staff are to be found. If it were not for a few scant references and for a photograph (fig. 4), we would be left with the wrong impression that the ICRC delegates worked in a vacuum.

How can it be explained that the local staff were almost erased from the records? This was due to a combination of gender, class, and racist biases. It is possible that international officers dismissed mundane practices of care, since they were implemented by persons with little or no education, and who probably did not speak foreign languages.⁹⁵ We cannot exclude that the delegates extended a certain civilizational posture towards the Estonian local staff too, on the account that some of them might have participated in illicit exchanges of items across the fortress's walls. With regard to women, either cooks or nurses, their feminine occupations *de facto* subordinated them to the professionalism of the men in the mission. The Red Cross delegates did not come even remotely close to acknowledge that, without the local staff, there would have been no exchange, let alone did they realize that foreign relief perpetuated a gendered, classist, and racialized view of the world.

2.5 Conclusion

At the end of the exchange, a total of 251,703 Russians repatriated from Germany, including 198,486 POWs, 41,712 internees of the Red Army, as well as a number of Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Poles, Austrians, Czechoslovakians, and Hungarians. From the opposite side, 154,388 POWs from the Central Powers were repatriated from Russia, with Austrians, Czechoslovakians, Hungarians, Germans, Polish, Rumanians, and Yugoslavians being the largest groups.⁹⁶ The humanitarian operation impacted the main actors involved in specific ways. Regarding Estonia, in October 1922, politician Jaan Tõnisson expressed joy that “[his] homeland had served as an intermediate point, where after a long and painful captivity each prisoner felt free again and with joy and often with tears in his eyes went to his beloved

⁹⁵ ACICR, B MIS 33.5/785, Wildbolz à la commission des missions du CICR au sujet de la situation de la mission du C.I.C.R. auprès des camps de p.g. russes en Allemagne, May 26, 1920.

⁹⁶ ALON, R1703, Rapport du Dr. Nansen, haut-commissaire de la Société des Nations sur le rapatriement des prisonniers de guerre soumis au Conseil le 1 septembre 1922, 42.22952.5213. Austrians, 16,961; Americans, 7; Armenians, 2; Belgian, 1; British, 20; Bulgarians, 50; Czechoslovakians, 27,961; Danish, 14; Estonians, 11; French, 8; Germans, 33,903; Greeks, 4; Hungarians, 36,097; Japanese, 1; Italians, 1,417; Latvians, 11; Lithuanians, 11; Polish, 7,961; Rumanians, 18,140; Russians, 55; Swedish, 18; Swiss, 1,162; Turks, 113; Ukrainians, 134; Yugoslav, 11,159; total, 154,388.

homeland.”⁹⁷ At the end of the exchange, the ICRC donated delousing machines and other material to the Estonian government, which used them to bath Estonians coming from Russia and Russian refugees.⁹⁸ The repatriation of POWs was pivotal to present the newly Estonian state as a reliable partner in the eyes of the West as well as to strengthen internal state-building processes. Estonia became a member of the LON in 1921.

For the ICRC, which was experiencing harsh competition both from within and outside the Red cross movement, returning POWs was pivotal to strengthening its political authority and to restoring its finances. As for the LON, participating in the planned migration of POWs allowed testing the extent of its newly established mandate and of its power in inter-governmental diplomacy. Interestingly, forms of cooperation and competition were not mutually exclusive. In the summer of 1922, announcing the imminent end of the exchange plan, the ICRC sent a letter to the LON where it reiterated that its delegates should be thanked for the success of the operation.⁹⁹ At the letter’s receiving end, the LON wanted to avoid that “the respective roles of the C.I.C.R. and the League should be depicted in exactly the light in which they [were] depicted in [the] letter”; Nansen was then pressured to act in advance and thank the ICRC, hence implying that the LON had had the operation’s lead.¹⁰⁰ All of these looked like void ploys for an operation that was indeed co-directed.

By looking at humanitarian diplomacy and at mundane practices of protection in the fortress of Ivangorod and in the surrounding region, we start observing a multiplicity of actors, the overlapping discourses that were forged on themselves and on the “other,” and the different meanings that they attributed to the space where they operated. This book claims that the actors which participated in the exchange plan were far more diverse than what the literature has so far acknowledged: ICRC delegates, humanitarians from other organizations, representatives of national (military) authorities, members of the local staff, and POWs need to be studied in the same framework if we want to form a sounded idea of their experiences.

While the archival sources at my disposal do not allow exploring agencies evenly, they suggest how the encounters are rich in analytical possibilities. The ICRC delegates self-represented as being in command, alongside an active masculinity, yet they at times lingered in describing the nurturing practices that they were called to perform. As for POWs, they were alternatively depicted as weak and dependent on foreign aid, carriers of political and epidemiological threats, or as vectors of postwar reconstruction. From the reports penned by returning POWs

⁹⁷ ACICR, MIS B 35.5/1123, Tönisson to Ador, October 2, 1922.

⁹⁸ ALON, R1705, Brunel to Nansen, March 21, 1922, 42.19666.5896.

⁹⁹ ALON, R1703, Paul de Gouttes to Nansen, July 19, 1922, 42.22139.5213.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1703, Letter to Baker, August 1, 1922, 42.22139.5213.

who were stationed for a few days in Narva, we see how they capitalized on these constructions to receive additional protection. Far from being passive, POWs often felt responsible for the fellows still in Russia, lobbied for their liberation, and, in doing so, they prepared to return to their families. With regard to the local staff, in addition to providing evidence of its crucial work, this book starts unpacking the discriminations which contributed to its marginalization. All in all, the internationally managed exchange of forgotten groups of POWs through Estonia turned out to be a laboratory to test innovative humanitarian policies and practices. A number of factors, if not a favorable context, were decisive for its success. This explains why the experiment was extended to the protection of Russian refugees a few months later, yet with far more mixed results.

PART II

The internationalization
of the Russian refugee
question

From prisoners of war to Russian refugees: continuity of policies

Abstract

This chapter engages with the reasons why the humanitarian responses to the forced displacement of white Russians, who had fought against the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, became a matter of inter-governmental intervention. Their sheer number and dire conditions, the geography of the displacement in fragile post-imperial regions, and the measures of denationalization adopted by Soviet Russia laid the foundation for inter-institutional cooperation, with the establishment of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees at the League of Nations.

Keywords: white Russians, denationalization, High Commissariat for Russian refugees, anti-communism, refugee politics.

If the former prisoners of war waiting to return to their motherland were worthy of the interest which the League of Nations displayed in them, surely also the Russian refugees, without protection, without country, likewise victims of the scourge of war, will not be abandoned by the League of Nations to their tragic fate.¹
—Memorandum by Gustave Ador to the League of Nations.

[The Russian refugee question] is a problem which affects the direct material interests of a great number of the Governments of Europe, and which indirectly is of great importance to the reconstruction of Russia and, through Russia, to the reconstruction of the prosperity of Europe and of the world.²
—Fridtjof Nansen.

During the Greater War, Russians experienced massive migrations. Nearly six million escaped from the Central Powers' armies that were advancing from the West; to cope with their needs, the Russian government established an internal governance

¹ 2 League of Nations O. J. 225 1921. Memorandum from the Comité International de la Croix Rouge at Geneva to the Council of the League of Nations, signed by Ador, February 28, 1921.

² 3 League of Nations O. J. 1134 1922, Report by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, high commissioner of the LON to the fifth committee of the Assembly, September 15, 1922.

of assistance and resettlement.³ Once the war was over, from 1918 to 1922, up to two million Russians crossed states' borders to find asylum "at the doors of Europe," in Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Bosphorus, and the Far East.⁴ Referred to as "white Russians," since they were enrolled in the White armies during the Russian Civil War, they left in unplanned waves and often brought their families with them.⁵ The first group moved westwards from Ukraine, occupied by the Central Powers and then by the Soviets in 1918. A few months later, more Russians reached Poland and the Baltic region. In March 1920, General Anton Ivanovich Denikin and his followers, won over by the Bolsheviks, were forced to evacuate from Novorossiysk to the Bosphorus, thanks to the assistance of the British navy. In November 1920, nearly 150,000—General Piotr Wrangel's followers—frantically moved from the Black Sea port of Odessa again to the Bosphorus and were assisted by the French navy. Famine in Ukraine, the spread of typhus, and a broken economy contributed to create further flows.

As John Hope Simpson writes, under the label of Russian refugees, we find a heterogeneous group. Ethnically, Russians were the majority, yet we also find Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Turks, Georgians, Ukrainians, Tartars, and Calmucks. Socially, there were political, military, and civil emigrants, officials, and civilians who happened to find themselves in newly created independent states, or Jewish refugees from Ukraine.⁶ For instance, most Russian refugees who reached the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes came from urban settings instead of the countryside; men outnumbered women (they were 69%), yet there were also many unaccompanied children. In the Balkans, Russians were mainly young, as 66% of them were aged between 19 and 45. While a few traveled in family settings, almost

³ Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking*.

⁴ Numbers are contested. Russian organizations abroad and the American State Department counted two million Russian refugees. ACICR, C.R.87 5/70, Copy of Cable Received from ARC Headquarters, Washington, March 4, 1921. ACICR, C.R.87 5/122, Prince Lvoff to da Cuhna, May 24, 1921. After a few months, based on the reports that they were able to collect, Russian organizations decreased their stated number of Russians to one and a half million. ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922-1924, volume 8, Mémorandum sur la question des réfugiés russes présenté au Conseil de la Société des Nations par la Conférence des Organisations Russes réunie à Paris en août 1921.

⁵ On Russian migration, see Tatiana Schaufuss, "The White Russian Refugees," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (1939): 45–54. Robert H. Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920-1945* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988). Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Norman Stone and Michael Glenny, *The Other Russia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990). Paul Robinson, *The White Russian Army in Exile, 1920-1941* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2002). Marc Raeff, "Recent Perspectives on the History of the Russian Emigration (1920-40)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History* 6, no. 2 (2005): 319–334.

⁶ Simpson, *op. cit.*, 83–84.

two-thirds of Russian men were unmarried. There were more educated than illiterate Russians.⁷

Not only were Russians numerous and in dire conditions, but they were also displaced in what international humanitarian organizations perceived to be unsettled regions, due to ongoing warfare, because of the post-imperial transition and of new states' borders. While Central European states extended limited welfare programs to Russians, including food, shelter, clothing, and emergency medicine, they lacked the economic resources and the political willingness to do more.⁸ Coupled with the fragility of new governments which engaged in massive state-building processes, international organizations were left space to intervene: Russian organizations such as the exiled Russian Red Cross and the Zemgor, American organizations including the ARC and the YMCA, the societies of the Red Cross movement, the UISE and the SCF—just to quote the main ones—attempted to meet the immediate needs of displaced Russians.⁹ Most of them were already operating in Central and Eastern Europe on behalf of destitute civilians, and children among them, and extended their programs to Russian refugees.

Chapter 3 interrogates why and how the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Labour Organization, and the League of Nations engaged into the Russian refugee question. The ICRC was drawn to protect Russians out of humanitarian compassion, inter-institutional competition, and prestige—alongside its programs for prisoners of war. In the eyes of the ILO, dealing with the Russian displacement, even from afar, was an opportunity to collect data on Soviet Russia,

⁷ William Chapin Huntington, *The Homesick Million, Russia-out-of-Russia*, (Boston: Stratford Co., 1933): 25–28.

⁸ For Russian refugees in specific countries, see Alexandra Fortounatto-Behr, *Les réfugiés russes en Allemagne 1918-1925, histoire d'un accueil forcé* (Dissertation, Paris: 2003). Hélène Menegaldo, *Les Russes à Paris: 1919-1939* (Paris: Éd. Autrement, 1998). Catherine Klein-Gousseff, *L'Exil russe: la fabrique du réfugié apatride, 1920-1939* (Paris: CNRS, 2008). James E. Hassell, "Russian Refugees in France and the United States between the World Wars," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series 81, no. 7 (1991): 1–96. Elena Chinyaeva, "Russian Émigrés: Czechoslovak Refugee Policy and the Development of the International Refugee Regime between the Two World Wars," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 8, no. 2 (1995): 142–162. Sam Johnson, "'Communism in Russia Only Exists on Paper': Czechoslovakia and the Russian Refugee Crisis, 1919–1924," *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 03 (2007): 371–394. Elena Chinyaeva, *Russians Outside Russia: The Émigré Community in Czechoslovakia 1918-1938* (R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001). On cultural aspects, see Catherine Gousseff and Anne Sossinskaïa, *Les Enfants de l'exil: récits d'ecoliers russes après la Révolution de 1917* (Paris: Bayard, 2005). Robert Chadwell Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigrés in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972). John Slatter (ed.), *From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917* (London, England; Totowa, N.J.: F. Cass, 1984).

⁹ ACICR, Correspondence C.R.87.2, Annexes au mémorandum présenté par le CICR au Conseil de la SDN sur les réfugiés russes, February 28, 1921.

whose borders were difficult to cross, and to test its technical expertise on international migration and on unemployment.¹⁰ Regarding the LON, it felt morally and politically responsible for displaced Russians, as two of its member states, France and Great Britain, had supported the White armies in the Russian Civil War; the inter-governmental organization understood their displacement as a consequence of the Great War, as it did for POWs, and connected humanitarian relief to peace and reconstruction. By looking at inter-institutional connections and by situating the three organizations in the interaction with governments and private, voluntary organizations, this chapter shows that expert knowledge and empirical data shaped the contour of refugee politics. It also demonstrates that gendered, classist, and racist biases permeated humanitarian protection, determined who was deemed to be worthy of protection, and produced a plurality of discourses around the providers and the recipients of assistance—discourse which still much informs our understanding of forced migrations.

3.1 The ICRC and Russian refugees

Alongside POWs, children and people stricken by epidemics or starvation, Russian refugees were the “war victims” towards whom the ICRC wished to extend its peacetime mandate, as it was stated in the 174th circular of late November 1918.¹¹ News on the conditions of displaced Russians reached Geneva from Europe and beyond. In the words of delegate, Georges Dessonnaz, stationed in Narva, “life was rough for the Russians who lived in Estonia, without work, without means of livelihood, without news of their homeland.” Those who repatriated often did so at the risk of their life.¹² Dessonnaz also wrote:

Most of them live miserably and accept any job, provided they can survive and not be driven out of here. A general’s daughter serves here as a *sommelier*; an officer sings there, a colonel is a sawmill guard. Many come to our office hoping to find a place in our camp, but our employees do not want to abandon their positions.¹³

¹⁰ AILO, R100/1, Note sur l’intervention du Bureau International du Travail dans les questions russes, undated.

¹¹ On the ICRC and Russian refugees, see Corine Nicolas, “Le CICR au secours des réfugiés russes 1919-1939”, *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 95, no. 3 (2009): 13–24. Piana, *L’humanitaire d’après-guerre*. Kimberly A. Lowe, “Navigating the Profits and Pitfalls of Governmental Partnerships: The ICRC and Intergovernmental Relief, 1918–23,” *Disasters* 39, no. 2 (2015): 204–218.

¹² ACICR, B MIS 35, Dessonnaz to ICRC, September 30, 1920.

¹³ ACICR, B MIS 35.518, Personal letter from Dessonnaz to Oberholzer and Temmel, November 17, 1920.

Before the headquarters of the ICRC decided whether to extend its humanitarian protection to Russians, delegates took personal initiatives. Solicited by the SCF, in November 1920, Dessonaz managed the distribution of clothing and food to Russian refugee children, who had arrived with the followers of general Yudenich in Narva;¹⁴ he would soon coordinate food distribution beyond Narva in other Estonian cities.¹⁵

News on the conditions of Russian refugees also reached the ICRC from the outside, proving the collecting nature of the archives of the international humanitarian organizations. The Russian Red Cross and the Zemgor¹⁶—which emerged in coincidence with late-nineteenth-century social reforms, and which followed their compatriots in exile—shared detailed reports on the number, on the dislocation, and on the conditions of refugees.¹⁷ Georges Lodygensky for the Russian Red Cross wrote that Russian refugees in Finland were mistreated and, when they decided to voluntarily repatriate, were often met by Bolshevik gunfire. He also denounced that among the Russians who happened to be in Estonia, there were a group of intellectuals who were employed in swamp forests, a type of work for which they were not physically skilled, and which risked undermining their health.¹⁸ According to Lodygensky, waiting for long-term solutions to be internationally agreed upon, Russians who were concentrated in areas going through a delicate post-imperial transition could be temporarily resettled elsewhere and set in productive employment. Once the political context would calm down, hopefully in favor of the White armies, Russians would return through “the apparatus created for POWs” by the ICRC. Lodygensky was one of the many international officers who suggested the use

¹⁴ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/618, Dessonaz to Frick, November 25, 1920.

¹⁵ ACICR, B MIS 35, Dessonaz to ICRC, May 31, 1921.

¹⁶ Catherine Gousseff and Olga Pichon-Bobrinsky, “Avant-Propos,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 667–671. Olga Pichon-Bobrinsky, “Action publique, action humanitaire pendant le premier conflit mondial,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 673–698. Dzovinar Kévonian, “L’organisation non gouvernementale, nouvel acteur du champ humanitaire,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 739–756. Catherine Gousseff, “Le placement des réfugiés russes dans l’agriculture,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 757–776. Paul Robinson, “Zemgor and the Russian Army in Exile,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 4 (2005): 719–737.

¹⁷ ACICR, C.R.87 5/16, Note sur la question des réfugiés russes by Frick, January 24, 1921. ACICR, C.R.87 5/9, S. Sklabinsky (Russian Red Cross) to ICRC, December 9, 1920. Information on the number, conditions, and relief by Russian refugees is organized by country. ACICR, C.R.87 5/18, Extrait du rapport du Comité de l’Union des Zemstvos à Constantinople sur la question de l’organisation du travail des émigrés, January 25, 1921.

¹⁸ ACICR, B MIS 35.5/495, Lodygensky to Boissier, October 9, 1920. On the rescue for Russian intellectuals, see Tomás Irish, *Feeding the Mind: Humanitarianism and the Reconstruction of European Intellectual Life, 1919–1933* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

of the routes, of the camps, and of the logistics put in place for prisoners of war to the protection and, ultimately, to the resettlement of Russian refugees.¹⁹

From the first exchanges of letters and reports, an amalgam of discourses on Russian refugees emerges. The 174th circular that the ICRC distributed in November 1918 described refugees as victims, people who suffered at the hands of their own government and because of the failed Allied interventions during the Russian Civil War. Since they were helpless, refugees were also worthy of protection, which the ICRC was ready to provide alongside the extension of its mandate from wartime to peacetime. However, by means of the reports coming from the field, the ICRC headquarters in Geneva soon learnt that not all Russians were alike. Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Lederrey, stationed in Constantinople, pressed to distinguish between real and fake refugees: only those who showed an attitude for self-help were worthy of protection.²⁰ A few months later, Georges Burnier, again from Constantinople, enquired about the conditions of Russian prostitutes: in a moralizing tone, he suggested that only those willing to detour from the “path of vice” should be assisted.²¹ These examples suggest that protection did not apply to all and came across as a discriminatory, selective, and ambiguous practice, embedded with notions of moral, racist, and gendered superiority.²²

Discourses of victimization were neither stable nor exclusive: Russians were often described as threats. Because the followers of the white generals, Denikin and Wrangel, did not hand over their weapons when they evacuated from the Black Sea to the Bosphorus, there were chances that they might endanger public security, especially since the Eastern Mediterranean region was experiencing a delicate post-imperial transition.²³ As far as public health was concerned, the poor sanitary conditions of camps turned Russian refugees into potential carriers of epidemics, whereas Russian prostitutes in Constantinople were told to spread venereal diseases to the Allied soldiers, and, through them, to their families. There were instances when dangers were abstract. Even though Russians had left because they opposed Bolshevism, they were still seen as potential political agitators, capable of endangering social and political cohesion. Gustave Ador worried that uneducated Russian refugee children might become “useless and harmful elements of the

¹⁹ ACICR, C.R.87 5/18, Memorandum by Lodyginsky, January 1921.

²⁰ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople, December 13, 1920.

²¹ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, May 2, 1922, 45.17871.x.

²² ALON, *Mémorandum du Haut-Commissariat à la Sociétés des Nations pour les Réfugiés Russes*, à la Section Économique et Financière de la Société des Nations, C.C.R.R./PV.1 annexe.

²³ AILO, R201.1, *Télégramme envoyé par Briand à Londres, Rome, Bruxelles, Washington, Copenhague, Madrid, Stockholm, La Haye, Lisbonne, Constantinople, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico, Buenos-Aires, Christiania*, 19 Janvier, 1921.

Europe of tomorrow.”²⁴ Real or exaggerated, the Red Cross capitalized on threats to secure Western governments’ political and financial support.

Last, Russian refugees might turn into vectors through whom postwar societies could be rebuilt. For instance, in the reports addressed to the ICRC and the LON, the exiled Russian Red Cross coupled relief with rehabilitation and reconstruction. “The relief work for the Russian émigrés who remain in Europe must have the precise aim of giving back to Russia citizens who are able to work well, healthy physically and morally.”²⁵ When it became clear that the road from relief to repatriation might entail a more or less permanent local integration or resettlement, Russian organizations pushed for refugees to become self-sufficient and to contribute to the host society. This idea was largely shared by liberal circles of Geneva-based international organizations which, in Nansen’s words, feared that Russian refugees could “affect the direct material interests of a great number of the Governments of Europe.”²⁶

This heterogenous amalgam of discourses both informed and were informed by the several solutions that the ICRC formulated for Russian refugees. The words of Marguerite Frick-Cramer embody the uncertainty of the situation: “What would be the point of organizing, for example, workshops in Serbia if it is decided to bring about a movement of emigration to Argentina or if one gets guaranties sufficient to send back the biggest part of the Russians in their own country?”²⁷ It is not surprising that, while it was in touch with the ILO and the LON to internationalize the question, the ICRC negotiated with Russia the terms of a massive repatriation.²⁸ Indeed, in a telegram to Chicherin, who had already collaborated with Nansen on the repatriation of POWs, Ador suggested that Russians could return home by using the logistics in place, under the neutral supervision of the ICRC.²⁹ Ador’s proposal reflected the hopes of part of Russian refugees, as we read in the following petition:

²⁴ 2 League of Nations O. J. 225 1921. The Question of the Russian Refugees.

²⁵ ACICR, C.R.87 5/18, Memorandum by Lodygensky, January 1921.

²⁶ League of Nations O. J. 1134 1922. Report by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, high commissioner of the LON to the fifth committee of the Assembly, September 15, 1922.

²⁷ ACICR, C.R.87 5/16, Note sur la question des réfugiés russes, January 24, 1921, by Marguerite Frick-Cramer.

²⁸ Attempts at massive repatriation also came from the British authorities. Since the summer of 1919, Great Britain had made itself responsible for the relief of Russian refugees belonging to the army of the white general Anton Ivanovich Denikin but tried to end its humanitarian and financial support. Therefore, the British government negotiated an amnesty for Russian refugees with the Bolshevik authorities. Russian white generals strongly opposed the British proposal for repatriation, fearing persecution and hoping to be able to reverse the political situation in Russia. National Archives (NA), Foreign Office (FO), 371.8159, N8453.43.38, Childs to Evans, Sofia, September 4, 1922. NA, FO, 371.8150, N1791.43.38, Draft Briefs 16.3.1922, 28, Russian refugees, C.B.C.33/28 by Evans.

²⁹ ACICR, CR 87, Ador to Chicherin, undated. Likely early January 1921.

Petition from the old men of the colony of Russian refugees in the town of Shabtz, in Serbia. In the general flood of refugees from Russia in the summer and autumn of 1920, due in part to fear and threats from the troops of the Soviet Government and in part to their being cut off from their homes by military operations in Kuban and due to the impossibility of returning, we, a few old people of 60 and 70 years of age, ex-Kuban Cossack officers, also left. We took part in no military operations against the Red troops in Kuban or the Crimea and belong to no political party but love our native Russia and wish her well. We therefore beg you, Mr. High Commissioner, to make representations to the Soviet Government to overlook the past and to allow us to return to our homes in the Kuban provinces where we, though old men, will use all our strength, our knowledge, and our skill to help the Russian people and our families in agricultural work and in such work as will reconstruct the economic fortunes of our native land.³⁰

While massive repatriation did not happen and only a small number of Russians (6,000 agriculturist Cossacks who repatriated to the Don and Kuban regions) returned under international supervision, it is striking to realize that diverging solutions—including repatriation, local integration, and resettlement—were explored at the same time.³¹ Such a convergence suggests that there was no “general plan,” in the words of Frick-Cramer, to protect Russians and that such protection depended on the circumstances. Some of the ways in which the ICRC understood the conditions of displaced Russians would be embraced, yet, partially, by the ILO.

3.2 The ILO and the Russian questions

Differently from the ICRC and the LON, the International Labour Organization is not a humanitarian organization and did not turn into one.³² The reasons for the ILO intermittent interest in Russian refugees was twofold: it was curious and concerned about the Soviet experiment; and it aimed to establish a “...supranational authority that regulates the distribution of the population along rational and impartial lines, controlling and directing migratory movements and deciding

³⁰ ALON, R1717, Petition from the old men of the colony of Russian refugees in the town of Shabtz, in Serbia, to the High Commissioner for Russian refugees, 45.18425.18542.

³¹ On questions of repatriation, protection, and voluntariness, see Martyn Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea: Fridtjof Nansen, Constantinople and the First Modern Repatriation of Refugees Displaced by Civil Conflict, 1922-23,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88, no. 3 (2010): 495–524. Long, “Early Repatriation Policy.” Katy Long, “Refugees, Repatriation and Liberal Citizenship,” *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 2 (2011): 232–241.

³² Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”.

whether countries are open or closed to specific immigration flows.”³³ Addressing, even partially, the needs of displaced Russians became an opportunity to test the intersection of migration with unemployment.³⁴ It was also instrumental to experiment with the possibilities and shortcomings of technical cooperation, which was framed as apolitical, and which became a quintessential feature of the ILO.³⁵

At the end of WWI, the ILO was a new organization that was spurred by the Treaty of Versailles.³⁶ Overlapping historical processes contributed to its establishment: late-nineteenth-century social reformism across Europe, the role of trade unions during the war efforts on the home front, and the lobbying of the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.³⁷ In the words of his first influential president, the French socialist, Albert Thomas, the ILO was meant to “establish humane working conditions everywhere; establish and implement a system of international labor legislation, subject to reservations imposed by the sovereignty of each state and by the conditions prevailing therein.”³⁸ Peace and social justice would be obtained by expanding workers’ social protection internationally, and this would offer “a peaceful alternative to revolution.”³⁹

³³ Albert Thomas, “Albert Thomas on the International Control of Migration”, in *Population and Development Review* 9, no. 4 (1983): 707.

³⁴ Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Ingrid Liebeskind-Sauthier, “Albert Thomas, le BIT et le chômage : expertise, catégorisation et action politique internationale,” *Les cahiers Irice* 2, no. 2 (2008): 157–179. Paul-André Rosental, “Géopolitique et État-providence. Le BIT et la politique mondiale des migrations dans l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 61, no. 1 (2006): 99–134.

³⁵ Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales.” Dzovinar Kévonian, “Les réfugiés européens et le Bureau international du travail: appropriation catégorielle et temporalité transnationale (1942-1951),” in Alya Aglan, Olivier Feiertag, Dzovinar Kévonian (eds), *Humaniser le travail. Régimes économiques, régimes politiques et Organisation internationale du travail (1929-1969)* (Bruxelles, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2011): 167–194.

³⁶ Antony Evelyn Alcock, *History of the International Labour Organisation* (London, Macmillan, 1971). Franco De Felice, *Sapere e politica. L’Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro tra le due guerre, 1919-1939* (Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988). Isabelle Lespinet-Moret and Vincent Viet (eds), *L’Organisation internationale du travail: origine, développement, avenir. Pour une histoire du travail* (Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011). Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoeltker, Susan Zimmermann (eds), *Women’s ILO: Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards, and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present* (Leiden, Brill, 2018).

³⁷ Olga Hidalgo-Weber, *Social and Political Networks and the Creation of the ILO: the Role of British Actors*, in Kott, Droux (eds), *op. cit.*, 24.

³⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*

³⁹ James T. Shotwell, “The International Labor Organization as an Alternative to Violent Revolution,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 166 (1933): 18–25. Sandrine Kott, “ILO: Social Justice in a Global World? A History in Tension,” *International Development Policy | Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement* 11 | 2019, no. 11 (2019): 21–39.

As for its structure, member states, the same that adhered to the LON (Austria and Germany were exceptions as they were immediately admitted to the ILO and only later to the LON), were represented by two delegates from the government, one from the employers, and one from the workers, who sat at the annual international labor conference, where recommendations and conventions were approved, and in the Governing Body, the decision-making body. In turn, the *Bureau international du travail* (BIT), where the Russian refugee question developed, acted and still does as the permanent secretariat, led by Thomas. Moreover, Article 398 of the Treaty of Versailles established a tight collaboration with the LON: questions including the regulation of working hours, social protection, and the freedom of trade unions belonged to the ILO, whereas migration and unemployment were negotiated with the LON.⁴⁰

As soon as it became operational, the ILO engaged in normative work: it formulated, discussed, and approved a series of important recommendations, including those on unemployment, maternity protection, child labor, and night work for women. The ILO also expressed curiosity towards Russia and concern about the fascination that Bolshevism exerted among the working class in the West, which was attributed to the Soviet experiment's higher standards of work and production.⁴¹ Hence, in 1920, the Governing Body suggested sending a commission of enquiry to Russia; a Russian Section was created at the BIT, headed by Guido Pardo who had first-hand knowledge of Russia and who spoke the language.⁴² In haste, Pardo coordinated the publication of a questionnaire for the commission of enquiry to use and negotiated with the Soviet government the terms of the enquiry.⁴³ However, the deep mistrust that Soviet Russia had towards Western countries created an unfortunate context for the ILO commission of enquiry, which did not receive the green light. As a result, the Labour Organization collected Soviet newspapers and gathered all sorts of documents, including those written by the government's economic ministry; it also showed an interest in "other manifestations of Russian social life, having repercussions on working conditions in Europe," meaning Russian refugees.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Manuela Tortora, *Institution spécialisée et organisation mondiale. Étude des relations de l'OIT avec la SdN et l'ONU* (Bruxelles, E. Bruylant, 1980): 77.

⁴¹ Sandrine Kott, "OIT, justice sociale et mondes communistes. Concurrences, émulations, convergences," *Le Mouvement Social* n° 263, no. 2 (2018): 139–151.

⁴² *Minutes of the Second Session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, held in Paris, January 26-28*, (Genève, ILO, 1920): 20–22.

⁴³ International Labor Office, *Labour Conditions in Soviet Russia, Systematic Questionnaire and Bibliography, prepared for the mission of enquiry in Russia* (London, Forgotten books, 2012).

⁴⁴ AILO, R100/1, Note sur l'intervention du Bureau International du Travail dans les questions russes, undated.

Meanwhile, the ILO tested the extent of its mandate. Treated separately in the Convention, unemployment and migration were weaved by the first international labor conference in October 1919⁴⁵. The conference suggested that an unemployment section would elaborate policies “relating to the migration of workers and the condition of workers and foreign workers,” while an international emigration commission would “consider and report what measures can be taken to regulate the migration of workers outside their own states and to protect the interests of migrant workers residing in states other than their own.”⁴⁶ In doing so, the ILO wished to expand internationally the terms of the 1904 treaty signed by France and Italy, when the former agreed to improving the social protection of workers in Italy to ease the competition with France, where many Italians had migrated. As historian Paul-André Rosental, suggests, the ILO connected the geopolitics of migration with social protection and unemployment globally.⁴⁷ Migration, which was seen as a collective choice rather than an individual one, could benefit, if duly managed, both the country of emigration and of immigration.

In March 1920, the Governing Body created the International Emigration Commission (IEC), composed in equal parts of representatives of governments, entrepreneurs, and workers, coming from both European and non-European countries, both places of immigration and emigration. Institutionally, the ICE drafted resolutions and addressed them to the Governing Body, which judged if they could be discussed by the international labor conferences and, from there, transferred to the member states.⁴⁸ Soon after the creation of the commission, Thomas sent a questionnaire in which member states were asked to share migration statistics, references to migration treaties, and how they understood the future of the IEC. The 32 answers received allowed the ILO to prepare two reports, one on the methods for collecting statistical data and the other on the treaties relating to immigration and emigration of about 50 countries.⁴⁹

In late 1920, after the massive, unexpected arrival of Russians in the Bosphorus, the ILO was urged to intervene. Lodyginsky for the Russian Red Cross asked the Labour Organization to mediate with governments and employers in order to find remunerated employment for displaced Russians.⁵⁰ Around the same time,

⁴⁵ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”, 865–870.

⁴⁶ League of Nations, *International Labour Conference, first annual meeting, October 29, 1919 – November 29, 1919* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1920): 276.

⁴⁷ Rosental, *op. cit.*, 109.

⁴⁸ *Migration. The International Emigration Commission*, in “International Labor Review,” IV, 1921, 3, 85–110.

⁴⁹ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione,” 869–870.

⁵⁰ AILO, R201/6, Le problème des émigrés russes par Lodyginsky. AILO, R201/1, Varlez to Thomas, undated.

Aristide Briand, the French ministry of foreign affairs, similarly pushed for the ILO to “[establish] a plan for the settlement of Russian refugees in areas that could welcome them,” especially since France had just discontinued relief in Constantinople.⁵¹ These two requests, formulated by different actors, had a crucial commonality: rather than being helpless victims, Russians were understood as unemployed migrants, who, when resettled along labor lines, could not only be independent but also contribute to postwar reconstruction. In doing so, the Russian Red Cross and the French government proved to understand what was at stake for both displaced persons and for the ILO.

A third actor played a crucial role in associating the ILO with refugee politics: the Red Cross. In late December 1920, Eduard Frick and Lucien Brunel for the ICRC pressed Harold Butler, the British deputy-director of the BIT, to find employment for Russian refugees, who were portrayed to be both without a state and without a country. Would the BIT host an Emigration Bureau, charged with the collection of data, the organization of Russian refugees in Eastern Europe into professional categories, and the matching of offers with applications?⁵² In this early phase, as we have seen, resettlement along employment lines was believed to be temporary as displaced Russians would eventually repatriate, thanks to the logistics in place for prisoners of war. The principle behind this—clearly unrealistic due to the ethnic mixing in post-imperial Central Eastern Europe—was that the alignment of ethnicity with nationality would guarantee peace and stability. When Russia approved a decree of denationalization and made the return of refugees impossible in late 1921, governments and international organizations derogated to the nation-state principle and allowed the permanent resettlement of refugees across Europe and beyond.

While the creation of an Emigration Bureau in Eastern Europe was a sound proposal, it also epitomized the strategies of the ICRC, which regularly volunteered to coordinate the relief programs implemented by other organizations, as a way to divert attention from its endemic lack of resources and to capitalize on its delegates’ expertise. This happened with the Constantinople-based Bureau for the Relief of Russian Refugees and a Vienna-based Central Bureau for the Fight against Epidemics.⁵³ To make the case stronger, Frick and Brunel shared many documents with the BIT: a memorandum concerning Russian refugees; a report on the refugee situation in Constantinople; minutes of the first two assemblies of the private organizations working for Russian refugees in Constantinople; a copy of the individual form that would be used to conduct the census of refugees in Constantinople and in

⁵¹ AILO, R201/1, Briand to Thomas, January 25, 1921.

⁵² AILO, R201.2, Brunel to Butler, December 29, 1920.

⁵³ Marta Aleksandra Balinska, *Une vie pour l’humanitaire: Ludwik Rajchman (1881-1965)* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995).

the Balkans; and a list of refugees as of December 25, 1920.⁵⁴ Collecting information and sharing it was a classic procedure among international organizations.

The ILO took the request of the ICRC seriously. At first, it launched another enquiry to verify the truly anti-Bolshevik attitude of displaced Russians: fleeing Bolshevism across international borders did not seem to be enough to prove one's political allegiance.⁵⁵ Then, in January 1921, Thomas and Butler turned to the Governing Body, where representatives of governments, trade unions, and employers were in attendance. In particular, Thomas was eager to understand whether the establishment of an Emigration Office in Eastern Europe would not "exceed [the] scope [of the ILO]" upon which the work of coordination might fall.⁵⁶ The proposal was received with mixed feelings. Contrary to the BIT's positive attitude, Louis Varlez, the director of the migration and unemployment section, believed that the early stage of the IEC would negatively impact refugee work;⁵⁷ he was also reluctant to commit the ILO beyond the social protection of industrial workers, who constituted its core group.⁵⁸ The proposal was eventually rejected, and the BIT committed to providing technical assistance to the Emigration Office.⁵⁹ However, the establishment of the office remained a dead letter, mainly on account of the plan's underdeveloped status.⁶⁰

Regarding Thomas, in February 1921, he requested the IEC to investigate whether member states would welcome Russians.⁶¹ Most governments cited widespread unemployment for denying entry.⁶² For instance, Butler lobbied the British government, suggesting that Russians could work in agriculture in the Dominions or the Colonies.⁶³ Again, such a proposal was rejected. "There is no chance that either Canada or Australia will be able to take any of the Russian refugees whom you mention and therefore it would only raise false hopes if it were suggested to those responsible that they should communicate with us direct on the subject

⁵⁴ In addition to a copy of a telegram concerning Russian refugees in Bulgaria and two other telegrams received from an ICRC delegate in Belgrade AILO, R201.2, Brunel to Butler, Geneva, January 17, 1921.

⁵⁵ AILO, R202/1, Varlez to Lemerrier, January 11, 1921.

⁵⁶ AILO, Minutes of the sixth session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, January 11-13, 1921.

⁵⁷ AILO, R201/1, Note pour Butler, Civils russes réfugiés, December 27, 1920.

⁵⁸ AILO, R202/1, Varlez to Lemerrier, January 28, 1921.

⁵⁹ AILO, R201.2, Brunel to Butler, Geneva, January 17, 1921.

⁶⁰ AILO, Minutes of the sixth session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, January 11-13, 1921.

⁶¹ AILO, R202/1, Projet de lettre – réfugiés russes, undated.

⁶² ALON, Conférence d'étude sur la question des réfugiés russes, note sur l'intervention du Bureau International du Travail dans les questions russes, présentée par le Bureau International du Travail, C.R.R.7., August 19, 1921.

⁶³ AILO, R201.1, sub-folder called *correspondence avec le gouvernement anglais*, Butler to Amery, chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee, February 1921, no day.

[...].”⁶⁴ Only Brazil showed an interest, less out of humanitarian compassion, on account of Russians’ employability on the plantations and because, being white, they could improve the mixed population.⁶⁵ Moving Russian refugees *en masse* out of Europe to countries which needed a labor force looked a promising solution for the ILO. Yet, it also pointed out an unsolved question, “whether labor safeguards in receiving countries would match labor laws in western Europe,” especially in view of discriminations entrenched in the “colonial clause.”⁶⁶

These examples—the BIT’s suggestion to frame Russians as unemployed migrants, as well as the Brazilian and British diverging responses—hinder a couple of reflections. While the intuition of addressing the needs of Russians by resettlement plans along employment lines was highly innovative, it failed to acknowledge that forced displacement was also a humanitarian and legal endeavor. Moreover, as we will see both in the settlement of Russian and Armenian refugees, they turned out to be involuntary pawns in the making of a racialized and gendered labor governance, by which, as fragile migrants, they were quickly transformed into cheap, under protected workers.⁶⁷ As Christopher Szabla writes, refugees got caught up in settler colonialism: on the one hand, European states got rid of groups which were displaced, unemployed, and possible carriers of political and social unrest; on the other hand, Latin American states welcomed refugees in order to “grow economically and to fortify their societies against the threat of raids by the natives whom new populations were displacing,” hoping to be later admitted into the “family of nations.”⁶⁸

How did Russian leaders, organizations, and refugees perceive the plans that had been developing at the headquarters of international humanitarian organizations? General Wrangel and Russian organizations in the Balkans vocally opposed repatriation plans, as they feared for their safety, as well as the option of the Brazilian resettlement. By being in Latin America, Russians were too far away had a counter-offensive been launched against the Reds, and they feared becoming “white slaves” on the plantations.⁶⁹ In the spring of 1921, alarmed by France’s decla-

⁶⁴ AILO, R201.1, sub-folder called correspondence avec le gouvernement anglais, Amery to Butler, March 17, 1921.

⁶⁵ ALON, R1713, Letter from Astrov, 45.14500.12319.

⁶⁶ Robson, *Human Capital*, 41. See also Christopher Szabla, “Entrenching Hierarchies in the Global Periphery: Migration, Development and the ‘Native’ in ILO Legal Reform Efforts,” *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 21, no. 2 (2020): 334–372.

⁶⁷ ALON, R1713, Appendix 2 to Memorandum 12, signed by General P. Wrangel, May 4, 1921.

⁶⁸ Szabla, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, “Domestic Service and Urbanization in Latin America from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in Dirk Hoerder and Amarjit Kaur (eds), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 86–102.

ration to discontinue its feeding programs in the Balkans, as well as by the French willingness to either repatriate Russians or resettle them in Brazil, numerous letters written by refugees reached the League of Nations.⁷⁰ One letter, written by the Russian colony in Derventa, situated in present-day Republika Srpska, made reference to the sacrifices of Russian refugees, who had fought against the Red armies and alongside the Allies; to the political responsibility that France should show towards fellow Russians; and to the superior Western civilization which might risk succumbing under the communist threat.

...To reward us for six painful years of fighting for the victory of culture and civilizations, [France] proposes to her faithful allies: either fall into “white slavery” in Brazil or return to the tyrannical kingdom of the Red International... It is to you civilized peoples, it is to you governments, it is to the League of Nations, that we address our prayers – help save the remnants of the Red Army with its leaders, who fought for your happiness!! Do not let the children of great Russia die of hunger, who prefer to be refugees than to remain under the Bolshevik government. Growing Russia will pay you a hundred times more than the aid provided. This is the last time we send our appeals, and if our voice does not awaken your consciences, do not forget that the children of future Russia will then be your mortal and pitiless enemies, that now they are faithful allies.⁷¹

Similarly, the Russian colony in Dubrovnik wrote:

Refusing to believe that the civilized world can persist in its role as a passive spectator in the face of the greatest common spoliation of history, the Russian colony of Dubrovnik allows itself to make a direct appeal to the League of Nations, convinced that this great institution will find the means to preserve the Russian army – this handful of brave people through all tests – to put an end to what is currently happening in Russia and to provide for the needs of Russian refugees until social order is restored.⁷²

3.3 The Red Cross shares the burden

In times of experimentation, refugee politics took unexpected turns. As soon as the ICRC realized that displaced Russians could not resettle under the aegis of the ILO

⁷⁰ ALON, R1713, Appendix 2 to Memorandum 12, signed by General P. Wrangel, May 4, 1921.

⁷¹ ALON, R1713, Rapport de la colonie de 165 réfugiés russes, évacués de Crimée, V. Derventa Le Royame S.H.S. Bosnie, 45.12319.12319x. Translated from French.

⁷² ALON, R1713, Compte-rendu de la séance de l’assemblée générale des membres de la colonie russe à Dubrovnik du 10 avril 1921, 45.12319.12319x. Translated from French.

and would not easily repatriate, it adapted its strategy. To do so, it chose the simplest, less expensive, more productive way: it conveyed and hosted a conference which took place from February 16-17, 1921 in Geneva, where inter-governmental organizations, the LON and the ILO, private, voluntary institutions, the LRCS, the UISE, the SCF, Russian organizations, and the French government (the only one to be invited due to its role in assisting Russians in Constantinople) were in attendance.⁷³ With the conference, the ICRC had the intuition of bringing together a diverging set of actors, both governments and private organizations. Far from being unique, conferences became a preferential tool of international diplomacy, as they favored data-sharing and discussion.

The charismatic ICRC president, Ador, opened the meeting: building on the reports that the organization had received, he shared the total number of the displaced, the geography of forced displacement, their needs in terms of general and specialized assistance (for the old, invalid, orphaned, and sick ones) as well as their legal status. To Ador's introduction, Englantyne Jebb for the UISE reacted by exposing the work done to assist Russians and the difficulties encountered; other private organizations closely followed her example. However, it was Paul Verchère de Reffye, the general consul of France in Geneva, who had the lion's share and illustrated at length France's role in protecting Russians in Constantinople, particularly in the light of discontinuing the programs. Being seated at the same table did not mean that governments and international organizations were equal or that their opinions were evenly taken into account.

Two were the conference's main outcomes. It was agreed that assisting Russian refugees should not exclusively fall on the states of first asylum, but to the whole international community, which was called on to financially contribute. Then, a high commissioner for Russian refugees should be appointed, alongside the successful exchange of POWs.⁷⁴ Both resolutions were welcomed by inter-governmental and private organizations alike, particularly Russians; Thomas went

⁷³ The ICRC had the largest delegation with Ador, Chenevière, Ernest Sautter, Frick, Lederrey, and Burnier. Emerson of the American Red Cross could not attend the conference, but he assured the ICRC that his organization was willing to cooperate for the relief of Russian refugees. The LON was represented by Rachel Crowdy of the Health Section, Joost Adriaan van Hamel and Van Kleffens of the Legal Section, and Vladimir Slavik of the Political Section. Thomas, Butler, and Varlez of the Service des questions russes represented the ILO. De Reffye, general consul of France in Geneva, represented the French government. Donald Brown represented the LRCS. The UISE was represented by its vice-president, Englantine Jebb, Mac Kenzie, Etienne Clouzot, and L.B. Golden for the SCF; the Russian Red Cross was represented by Czamanski and Lodyginsky. AILO, R201.2, Réunion relative à la situation des réfugiés russes, 1^{ère} séance tenue à Genève le 16 février 1921 au siège du Comité International de la Croix Rouge.

⁷⁴ AILO, R201.2, Réunion relative à la situation des réfugiés russes, 2^{ème} séance tenue à Genève le 17 février 1921 au siège du Comité International de la Croix Rouge.

further, suggesting that “a man of a real international authority to group all the efforts” should be appointed.⁷⁵ The task ahead included the determination of the legal status of Russian refugees, the decision whether to repatriate or resettle them, and the coordination of the several actors which were relieving them.⁷⁶ A few days later, the ICRC officially transmitted to the LON Council a series of documents (table 1): a memorandum on the conditions of Russian refugees, their numbers, their needs, and the number of aid organizations taking care of them.

Table 1. Total number of Russian refugees and the list of institutions assisting them by country.⁷⁷

Country	Number of refugees	Organizations
Austria	5,000 (especially in Vienna)	Danish Red Cross and Russian Red Cross
Bulgaria	2,500 in Bourgas, Messembrie and Sosopol; 2,000 in Varna and Nova Zagoru; 600 in Roustschouk, Plevna, Liaskowes and Tirnovo; 1,000 in Sofia. The total was 4,495 men, 1,619 women, and 739 children	Bulgarian Red Cross, Russian Red Cross; Srs de Nicolas
Czechoslovakia	5,000 refugees	Russian Red Cross; section of the Central Committee for Russian refugees in London; Czechoslovakian Red Cross; committee of assistance to Russians chaired by the mayor of Prague, M. Baksa, financed by the Czechoslovakian government
England	15,000	Russian Red Cross Society (Baron Raush); British Committee of the Russian Red Cross; Central Refugee Committee in London (Count Ignatieff); SCF
Estonia	7,858 men, 4,022 women, and 2,964 children	<i>Comité des émigrés russes en Esthonie</i> ; M. Ragojnikoff; Swedish Red Cross and SCF

⁷⁵ ACICR, C.R.87-2/39ter, Annexe 1, Situation des réfugiés russes en Europe et organisations qui s’en occupent, February 28, 1921.

⁷⁶ ACICR, C.R.87.SDN, communications de la SDN concernant les réfugiés russes, Mémorandum adressé par le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge à Genève au Conseil de la Société des Nations, February 10, 1921.

⁷⁷ ACICR, C.R.87.2, Annexes au mémorandum présenté par le CICR au Conseil de la SDN sur les réfugiés russes, February 28, 1921.

Country	Number of refugees	Organizations
Finland	3,953 men, 4,762 women, and 6,033 children	
France	150,000	French government; <i>Conseil general de l'ancienne Croix-Rouge russe</i> ; comte Bobrinsky; M. Goloubeff
Germany	300,000 refugees and among them 65,000 in Berlin	ICRC mission; mission of the former Russian Red Cross; mission of the Soviet Red Cross. The German government gave them 2.35 marks. 4,000 refugees in the camps of Altengrabow and Wunsdorf were fed by the German government
Greece	200,000 in Athens, in Salonika, and in the Pireus	<i>Comité de l'Union de Secours aux Russes de Grèce</i>
Hungary	A limited number of Russians were self-sufficient	ICRC
Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes	31,700 refugees	Russian Red Cross
Italy	20,000	Russian Red Cross; <i>Comité de secours aux russes</i> ; M. Weidemiller
Latvia	17,218 men, women, and children	Russian Red Cross; M. Goudim-Levrovitch; ICRC mission; Lady Muriel Paget's mission; SCF
Lithuania	3,000	
Poland	100,000 refugees scattered between Voltynia, Grodno, Dubno, Sarne, and Kowel; 3,000 orphans	ICRC mission; Russian Red Cross's mission, Mme Loubimoff; Friends; SCF, Miss Vuillamy
Sweden	1,000 refugees	Section of the Committee for Russian refugees in London, M. Goulkevitch
Switzerland	4,000	Former and present Russian Red Cross; several local Russian and Swiss committees

Country	Number of refugees	Organizations
Turkey	7,500 civilians in the area of Constantinople; 5,000 civilians authorized to settle at their own expense in the area of Constantinople; 64,298 military in the camps; 779 enlisted in the French Foreign Legion; 2,027 in hospitals in Constantinople; 4,961 on the "rade Beicos"; 10,000 unidentified. Total 94,070 refugees	Russian Red Cross; Zemgor; White Red Cross; ARC; Italian Red Cross; YMCA; ICRC's mission; SCF; gifts from Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish Red Cross...
Total: 785,433 Russian refugees		

Only the LRCS did not adhere to the policy recommendations that were spurred by the conference. Donald W. Brown, acting director-general of the LRCS, saw divergence rather than convergence between POWs, who were forcibly displaced, and Russian refugees who, in his own words, "voluntarily left their own country"; he opposed the appointment of a high commissioner and suggested that private organizations should be given a more prominent position in the plan; and he also believed that Russian organizations in exile could protect their compatriots without the intervention of the LON.⁷⁸ If one can understand that different actors could offer diverging views on the same humanitarian emergency, the ongoing tensions between the ICRC and the LRCS might have motivated Brown's position. It took the ICRC a few weeks of negotiation for the LRCS to eventually support the appointment of a high commissioner for Russian refugees in March 1921.⁷⁹

Guaranteeing the LRCS's support was a strategic choice: the ICRC knew that having the LON's member states accept responsibility over displaced Russians would not be easy. While the LON Secretariat engaged in lengthy discussions with its constituents, the Red Cross continued its work of information gathering and lobbying. On March 18, 1921, it participated in a conference on refugee children in the Balkans, organized by the ARA at its London offices, where the ARC, the SCF, and the

⁷⁸ "Whereas the repatriation of prisoners of war was purely [sic] a governmental function and one which therefore properly came under the League of Nations, the question of the Russian refugees who now find themselves scattered throughout various parts of the world, due to the fact that they voluntarily left their own country, is one for voluntary effort to cope with, in conjunction with such help as individual governments of the countries in which these refugees find themselves might give." ACICR, C.R.87 5/43, Brown to Ador, February 17, 1921.

⁷⁹ ACICR, C.R.87-5/79, Conférence avec les général Henderson, March 10, 1921.

American Relief Administration European Children's Fund were in attendance.⁸⁰ Since the international protection of children enjoyed favorable momentum, the conference articulated the rescue of refugee children within world peace, stability, and reconstruction.⁸¹ It also decided that information was to be shared and the division of labor established.⁸² The ICRC would feed Russian refugee children in the Bosphorus, Bulgaria, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; the ARC would continue caring for Greek refugee children in Salonika; and the ARAECF would feed children in Hungary.⁸³

In April 1921, the ICRC showed proactiveness in information gathering and charged the British General C. B. Thomson, who was knowledgeable about the region, to verify the conditions of Russians displaced throughout the Balkans.⁸⁴ Such information would be instrumental had a high commissioner for Russian refugees at the LON been appointed.⁸⁵ Assisted by Maurice Gehri of the UISE, Thomson met with government representatives; he suggested that an officer should be appointed to cope with Russian refugees nationally; he verified the exactness of reports that were sent to Geneva; and he tried to classify refugees in three groups: those who desired to emigrate, those who wished to repatriate, and those who either wanted

⁸⁰ ACICR, C.R.87 5/85, Feeding of under-nourished children in the Balkans, March 17, 1921.

⁸¹ On the international history of child protection, see Dominique Marshall, "The Construction of Children as an Object of International Relations: The Declaration of Children's Rights and the Child Welfare Committee of League of Nations, 1900-1924," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 7, no. 2 (1999): 103-148. Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights in Imperial Political Cultures: Missionary and Humanitarian Contributions to the Conference on the African Child of 1931," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 12 (2004): 273-318; Joëlle Droux, "La tectonique des causes humanitaires: concurrences et collaborations autour du Comité de protection de l'enfance de la Société des Nations (1880-1940)," *Relations internationales* n° 151, no. 3 (2013): 77-90. Emily Baughan, "'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!' Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-War Britain," *Historical Research* 86, no. 231 (2013): 116-137. Heide Fehrenbach, "Children as Casework: The Problem of Migrating and Refugee Children in the Era of World War," in Jacqueline Bhabha, Daniel Senovilla Hernandez, and Jyothi Kanics (eds), *Research Handbook on Child Migration* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Pub, 2018): 23-36. Elisabeth Piller, "German Child Distress, US Humanitarian Aid and Revisionist Politics, 1918-24," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 3 (2016): 453-86.

⁸² ACICR, C.R.87 5.88, Etat actuel de la question d'un secours international aux réfugiés russes, March 22, 1921.

⁸³ AILO, R201.2, Frick to Varlez, March 19, 1921.

⁸⁴ ACICR, C.R.87, Neuvième séance du Conseil de la SDN, February 26, 1921, M/21/29/1.

⁸⁵ ACICR, B MIS 15, MIS.15.2/274, Brunel to Burnier, April 26, 1921. "His mission is considered by us as a useful preparation for the action in favor of the Russian refugees, a preparation which will only greatly facilitate the task of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations, if he is appointed, and which in the contrary case will nevertheless constitute an important step towards the solution of the problem." Translated from French.

or had to stay in the country of first asylum.⁸⁶ Thomson's final assessment confirmed that repatriation was the best solution for military and civilians.⁸⁷

3.4 The LON and Russian refugees

In the spring of 1921, Drummond hastened member states to advise whether the LON should protect Russian refugees, knowing that the Council was "most anxious to give assistance," yet within "certain limits."⁸⁸ Understanding what were the limits of refugee protection and the reasons for the LON's involvement was key.⁸⁹ Responses were mixed: Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom expressed a general support; Denmark, Finland, and Poland dwelled on the conditions of Russian refugees in their countries; only Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, and Switzerland endorsed the appointment of a high commissioner.⁹⁰ As soon as governments' responses came in, Gabriel Hanotaux, the French representative to the LON Council, compiled a report which was later distributed to all member states and which served as the basis for a memorandum, published on June 27, 1921, where consensus was reached on a number of points: Russian displacement was an unexpected consequence of WWI, for which a "carefully chosen" high commissioner should be appointed; an inter-governmental conference would be convened; and negotiations should be initiated between the LON Secretariat and governments on questions of financing.⁹¹

Regarding the appointment of the high commissioner, at first the names of Colonel William Haskell for the ARA and of Colonel Robert Edwin Olds for the ARC were advanced on account of their vast experience in humanitarian relief.⁹² Their American nationality also counted in the equation: the LON Secretariat, which saw

⁸⁶ ACICR, CR 87 2/301, Instructions données au général Thomson pour sa mission dans les pays des Balkans pour étudier cette question des réfugiés russes.

⁸⁷ ACICR, C.R.87, Report on Russian refugees in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey by Thomson, May 31, 1921.

⁸⁸ ACICR, C.R.87, Drummond to Ador, March 1, 1921, 2 League of Nations O. J. 225 1921. The Question of the Russian refugees. ACICR, C.R.87-5.61, Copie de la lettre adressée aux gouvernements, March 4, 1921.

⁸⁹ Kimberly A. Lowe, *The Red Cross and the New World Order, 1918-1924* (Dissertation, Yale, 2013), 173-227.

⁹⁰ 2 League of Nations O. J. 485 1921. The Question of the Russian refugees. II. Summary of the documents received by the Secretariat.

⁹¹ ALON, R1713, The Question of the Russian Refugees, Report Presented by M. Hanotaux, French Representative and Adopted by the Council on June 27, 1921, C.133(b)M.131.1921.VII, 45.13687.12319.

⁹² ALON, C1117, Letter to Lodge, May 31, 1921. NA, FO, 371.6868, W 8316.38.38, Memorandum on the LON and Russian Refugees by Emrys Evans, July 15, 1921.

in the Russian refugee question both a matter of politics and money, believed that Haskell and Olds could ease the contacts with American philanthropies, whose resources were incomparably larger than those available in Europe. It was after their refusal that Drummond and Noel-Baker turned to Nansen, who enjoyed a good reputation for successfully managing the exchange of POWs. Yet, Nansen had already accepted another mandate, acting as high commissioner for famine relief in the Volga region, where he coordinated the feeding and medical plans of European humanitarian organizations.⁹³ Moreover, in the medium term, he hoped to resume the academic work that he had put on hold to pursue his political career.⁹⁴

It took Noel-Baker's careful negotiation for Nansen to accept.⁹⁵ Not only did the British officer appeal to humanitarian compassion, alongside the discourses formulated on displaced POWs, but he also believed that the Russian refugee question could be solved by a part-time "travelling agent".⁹⁶ How can we understand such a serious misrepresentation of refugee work, knowing that, in the summer of 1921, Noel-Baker possessed abundant data on the articulation of Russian displacement in terms of relief, politics, and law? On one hand, Noel-Baker, far from being a lonely voice, embodied the widespread belief that Russian refugees, whose displacement was rooted in WWI, could be quickly repatriated, by using the same machinery in place for displaced former combatants. On the other hand, the British officer also epitomized the credo, according to which Russians could not possibly live in permanent exile. At least at the beginning, the brand-new international system, where political and social stability could be obtained by matching ethnicity with nationality, was not ready to already face such a glaring exception.

It is important to stress that the decision to appoint Nansen was not unanimous. The British Foreign Office believed that it was inappropriate for the same person to provide relief to famine-stricken regions in Russia and to Russians in exile.⁹⁷ The United Refugee Relief Organization in London went further: "it [was] both practically inexpedient and morally inadmissible to combine the task of championing the Soviets and of protecting the interests of the refugees".⁹⁸ To accommodate British

⁹³ Vogt, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F1, legg 1, Baker to Nansen, Geneva, August 6, 1921.

⁹⁵ "I cannot take the responsibility to remain inactive if something really useful can be achieved for the relief of Russia"—this is what Nansen stated. ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F1, legg 1, Handwritten letter from Nansen to Baker, July 27, 1921.

⁹⁶ NBKR, 4:472, Memorandum on the possible action of the League in connection with Russian refugees by Noel-Baker, May 6, 1921.

⁹⁷ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Comments by Emyr Evans, March 8, 1922.

⁹⁸ NA, FO 371.9336, N7299.46.38, Memorandum from United Russian Refugee organizations in London to Lord Cecil, London, August 13, 1923. The United Refugee Relief Organization in London grouped the following institutions: the Russian Red Cross, Russian Refugees Relief Associations,

skepticism, the LON made sure at least to separate the staff in charge of refugee work and famine relief. Nor was Nansen's entourage held in great esteem. Frick, who was in charge of refugee and famine work, was suspected of undertaking a personal side business in Berlin and had to resign.⁹⁹

The LON eased Nansen into the position by organizing a new conference on Russian refugees in late August 1921 with the presence of interested governments and a few international organizations. The conference's inter-governmental imprinting marked a break from the gathering that the ICRC had convened early the same year which saw a much larger participation of private, voluntary, sectarian organizations.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, much to the chagrin of Russian organizations in exile, they were not invited. As we read in the letter addressed to Drummond by Jean Efremoff, the former Russian representative in Switzerland, "aren't the Russians who are the most interested and who have the duty and the right to provide all the information and all the necessary questions?"¹⁰¹ One should not forget that Russian organizations had just met in the Conference of Russian Refugee Organizations in Paris, where they formulated important policy directions that could be of use to the LON.¹⁰²

At the August meeting, one after the other, governments shared their take on the Russian refugee question. In Finland, "the organization of relief was not [an] easy matter for a country that [had] just passed through the horrors of the war, and where even the food supply of the general population presented serious difficulties"; "un-accustomed to discipline and order" Russian refugees were told to conspire against Finnish "hospitality." The French delegate spoke of the danger of keeping armed Russian soldiers in the Bosphorus, only to be echoed by the Polish delegate who spoke of invasion and burden.¹⁰³ In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, where an institution dealing with Russian refugees had just been created, the high commissioner should first communicate with the Ministry of Foreign

Russian Self-Help Association, Russian Children Welfare Association, Russian Relief Fund, Russian Army and Navy Ex-Service Men' Association, Russian Academical Group, and Northern Association.

⁹⁹ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Russian refugees at Constantinople and elsewhere, March 10, 1922.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1721, Conference on the Russian Refugee Question, Geneva, August 26, 1921, C.227.M.203.1921.VII, 45.15145.13564.

¹⁰¹ ALON, R1713, Efremoff to Drummond, July 3, 1921, 45.13785.12319.

¹⁰² AILO, R201.6, Mémorandum sur la question des réfugiés russes. Fourteen Russian organizations were present. La Conférence des Ambassadeurs de Russie; les Représentants de l'Armée Russe; le Comité Central de la Croix Rouge Russe; le Comité des Zemstvos et des Villes; le Comité Parlementaire Russe; le Comité National Russe; le Union pour la libération et la régénération de la Russie; le Union Commerciale et Industrielle; le Comité des Banques; le Association des Universitaires; l'Association des Hommes de Lettres; le Conseil des Chemins de Fer Privés; l'Association des Avocats; l'Association des Ingénieurs. De Giers, dean of the Russian Ambassadors, was the president of the conference.

¹⁰³ 2 League of Nations O. J. 1006 1921.

Affairs in order to respect institutional hierarchies. These examples show how most of the governments which, *nolens volens*, happened to welcome displaced Russians, formulated discourses around collective security, cultural clashes, and economic burden, while dismissing moral and political obligations.

At the end of the conference, national representatives were asked to report to their governments and asked for instructions.¹⁰⁴ Eventually, Nansen came to office as the high commissioner for Russian refugees at the LON on September 1, 1921; he mainly worked from Lysaker, near Oslo, and regularly traveled to Geneva for meetings and conferences, and also made his way to Russia, the Balkans, and Armenia. In Geneva, the staff of the HCR was small: in addition to a bilingual secretary, a deputy high commissioner—first Frick, then de Watteville, both from the ICRC, and last, the British Thomas Frank Johnson—assisted Nansen.¹⁰⁵ Delegates of the Red Cross and, to assist on specific projects, *ad hoc* appointed experts such as engineers and agronomists would be dispatched in places of displacement and intervention across and beyond Europe.

3.5 The first steps of the HCR

What might appear as a detailed analysis of institutional politics, ideological tensions, and interpersonal connections, instead exposes the specific context where manifold actors—from governments to inter-governmental organizations, from private organizations to civil society associations, and from lawyers to social workers and experts—were drawn to refugee protection in the early 1920s. While the establishment of the HCR was an absolute novelty in international relations, the LON also set a number of conditions. First, the HCR should not engage in direct relief, which fell to governments and private organizations, as there was no money at Nansen's disposal aside from a small amount for the benefit of the Geneva

¹⁰⁴ This is what the August 1921 conference wrote about the financial and economic side of the refugee work: "The Conference expresses the opinion that, as the present situation of the Russian refugees is of interest to the whole world, it would not be right to leave the burden of helping them to the few nations which have hitherto been the only ones to assume it, both out of humanity and because of their geographical situation, which may involve them in sacrifices beyond their strength, and that not only all the member states of the League of Nations, but all the states of the civilized world should be invited to contribute to this urgent and indispensable work of world solidarity a contribution commensurate with their resources." Translated from French. ALON, *Mémorandum du Haut-Commissariat à la Sociétés des Nations pour les Réfugiés Russes, à la Section Économique et Financière de la Société des Nations, C.C.R.R./PV.1 annexe.*

¹⁰⁵ ALON, R1731, Drummond to Nansen, September 21, 1921, 45.16056x.16056. Johnson was the author of a book on refugee policies, Thomas Frank Johnson, *International Tramps: From Chaos to Permanent World Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1938).

office. Second, the high commissioner was appointed on a one-year mandate, on the assumption that Russians could be easily repatriated or resettled. This means that Nansen's mandate was renewed by the LON's Assembly meeting in September. Third, the HCR should only protect Russians: this excluded the refugees created by the adjustment of post-imperial borders or sub-group as Russian-Jewish refugees, for whom Lucien Wolf, the president of the Jewish Colonization Association, would have wanted to create a specific sub-section.¹⁰⁶ In the 1920s, the work of the HCR would only be extended to Armenian, Assyrian, and Assyro-Chaldean refugees.¹⁰⁷

Fourth, the LON had a collectivist approach to Russians, who were defined as having lost the protection of their state of origins. If being a needy Russian abroad was enough to receive international protection, since a refugee was not asked to individually prove the reasons for her flight, a group approach was problematic as it dismissed the fragile conditions of specific categories such as women or children. This was clear to a specialized organization like the SCF which, in the summer of 1921, unsuccessfully petitioned the HCR to create a sub-section in charge of Russian children.¹⁰⁸ However, it also happened that humanitarians in the field adapted their work: this was the case for the relief measures on behalf of "fallen" Russian women in Constantinople, thanks to the donations of Scandinavian women's organizations who reacted to Nansen's personal appeal; this was also the case for the educational and vocational programs that were especially established for Russian children and youth.¹⁰⁹ Last, experiments in refugee politics and humanitarian protection at the end of WWI contributed to creating discourses about their supposedly apolitical nature. When the LON's member states did establish the HCR, they also insisted that its actions would be outside of politics. What appears as a constraint at times left space to innovate refugee practices, of which Nansen's passport or communication campaigns are good examples.

¹⁰⁶ ACICR, C.R.87/SDN communications de la SDN concernant les réfugiés russes, Wolf to Drummond, C.R.R.8, August 15, 1921. Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Empire, The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf 1914-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Metzger, "League of Nations, Refugees, and Individual Rights," in Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch (eds), *Refugees in Europe, 1919-1959: A Forty Years Crisis?* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 101-120.

¹⁰⁸ ALON, R1719, De Geer and Golden to Drummond, Geneva, August 24, 1921, 45:15044.12930. A conference took place in Stockholm, organized by the UISE, from September 25-26, 1921 to discuss relief measures already undertaken by private organizations and to set up a plan of action for future operations.

¹⁰⁹ ALON, JO, Rapport général sur l'œuvre accomplie jusqu'au 15 mars 1922 par M. Fridtjof Nansen, Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations, Avril 1922. The organizations were the *Conseil national des femmes norvégiennes*, the *Conseil national des femmes danoises*, the *Conseil national des femmes suédoises*, and the *Union des femmes islandaises*. They provided a donation of £1,000.

As soon as Nansen was appointed, another international conference met in Geneva from September 16-19, 1921. It was no coincidence that the conference occurred in concomitance with the LON Assembly—an element which would make refugee work visible, and which would ease the participation of national representatives, international officers, and a large number of relief organizations, yet again with the exclusion of Russian organizations.¹¹⁰ Deputy high commissioner Frick, who welcomed the participants, started by giving a general overview of Russian refugees' conditions, particularly in Constantinople. Governments closely followed. France was about to stop the feeding plans for Russians in Constantinople, as it considered food provision “an international affair”; the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which dwelled on having provided abundant assistance to displaced Russians, called upon the states which had not done their part yet, on account of not hosting refugees on their territory, to do so.

Unsurprisingly, heated discussions happened around finances. Faced with governments' well-proved reluctance to allocate financial resources for humanitarian protection, Nansen wished to publicly appeal for money, but after checking first with private organizations about how much they could donate. This project was critically received by Wolf, for whom these organizations had a better time launching the appeal, as they connected with their supporters more easily than governments with citizens. To back up his suggestion, Wolf reported a successful fundraising campaign which occurred in the United Kingdom, based on “one pound for one pound,” meaning that for each pound given to charity, the British government provided another pound.¹¹¹ In the words of Lewis Golden of the SCF, gifts from governments “should stimulate and not discourage private charity and vice versa.”¹¹² All in all, the September conference formulated recommendations, which were not binding but instead offered a “road map”: Nansen was asked to contact governments based on the fact that Russians lacked identification documents to cross international borders; the ILO was officially identified as the organization which would help resettle refugees upon much needed political and economic

¹¹⁰ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 16, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.1. For governments: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, China, Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. For international organizations: the ICRC, the LRCS, the Jewish Colonization Association and Associated Societies, the ILO, the NER, the European Student Relief and World's Committee Christian Federation, the World's Committee of the YMCA, the ARC and Refugees Fund, the SCF, the UISE, the Armenian Refugees Lord Mayor's Fund, American Refugee Fund, and the Lord Mayor of London Fund.

¹¹¹ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 16, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.1.

¹¹² ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 17, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.2.

considerations; it was agreed that Nansen would directly appeal to governments and international organizations, Russians among them, to financially support refugee work.¹¹³

Practices of protection were immediately implemented. The HCR's first action was to have a more detailed picture of the Russian displacement; it did so by conducting a census in asylum countries, thanks to the collaboration of the ICRC and the ILO, which gathered information, advised on legal matters, and implemented coordination plans.¹¹⁴ The census was composed of three different forms. Form A pertained to data regarding sex and age; form B focused on profession, which was defined according to sex, age, and civil status; and form C concentrated on the distribution of refugees who could not find employment.¹¹⁵ Despite laudable efforts, it proved difficult to intercept those refugees who lived outside the camp system in cities' neighborhoods. Hence, local institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the police department that was in charge of the control of foreigners, and autonomous relief organizations were associated with the international plan.¹¹⁶

The witty words of Captain Lawford Samuel Childs, a Briton who implemented important refugee work for the HCR in Constantinople and who wrote a chapter entitled "Refugees – a permanent problem in international organizations," do a wonderful job to illustrate some of the HCR's main challenges.

'There is nothing in the Pact about refugees,' the henchmen of hegemony would murmur apologetically to Dr. Nansen when he besought them in the corridors for more money for his work; and when he pressed them, as he always did, they would say that their Governments were rather uneasy about the whole question and that Dr. Nansen must excuse them, as they were due for an important session to consider the experts' report on the work of the sub-committee on phytopathological questions. The epidemic among the elm trees in Europe which was decimating the number of trees available for coffins and

¹¹³ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Conference on Russian refugees, September 19, 1921, C.R.R./2nd session/PV.3.

¹¹⁴ AILLO, R201.20.1, Butler to Nansen, September 24, 1921.

¹¹⁵ NA, FO 371.6870, N11776.38.38, Memorandum on Russian refugees in Constantinople, October 21, 1921. NA, FO, 371.6871, N12375.38.38, Census of Russian refugees in camps. This document was followed by a list of six questions. The first one dealt with the total number of refugees under the jurisdiction of the government concerned. The second one dealt with the number of refugees at public expense (a distinction to be made between men, women, and children). The third one covered the number of refugees who had no prospect of being self-sufficient by means of a paid job (the same distinction was made between men, women, and children). The fourth question was for invalid refugees. In the fifth, the refugee was asked to declare what his profession in Russia had been. The sixth question asked how many refugees were helped by private humanitarian organizations.

¹¹⁶ ACICR, C.R.87.5.214 généralités, Recensement des réfugiés russes dans les camps et recensement des réfugiés russes non internés dans les camps, November 10, 1921.

other purposes, including armaments, – there, they declared, was a serious matter, which required their attention, and it was, moreover, a direct result of the War, for during the terrible bombardments the wounds in the trees had caused the appearance of various new forms of fungoid growth, which, in their turn, had harbored the parasites which were killing the trees in defiance of the efforts of the experts to deal with them. As for refugees, well, perhaps if Dr. Nansen could promise an immediate, cheap, and efficient scheme for transferring all the refugees which were a charge on their countries to the territories of somebody else, they would see what they could make their Government agree the credits.¹¹⁷

From the outset, Nansen relied upon a handful ICRC delegates, who allocated part of their time to protecting Russian refugees: Captain Georges Burnier in Constantinople, Georges Dessonaz in Sofia, Dr. Bacilieri in Bucharest, N. Ramseyer in Estonia, Edouard Gallati in Latvia, Baron Rudolphe de Reding-Biberegg in Hungary, Henri Reymond in Austria, and Victor Gloor in Poland.¹¹⁸ Being already on the spot, delegates rarely met with Nansen and instead received general instructions by letter: they were asked to put the HCR in touch with governments, to implement the census, and to provide empirical data, and often ended up performing consular functions.¹¹⁹ Left with a large amount of freedom, delegates were kept accountable for currently estimating how much time they put into refugee protection, in addition to their ongoing projects, and for keeping accurate budgets.¹²⁰ Local conditions were determinant: if Baron Rudolph de Reding-Biberegg, based in Budapest, spent one-fifth of his time on Russian refugees, Victor Gloor had to increase the personnel in the Warsaw office, as all of his time was occupied with protecting displaced Russians. As we will see in Chapter 5, which concentrates on the assistance to Russian refugees in Constantinople, Captain Georges Burnier spent two-thirds of his time dealing with refugee-related questions, as one can read in the following table.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Lawford S. Childs, “Refugees – a Permanent Problem in International Organization,” *War Is not Inevitable: Problems of Peace; Thirteenth Series* (London: Peace Book Co. LTD, 1938), 197–198.

¹¹⁸ ACICR, C.R.87.5/197, Nansen to ICRC, September 24, 1921.

¹¹⁹ ACICR, C.R.87.5/197, Instructions for Dr. Nansen’s Delegates, October 10, 1921.

¹²⁰ ACICR, CR 87.2/201 à 300 Généralités (janvier 1922 à janvier 1930), Lettre de Brunel, secrétaire général du service des missions, aux délégués du CICR à Belgrade, Berlin, Budapest, Constantinople, Narwa, Riga, Trieste, Varsovie, Vienne, Geneva, January 12, 1922. ACICR, CR 87.2/203 ter généralités, Projet, aide-mémoire correspondance concernant les frais du CICR pour le HC pour les réfugiés russes.

¹²¹ ACICR, B, MIS 33.5.538, Missions et postes de CICR s’occupant des prisonniers de guerre. May 10-11, 1920.

Table 2. List of the Red Cross missions, May 10-11, 1920. Courtesy of the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.

Mission in Berlin	It took charge of all Russian POWs in Germany and the transport of these POWs to other countries. It allowed the passage of Austro-Hungarian POWs through Germany.
Mission in Prague	Transport of POWs between Czechoslovakia and other countries of former Austria-Hungary. It also took charge of Russian POWs in Czechoslovakia with the support of the Czechoslovakian Red Cross Society.
Mission in Vienna	It maintained contact with the Austrian government and other ICRC missions that worked with Austrian POWs who were still in Siberia, Poland, and Romania.
Mission in Budapest	It maintained contact with the Hungarian government and other ICRC missions that worked with Hungarian POWs who were still in Siberia, Poland, and Romania. Furthermore, it took care of Russian POWs in Hungary and of the camp in Budapest where some workshops were set up for them.
Mission in Warsaw	The ICRC mission worked on behalf of Ukrainian (Galician) and Russian POWs kept captive in Polish camps. It negotiated their passage through Poland from both East to West and West to East.
Mission in Bucharest	Bacilieri, working for the Swiss delegation in Bucharest, oversaw transports through the Danube.
Mission in Narva and in Björko	The mission in Narva focused on the exchange of German, Austrian, Hungarian, and Czech POWs coming from Russia and Siberia with Russian POWs still in Germany. Its main task was to clean, disinfect, and feed POWs from the Central Powers coming from Russia before transporting them to Stettin.
Mission to Siberia	Its aim was visiting and relieving POWs from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire that were kept captive in Eastern Siberia and in Japan. A sub-mission was sent to Irkutsk to verify the possibility of transporting the greatest number of POWs in steamers destined for Europe.
Missions to Lithuania, Latvia, Constantinople, Southern Russia (Odessa and Novorossiysk), and the Caucasus (Batoum, Ekaterinodar)	These were exploratory missions to study the possible transport of Russian POWs to their country and of Austrian Hungarians back to Central Europe.

As in the case of Colonel V., Russian refugees did not shy away from petitioning the LON directly. The most active ones appear to be those who were first resettled in the

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. In late December 1922, a group of Russians who were trained as locksmiths in Serbia wished to migrate to the US, where they might "...improve practically in certain branches of technology by working in factories richly equipped from a technical point of view."¹²² In addition to group requests, individual ones reached the League of Nations too, opening a sad window into the desperate material conditions of Russian refugees. One Russian family, living in Ljubljana, asked for 3,000 dinars in order to buy a sewing machine, thanks to which the wife would be able to work and to support the family.¹²³ An invalid Russian man living in Serbia, who had lost his left hand during the war, and who was supposed to support two babies, his mother, and an invalid brother, asked Nansen for USD 750 in order to open a shop. The money would be returned, Sergia L. wrote, giving his word as "an officer of the old imperial Russian army." Poignantly, Sergia begged Nansen to "help [him] to stand on [his] feet and live like a man."¹²⁴

What do these letters say? They put into concrete words the misery that the majority of Russians experienced in exile, where some received some form of assistance, whereas many others tried to find the means to be self-sufficient. They suggest that Russians perpetuated discourses of victimhood as a legitimate foundation for their requests, yet they also stressed the importance of work to escape their misery and to free themselves from foreign relief. What is also interesting is that refugees did not advance abstract requests: they sketched rudimentary business plans, such as in the case of the shop opening and the sewing machine, or they knew the prize of a boat ticket to America. As for Nansen, his reply to all letters, with a few exceptions, was coherent with his mandate: there was no means to intervene.¹²⁵

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the ICRC delegates that were spread across the European continent to deal with POWs were among the first to witness the desperate conditions of Russian refugees. From Estonia, Georges Dessonaz reported that refugee camps had sprung up since 1919 on the eastern border of the country, where the followers of the white general Yudenich had found asylum.¹²⁶ De Chabannes La

¹²² ALON, R1717, Lettre écrite par le président de l'Union de serruriers et monteurs, sortis du Cours spéciale en serrurerie et de montage établi dans l'usine technique du Ministère de guerre à Kragujevac, December 21, 1922, 45.18425.12542.

¹²³ ALON, R1717, Colonel Z. to Nansen, November 30, 1922, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁴ ALON, R1717, Sergia L. to Nansen, June 6, 1924, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁵ ALON, R1717, Nansen to Serge N., November 30, 1922, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁶ AICRC, B MIS 35, Dessonaz to ICRC, May 31, 1921.

Palice, headquartered in Constantinople, witnessed the impromptu and massive arrival of Russian refugees from Crimea in November 1920.¹²⁷ These delegates, alongside their colleagues in Geneva, immediately extended their limited resources to include needy Russians, who were understood to be war victims, in line with the ICRC postwar manifesto.

Building on the expertise and knowledge of Russian humanitarian organizations, as well as on the work of its delegates, the Red Cross played a central role in conceptualizing the refugee in different, yet not mutually exclusive, ways. Despite its limited resources, the ICRC was pivotal in raising the question of Russian refugees with the ILO and then with the LON, where it became an inter-governmental question with the creation of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees and the appointment of Nansen as high commissioner. The different conceptualizations of the refugee overlapped, cohabitated, and, at times, produced clashes among the actors involved. The ICRC considered Russian refugees as “war victims,” “without protection and without country,” and thus entitled to humanitarian aid. To the ILO, Russians were economic migrants, who could engage in remunerated activities, no longer depending on charity and actively contributing to postwar reconstruction. Russian refugees were also a political and social category, as they were forced to leave their country and seek protection and welfare services elsewhere.

Ideas of civilization and racism played a role in settlement plans and immigration policies. The ILO tried, and failed, to settle Russians in the British Dominions and Colonies in the belief that they would be good (and white) settlers. Both the British government and the LON believed that Russian refugees would fit better in Eastern and Southeastern Europe because of their linguistic and religious proximity to the local societies. Russians then were welcomed in postwar France as workers due to the fact that French men had passed away during wartime and because they were white, thus avoiding the racial anxieties that people of color from the colonies created in the *métropole*. The situation was similar in Brazil, which opened the door to Russians as workers on the plantations because they would contribute to the “racial betterment” of its racially mixed population.

From the appointment of Nansen as high commissioner in June 1921 and the creation of the High Commissariat at the LON, the seeds of what would become our current governance emerged. International, inter-state, and transnational forms of cooperation between organizations and governments gave way to a never-before-seen structure at the LON, which already constituted a political novelty in the interwar period. Instead of being addressed by governments or associations alone, the refugee question was internationalized through the arena of the LON. As we

¹²⁷ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople.

have seen, this internationalization went through twists and turns, often suffering from a lack of political and financial support. However, the existence of the High Commissariat for refugees, whose structure and functioning were grounded on the international repatriation of prisoners of war, was already a mirror for these changing times, alongside the creation of specific committees and commissions, the propaganda measures that international organizations used, the legal definitions, and the establishment of the Nansen passport.

CHAPTER 4

The global governance of refugee protection: obstacles and innovations

Abstract

This chapter presents the main innovation of the global governance of refugee protection, suggesting that it embodied both the failure of statecraft and was a source of innovation. Private and voluntary organizations, of a religious and a secular nature, which were central in providing immediate relief, found a place in inter-governmental politics; the Nansen passport and the first definition of refugee were approved; fundraising techniques increasingly built on visual politics to emotionally engage the audience, hoping for financial support; and, as of 1925, the governance saw refugees as unemployed migrants to be resettled beyond Europe, in mandated Middle East and in Latin America. Officers, humanitarians, and lawyers offered crucial expertise.

Keywords: global governance, experts, Nansen passport, fundraising events, employment.

The very nature of the refugee work, which is essentially of a cumulatively pioneer constructive character, precludes anything like an accurate estimate being afforded of the absolute results obtained. Emigration currents are created, and their directions shaped, but it is impossible to estimate accurately their ultimate volume, as when the way has once been paved for the introduction of refugees by the establishment of systematic methods, their relatives and friends usually follow independently.

—Memorandum by the director of the International Labour Office on the work of the refugee service.¹

The history of international refugee protection and the making of global norms carries both constraints and possibilities: it is a history of deadlocks and innovations; it is about utopia, compassion, and the driest cynicism.² As we have started to see, the displacement of an unexpected number of Russian military and civilians into the unsettled areas of Central Eastern Europe and the Middle East created

¹ R1602, Memorandum by the director of the International Labor Office on the work of the refugee service, 1926, 40-52990-41465.

² Ethnographic work has been useful to analyze the making of global norms, Marion Fresia, “Building Consensus within UNHCR’s Executive Committee: Global Refugee Norms in the Making,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27, no. 4 (2014): 514–533.

preoccupations among national and international organizations. Governments which emerged from the imperial collapse extended limited assistance, while international humanitarian organizations, many of which were already *in loco*, adapted their mandate to the circumstances. The International Committee of the Red Cross was one of them: from the Baltics to the Bosphorus, its delegates reported about the desperate conditions of displaced Russians, especially vulnerable children. The Red Cross turned to the International Labour Organization first and then to the League of Nations, where the question became an inter-governmental concern and where the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, headed by Fridtjof Nansen, was created.³

At the end of the war, massive humanitarian emergencies occurred where ideas about humanitarian protection, which had emerged in a plethora of prewar and wartime settings, met a completely new international system. This created a peculiar context in which the widespread crises of statecraft and insufficient resources left space for the elaboration of path-breaking political, humanitarian, and legal solutions.⁴ While private and voluntary organizations, religious or secular, are scattered throughout this book, as they played a crucial role in offering immediate relief to needy prisoners of war and refugees, this chapter wishes to reflect more deeply on the interplay of the non-state sphere in the inter-governmental realm. It does so by examining the emergence and the running of the Advisory Committee for Private Organizations, a special body which was created in the fall of 1921 to support and advise the High Commissariat. As the Advisory Committee discussed at length, the lack of financial resources hindered refugee protection. This explains the importance attached to communication campaigns, where visual resources were mobilized, aimed at moving the Western public and at unblocking financial contributions. Locally, initiatives including lotteries, balls, or festivals were organized for the benefit of “next-door” Russian refugees rather than the “distant other.”⁵

Thanks to its first-hand experiences across Europe and the Middle East, the Advisory Committee for Private Organizations was acutely aware that refugees were stuck in a limbo: as soon as the Russian and the Turkish states approved decrees of denationalization, which denied the possibility of return, refugees had a hard time resettling, as they lacked the documents to cross international borders. Again, the impasse opened the doors to an innovative solution, the Nansen passport. We will see how the document came into being and how its implementation varied, depending on national regulations. The Nansen passport gave way to the

³ ALON, R1713, The Question of the Russian Refugees, Report Presented by M. Hanotaux, French Representative and Adopted by the Council on June 27, 1921, C.133(b)M.131.1921.VII, 45.13687.12319.

⁴ Dubin, *op. cit.* Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”.

⁵ Kennedy, “Selling the Distant Other”.

development of international refugee law.⁶ Meanwhile, the ILO came back into the picture. If, in 1921, the Labour Organization had refused to play a central part in refugee politics, as it exceeded its mandate, only a few years later it agreed to resettle Russian and Armenian refugees, as it saw in them unemployed migrants, mostly agriculturists who would help “colonize” underpopulated areas of the Middle East and Latin America, at times at the expenses of the local population.⁷ By an unexpected twist, from 1925 to 1929, the LON and the ILO joined forces to “liquidate”, in their own words, the refugee question. They were yet to see that refugees had already become a permanent actor of international relations.

4.1 The early years of the Advisory Committee for Private Organizations at the HCR

We have seen that aid organizations played a central role both in implementing relief plans for Russian refugees and in pushing for solutions to be articulated at the international level. Article 25 of the LON Covenant explicitly mentioned private organizations, particularly “the establishment and cooperation of duly authorized voluntary national Red Cross organizations having as purposes the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world.”⁸ Yet, as Philip Noel-Baker noticed, “general principles” regulating the interaction between the LON and aid organizations had not been settled and would rather emerge from practice.⁹ Humanitarian protection and refugee politics offered

⁶ Reflections on the LON humanitarian and social work already started during the interwar period. Rachel E. Crowdy, “The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (1927): 153–69. Weindling, *op. cit.* Borowy, *op. cit.* Piana, “Humanitaire et politique, in medias res.” Céline Paillette, “De l’Organisation d’hygiène de la SDN à l’OMS: Mondialisation et régionalisme européen dans le domaine de la santé, 1919-1954,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin* 32, no. 2 (2010): 193–198. Balinska, *op. cit.* On the international work on children, see Marshall, “The Construction of Children as an Object of International Relations,” Droux, *op. cit.*; Baughan, “‘Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!’ For the international regulations on matters of cannabis and alcohol consumption, see Liat Kozma, “The League of Nations and the Debate over Cannabis Prohibition,” *History Compass* 9, no. 1 (2011): 61–70. Philippe Bourmaud, “Les faux-semblants d’une politique internationale: la Société des Nations et la lutte contre l’alcoolisme dans Les Mandats (1919-1930),” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History / Bulletin Canadien d’histoire de la médecine* 30, no. 2 (2013): 69–90. See also Rodríguez García, Rodogno, Kozma (eds), *op. cit.*

⁷ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*. Robson, *Human Capital*.

⁸ The Covenant of the League of Nations.

⁹ Quoted in Thomas Richard Davies, “A ‘Great Experiment’ of the League of Nations Era: International Nongovernmental Organizations, Global Governance, and Democracy Beyond the State,” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 18, no. 4 (2012): 408.

preferential spaces for observing the interplay of non-state and inter-governmental actors.

With the *placet* from the LON Secretariat, in September 1921, Nansen suggested the creation of a committee having a consultancy capacity where “Russian and foreign organizations would preserve their absolute autonomy in their own field of activity, [and have] full control of their own funds.”¹⁰ The move was clear: the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, which had a limited range of action, attempted to rely on the resources and the expertise of private organizations and charities to formulate policy directions, while, by joining the ACPO, aid organizations acquired legitimacy, created coalitions, and avoided the duplication of efforts.¹¹ Institutionally framed within the HCR, the ACPO turned out to be a space for discussion, information gathering, alliance making, and policy suggestions, and acted as a critical ally to the HCR in many instances. In 1922, it supported the creation of the Nansen passport, and, in 1924, it advocated for refugee work not to be dismissed.¹²

How did the ACPO work? Between 1921 and 1925, the committee met once a year (on September 19, 1921, on November 24, 1921, from May 29-30, 1922, on April 30, 1923, and on September 3, 1924), upon the initiative of the LON Secretariat or of the HCR, which determined the agenda, also thanks to the inputs of aid organizations. Indeed, before the meeting, private voluntary organizations shared reports which laid the foundation for future discussions. In turn, the ACPO produced further documents and recommendations that Nansen forwarded to the LON Assembly and the Council.¹³ Due to its under-theorized status, the ACPO could be convened at crucial moments. This happened in the spring of 1922, when Nansen needed support for the inter-governmental conference on the certificates of identity that would take place in July of the same year. In the words of Noel-Baker, “I think a discussion of some such agenda as this would please the Committee of Voluntary Associations and would enable us to elicit their support, for what it is worth, with the Governments in some of the proposals which we intend to lay before the Council.”¹⁴

¹⁰ ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Resolutions passed at the conference of delegates on Russian refugees on September 16, 17, and 19, 1921. ALON, Commission des réfugiés russes, Mémorandum sur la question des réfugiés russes présenté par la conférence russe réunie à Paris en Août 1921, C.R.R.10.

¹¹ For a discussion on the ACPO from 1926 to 1930, which also contains a table with the list of the organizations for each meeting, see Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 343–353.

¹² Steve Charnovitz, “Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18 (1997).

¹³ Chris Ansell, Egbert Sondorp, and Robert Hartley Stevens, “The Promise and Challenge of Global Network Governance: The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network,” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 18, no. 3 (2012): 333, 317–337.

¹⁴ ALON, R1736, Baker to de Watteville, March 9, 1922, 45.19454.X17337.

As far as membership was concerned, any organization interested in the Russian refugee question was welcome to attend (see table 3). During the first meeting of the ACPO, we find 12 organizations; 11 during the second; nine during the third; 15 in April 1923; and 13 in September 1924. The number of organizations increased to 24 when the ACPO extended its work to both Russian and Armenian refugees.¹⁵ Here is the list of those in attendance in September 1921: the International Committee of the Red Cross, the *Union internationale de secours aux enfants*, Save the Children Fund, the Jewish Colonization Association and Associated Societies, the Armenian Refugees' Fund, the Fight the Famine Council, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Near East Relief, the European Student Relief World Christian Federation, the World Jewish Relief Conference, the Russian Red Cross, and the Zemgor.¹⁶ These institutions were quite different from one another: while the ICRC and the ILO had much larger mandates than refugee protection, there were those that targeted ethnic groups, such as Armenian, Jewish, or Russian, and those that worked in relation to specific categories such as women and children. Neither was there homogeneity in the typology of relationships that aid organizations created with the LON: if the ICRC, the UISE, or the SCF had already established agreements on refugee work, institutions including the NER and the Jewish organizations were never formally associated with the inter-governmental organization, yet they crucially contributed to debates around questions including identity documents or emigration plans.¹⁷

If we move from the level of private organizations to the level of international civil servants, the diversity was even larger.¹⁸ Frick, who acted as the chairperson during the first ACPO meeting, was working towards the repatriation of POWs for the ICRC.¹⁹ His wife, Marguerite Frick-Cramer, had served in the International Agency for Prisoners of War for the ICRC, together with a young Suzanne Ferrière,

¹⁵ ANB, Ms.fol. 1988, F10.Ia legg 35, Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Refugees held at the International Labour Office, September 10, 1925. In addition to core organizations, at the 1925 meeting, there were many new ones, connected to the Armenian question: President of the late Armenian Republic, *Union Générale Arménienne de Bienfaisance*, *Comité Central de secours pour l'Arménie*, *Comité de l'Association internationale pour le Proche-Orient* and of the *Comité Central de l'œuvre suisse de secours aux Arméniens*, British Society of Friends, *Comité Central des Réfugiés Arméniens*, and *Comité Philarménien belge*.

¹⁶ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture Volume I* (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

¹⁷ For Jewish organizations at LON, see Jaclyn Granick, "Les associations juives à la Société des Nations, 1919-1929: l'accès sans l'influence," *Relations internationales*, no. 151 (2013): 103-113.

¹⁸ Saunier, "Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux." Kott, "Une 'communauté épistémique' du social?" Rodogno, Gauthier, Piana, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ L'expérience du Comité international de la Croix Rouge en matière de secours internationaux, 56.

who was also the spokesperson of the UISE.²⁰ Georges Lodygensky represented the Russian Red Cross, while Sophia Panine and Nicolas Astroff represented the Zemgor.²¹ The two larger groups were composed of British and Americans. For British organizations, we find Lewis Golden, the treasurer of the SCF; Wolf, who represented the Jewish Colonization Association and Associated Societies; Rev. Harold Buxton and John Harris for the London-based Armenian Refugees' Fund, an organization established after the Hamidian massacres with Buxton having traveled in Armenia and Harris being engaged in anti-slavery activism in Belgian Congo;²² and George Paish acted on behalf of the British-based Fight Famine Council. Representing American organizations were B. A. Davis for the YMCA and G. L. Berry for the NER. S. Harvanowsky represented the European Student Relief World Christian Federation, and Zevi Aberson the World Jewish Relief Conference²³.

What did these men and a few women have in common? It was their knowledge of internationalism, humanitarian aid, charity, philanthropy, and refugee work. At the ACPO, they talked to each other, and shared data and expertise, which turned out to be instrumental for creating new knowledge. If the group of humanitarians sitting at the ACPO were an “epistemic community”—a category borrowed from political science which has been productively mobilized to study international organizations—other determinants including nationality, education, gender, age, class, and religion are instrumental to understand where ideas and practices of refugee protection originated.²⁴ The prevalent American, British, and Swiss nationalities of the ACPO members over the small number of Russians mirrored the civilizational categories that the new international system had inherited from the pre-world order, coped with the ideological divide which separated liberalism and Bolshevism: those with financial and political credentials had a more influential place in the decision-making process in the ACPO.

Alongside geopolitical hierarchies, knowledge embodied gendered discriminations: not only men outnumbered women but they also had a university degree and were often in command, whereas two of the three women, Ferrière and Panine, had learnt social work and philanthropy from practice, with Frick-Cramer being an

²⁰ Fiscalini, *op. cit.*, 142, 162.

²¹ ALON, Commission des Réfugiés Russes, C.R.R./P.V. Extraordinaire, Conférence des réfugiés russes, Réunion tenue entre le Haut-Commissaire et les représentants des associations privées, le lundi 19 septembre 1921.

²² Noel Buxton, Harold Jocelyn Buxton, *Travels and Politics in Armenia* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914). On Harris, see Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, 175; Ribi Forclaz, *op. cit.* Kevin Grant, “Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29, no. 2 (2001): 27–58.

²³ Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism*, 142–149.

²⁴ Kott, “Une ‘Communauté Épistémique’ du Social?”.

exception as she had a doctorate and taught history at the University of Geneva.²⁵ Different generations met in the ACPO: Wolf and Panine were the elders of the group and embodied late-nineteenth-century charity and philanthropy, which were at odds with liberal ideas of efficiency and professionalism in the aid industry, particularly endorsed by the Americans. This aspect is closely connected to the coexistence of paid and voluntary work: the ICRC was probably the most striking example of an organization built upon voluntary work, especially at the level of the Geneva-based Committee to which Frick, Frick-Cramer, and Ferrière belonged. Humanitarian aid was also a matter of class, as among its ranks, the ACPO exclusively counted representatives of high bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Regarding religion, there were Protestants of different denominations, Jews, and Orthodox Christians. The diversified amalgam of individuals and experiences which crossed paths in the ACPO created the context where re-conceptualized and new ideas about charity, progressive philanthropy, and morality informed refugee politics.

As we have seen, the first meeting of the ACPO took place as a spontaneous side event to the September 1921 conference on Russian refugees through which Nansen inaugurated the new position of high commissioner.²⁶ The most heated topic was the fragile presence of Russian refugees in Constantinople, whose conditions were so dire that the ACPO decided to quickly reconvene. This happened in November 1921, when the relief organizations in attendance recommended that Nansen pressed the League of Nations Council to communicate with governments, both members and non-members, on the challenges that displaced Russians in Constantinople faced. Such an example carries a double significance. On the one hand, private organizations largely acknowledged governments' primacy in international relations and, if they failed to do so, Frick did not shy away from reminding them that refugee protection was "a question of competence" falling into the governmental realm. On the other hand, non-state advocacy was imaginative and informed governments' decisions. For instance, private organizations suggested that Russians in Constantinople would be transported abroad, upon the granting of transit visas, and helped find "the means necessary to their maintenance and their settlement in productive employment." Wolf was particularly vocal: refugees should be urgently

²⁵ Adele Lindenmeyr, "Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762-1914," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (1993): 562-591. Adele Lindenmeyr, "The First Soviet Political Trial: Countess Sofia Panina before the Petrograd Revolutionary Tribunal," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 4 (2001): 505-525. Fiscalini, *op. cit.*, 142.

²⁶ ALON, Réunion tenue entre le Haut-Commissaire et les représentants des associations privées, le lundi 19 septembre 1921, C.R.R./P.V. Extraordinary.

given an identity document, while their legal status was “an entirely different question” that could be momentarily postponed.²⁷

Crucial questions were discussed at the ACPO. In May 1922, Wolf denounced the consequences of American and Canadian anti-immigration policies on desperate Russian refugees, for whom quota measures remained unchanged.²⁸ To bypass the problem, Wolf was happy to “take refugees off the hands of the High Commissariat,” provided that Jewish refugees had access to “political privileges and facilities.” Wolf was particularly critical of the recent anti-immigration laws approved by the United States:

...The great immigration countries [were] earnestly asked to share in these sacrifices by such a relaxation of their immigration restrictions as [would] enable a substantial proportion of these refugees to settle in their midst, the numbers, qualifications and other conditions to be determined hereafter by mutual agreement.²⁹

However, Wolf’s request remained a dead letter, on account of Russian refugees being seen as Bolshevik agents by the American and Canadian governments, despite the fact that they had become refugees to escape from Bolshevism.³⁰ Neither did the dire conditions of Russian children being underfed, uneducated, or sick with tuberculosis soften the anti-immigration policies.³¹

Alongside the expansion of the HCR, in 1924, the ACPO enlarged its mandate to Armenian refugees and created a large number of specialized sub-committees on questions including resettlement, identity documents, or the needs of refugee

²⁷ ALON, Second meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Relief Organizations for Russian refugees held on November 24, 1921 at 3 p.m., C.C.R.R./O.P./PV.2.

²⁸ At times, Jewish organizations bypassed the LON, contacting countries that had approved anti-immigration laws, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and worked towards softening their policies. This is what Wolf reported at the fourth meeting of the ACPO in 1923. ALON, PV de la séance de la Commission consultative des Organisations privées de secours aux réfugiés russes, tenue à Genève le vendredi 20 avril 1923, C.C.R.R./O.P./3^e session/PV.1. On the history of American politics towards refugees, see Bon Tempo, *op. cit.*

²⁹ ALON, R1714, Resolution proposed by Mr. Lucien Wolf of the Jewish Colonisation Association and adopted unanimously by the Advisory Committee of Voluntary Organisations for relief to Russian refugees at its meeting from May 29-30, 1922, 45.21041.12319.

³⁰ ALON, Minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations for the relief of Russian refugees, held on Monday May 29 and Tuesday May 30, 1922 at the offices of the Secretariat, C.C.R.R./P.P./PV.1.

³¹ ALON, PV de la séance de la Commission consultative des Organisations privées de secours aux réfugiés russes, tenue à Genève le vendredi 20 avril 1923, C.C.R.R./O.P./3^e session/PV.1.

children.³² In time, the ACPO would gain further independence: in 1926, private, voluntary organizations were asked to contact their respective national delegations and investigate whether further cooperation with the LON was possible; in 1927, the refugee problem was so far away from being “liquidated” that the ACPO decided to meet twice a year as work was pressing;³³ in 1929, the members of the ACPO pushed for the HCR to become a permanent organization.³⁴

The ACPO also went local: mirroring the delegations of the High Commissariat based in Austria, France, and Hungary, it created local committees which gathered all aid organizations engaged in refugee protection.³⁵ By 1925, when part of the work was transferred to the ILO, ten out of eleven HCR delegations relied upon national committees of the ACPO. Moreover, a local anchoring was considered to be the best solution for the LON to reach governments, which were called to financially contribute on top of their annual contributions to the LON and in addition to the resources that had been already deployed on their territories to assist both Russian and Armenian refugees. Yet, the consequences of the economic crises in the 1930s worsened an already compromised situation.

Table 3. List of private, voluntary organizations participating in the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations, from 1921 to 1925.

September 19, 1921	President E. Frick; M. Frick-Cramer (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. B. Golden (SCF); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); H. Buxton and J. H. Harris (Armenian Refugee Fund); G. Paish (Fight the Famine Council); B. A. Davis (International Committee American YMCA); G.L. Berry (NER); S. Harvanowsky (European Student Relief World, Student Christian Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodygensky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor) ³⁶ .
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³² The Armenian sub-committee for the settlement of Armenian refugees in Syria and Lebanon, as we will see in Chapter 7; the special technical commission for the juridical situation of Armenian and Russian refugees; the sub-committee for the management of the revolving fund; the sub-committee for Russian refugees in Istanbul; the special commission for appointments; the sub-committee for the study of the conditions of refugee children; the sub-committee for the anti-tuberculosis funds; and the sub-commission to study the distribution of documents. Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 348.

³³ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, séance du 9 septembre 1926 tenue au BIT, A/C-3-1926. ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, séance du 7 septembre 1927, A/C-6-1927.

³⁴ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, séance du 22 mai 1928, A/C.1-1928 (1). ALON, C1471, Comité consultatif des organisations privées, séance tenue à Genève le 15 février 1929, A/C-4-1929.

³⁵ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, General report submitted to the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations at its meeting in Geneva on April 20, 1923, C.R.R.49, 45.27914.12319.

³⁶ ALON, Réunion tenue entre le Haut-Commissaire et les représentants des associations privées, le lundi 19 septembre 1921, C.R.R./P.V. Extraordinary.

November 24, 1921	President E. Frick; M. Frick-Cramer (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. Wolf and L. Ginsberger (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); O. Mc. Cowen (International Committee American YMCA); K. Fries (Student Relief World, Student Christian Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor); L. Bryson (League of Red Cross Society); Major Buxton (Imperial War Relief Fund); H.B. Butler, G. Pardo, and Villalonga (ILO) ³⁷ .
May 29-30, 1922	L. Brunel (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. Wolf and L. Ginsberger (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); C. Hoffmann (European Student Relief Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor); De Salis (League of Red Cross Society); H.B. Butler and Dickinson (ILO) ³⁸ .
April 20, 1923	President F. Nansen; L. Brunel (ICRC); S. Ferrière (UISE); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); B. A. Davis (International Committee American YMCA); G.L. Berry (NER); C. Hoffmann (European Student Relief Federation); L. Aberson (<i>Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours</i>); G. Lodyginsky (Russian Red Cross Society); S. Panine and N. Astroff (Zemgor); G. Milsom (League of Red Cross Society); Dickinson, Hentsch, Corbett (ILO); Rev F. Komlosy (Russian Relief and Reconstruction Fund); Arciszewsky (Representative of the Polish Delegation); G. Goulkévitch (Conference of Russian Ambassadors); Dr. Ferber (Delegate of the Free City of Danzig) ³⁹ .
September 3, 1924	E. Clouzot (ICRC and UISE); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies and SCF); J. H. Harris (Lord Mayor's Fund); O. Mc. Cowen (International Committee American YMCA); C.V. Vickery (NER); C. Hoffmann (European Student Relief Federation); Capt. C. Peterson (League of Red Cross Society); H.B. Butler and M.L. Varlez (ILO); G. Goulkévitch (Conference of Russian Ambassadors); G. F. Gracey (Friends of Armenia); T. Strong (International YMCA); M.A. Andréadios (delegate of Greece); M.V. Colocotronis (Greek <i>chargé d'affaires</i>) ⁴⁰ .

³⁷ ALON, Second meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Relief Organizations for Russian refugees held on November 24, 1921 at 3 p.m., C.C.R.R./O.P./PV.2.

³⁸ ALON, Minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations for the relief of Russian refugees, held on Monday May 29 and Tuesday May 30, 1922 at the offices of the Secretariat, C.C.R.R./P.P./PV.1

³⁹ ALON, PV de la séance de la Commission consultative des Organisations privées de secours aux réfugiés russes, tenue à Genève le vendredi 20 avril 1923, C.C.R.R./O.P./3^e session/PV.1.

⁴⁰ ALON, C1468, League of Nations High Commission for Refugees, meeting of the Advisory Committee held in Geneva, at the Offices of the Secretariat, on September 3, 1924, C.C.R.R./O.P.4th session/PV.1.

September 10, 1925 President F. Nansen; L. B. Golden (SCF and UISE); L. Wolf (Jewish Colonisation Association and Associated Societies); I. M. Smith and J. H. Harris (Lord Mayor's Fund and Friends of Armenia); O. Mc. Cowen (International Committee American YMCA); G.L. Berry (NER); L. Motzin and L. Aberson (*Conférence Universelle Juive de Secours*); G. Lodygensky (Russian Red Cross Society); Capt. C. Peterson (League of Red Cross Society); A. Thomas, H.B. Butler and T. F. Johnson (ILO); G. Goulkévitich (Conference of Russian Ambassadors); A. Khatissian (President of the late Armenian Republic); G. Sinapian and Y. Agathon Bey (*Union Générale Arménienne de Bienfaisance*); M. Papajanian (*Comité Central de Secours pour l'Arménie*); A. Krafft-Bonnard (*Comité de l'Association Internationale pour le Proche-Orient, Comité Central de l'Oeuvre Suisse de Secours aux Arméniens*); J. Burt, K. D. Courtney and H. Clark (British Society of Friends); W.M. Kotsching (International Student Service); B. Nikolsky (*Comité Central de Patronage de la Jeunesse Universitaire Russe à l'Étranger*); R. Pelantová (Czechoslovakian Red Cross Society); L. Pachalian (*Comité Central des Réfugiés Arméniens*); K. Jeppe (Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East of the LON); W. Orr (Council of the YMCA of the US); R. Larned (International Migration Service HQs); D. L. Rayner (Greek Branch of the International Migration Service); H. La Fontaine (*Comité Philarménien Belge*).⁴¹

4.2 Communication, publicity, and fundraising

Financial resources (or the lack of thereof) shaped humanitarian protection and refugee politics. The annual contribution that the LON made to the HCR was only meant to cover administrative costs which figured in temporary expenses.⁴² Governments' share was then crucial, yet difficult to secure. To that end, Nansen mobilized all types of discourses, ranging from moral compassion to political responsibility; he connected the humanitarian needs of displaced persons to world peace and postwar reconstruction; he even highlighted that desperate Russians could be vectors of social, medical, and political instabilities. Yet, the most heartfelt

⁴¹ ANB, Ms.fol. 1988, F10.1a legg 35, Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Refugees held at the International Labour Office, September 10, 1925.

⁴² This is the full list of questions listed under the temporary headline: the Temporary Commission for the Reduction of the Armaments, the International Blockade Committee, the repatriation of prisoners of war, the Commission of Enquiry regarding the deportation of women and children in the Near East, international bureaux and organizations—including the Committee for International Questions regarding Intellectual Cooperation, the Commission of Enquiry to Albania, the Committee of allocation of expenses. 2 League of Nations O. J. 1037 1921. Chapter III in the budget.

or even the most threatening appeals could do little against a simple fact: by the beginning of the 1920s, governments believed that they had already done enough to assist Russians. When, in the fall of 1921, France wished to discontinue the programs for Russian refugees in Constantinople, the numbers were brought to the attention of the HCR.

[...] The cost of the assistance of Russian refugees evacuated from the Crimea exceeded 150.000.000 francs. This sum had been provided as follows: 86.000.000 by the Ministry of War on the account of the Levant Army, 50.000.000 by the Navy, 6.000.000 by the merchant marine on special account, and 1.246.000 francs by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the account of the Committee for liquidating Wrangel assets. This money should be considered as an advance to the paid back from the Russian government to the French one.⁴³

Governments' growing disinterest towards postwar emergencies prompted the visual politics of humanitarian aid, which was made possible by recent technical innovations, and which flourished thanks to the rise of the consumer culture.⁴⁴ At the end of the war, the International Committee of the Red Cross realized that more articulated communication strategies were pivotal to broadening the political consensus, to emotionally moving the audience, and, hopefully, to raising contributions. This is the reason why a propaganda commission was established in 1919; its work concentrated on the running of local and national campaigns in Switzerland. While the commission continued to rely on traditional media, such as posters, postcards, stamps, and booklets, it also organized public screenings in Geneva where photographs were showcased, commented on by one of its delegates, and where "propaganda movies" were projected.⁴⁵ In late 1920, the Red Cross mandated the realization of four movies to be shown first at the 10th Conference of the Red Cross movement, which met in Geneva in late spring 1921. Such a short notice epitomized

⁴³ AICRC, C.R.87/SDN communications de la SDN concernant les réfugiés russes, Russian refugees, development of the question since the last meeting of the Council, memorandum by the Secretary-General and resolution adopted by the Council on September 2, 1921, C.292.(a)1921.VII. Measures taken by the French government to assist Russian refugees, statement by M. de Reffye, French Consul-General in Geneva.

⁴⁴ For a study on the ARC, see Kevin Rozario, "'Delicious Horrors': Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2003): 417–455. The history of visual politics of international organizations is a field undergoing expansion. For some examples, see Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (1995): 303–334 and Kate Manzo, "Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood," *Antipode* 40, no. 4 (2008): 632–657.

⁴⁵ Francesca Piana, "Photography, Cinema, and the Quest for Influence: the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First World War," in Fehrenbach and Rodogno, *op. cit.*, 140–164.

the institution's uncoordinated attempts to regain primacy within the movement. By portraying its flagship programs—the campaigns against typhus in Poland, the exchange of prisoners of War In Estonia, the assistance for Russian refugees in Constantinople, and child relief in Budapest—the ICRC put itself and the delegates at centerstage, stressing once again humanitarian compassion, professionalism, and determination. The receiving ends are innocent victims, needy children, or adults being displaced and in disarray.⁴⁶

As far as Nansen is concerned, from the outset, he complemented the appeals to governments with those addressed to civil society. As soon as he was appointed high commissioner for Russian refugees, in the fall of 1921, Nansen reached out to collect money for Russian refugees in Constantinople, followed by another appeal on behalf of Russian women in the city.⁴⁷ Thanks to the assistance of the LON Information Section, Nansen also published articles in newspapers, hoping to increase the visibility of refugee work.⁴⁸ Alongside the widespread use of propaganda movies, Nansen brought back from the famine-stricken Volga region a new one, thanks to which he tried to convince Western donors of the purely humanitarian, non-political call on behalf of starving Russians.⁴⁹ Two years later, in late 1923, Nansen toured the US in order to “tell the people of America about the suffering caused by the present conditions in Europe,” presenting in particular the desperate conditions of Ottoman Greeks and Armenians in the Near East, from which he had just returned.⁵⁰

Despite being small in scale, at times local initiatives brought more tangible results. In the fall of 1922, the Sofia Office of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees organized a grand ball, the proceeds from which helped to supply

⁴⁶ For work on the visual politics of the ICRC, see Enrico Natale, “Quand l’humanitaire commençait à faire son cinéma: les films du CICR des années 1920s,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 854 (2004): 415–437. Sébastien Farré and Yan Schubert, “L’illusion de l’objectif. Le délégué du CICR Maurice Rossel et les photographies de Theresienstadt,” *Le Mouvement Social* 227, no. 1 (2009): 65–83. Fania Khan Mohammad and Daniel Palmieri, “Des morts et des nus: le regard du CICR sur la malnutrition extrême en temps de guerre (1940-1950),” in Renée Dickason (ed.), *Mémoires croisées autour des deux Guerres mondiales* (Paris, Mare, & Martin, 2012), 85–104. Valérie Gorin, “When ‘Seeing Was Believing’: Visual Advocacy in the Early Decades of Humanitarian Cinema,” *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2021): 18–27.

⁴⁷ ALON, Second meeting of the Advisory Committee of Private Relief Organizations for Russian refugees held on November 24, 1921 at 3 p.m., C.C.R.R./O.P./PV.2. A second appeal would be launched in February 1922. NA, FO, 371.8155, N2955.43.38. Handwritten note by R.A. Leeper, March 28, 1922.

⁴⁸ ALON, R1720, Baker to Komlosy of the Russian Relief and Reconstruction Fund, March 10, 1922, 45.19199X.12930.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Hicks, “Documentary Film and the Volga Famine: Save the Children Fund’s Famine (1922),” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 43, no. 3 (2023): 645–667.

⁵⁰ ALON, R1756, For the hungry little children of the Near East. Golden Rule Sunday, December 2, 1923, 48.32579.29451.

children with much-needed winter boots.⁵¹ The same office organized a lottery in January 1924, aimed at assisting children, invalids, and sick Russian refugees living in the city. A “temporary committee” was created to organize the lottery and to represent the main organizations responding to the needs of Russians. This committee was composed of representatives of the League of Nations, of the Bulgarian government, and of local and international organizations, such as the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Russian Red Cross, and the Union of Russian Towns.⁵² As many as 250,000 tickets were issued, of which 1,169 were winning numbers. The total sum of the lottery was 2,500,000 levas, while the sum of the winning tickets amounted to 500,000 levas. The profits were distributed to various organizations that were focusing on particularly fragile categories: the Russian Red Cross helped invalids and child internees; Zemgor established a consumptive sanatorium; the Sofia school provided clothing for destitute children, while the Students of Sofia University assisted university students.⁵³

Similarly in Constantinople, where Russian refugees were in dire conditions, fundraising activities were organized, from concerts to exhibitions showcasing handcrafts produced by the refugees.⁵⁴ Indeed, the American Red Cross established workshops where refugees did embroidery and sewing work, as well as wood carving and furniture making; products were then sold to tourists in the city.⁵⁵ In Aleppo, the Danish Karen Jeppe equally established workshops where Armenian women did embroidery, reproducing the traditional patterns of their region of origins and where boys crafted goods which were sold in Denmark and elsewhere.⁵⁶ The underlying idea was for refugees to be self-supporting and to contribute to their own rescue by means of a concrete activity. Jeppe, who owned a camera, also took photographs which were then used in the written press and in public campaigns in Denmark, as a strategy to communicate and raise empathy. While only a few, fully captioned, photographs are left in the League of Nations’ archives, Jeppe’s full album is preserved at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan.⁵⁷

⁵¹ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, general report submitted to the ACPO at its meeting in Geneva on April 20, 1923, C.R.R.49, 45.27914.12319.

⁵² ALON, R1742, The statute of the Temporary Committee of the Lottery organized for the purpose of helping the children, the invalids, and the sick Russian refugees, 45.21997x.20135.

⁵³ ALON, R1742, Collins to Johnson, January 26, 1924, 45.21997x.20135.

⁵⁴ ALON, C1398, Fonctions du Bureau de Constantinople: Bureau International du Travail, Service des réfugiés, mois de février 1925.

⁵⁵ ALON, C1437, Extracts from Mrs. Miles report, undated, possibly 1925, R404/1/66/1.

⁵⁶ ALON, R640, Deportation of women and children in Turkey and the neighboring countries, memorandum by the secretary-general, September 4, 1922, A.28.1922.III, 12.23010.4631.

⁵⁷ ALON, R641, Annual report “B” supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

4.3 The “Nansen passport” and legal definitions

Refugee work was about humanitarian practices and policies as much as about international law. In their unexpected exile, a few Russians brought identity documents and passports, which were no longer valid as they had been issued by non-recognized *de facto* authorities, while many had no documents at all.⁵⁸ Indeed, passports became compulsory to cross states' borders only at the end of WWI when a rigid system of control was put into practice.⁵⁹ Moreover, Soviet authorities approved a decree on December 23, 1921, which deprived the majority of Russian refugees of their citizenship.

A Government decree declares that the following persons have forfeited their Russian citizenship: 1. Those who have resided continuously abroad for five years without obtaining certificates from the Soviet representatives by June 1, 1922, except in the case of countries having as yet no such representatives. 2. Persons who left Odessa after October, 1917, without Soviet authorization. 3. Persons who served voluntarily with the counter-revolutionary armies and organizations. 4. All other Russians resident abroad who fail to get registered at the Soviet Legations by [the] above-mentioned date". This new law also stated, "[A]ll these persons may, however, petition the all-Russian Executive Committee through the nearest Soviet representative not later than June 1, 1922."⁶⁰

As legal scholar George Ginsburgs, writes, mass denaturalization was “new both to the Soviet government and to international law.”⁶¹ The decree of December 1921 would be confirmed by Article 12 of the Statute of 1924, which the Soviet Union approved after its official creation in 1923.⁶² Amnesties allowed a few Russians to repatriate, especially Cossacks; this happened on their own initiative or under the aegis of the ICRC and of the LON.⁶³

⁵⁸ Louise W. Holborn, “The Legal Status of Political Refugees, 1920-1938,” *The American Journal of International Law* 32, no. 4 (1938): 680, 680–703. For stateless persons, Rubinstein talked of “repudiation” from the state of origin. J. L. Rubinstein, “The Refugee Problem,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)* 15, no. 5 (1936): 716–734.

⁵⁹ Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*. John Torpey, “Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate ‘Means of Movement’,” *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 3 (1998): 253, 239–59.

⁶⁰ FO, 371.8150, N1791.43.38, Draft Briefs 16.3.1922, 28, Russian refugees, C.B.C.33/28 by Evans.

⁶¹ George Ginsburgs, “The Soviet Union and the Problem of Refugees and Displaced Persons 1917-1956,” *The American Journal of International Law* 51, no. 2 (1957): 329, 325–361.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 333. See also, Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea.” Long, “Early Repatriation Policy”.

Rooted in the writings of jurists, Hugo Grotius and Emmerich de Vattel, the norm of asylum had a long tradition in customary law; yet, as stakeholders would soon realize, its implementation remained vague.⁶⁴ To asylum governments, Russian refugees were foreigners, whose rights and duties were uncertain, and who would potentially become a burden to public assistance in the delicate post-war reconstruction. While those who stayed locally might undergo processes of naturalization which varied according to the rules in place, many had to resettle in order to find remunerated employment. In the first case and most certainly in the second one, an identity document was necessary. This is the context where the Nansen passport came into being: while being an absolute novelty in international relations, since the League of Nations acted as the putative state of stateless Russians and Armenians, it was also a means to protect the nation-state and postwar welfare systems from “threatening” foreigners.⁶⁵ Instead of addressing inequalities or addressing the root causes of forced displacement, international refugee law inherited nineteenth-century civilizational categories.⁶⁶

As soon as he came to office, Nansen pushed asylum countries to issue identity certificates thanks to which Russian refugees could cross states’ borders in order to find employment and become self-sufficient. To do so, he relied on the expertise of Russian lawyers: André Mandelstam, a member of the Institute of International Law, addressed a memorandum to the LON Secretariat on the legal position of Russian refugees;⁶⁷ further discussions took place on the occasion of two conferences that occurred in Paris in early 1922 in the presence of Russian jurists and representatives of the HCR.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Nansen asked the International Labour Organization about the typology of documents that would safeguard the interests of Russian refugees as workers.

⁶⁴ Peter Pavel Remeč, *The Position of the Individual in International Law According to Grotius and Vattel* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960).

⁶⁵ For a reference on the place of refugees in international law, see Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher (eds), *Refugees in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶⁷ ALON, R1725, Memorandum regarding the legal position of the Russian refugees by André Mandelstam, C.R.R.3., 45.14387.14387.

⁶⁸ Baron Nolde, professor at the University of Petrograd and member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, affiliated with the Institute of International Law; Aleksandre A. Pilenko, professor at the University of Petrograd; Jacob Rubinstein, lawyer at the Court of Kharkov; and Gronsky, professor at the University of Petrograd. ALON, R1728, PV des conférences des représentants du Haut-Commissaire de la Société des Nations pour les réfugiés russes et des juristes russes, tenues à Paris le 30 et 31 janvier et le 2 février 1922, 45.19251.15823. Dzovinar Kévonian, “Les juristes juifs russes en France et l’action internationale dans les années vingt,” *Archives Juives* 34, 2 (2001): 72–94.

It is thought that a considered opinion from the legislative section of the International Labour Office would carry great weight with the governments interested in bringing this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. The High Commissariat is of the opinion that a simple papier d'identité would not be an instrument of sufficient protection to the workers vis-à-vis the employers. The opinion of the International Labour Office on this very important question would, it is thought, be one of the principal arguments which the High Commissariat might bring forward in pressing the Governments to take urgent measures to grant Russian refugees on their territories a recognized and valid legal status.⁶⁹

In March 1922, the HCR prepared a draft certificate that the LON Council distributed to member states for advice. This initiative was closely followed by a letter in which Eric Drummond asked for governments' views on Nansen's proposal and investigated the legal position of Russian refugees in their respective countries. France replied and suggested that a conference would be convened to discuss the technical and legal matters connected with certificates for refugees. Participants would then agree on a certificate under which all the legal dispositions that already applied to refugees in asylum countries were accepted.⁷⁰ Following the French proposal, the High Commissariat for Russian refugees organized an international conference from July 3-5, 1922 in Geneva.⁷¹ A model identity document was created, commonly referred to as the Nansen passport, as well as "an arrangement relating to the granting of identity certificates" to standardize procedures. Without dismissing local peculiarities, the rationale behind the certificate and the Arrangement was to provide refugees with a document that might have general validity and foster coordination among governments. The LON Council approved the recommendation of the Geneva conference on July 20, 1922.⁷² The Nansen passport was valid for one year and would lose its validity in the event that the Russian refugee obtained a new nationality. "On presentation of the certificate (which identifies the bearer as a Russian refugee), the refugee may in certain circumstances be admitted into the State which he wishes to enter [...]."⁷³

⁶⁹ ALON, Note for the International Labor Office, November 23, 1921, C.C.R.R.OP/1.

⁷⁰ ALON, R1729, Papers of Identity, Memorandum of the High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, C.L.79(b)1922, 45.22592.15833.

⁷¹ Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Poland, Romania, the Kingdom of the SHS, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. There were also Corbett and Dickinson for the ILO, de Watteville as Assistant HCR and secretary-general of the conference, and Johnson for the HCR. Van Hamel of the LON Legal Section acted as the president. ALON, R1728, Governmental Conference on Passports for Russian Refugees held at Geneva, July 3-5, 1922, C.R.R./C.I./PV.1.(1), 45.21597x.15833.

⁷² ALON, R1714, Russian refugees, Report of the Fifth Committee as submitted to the Third Assembly by Ador, delegate of Switzerland, A.141.1922, Geneva, September 25, 1922, 45.23660.12319.

⁷³ Arrangement with regard to the issue of certificates of identity to Russian Refugees, July 5, 1922, paragraph 5, 355 LNTS, 238.

With the 1922 Arrangement, international refugee law, grounded in the European public law political tradition, took the first step toward the establishment of agreed norms and rules to codify the rights of stateless people.⁷⁴ However, echoing lawyer James Hathaway, “its purpose [was] not specifically to meet the needs of refugees themselves [...] but rather to govern disruptions of regulated international migration in accordance with the interests of states.”⁷⁵ Indeed, the Arrangement did not determine who was a refugee; it was not binding upon states, nor did it limit states’ sovereignty. Created for Russian refugees, the Arrangement was then extended to Armenian refugees on May 31, 1924. Soon after, painstaking debates took place at the LON as to whether to extend the Nansen passport to other groups. As Claudena Skran writes, upon the request of the Belgian delegation in 1926, the HRC was asked to examine the possible extension of the passport.⁷⁶ Such opening saw various private and voluntary address reports to the Refugee Section of the ILO on the conditions of specific groups, among which we find “19,000 Assyro-Chaldeans in the Caucasus and Greece, 9,000 Ruthenians in Austria and Czechoslovakia, 100,000 refugees in central Europe, including 10,000 former Hungarians in Austria, France and Romania, 16,000 Jews in Romania” and a few Turks in Greece.⁷⁷ Eventually, the LON Council reiterated that humanitarian protection could only be extended to refugees whose displacement was a consequence of the war; this means that the Nansen passport was exclusively extended to Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean, and Turkish refugees in 1928.⁷⁸ Figure 5 is an example of a Nansen passport delivered by Luxembourg.

How did the Nansen passport work? After adhering to the 1922 Arrangement, governments could grant it as a provisional passport to which visas would be added.⁷⁹ A diversified set of institutions—local or provincial authorities, refugees’ committees, or the local office of the HCR—applied for visas on a family or individual basis.⁸⁰ Yet, the Nansen passport carried restrictions: governments did not allow refugees to return; they had no obligation either to issue visas to Nansen

⁷⁴ Holborn, *op. cit.* James C. Hathaway, “The Evolution of Refugee Status in International Law: 1920—1950,” *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1984): 348–380.

⁷⁵ James C. Hathaway, “Reconsideration of the Underlying Premise of Refugee Law,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 31 (1990): 129–183.

⁷⁶ Skran, *op. cit.*, 114–115.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ ALON, Arrangement concerning the extension to other categories of refugees of certain measures taken in favor of Russian and Armenian refugees, signed at Geneva, June 30, 1928.

⁷⁹ Work on the Nansen passport still needs to be written. One of the few and early exceptions is the work of Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill on the reasons why Canada did not accept the Nansen passport and on the measures that Canada adopted instead. Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “Rejecting ‘Misfits’: Canada and the Nansen Passport,” *International Migration Review* 28, no. 2 (1994): 281–306.

⁸⁰ Individual visa applications contained a brief history of the refugee and the reasons for her/his emigration. ALON, C136, Nansen office for refugees, delegation in Germany (Berlin), correspondence

passport holders or to protect them or allow them to move freely. Granting the Nansen passport did not imply that refugees would be given the financial resources needed to travel.⁸¹ Furthermore, it was not until the 1933 Convention that Nansen passport holders would automatically benefit from the law governing the status of foreigners in the countries of asylum.



Fig. 5. Example of a Nansen passport. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.⁸²

with and concerning Russian refugees currently residing in (moving into/out of) Germany (legal status, Nansen passport, visas, etc.) letters A-Z (1923).

⁸¹ ALON, C1228, Letter to the High Commission of the League of Nations, Geneva, March 19, 1923, unsigned.

⁸² ALON, C1416/312/R.409/40/1 – International Labour Office Refugees Service – Legal Status and Identity Certificates of Refugees – Luxembourg.

Local regulations shaped the granting of the Nansen passport. In Austria, the government collaborated with the HCR, most likely as it received a great deal of economic and financial help from the LON with its postwar recovery. This explains why the Austrian authorities delegated to the national office of the HCR in Vienna the decision on who was eligible for a passport, thus surrendering part of its sovereignty to an international organization.⁸³ Opposite is the case of Lithuania: despite adhering to the 1922 July Arrangement, the Baltic state delivered only a limited number of passports to Russian refugees. It preferred to furnish Russian refugees with ordinary residence permits, which would not give them the right to be admitted to another country. As Russians had neither passports nor Nansen papers, they were often expelled to Soviet Russia.⁸⁴ Indeed, at the time, the principle of *non-refoulement* had not yet been formalized; it would be formulated only in the Convention of 1933.

The situation was even more complicated in Constantinople, the ex-Ottoman capital, which first experienced an inter-Allied occupation, and which was then integrated into the new Turkish state. Between 1918 and 1923, at the apex of the Russian refugee crisis, the city did not have a formal territorial authority, and the Allied Powers were *de facto* responsible for the government of Constantinople. In view of the Kemalists' control of the city, faced with the looming dangers of expulsion, Nansen urged the Allies to grant identity certificates to Russian refugees, while the office of the HCR would take care of printing and distributing the papers.⁸⁵ The Italian and British governments followed Nansen's suggestion, whereas the French government did not, as it did not consider itself to be the formal territorial power of Constantinople.⁸⁶ Knowing that France had initiated the conference on identity documents, such an attitude was certainly incongruous. To cope with the situation, the Inter-Allied Bureau of Passports of the LON in Constantinople delivered passports to Russian refugees.⁸⁷ Things changed once more when, in 1922, the Turkish government took control of the city and decided to issue a special Turkish passport to Russian refugees who refused to contact the Soviet consulate in the city (Germany was the only one to accept Soviet passports at that point). The Turkish

⁸³ ALON, R1715, Rapport présenté sur l'activité de la Délégation en Autriche et en Hongrie du 1^{er} IX 1922 au 1^{er} août 1923 au Haut-Commissariat de la Société des Nations pour les Réfugiés par Henri Reymond, Vienna, August 10, 1923, 45.29424.12319.

⁸⁴ ALON, R1715, Rapport général sur la situation des réfugiés russes en Lettonie, Esthonie et Lithuanie pour la période du mois d'août 1922–mois d'août 1923, 45.29424.12319.

⁸⁵ ALON, C1443, Note concerning the Provision of Identity Certificates for Russian Refugees in Constantinople, circulated to the High Commissioners of the Principal Allied Powers by Nansen, High Commissioner of the League of Nations, R409/06/1.

⁸⁶ ALON, C1443, Poincaré to Nansen, December 5, 1922, R409/06/1.

⁸⁷ ALON, C1443, Oungre to Wolf, September 24, 1922, R409/06/1.

passport was meant to substitute the Nansen passport, since Turkey did not adhere to the 1922 Geneva Arrangement. Visas of departure would only be attached to the special Turkish passport—the Turkish authorities refused to allow Russian refugees to leave if they did not possess it.⁸⁸ This explains why the representatives of the HCR did all they could for the Turkish and Nansen passports to be considered equal.⁸⁹

As these case studies suggest, the limits of the Nansen passport soon became so evident that a new inter-governmental conference was convened from May 10-12, 1926, one year after the technical services of the HCR migrated from the LON to the ILO. On the same occasion, the first legal definition was approved, and was soon extended to Armenian refugees.

A refugee was any person of Russian origin who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Union of Soviet Republics and who has not acquired another nationality.⁹⁰

Interpretations of such definition vary. Historians, Claudena Skran and Michael Marrus, agree that such definition eased refugees' access to humanitarian assistance; moreover, a group approach potentially protected all Russians abroad, without the need to individually explain the reasons for the flight. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this included a kaleidoscopic group of white Russian soldiers and officials who fled with their families; people who escaped the famine of 1920 and 1921; aristocrats; and middle-class people.⁹¹ However, the definition made reference neither to the political, ideological, economic, or religious causes that had uprooted Russians nor to the legal obligation to offer them asylum.⁹² Likely, maintaining good relations with refugee-producing countries Russia and Turkey, at that time still outsiders of the "family of nations," appeared to be more important than denouncing the events from which millions of people sought protection abroad. All in all, 54 governments recognized the Nansen passport for Russian refugees, while 38 governments recognized the Nansen passport for Armenian refugees.

⁸⁸ ALON, C1443, McKinnon to Johnson, December 10, 1923, R409/06/1.

⁸⁹ ALON, C1443, Letter from Childs, November 27, 1923, R409/06/1.

⁹⁰ ALON, Arrangement of May 12, 1926 relating to the issue of the identity certificates to Russian and Armenians Refugees.

⁹¹ Skran, *op. cit.*, 1-7. Marrus, *op. cit.*, 3-13.

⁹² Hathaway, "Reconsideration of the Underlying Premise of Refugee Law." Long, "Early Repatriation Policy." Siegelberg, *op. cit.*

4.4 Political refugees or economic migrants? The ILO perspective

Early on, the BIT provided technical “non-political” expertise to the LON on Russian refugees, by framing humanitarian protection and refugee politics at the crossroad of migration and unemployment.⁹³ Since 1921, the BIT participated in the inter-governmental conferences that Nansen organized at the LON and played an active role in the meetings of the ACPO; Guido Pardo, the head of the Russian Section, and Louis Varlez, the head of the Emigration and Unemployment Section, tightly collaborated with the LON; an officer, D. Dickinson, was detached from the Russian Section of the BIT to the HCR.⁹⁴ For an organization that wished to limit its involvement in the Russian refugee question, the density and the frequency of inter-institutional and personal connections prove quite the opposite.

Thanks to the newly created IEC, the ILO was one of the few organizations, if not the only one, able to collect widespread data on international migrations—data that informed its work. At its first meeting in August 1921, the IEC presented 29 resolutions where it exposed the abuses that migrants underwent in the place of departure, during the journey, and upon arrival. Yet, it did not limit itself to denouncing abuses but put forward a solution for each resolution. For instance, to migrants who often ignored national legislations, governments should issue advice on the procedures and risks before embarkation. Local charities and institutions were encouraged to coordinate their efforts, especially knowing that the migrant would not have the same access to social protection than the national worker. The outcome of the IEC’s meeting was that the governments in attendance unanimously approved the resolutions and that the BIT prepared ten reports, two of them containing executive measures for the formulation of statistics and for the international coordination of national legislations on migration.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, the question of Russian refugees opened the door to experimentation.⁹⁶ Building on the initiative that Thomas undertook in early 1921, when he investigated with the IEC whether governments would resettle Russians on their territory, in October of the same year, Butler, the deputy-director of the BIT, consulted European and overseas governments once more.⁹⁷ As the request was

⁹³ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”: 877–885.

⁹⁴ AILO, R201/10, Thomas to Drummond, August 19, 1921. AILO, R201/20/1, Butler to Nansen, September 23 1921.

⁹⁵ AILO, *International Labor Review*, “Migration. The International Emigration Commission,” 4 (1921): 3, 96–97.

⁹⁶ AILO, R201/20/1, Provisional record of the third session of the International Labor Conference, supplement, no. 23, November 18, 1921, Relief of Russian Refugees, communication addressed to the Conference.

⁹⁷ AILO, R202/3/B, Butler to the Danish and Norwegian governments, October 4, 1921.

met with renewed skepticism, the BIT adapted its strategy and, upon the request of Nansen and of the LON, undertook the census of Russian refugees in various countries where it paid attention to their professions, as a way to launch programs of local integration or resettlement.⁹⁸ As soon as the census was completed, the BIT promptly transformed empirical data into a detailed report, soon distributed to governments and organizations.⁹⁹ It also contacted countries of possible emigration to investigate whether they would be willing to accept Russians. Here is an example of a cable addressed to the Peruvian government in the fall of 1921.

In order to the end the problem of the Russian refugee question the League of Nations has appointed Nansen High Commissioner stop A special Conference of Governments has decided upon the taking of a general census of Russian refugees in order to obtain the exact number, the sex, age, civil status and occupation stop The Conference has entrusted the International Labor Office with the question of finding employment by emigration to overseas countries stop It is desired to ascertain what classes of Russian refugees might employment in and under what conditions stop Would the Peruvian government bear the cost of journey and settlement stop Would it be willing to send representatives to the Port of embarkation to select refugees stop The International Labor Office calls attention of the Peruvian government to the importance of the efforts made by the League of Nations in view of the extreme necessity of settling this question rapidly stop please reply urgently.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1921, Varlez adjusted the work of the IEC to the conditions of Russian refugees: they should be examined before embarkation, hence avoiding being considered “unfit” once they reached Ellis Island or Halifax, and they should be provided with a passport. According to Varlez, “the immigration of Russian refugees would [have] be[en] significantly facilitated,” had overseas countries mitigated their anti-immigration laws.¹⁰¹ Clearly, the BIT framed Russian refugees as unemployed migrants rather than as an unexpected byproduct of the Great War. Yet, the BIT’s involvement in Russian refugees’ resettlement did not exclude other solutions. Indeed, both the LON and Czechoslovakia urged the BIT to share its knowledge of Russia’s politics and economics in view of agreeing on repatriation

⁹⁸ AILO, R225/1, Liste d’occupations des réfugiés russes sans travail, undated. The lists include fishermen, farmers, tanners and leather workers, textile workers, food producers, carpenters, paper workers, bricklayers, painters, gas and water technicians, transport workers, commercial employees, secretaries, representatives of the liberal professions, domestic workers, warehouse workers, transport workers, and unskilled laborers.

⁹⁹ AILO, R202/1, Note pour M. le directeur, undated but likely fall 1921.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1734, Telegram, 45.16776.16404.

¹⁰¹ AILO, R202/1, Note de la section d’émigration par Varlez, undated, likely fall 1921.

plans. Repatriated refugees could become “pioneers of Western methods, ideas and culture” thanks to the vocational training that they had received in exile.¹⁰²

The ILO was neither alone nor the first institution to embrace “assistance through labor.”¹⁰³ In the countries of first asylum, Zemgor had created offices that helped refugees to be hired in the public or private sectors, or create small businesses, such as crafting or sewing shops, or work in agricultural colonies, for instance. It soon became clear that these measures, albeit important, could not neutralize the shaky status of postwar markets, where refugees competed with national workers, and could not tackle the conditions of fragile categories, such as the intellectual, invalid, or old ones. Hence, Zemgor suggested that Russians should be assisted in crossing international borders and in finding employment abroad.¹⁰⁴ While the question of passports was studied at the LON, the Legal Section of the BIT suggested that Russian organizations in exile or the offices of the HCR produce a “certificate of nationality” to which visas should be added in order to cross borders; once having arrived in the new country, Russian refugees should be given regular residency permits which would ease their insertion into the local labor market, where they would enjoy the same status and social protection as nationals.¹⁰⁵ If the expert knowledge of the BIT certainly informed the discussions around the making of the Nansen passport, it was not until 1933 that refugees and nationals would be extended the same amount of social protection. As historian Catherine Gousseff highlights, Russian refugees were turned into cheap laborers, whose social, economic, and political rights were long undermined.¹⁰⁶

The so-called disentanglement of the ILO from the refugee question was further challenged by the needs arising from the Greek and Armenian displacements to which the organization responded, by sharing its technical expertise.¹⁰⁷ By 1924, though, it became clear that the refugee question would not be easily “liquidated” and that Russian as well as Ottoman Armenian and Greek refugees would have to be resettled, since repatriation plans were impossible. Indeed, as we have seen, the establishment of post-imperial Russian and Turkish citizenry went hand in hand with the approval of decrees of denationalization which turned white Russians

¹⁰² AILO, R219/2, Note for the director by D. Dickinson, April 6, 1922.

¹⁰³ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”: 881–882.

¹⁰⁴ AILO, R201/9, L’assistance aux réfugiés russes par le travail par Zemgor, November 23, 1921.

¹⁰⁵ AILO, R204/2/1, Note sur la situation juridique des réfugiés russes en tant qu’ouvriers, et sur la manière de leur assurer la jouissance d’un statut régulier, November 24, 1921.

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Gousseff, “Le placement des réfugiés russes dans l’agriculture,” *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie – Empire russe – Union soviétique et États indépendants* 46, 4 (2005): 757–776.

¹⁰⁷ Kontogiorgi, *op. cit.* Davide Rodogno, in collaboration with Shaloma Gauthier and Francesca Piana, “Relief and Reconstruction Programs in Greece, 1922–1925,” in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013): 147–170.

and Armenian refugees into stateless persons, while the internationally endorsed ethnic cleansing between Greece and Turkey annihilated the possibility of return. As many private organizations suggested—including Zemgor, as well as the Jewish Colonisation Association—it was of the utmost urgency to match job offers and requests at the international level rather than at the national one.¹⁰⁸

By the mid-1920s, there were three options that the HCR had, i.e., to close, to continue working within the LON Secretariat, perpetuating the same political and financial problems that had hindered its activities, or to transfer part of its work to the ILO. As per usual, the HCR consulted with the organization's member states: to the British government, "the service [was] or should be, a dying one: nothing [was] advanced to show that it [would] be either better done, or sooner ended, by the ILO, and the whole weight of 'inertia' [was] against the transfer."¹⁰⁹ From their end, Australia, South Africa, and Venezuela believed that it was not in the mandate of the LON to find employment for refugees, not even through joint policies with the ILO.¹¹⁰ Yet, despite these opposing voices, the member states of the LON were rather in favor of getting rid of refugee work by collaborating with the ILO.

As of the spring of 1924, thanks to inter-institutional discussions, the basic principles were settled: legal and political questions would continue to be managed by the HCR, whereas the BIT would be responsible for the technical work.¹¹¹ The approval was easier from the LON side: in June 1924, the transfer was positively welcomed during a meeting at the Secretariat.¹¹² Problems, rather, were raised from the ILO side, where the question was discussed during the meetings of the Governing Body. On the one hand, a few officers lamented that the expert knowledge provided by the BIT to the LON had not been correctly acknowledged; taking over refugee work would officially shed light on the organization's specific contribution. On the other hand, a majority perceived the transfer as being imposed by the LON, which rather delayed the discussion of other delicate questions including the budget and the total number of Russian and Armenians refugees needing protection.¹¹³ This

¹⁰⁸ AILO, R204/7, Thomas to Wolf, April 20, 1923. AILO, R204/7, Wolf to Thomas, May 2, 1923.

¹⁰⁹ NA, FO T160.225, Refugees, General, League of Nations activities in connection therewith November 1, 1923–October 12, 1925, F8415, Letter to Kingham, Ministry of Labour, June 3, 1924. Along the same lines, George William Rendel, the authoritative chief of the Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office, argued that the transfer of the activities on behalf of refugees to the ILO would not improve their general conditions. NA, FO 371.10467, N3197.17.38, Handwritten note by G.W. Rendel, April 7, 1924.

¹¹⁰ Skran, *op. cit.*, 190.

¹¹¹ AILO, R201/20/5 jacket 1, Nansen to Thomas, February 23, 1924.

¹¹² AILO, R201/20/5 jacket 1, Transfert éventuel de l'oeuvre des réfugiés au BIT, PV d'une séance tenue au secrétariat de la SdN, June 18, 1924.

¹¹³ Minutes of the 22nd session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, Geneva, April 1924. Even if numbers were contested, the ILO reported that in 1925, there were 400,000 Russian

explains why, more than helpless refugees, in the discussions at the ILO, Russians and Armenians came across as an “element of danger for the development of social progress,” from which local labor markets should be protected.¹¹⁴ What is interesting here is to see how different actors articulated the word protection in relation to humanitarian compassion and refugee work.¹¹⁵

Since inter-institutional connections proved tense, inter-personal ones turned out to be crucial. During the whole process, Nansen was in close touch with Thomas, who never hid his interest in refugee work. “I need hardly add”—Thomas writes to Nansen—“it would give me the greatest pleasure personally to be associated with you in the self-sacrificing and humanitarian work on behalf of the refugees and which has already given such notable results [...]”¹¹⁶ Moreover, the transfer was also endorsed by the ACPO: not only did its members officially express appreciation for the work that the BIT had previously done on behalf of refugees, but most of them already knew the organization from within, as they had been affiliated with a new body, the International Committee of Private Organizations for the Protection of Emigrants.¹¹⁷ At his end, Nansen stressed the non-political character of refugee work and argued that questions with a political character—such as passports and the negotiations with the Soviet authorities—had already been solved by the LON.¹¹⁸

After having double-checked the budget, having reduced the number of HCR staff, and having investigated how the passport system worked, the ILO agreed to extend its technical services to refugees. To do so, it advanced two preliminary conditions: the transfer would only take effect beginning on January 1, 1925, and the LON Assembly would have to include a financial provision for the refugee issue in the budget for 1925.¹¹⁹ There was another element which explains the ILO’s interest in Russian refugees. In May 1924, the Italian government organized a conference in Rome on emigration and immigration, from which the ILO was at first excluded. Playing a more active role in refugee work was probably instrumental in gaining authority in international migrations when the ILO’s role was unsure.¹²⁰

and Armenian refugees looking for employment. AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 2, PV d’une conférence de représentants des gouvernements relative à l’émigration et l’immigration des réfugiés, convoqué par Nansen, Geneva, September 27, 1924, CR/EI/PV1.

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the 23rd session of the Governing Body of the International Labor Office, Geneva, June 1924.

¹¹⁵ Piana, “Fra protezione sociale e lotta alla disoccupazione”.

¹¹⁶ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, Thomas to Nansen, personal, March 4, 1924.

¹¹⁷ ALON, R201.20.5 jacket 1, Letter from the ACPO to Nansen, undated. Linda Guerry, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁸ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, Nansen to Thomas, April 3, 1924.

¹¹⁹ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, ILO, 22nd session of the Governing Body, Geneva, April 1924, 2nd supplementary report to the director. AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 1, High Commissioner for refugees, budget for the year 1924.

¹²⁰ Rosental, *op. cit.*

Things moved fast. In October 1924, the Governing Body instructed the director to “draw up a scheme of the services providing employment for the refugees.” While the administrative cost would be covered by the LON, the scheme would encompass the “investigation, coordination and communication of offers of employment made to the refugees, the conditions in which the refugees [could] take advantage of such offers and an estimate of the number of refugees for whom employment [was] to be found.” In line with Nansen’s mandate, no direct relief was possible and, the service being temporary, it would be closed down as soon as possible.¹²¹ Nansen would continue to act as the high commissioner, being responsible for political and legal actions, whereas the work of the HCR and its delegates would be transferred to the newly created Refugee Section at the BIT, headed by Thomas Frank Johnson, who closely collaborated with Verlaz.¹²² A centralized system of accounting and control was also created.¹²³

The ILO Refugee Section immediately undertook a new census of refugees. Differently from previous attempts, this time delegates paid much more attention to the professions of refugees (the form contained 25 professional categories and 14 sub-categories).¹²⁴ One of the more tangible aspects of the ILO’s work for refugees was the transfer of nearly 50,000 able-bodied men to France, where they found employment in agriculture and industry.¹²⁵ It was established that firms would address their requests to the ILO, which was charged with transmitting them to its agents on the spot and recruiting suitable refugees for the positions.¹²⁶ For Russian refugees, the ILO greatly relied on the help provided by Zemgor and other Russian local organizations in France and elsewhere. The French government also played a proactive role in the settlement of agricultural refugees in its territory and created coordinative bodies with Russian organizations and the ILO for this purpose. For instance, the French Ministry of Agriculture arranged for the settlement of Russian refugees as *métayers* in France: for that, the HCR selected refugees who used to be agriculturists, especially Cossacks, and advanced small sums for their transports and preliminary expenses. It also resettled from Greece 50 Armenian orphans, despite the opposition of Armenian organizations, which rather targeted Soviet Armenia.¹²⁷

¹²¹ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 3, Thomas to Drummond, October 21, 1924.

¹²² AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 3, Questions concernant les réfugiés, note du Docteur Nansen, Haut-Commissaire pour les réfugiés, Transfert à l’Organisation Internationale du Travail de l’Oeuvre de secours en faveur des réfugiés russes et arméniens, C.553.1924.XIII.

¹²³ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 3, Nansen to Thomas, October (the day is missing) 1924.

¹²⁴ Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales”: 98. Skran, *op. cit.*, 190.

¹²⁵ Skran, *op. cit.*, 192.

¹²⁶ Gousseff, “Le placement des réfugiés russes dans l’agriculture”: 757–776.

¹²⁷ ALON, R1602, Memorandum by the director of the International Labor Office on the work of the refugee service, 1926, 40-52990-41465.

As soon as the ILO was officially associated with the refugee work, in March 1925, it sent a mission to Latin America hoping to create agricultural settlements.¹²⁸ Again, the main idea was to avoid refugees leaving the congested “peripheral” places of Central Eastern Europe and the Middle East for Europe, where they would end up competing in the labor market with local laborers. Foremost, the Labour Organization privileged the protection of fragile postwar economies over the protection of refugees, whose legal status was often uncertain, living conditions dire, and rights badly respected.¹²⁹ The ILO mission was led by James Procter, the former Director General of the Imperial Ottoman Bank in Constantinople, whom we will meet again in chapter 5, and benefited from the expertise of Varlez for the BIT, the Russian, Brunat, professor of agriculture, and a representative of the Jewish Colonisation Association, which paid for the trip. Among the countries visited, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay were open to the settlement of Russian and Armenian refugees.¹³⁰ There was a great demand for colonists and agricultural laborers both in Argentina and Brazil, where industrial work was also needed.

In the case of colonists [Burnier] estimate[d] that a minimum capital of £50 per family [was] necessary, and in some cases a higher figure, quite apart from the cost of the transport. In the case of laborers, whether agricultural or industrial, such a sum would not be necessary, but the cost of transport would still have to be fund except in cases where the Government authority was prepared to offer it.¹³¹

According to historian Laura Robson, the use of the term ‘colonist’ was not anodyne; she situates the resettlement plans for Armenian and Russian refugees in Latin America in direct continuation with the Ottoman responses to the Muslim refugees from the Balkans and from the South Caucasus in the nineteenth century and with “early twentieth-century ideas about removing Europe’s Jews and using them as colonial settlers across the globe, particularly in rural areas ripe for industrial development.”¹³² Argentina, which was believed to be hampered in its development by the lack of rural population, privileged those refugees who wished to settle in the countryside, as colonists or agriculturists, provided that they were morally/physically fit, and ready to face years of hardship. Brazil was interested in refugees working on coffee plantations, where they would take care of trees, and

¹²⁸ ALON, C1469-1, Mémorandum sur les considérations financières relatives à l’établissement d’émigrants pour le pays d’Outre-Mer par Procter.

¹²⁹ Robson, *Human Capital*, 52.

¹³⁰ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10A, legg 4, Mission en Amérique du Sud.

¹³¹ ALON, R1601, Report on the work of refugees, 40-46395-41465.

¹³² Robson, *Human Capital*, 60.

harvest and clean the fruit. In regard to the rumors about the bad working conditions on the plantations, Procter reassured that the Brazil government took actions against mistreatment, but he also feared that refugees would take a long time to build wealth. Taking the example of the United States model, in both Argentina and Brazil, resettled refugees were also instrumental in controlling the indigenous territory from social unrest and strikes.¹³³

The mission to Latin America also negotiated with private companies¹³⁴. Across the four countries, Procter reported that there were possibilities of employment in the railways, mines, light and power companies, tramways, and public and private works. In a letter signed by W. K. Billings for the Sao Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company, we read that he was looking for “3,000 men for unskilled labor in the construction of the Serra power plant and auxiliary works at the Serra do Mar between Santos and Sao Paulo.” After listing the wages and all the facilities at the workers’ disposal, Billings stressed that, despite the fact that their health conditions were excellent, there had been malaria cases. This explains why a careful medical examination upon embarkation was required: the HCR could select the most adequate refugees and make sure that a proper contract would be signed.¹³⁵ The main idea was to avoid problems, which were not infrequent. For instance, a group of refugees, which embarked in Greece for Brazil, lamented about the food during the trip; upon arrival, they declared to be artisans and hoped to find jobs in the cities, opposing to work on the coffee plantations; later, they left the fazenda.¹³⁶ Moving to Paraguay, Procter’s mission interacted with other private companies, some of them foreign-owned, whereas in Uruguay, the Mortgage Bank might advance money to buy a farm, through which the colonists would become the owners.¹³⁷

Once the mission went back to Geneva, Procter reported in length to the League of Nations and to the International Labour Organization, waiting for instructions. An immediate result was for the BIT to create two offices in Latin America which negotiated the resettlement of refugees, yet in smaller numbers compared to what had initially been hoped for.¹³⁸ For instance, by 1928, between 90,000 and 100,000 Russians had settled in Argentina: “the advantage which [was] most appreciated by

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 61–62.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³⁵ ALON, R1601, Report on the work of refugees, Letter from A. W. K. Billings to Procter, July 13, 1925, 40-46395-41465.

¹³⁶ ALON, C1427, Funducian to Zwerner, December 9, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

¹³⁷ ALON, R1601, Report on the work of refugees, Letter from Colonel Procter to the Uruguayan Ministry of Industry, April 27, 1925, 40-46395-41465.

¹³⁸ Skran, *op. cit.*, 191. Kévonian, “Enjeux de catégorisations et migrations internationales”: 105. ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés. Procès-verbal de la séance du 22 mai 1928 tenue au Bureau International du Travail à Genève, A/C.5-1928.

the refugees when they [came] to live in the Argentine [was] at first of a psychological rather than of a material nature.” Russians were told to appreciate the fact that they faced “the same difficulties and influenced by the same desire to make good” as other groups of migrants, including Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and Poles. Thanks to the resettlement in Latin America, “the refugee may feel that he [had] a permanent home at last and that he may stay there as long as he [wished] without being under the necessity of frequently changing his abode as a result of legislation or special disability due to his staatenlose condition.”¹³⁹

The picture is less idyllic though. Unemployed refugees were deemed to bring social and political unrest by offering their work at lower wages, hence competing with local laborers in fragile European markets. Alongside a colonial mindset, international humanitarian organizations aimed to resettle refugees into supposedly vacant lands where, by means of their (mainly) agricultural labor, they would help develop the national economy; in doing so, refugees also became part of an “investment opportunity” in the short and long run.¹⁴⁰ As we will see in Chapter 5, Russian refugees in Constantinople were offered a contract thanks to which they would resettle to France and elsewhere; they also agreed to pay back the cost of the boat trip, by subtracting a monthly portion of their salary. Or, turning to the criticism around the embedded inequalities of the global governance of refugee protection, not only did the relocation of refugees as economic migrants to the “peripheries” of Europe concur to transform them into a commodity, but it would also make them involuntary supporters of the system of exploitation which had produced them in the first place.¹⁴¹

Soon enough, the ILO struggled to collect the money that would allow refugees’ resettlement in Latin America. While the LON paid the administrative expenses and some governments chipped in, overseas travel demanded massive financing.¹⁴² Hence, Nansen suggested to create a “revolving fund” by which refugees were advanced the money for the trip to Latin America, which they would pay back by means of their work. Such a proposal was discussed at the 1926 inter-governmental conference in Geneva, yet it was not approved. The Jewish Colonisation Association then stepped in and advanced the financial resources for colonization schemes in Latin America.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, another idea was put forward, i.e. the establishment

¹³⁹ ALON, C1470, Refugee advisory committee, note by Mr. Childs, director of the South American Delegation of the Refugee Service, A/C-3-1928, May 21, 1928.

¹⁴⁰ Robson, *Human Capital*, 66, 58–67.

¹⁴¹ Chimni, *op. cit.*, 362–363. Zolberg, Suhrke, Aguayo, *op. cit.*

¹⁴² Simpson, *op. cit.*, 191–226. ALON, Russian and Armenian Refugees: Report to the Seventh Assembly, September 3, 1926, A.44.1926.

¹⁴³ ALON, C1470, Refugee advisory committee, note by Mr. Childs, director of the South American Delegation of the Refugee Service, A/C-3-1928, May 21, 1928.

of the so-called “Nansen stamp.” Indeed, refugees, with the exception of the destitute, were requested to buy the Nansen stamp (fig. 6)—blue for Russians and red for Armenians—and glue it to the Nansen passport annually.



Fig. 6. Example of a Nansen stamp. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.¹⁴⁴

Once more, Nansen is represented as a powerful hero: his Greek-style profile occupies the central space of the stamp; at the top of the stamp, there is a mention of the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees, while at the bottom right, we find the acronym of the I.L.O. More interestingly, the Nansen stamp is yet another example of how refugees contributed to their own relief and resettlement. Such an innovation paved the way for Russian and Armenian refugees to be represented in a special sub-committee of the ACPO, by which, once more, they shaped humanitarian policies and refugee work.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ ALON, MC42/B.6/1, Nansen stamp.

¹⁴⁵ Skran, *op. cit.*, 193.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter shows how the emergence of the global governance of refugee protection constituted an absolute political novelty in the interwar period: it was the result both of governments' limited interest in refugees and a clear example of experimentations. As soon as the High Commissariat for Russian refugees was established, Nansen and his deputy-officer, Philip Baker, tried to maximize the chances of success by officially associating private organizations with the work of the League of Nations. Such a choice reflected the increasing role that these institutions, some more than others, had in humanitarian protection and refugee politics; it also suggests that they possessed the expert knowledge and the financial resources that the HCR lacked. The creation of the ACPO turned out to be a good intuition, as the committee crucially supported refugee work in times of crises. Instead of shrinking, the ACPO underwent a significant expansion throughout the 1920s, when *ad hoc* committees were created. Moreover, an expanding notion of epistemic community—where expertise is enriched by determinants such as nationality, education, gender, age, class, and religion—allows one to see the commonalities and peculiarities that non-state officers brought to the ACPO. From this amalgam of experiences, originated the seeds of refugee work that we know nowadays.

Similarly, the establishment of the Nansen passport in 1922 and the legal definition of Russian and Armenian refugees, which was agreed upon in 1926, embody both the shortcomings and the possibilities behind the internationalization of humanitarian protection and refugee work. They epitomized the failures of the international system, and its institutions and governments, to protect people from persecution. And yet, they also offered to these same persons some (limited) forms of protection, by allowing them to move across international borders by means of an especially crafted passport, and by fitting them into a collective legal definition. The same ambivalence extends to the establishment of communication and fundraising campaigns, which the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO initiated in different forms and capacities, both in Geneva and in the places of intervention.

Singling out the involvement of the ILO in the refugee question allows one to understand the reasons why the organization designed a global racialized and gendered labor system. While, among governments and private organizations, there was widespread agreement that refugees should be assisted to find employment across international borders, the Labour Organization instrumentalized the question to test its technical expertise in the migration–unemployment conundrum. In turn, resettling refugees away from Europe became an opportunity for those countries which wished to expand their agricultural and industrial plans, as well as for those industries which anticipated the cost of the trip, knowing that refugees would repay it in time.

The formalized cooperation between the LON and the ILO on the refugee work was short-lived. Following a decision by the Governing Body of the ILO taken in the spring of 1928, the High Commissariat for refugees went back to the LON, since the Labour Organization refused to continue the work on behalf of refugees. It estimated that the task had been fulfilled and that no more resources could be collected to help the refugees who were still lacking employment. The new decade marked a significant change in the refugee organization of the LON: in the 1930s and especially during the war and in its aftermath, forced displacements were different and possibly far more complicated than in the 1920s, and so was the work of the new Nansen International Office for Refugees and of the many other organizations which followed.

Unsorted Constantinople: protecting white Russians from the inter-Allied occupation to modern Turkey

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the humanitarian programs on behalf of Russian refugees in Constantinople, the former capital of the Ottoman Empire soon to be integrated into modern Turkey. The ICRC, the LON, and the ILO, which feared for the safety of displaced Russians who risked being forcibly expelled to Russia, designed and implemented several plans, from local integration to resettlement in Balkan countries, France, and Latin America. At times, Russians accepted decisions made on their behalf; other times they protested. International organizations considered Constantinople to be a test case, from where successful plans could be exported elsewhere.

Keywords: Russian refugees, Constantinople, inter-Allied occupation, modern Turkey, protection, expulsion.

The presence of Russians “hinder[ed] local people causing a new cost of living and threaten[ed] security in a city populated by Greeks, Muslims and Armenians super-excited by recent events.”¹

In the words of Fridtjof Nansen, “[...] anything which can be done to enable the Russian refugees to cease living as the involuntary recipients of charity and to enable them to find some scope for their capacities for work [...] [was] a real contribution to a number of difficult problems, for which the majority of European countries are seeking a solution.”²

¹ Note pour le Conseil des Ministres sur les évacués russes en Crimée, Paris, November 29, 1920. Commission de publication des documents diplomatiques français, *Documents diplomatiques français* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987).

² ACICR, C.R.87 SDN 84 à 100, Russian refugees, Report submitted to the Council by Nansen on May 13, 1922, C.280.M.152.1922.

During the Great War and its aftermath, Constantinople was an unstable dynamic place, caught between the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of modern Turkey. The Armistice of Mudros, signed on October 30, 1918 between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire to end WWI, had agreed upon the partition of the empire and the foreign occupation of Dardanelles and Bosphorus forts.³ In May 1919, Greece occupied Smyrna in Asia Minor, aiming to govern all ethnic Greeks across the Aegean Sea. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10, 1920 between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies, confirmed the Greek control of East Thrace and Western Anatolia, and formalized the inter-Allied occupation of Constantinople under a joint commission composed of France, Italy, and Great Britain.⁴ However, the outbreak and the results of the Greco-Turkish War invalidated previous agreements: in September 1922, the victorious Turkish cavalry regained Smyrna, provoking mass killings, the fire of the Armenian neighborhood, and a massive exodus of Ottoman Greeks and Armenians towards Greece. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, eventually recognized the establishment of the Turkish Republic, while it dismissed the creation of independent Armenia and Kurdistan.

Of all the places where Russians were exiled, Constantinople underwent the most delicate transition. It was a congested metropole of one million inhabitants, "...a waiting room or corridor for much of the Russian refugees, a destination point for the Muslim refugees from the Balkans, country of origin and a destination of resettlement for the deported Armenians, Greeks, and other non-Muslim communities."⁵ Large numbers of Ottoman subjects—including Armenians, Greeks, and Muslims—had reached Constantinople as a consequence of the Balkan Wars, WWI, and the Armenian genocide.⁶ Used to accommodate foreigners, among whom were Russians who, since the late nineteenth century, had traveled south for tourism and business, including sex work, Constantinople was nevertheless unprepared for the massive

³ "I. Opening of Dardanelles and Bosphorus, and secure access to the Black Sea. Allied occupation of Dardanelles, and Bosphorus forts. VII. The Allies to have the right to occupy any strategic points in the event of any situation arising which threatens the security of the Allies. Mudros Agreement: Armistice with Turkey (October 30, 1918)".

⁴ On the occupation of Istanbul, see Bilge Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation, 1918-1923* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999) and James Edmonds, *Occupation of Constantinople, 1918-1923* (Uckfield: Naval & Military Press, 2010). On the social history of Istanbul up until the nineteenth century, see Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵ E. Tutku Vardağlı, "League of Nations' Refugee Operations through İstanbul: Back to the Origins of International Refugee Question," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 51 (2020): 154, 149–173.

⁶ There are a couple of historical novels on Constantinople, Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Charles King Gardner, *Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

arrival of white Russians.⁷ Evacuations from the Black Sea region had already started in the spring of 1919 and continued for almost two years. In early 1920, the followers of General Anton Ivanovich Denikin escaped from Odessa and Novorossiysk to the Bosphorus, thanks to the support of his Majesty's government, which had sided with Denikin.⁸ In early November 1920, it was the turn of General Piotr Wrangel's followers, supported by France. This last group was the largest, composed of nearly 135,000 Russians, half of them military men and the other half women and children.⁹

Anybody who looked at the Bosphorus in the early days of November 1920 witnessed an unforgettable scene. Almost overnight, boats of the Imperial Russian Navy and of the fleets of the Allied and Associated Powers congested the straits.¹⁰ In the words of Vera Dumesnil, the wife of the French vice-admiral, Charles-Henri Dumesnil, "...the boats' bridges are black, black, everything is black, they make only one black spot. They are human beings standing up. Chest against chest. They do not move, they cannot, supported by each other."¹¹ As soon as Russians were allowed to disembark, which took a few days, the occupation powers proceeded with their dispersion: civilians stayed in the city or in its vicinity, living independently or in hastily organized camps and accommodations; the military was placed out of Constantinople under the responsibility of the French army. Indeed, there was the widespread preoccupation that Russians would draw on local resources, which were already scarce, or that they would spread epidemics.¹² Moreover, as Russians kept weapons hoping to launch and organize a counter-offensive against the Reds, they were seen as security threats.¹³ This explains why military men were further scattered: Wrangel's followers stayed

⁷ See the work by Philippa Hetherington, "Red Lights on the Black Sea: the Traffic in Women and the Production of Imperial Russia's Southern Border," a talk given at the Institute of Historical Research in London, February 24, 2016.

⁸ NA, FO, 371.8159, N8453.43.38, Childs to Evans, Sofia, September 4, 1922.

⁹ Richard Pipes, "Les relations diplomatiques du gouvernement Wrangel en Crimée, 1920," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 4, no. 4 (1963): 432–433. ALON, R1713, Appendix 2 to Memorandum 12, signed by General P. Wrangel, May 4, 1921.

¹⁰ Huntington, *op. cit.*, 12.

¹¹ Vera Dumesnil, *Le Bosphore tant aimé: récit* (Bruxelles: Editions du Paon, 1947), 29. Translated from French.

¹² AILO, R201.1, Situation au 20 décembre 1920. The ICRC provided a list with the dislocation of Russian refugees in Constantinople.

¹³ "The meeting of nearly a hundred thousand refugees in a region with very limited resources offers serious economic disadvantages, and most importantly, even though General Wrangel's old army no longer exists, his soldiers have been disarmed and no longer regarded as mere private individuals, their prolonged concentration around the Straits in idleness and in a miserable situation could constitute a real danger to the security of Constantinople and the peace of the East. It is therefore important to disperse them without delay." Translated from French. AILO, R201.1, Briand to Thomas, January 25, 1921. 3 League of Nations O. J. 827 1922. Part IV, Constantinople, The Straits, and Black Sea Ports.

in Gallipoli across the Aegean Sea; the Kuban Cossacks on the Greek island of Lemnos and the Don Cossacks in Chataldzha, East Thrace.¹⁴

While Russians with contacts, means, or a liberal profession settled and contributed to the arts and to business, the majority were destitute.¹⁵ From a Red Cross propaganda movie, one of the four movies which were shown at the International conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement in the spring of 1921 and from the photographs taken by the director of the American Red Cross in the Near East, Charles Claflin Davis, we see typical scenes of displacement and intervention: military men queuing for food, emaciated children being fed, sick women hosted in a hospital caught surprised by the presence of a camera, as well as the miserable interiors of refugee camps, of barracks, and of warehouses.¹⁶ Several institutions, issuing from the Russian diaspora, as well as from liberal, missionary, and social reformer groups, tried to meet their needs.¹⁷ Among the main ones were the Russian Red Cross and the Zemgor, American, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, and Spanish Red Cross societies, the YMCA, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the *Union internationale de secours aux enfants*, and Save the Children, which all enjoyed a large freedom of action under the inter-Allied occupation.¹⁸

In the next few months, the number of Russians across the straits quickly dropped. Indeed, Wrangel and Great Britain contributed to resettling most Russians to neighboring states, including Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The choice of the Balkans was no coincidence: the geographical proximity to Constantinople made travel affordable, while it did not

¹⁴ Bruno Bagni, "Lemnos, l'île aux Cosaques," *Cahiers du monde russe* 50, no. 1 (2010): 187–230. Some white Russian soldiers turned into transnational fighters and joined the Francoist side during the Spanish Civil War. Xosé M. Núñez Seixas and Oleg Beyda, "Defeat, Victory, Repeat": Russian Émigrés between the Spanish Civil War and Operation Barbarossa, 1936–1944," *Contemporary European History* (2023): 1–16.

¹⁵ Jak Deleon, *The White Russians in Istanbul* (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi Publications, 1995). Türkan Olcay, "The Cultural Heritage of the White Russian Emigration in Istanbul," *Quaestio Rossica* 10, no. 4 (2022): 1318–1333.

¹⁶ "International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva: Russian Refugees in Constantinople," in *Humanitaire et cinéma: films CICR des années 1920* (Humanitarian Action and Cinema. ICRC films in the 1920s), *Memoriav*, J.-B. Junod, 2005. Harvard Law School Library, Charles Claflin Davis visual materials collection (<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/images/olvgroup12376/catalog>, last seen October 9, 2023).

¹⁷ Kathleen Sheldon, "No More Cookies or Cake Now, 'C'est la guerre': An American Nurse in Turkey, 1919 to 1920," *Social Sciences and Missions* 23, no. 1 (2010): 94–123. Müzeyyen Karabağ, "From Stay-at-Home Women to Career-Minded Women: The Istanbul YWCA, 1919–1930," *Women's History Review* 31, no. 3 (2022): 496–521.

¹⁸ ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922-1924, volume 8, *Rapports sur les travaux du Haut-Commissariat pour les réfugiés* présenté à la quatrième Assemblée par le Docteur Fridtjof Nansen, September 4, 1923, A.30.1923.XII.

preclude a future repatriation; it also was believed that sharing cultural, religious, and linguistic ties would ease the local integration, especially since immigration to North America was hindered by the approval of quota measures.¹⁹ As we have seen in Chapter 3, while Russian refugees in the Balkans were better received than elsewhere, their conditions were still precarious: a few wished to repatriate, others opposed both repatriation and resettlement in Brazil, while others wished to integrate locally, hoping that the LON would provide small loans to start businesses.

The harsh reality was that in 1922, almost two years after their massive evacuations from Crimea, there were still between 25,000 and 35,000 Russians in Constantinople. As if the situation was not serious enough, their conditions worsened due to the politics of ethnic cleansing between Greece and Turkey and Constantinople's integration into Turkey, which resumed or established diplomatic relations with all major governments, yet it did not adhere to the LON until 1932.²⁰ Modern Turkey engaged in widespread nationalizing policies and closed the doors to international organizations, with a few exceptions. It also developed a discretionary attitude towards foreigners: it welcomed migrants whose professional expertise could be of use and provided Russian refugees with temporary permits, not adhering to the Nansen passport system.²¹ Turkey maintained good relations both with Soviet Russia and with Western states, while it pushed against granting citizenship to non-Muslim populations.²²

Chapter 5 adopts the prism of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the International Labour Organization to examine humanitarian protection for white Russians. It does so by paying attention to the organizations' interactions with Ottoman authorities, occupation powers, Turkish institutions, private charities and relief organizations, and refugees. Alongside the exchange camp of Narva, Constantinople was again "at the doors of Europe": international organizations could experiment with populations' politics particularly under the inter-Allied occupation, when the Ottoman authorities were weak and ineffective.

¹⁹ Robinson, *op. cit.*, 31–50. Bagni, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Yücel Güçlü, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 1 (2003): 186–206.

²¹ Pınar Üre, "Conditional Welcome: Russian Refugees as a Source of Skilled Labor in Interwar Turkey," *Euxinos* 11, no. 32 (2021): 12–24.

²² Kemal Kirişçi and Ayselin Yıldız, "Turkey's Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions," *Turkish Studies* 24, no. 3–4 (2023): 522–549. The work of Pınar Üre is crucial to understand the continuities between subjecthood and citizenship from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish state, as well as the tensions between secularism and religion. Pınar Üre, "Remnants of Empires: Russian Refugees and Citizenship Regime in Turkey, 1923–1938," *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, no. 2 (2020): 207–221.

5.1 The Red Cross and its attempts at coordination

The International Committee of the Red Cross already had a delegation in Constantinople when Russian refugees started pouring in. Since 1919, the delegate, Count de Chabannes la Palice, had been mandated to protect prisoners of war, as well as Armenian and Syrian refugees.²³ At the moment of Russians' massive arrival in November 1920, the ICRC sent alarming cables to its delegate, who happened to be in Paris.

One hundred thousand Russians [sic] disembarked camped in bad conditions fifty thousand still on board stop epidemics threaten terribly stop sheets linen completely lacking disinfection equipment partially French effort splendid but insufficient.²⁴

However, for reasons which were unknown even to the ICRC, Chabannes la Palice did not hurry back. Instead of recalling its delegate to his duty, the ICRC launched an appeal for funds for the Red Cross movement: the collected money allowed for a new delegate, Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Lederrey, to be appointed and sent to Constantinople in December 1920.²⁵ Lederrey had a vast experience in relief work: he had visited POWs in Germany and directed a sanitary train from Vienna to Ukraine; he had also been the chief of the Vienna mission, where he centralized relief operations.²⁶ The newly appointed delegate was skilled and ready to open a separate office within the existing one, especially charged with the protection of Russians.

Hoping that more financial contributions would come, the ICRC volunteered to collaborate with the UISE and the SCF, its "sister" organizations, and made itself available to distribute goods kept in Constantinople warehouses. What could go wrong between the ICRC which had expertise but no means and the UISE and the SCF which had the means but no officers in the city?²⁷ Yet, a matter of competences arose in relation to whom was supposed to take the lead. Indeed, Chabannes la Palice was still in Paris and had not officially delegated to Lederrey, who was

²³ ACICR, B MIS 15/2/11, ICRC to Chabannes la Palice, August 24, 1920.

²⁴ ACICR, B MIS 15 Constantinople, Correspondance de la mission du CICR à Constantinople, Intercroixrouge 3449 to Chabannes Union Franco Syrienne 3 Francorusse, Paris, December 3, 1920.

²⁵ AILO, R201.6, Bulletin d'information de la Société de la Croix Rouge Russe (ancienne organisation), mission de Genève, January 1921. Several articles of the *Bulletin* were dedicated to the question of Russian refugees in Europe. See ACICR, C.R.87/5/180 bis généralités, Le Comité international de la Croix Rouge et les réfugiés russes, August 15, 1921 and the articles of January 15, 1921, February 15, 1921, and March 15, 1921.

²⁶ ACICR, B MIS.37.1, ICRC to Federal Counselor charged with the federal military department, October 25, 1920.

²⁷ AILO, R201.6, Bulletin d'information de la Société de la Croix Rouge Russe, January 1921.

in Constantinople.²⁸ Confusion was high and (mis)communication worsened it: Chabannes la Palice maintained a separate correspondence with the SCF, which was left to believe that food had been distributed, whereas Lederrey did not officially bring up the impasse, thinking that the ICRC did not trust him. While being an “empty-handed” ICRC delegate was difficult, shaky managerial skills and unclear communication did not help.²⁹

Meanwhile, Lederrey took the initiative to convene a conference which met on December 13, 1920 at the Russian Embassy, where Russian aid organizations as well as American, British, French, and Italian representatives of governments and private organizations were in attendance.³⁰ To Lederrey, the assistance provided by government and the private institutions had contributed to alleviating the suffering of Russians. Yet, the large number of private and voluntary organizations operating in Constantinople would benefit from information sharing and coordination, something for which he had experience. For that, the ICRC, which was an “apolitical” and “exclusively humanitarian” organization, could be of help, while it would also respect the independence of each institution involved. According to Lederrey, humanitarian aid involved two steps: emergency relief and rehabilitation programs. Upon disembarkation, the occupation powers had been distributing refugees amongst institutions—including hospitals, sanatoria, dispensaries, maternities, kindergartens, and camps—whereas aid organizations had provided medication, food, linen, soap and disinfectant, heating, bedding, clothing, and shoes. Thinking beyond relief, Lederrey proposed to create an office which, by centralizing information, would ease the work of private and voluntary organizations. The Red Cross delegate did not stop there but offered further details. According to his first-hand knowledge of the situation in Constantinople, the best way would be to select Russian refugee women, who knew both the language and the psychology of their fellows. These women, carefully trained and managed, would collect data and categorize refugees as “real” and “fake” ones. In Lederrey’s

²⁸ ACICR, B MIS.37/136, ICRC to Lederrey, January 22, 1921.

²⁹ ACICR, B MIS 15, MIS 15.2/198, Chenevière to Lederrey, January 22, 1921. “You will easily understand how important it is for the donor organizations, that the effects they have stripped themselves of have arrived safely and have helped to alleviate, to a small extent, the appalling misery that reigns in the Russian refugee camps, so that they can make further appeals which, no doubt, will not remain unsuccessful.” Translated from French. ACICR, B MIS 15.2/372, Burnier to ICRC, July 28, 1921.

³⁰ The United States was represented by M.F.H. Belin of the American Embassy, Hamilton Bryan, Navy Commander, and Claflin Davis of the ARC. Major General Welsh of the general staff represented Great Britain. For France, there were Miss Defrange, Miss Celine Picard, and M. Labussièrre, representing private agencies, Colonel Despres of the general staff, Lieutenant Colonel Balvedat, chief of the Red Cross mission, and Dr. Ortoni, on a mission for the War Ministry. Mr. Chabert from the colonial office represented Italy. The wife of General Wrangel represented Russian private relief, Senator Ivanitzky had a semi-official position, and Georges Lodyginsky represented Russian organizations.

words, the aim was "...not to reach only those who claim the most (they are rarely the real needy) but those who are really worthy of being rescued."³¹

There are some good and not-so-good intuitions in Lederrey's plan. While the centralization of all information on Russian refugees made sense, it might as well have duplicated ongoing efforts. At the request of the occupation powers, since May 1920, Russian Countess W. Brobinsky had been running an office which registered Russian refugees in the city.³² Hence, the creation of a new office to achieve the same ends responded more to the ICRC's attempt to overcome its endemic lack of resources than to an accurate assessment of the situation. Moreover, if employing Russian refugee women was a good idea, Lederrey took for granted that, by means of their gender, women were natural caregivers, and that, by means of their displacement, they would have accepted any unpaid work offered to them. Last, an underlying civilizing mission pushed to distinguish between the refugees who passively waited to be helped and those who helped themselves, which was an core principle of international humanitarian aid. In Lederrey's understanding, the inactive ones were unworthy of being protected, whereas humanitarian aid should target those who had shown an attitude for self-help and who, by being assisted, might aspire to reach the higher standards of Western societies.

Regarding rehabilitation, to Lederrey, "assisting [was] trying to raise up beings who have fallen physically, materially and morally to the bottom of the social ladder." This could only be achieved by means of productive employment: regardless of whether the refugees were repatriated, locally integrated, or resettled, work was instrumental to strengthening refugees' role in society. Lederrey also suggested that relief could become a business.³³ Instead of having refugees accept low-paid jobs, with the risk of creating rivalries with local laborers in Constantinople (this would become the leitmotiv of the ILO only a few months later), international aid organizations could create workshops of embroidery, sewing, woodcarving, or furniture making, where refugees were employed. In Lederrey's understanding, it would be a circular system by which refugees produced the goods of which they were in need. It would also be a vicious system though, as it implicitly expected that Russian refugees offered their services for free.³⁴

³¹ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople, December 13, 1920.

³² Klein-Gousseff, *L'exil russe*, 68. ACICR, B MIS 15, ICRC to Burnier, September 28, 1923.

³³ Michelle Tusan, "The Business of Relief Work: A Victorian Quaker in Constantinople and Her Circle," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2009): 633–661.

³⁴ AILO, R201.2, *Compte rendu de la 1ère assemblée des délégués des actions nationales de secours aux réfugiés russes*, Constantinople, December 13, 1920.

After the first meeting, Lederrey convened a second one on December 24, 1920.³⁵ Previous discussions proved useful, as private organizations, of a religious or of secular mandate, came prepared and submitted empirical data on the number of Russians, the geography of their dispersion, the functioning of workshops in refugee camps, and the special care that was needed by separated families and by fragile categories, including children, as well as invalid and sick refugees. However, with the exception of Lederrey, participants neither felt the urge to institutionalize the meeting nor to coordinate. Indeed, Lederrey diplomatically communicated to the ICRC that the meetings' immediate result was bringing different institutions to the same table.³⁶ Other actors were rather doubtful. American institutions, in particular, poorly judged the ICRC and refused to be subordinated to it or even to work in partnership. "I do not think we want to get into any partnership arrangement with the International Committee or its representatives," is what Colonel Olds of the ARC wrote.³⁷ Far from being an isolated incident, this attitude reflected the tensions that had emerged in coincidence with the creation of the LRCS a few months earlier. For instance, when, in the spring of 1921, the ICRC committed to providing food to Russian refugee children in Constantinople, Gallipoli, Lemnos, and the Balkan area for the next six months, American organizations feared that the plan would be unfeasible.³⁸

Eventually, in March 1921, Chabannes la Palice returned to Constantinople and distributed the long-awaited food to Russian refugee children.³⁹ While the distribution went smoothly, it also embodied the discretionary nature of relief: the UISE and the SCF had made clear that Russian refugee children should be the only targets, at the expense of equally needy Armenian and Jewish children.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, changes happened at the ICRC office in Constantinople: Lederrey left, and a new delegate, Captain Georges Burnier, was mandated to protect Russians.⁴¹ Burnier turned out to be a delegate for whom humanitarian aid did become a profession. Prior to

³⁵ The United States was represented again by M.F.H. Belin. Major General Welsh of the general staff represented Great Britain. For France there were Madame Defrange, Madame Dumesnil, Madame Picard, Colonel Despres of the general staff, Lieutenant Colonel Balvedat of the Red Cross, Commandant Raymond, and Dr. Orticoni, on a mission for the War Ministry. Ivanitzky represented Russian organizations. Lederrey represented the ICRC.

³⁶ AILO, R201.2, Lederrey to ICRC, December 25, 1920.

³⁷ HA, ANRC, Box 128, Constantinople, folder 19, Davis to Olds, December 15, 1920. HA, ANRC, Box 129, Constantinople, folder 5, Olds to Davis, Paris, April 8, 1921.

³⁸ HA, ANRC, Box 128, Constantinople, folder 4, Davis to Olds, Confidential, March 28, 1921.

³⁹ On competing programs for Russian refugee children, see Elizabeth White, "A Category 'Easy to Liquidate': The League of Nations, Russian Refugee Children in the 1920s and the History of Humanitarianism," in Rodríguez García, Rodogno, Kozma (eds), *op. cit.*, 201–214.

⁴⁰ ACICR, B MIS 15/2/243, Intercroixrouge 4282 to Chabannes la Palice, March 24, 1921.

⁴¹ ACICR, B MIS 15.2/198, Chenevière to Lederrey, January 22, 1921.

Constantinople, he had inspected camps of Russian internees and coordinated relief actions for children in Hungary; once in the city, he engaged in food distribution and linked the various offices of the High Commissioner for Russian refugees across Europe and globally; after the mission, he would be assigned to Syria and Lebanon, working with post-genocide Armenian refugees.⁴²

Being experienced did not mean that Burnier had an easy time. For instance, he reported on Russian refugees showing up at the office when they heard that the French government and the ARC intended to close down their feeding programs in the fall of 1921. Poor Russians literally picked the ICRC, “crying, shouting, and making scandal,” somehow making Burnier’s working environment less than ideal.⁴³ Moreover, Burnier’s tasks multiplied: institutionally, he had a triple hat, acting on behalf of the ICRC, the UISE, and the LON.⁴⁴ The triple affiliation articulated in manifold ways: upon the reception of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Burnier reported on the conditions of children; he negotiated repatriation plans to Russia and resettlement plans in Czechoslovakia; he studied whether refugees could be resettled in the areas of Asia Minor, recently cleansed of Ottoman Christians; he registered Russian refugees and, among them, Russian prostitutes; and he distributed flour. Each task entailed many more: for instance, the evacuation of Russian children to Czechoslovakia involved obtaining passports, organizing delousing and vaccination procedures, preparing shelter, and negotiating shipping procedures.⁴⁵

Between December 1921 and January 1922, Burnier carried out a census of Russian refugees in and around Constantinople.⁴⁶ While he foresaw that registering the refugees living outside camps would be difficult, he was rather taken aback by the open ostracism of Zengor. Indeed, the Russian organization shared depreciative rumors to dissuade Russians from registering: Nansen would be so close to Moscow to transmit the results of the census; families of Russian refugees previously registered in Lithuania had been jailed in Russia; among the census-takers, there would be untrusted Jews; and one of Burnier’s staff had commercial interests with the Soviets. These allegations, soaked in anti-Bolshevism and anti-Semitism, witness the difficult environment where international humanitarian organizations happened to work.⁴⁷

⁴² ACICR, B MIS 15.1 E.A.E-Z, Instructions to Burnier, March 1, 1921.

⁴³ ALON, R1734, Burnier to ICRC, October 17, 1921, 45.16984.16485.

⁴⁴ L’expérience du Comité international de la Croix Rouge en matière de secours internationaux,

54. ACICR, B MIS 15-2/549, Brunel to deputy high commissioner, December 28, 1921.

⁴⁵ ACICR, MIS 15.5/513, Burnier to the ICRC, January 20, 1922. ACICR, Procès-Verbaux de la Commission des Missions, séance du 17 novembre 1922.

⁴⁶ ALON, C1380, Burnier to the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, October 26, 1921, R201/20/3/66.

⁴⁷ ALON, C1380, Burnier to High Commissariat for Russian refugees, December 20, 1921, R201/20/3/66.



Fig. 7. Poster for the census of Russian refugees in Constantinople. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.⁴⁸

Despite lacking the support of Zemgor, Burnier relied on the collaboration of the occupation powers and of the police, as well as of 36 minor Russian institutions. His goal was to have the most precise picture of the number, the conditions, and the professions of Russian refugees. To that end, he affixed bilingual posters across the city, in French and Russian, to reach in particular the refugees living outside camps and institutions (see fig. 7); he urged all organizations to pass on the information and push refugees to join; and he hired four statisticians and 75 census

⁴⁸ ALON, R1733, Poster, Census of Russian refugees in Constantinople, 45.17254.x16404.

takers.⁴⁹ Actual work began on December 27, 1921, and lasted for a couple of weeks; latecomers were given the possibility to register until mid-January 1922. The census started in the hospitals, schools, and camps at Lannes, Sirkédji, and Sélimié; later on, there were simultaneous registrations in six offices in Constantinople, on the Bosphorus, and on the islands of San Stefano; it was then the turn of the colonies and agricultural farms. Every evening, the census papers were brought to the Russian Embassy, checked, and registered.⁵⁰

“Seeing the enthusiasm that the refugees put into coming to register and the fear they ha[d] at not arriving on time, we can estimate that the total that we will have will correspond exactly to the real total figure,” wrote Burnier at the end of the operation. A further proof of the census’s truthfulness was that the total number of registered Russians matched the data previously collected by Zemgor. It was then the ILO which offered its technical expertise and which, by elaborating the collected data, prepared tables for use by officers in the field. We learn that the total number of registered Russians amounted to 23,861 and that there were probably 10,000 more who did not register as they did not depend on charity. Among those who registered, the largest number were unemployed (18,719), while only 930 men, women, and children above 14 had a remunerated activity. The remaining share was composed of the old and invalids (1,493) and minors up to the age of 14.⁵¹ According to Burnier, the crucial difference between the census carried out by the LON and the one carried out by Zemgor was in relation to the data concerning refugees’ professions: Zemgor claimed that the majority of Russians were agriculturists, maybe thinking that they would be more easily resettled, whereas the LON observed that the specter of professions was much larger. Far from being anodyne, having data on refugees’ education and professions would direct evacuation plans and respond to the needs of asylum countries.⁵²

5.2 Policing women’s bodies

Alongside the general census of Russians in Constantinople, Burnier and the LON took an interest in a specific group: Russian prostitutes. This was the reaction of an enquiry prepared by Zemgor in the fall of 1921 on account of data collected by the

⁴⁹ ALON, R1733, Burnier to Nansen, December 22, 1921, 45.17254.x16404. ALON, C1380, untitled document containing the budget of the census, R201/20/3/66.

⁵⁰ ALON, R1733, Burnier to Nansen, December 22, 1921, 45.17254.x16404.

⁵¹ ALON, R1723, *The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople* by Samuel Hoare, February 8, 1922, 45.19759.13913.

⁵² ALON, C1380, Burnier to Nansen, January 4, 1922, R201/20/3/66.

Allied police: it was reported that there were 2,428 registered Russian prostitutes in Constantinople, of whom 2,218 had chosen prostitution due to “unemployment, destitution, and continued famine” and because they could not obtain a visa to reach their families abroad.⁵³ In the enquiry addressed to Nansen, Zemgor alternatively framed Russian prostitutes as single migrants with no family network or as “white slaves.” In doing so, it built on the discourses formulated since the late nineteenth century by reformist and feminist organizations, which denounced the sexual exploitation of innocent white women pushed into prostitution by racialized men and which lobbied for the suppression of state legislation regulating medical examinations for prostitutes and of authorized brothels.⁵⁴ The white slavery movement had migrated to the LON and had found in the Social Section, headed by the British social reformer, Rachel Crowdy, a place to develop under the heading “the traffic in women and children.”⁵⁵

Following Zemgor’s enquiry, Nansen hastened to issue an appeal about Russian women in Constantinople, “unfortunate victims” who worked as prostitutes and addressed it to a number of feminist organizations in Europe and the US.⁵⁶ Nansen’s dramatic words convey the urgency of the situation:

For transporting these women to the countries where their friends are situated, for feeding them until they can be so transported, for placing them in Homes, and for assisting them in other ways, I need funds, and need them urgently, and I venture to hope that your Organization might be able to send me a sum, however small, to assist me in the steps that I hope to take.⁵⁷

⁵³ ALON, R1738, Astrov and Panine for Zemgor to Nansen, October 31, 1921, 45.17871.17871.

⁵⁴ Petra de Vries, “‘White Slaves’ in a Colonial Nation: The Dutch Campaign Against the Traffic in Women in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Social & Legal Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 39–60. Camiscioli, *op. cit.* For the movement in Russia, see Siobhán Hearne, “Sex on the Front: Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Russia’s First World War,” *Revolutionary Russia* 30, no. 1 (2017): 102–122.

⁵⁵ Katarina Leppänen, “Movement of Women: Trafficking in the Interwar Era,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 30, no. 6 (2007): 523–533. Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des Blanches: enquête sur la fabrication d’un fléau* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009). For trafficking in the mandates, see Liat Kozma, “Regulated Brothels in Mandatory Syria and Lebanon: between the Traffic in Women and Children and the Permanent Mandate Commissions,” in Rodríguez Garcia, Rodogno, Kozma (eds), *op. cit.*, 153–165. On the Kinsie’s reports, see Paul Knepper, “The Investigation into the Traffic in Women by the League of Nations: Sociological Jurisprudence as an International Social Project,” *Law and History Review* 34, no. 1 (2016): 45–73.

⁵⁶ ALON, R1738 Letter by Nansen, November 9, 1921, 45.17871.x. Nansen’s appeal was addressed to the International Women Suffrage Alliance, the International Council of Women in Rome and Geneva, the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, Worlds Y.W.C.A, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, the International Council of Women in Paris, the International Women Suffrage Alliance, the International Women Suffrage Alliance in Milan, and the *Association Catholique Internationale [sic] des Oeuvres de Protection de la jeune fille*.

⁵⁷ ALON, R1738, Letter from Nansen, November 7, 1921, 45.17871.x.

Nansen's appeal was only met by Scandinavian women's organizations, which provided £1,100. This sum was used for the creation of a maternity hospital, the enlargement of a workshop that could employ women, and the evacuation of a few women abroad. Meanwhile, in mid-November 1921, Nansen also charged Burnier to investigate the conditions of Russian prostitutes.⁵⁸ To the ICRC delegate, "the report submitted [...] by Mr. Astroff and the Countess Panine [was] only a fantasist novel." First, he contested the number: only 169 Russian women worked as registered prostitutes in brothels, and the majority had migrated prior to the Great War. The remaining women worked as waitresses in restaurants, music halls, and coffee shops, and were not prostitutes. Second, Burnier highlighted that Russian women were often not alone and had migrated with their families, with whom they wanted to resettle, subject to the payment for visas.⁵⁹ Hence, according to the ICRC delegate, equating all Russian working women with prostitutes was an offense to their morality and posed a problem to their evacuation, as governments might refuse to welcome them. Burnier's report was seconded by another, written by the British High Commissioner in Constantinople, Sir Horace Rumbold, who confirmed his findings and reflections.⁶⁰

Russian women's bodies became the battleground for diverging discourses around morality, gender, migration, and race.⁶¹ On the one hand, at least formally, Zemgor shamedly admitted having misinterpreted the data of the Allied police (Russian registered prostitutes indeed numbered 169, whereas 2,218 was the total number of prostitutes in the city) and regretted to have created a case.⁶² However, we cannot exclude that Zemgor might have exaggerated the number and the conditions of Russian prostitutes to prompt a policy response. This explains why Russian prostitutes were presented as vulnerable single women, even if they had migrated with their families, for which prostitution became a strategy for survival. Zemgor might have been also reticent to admit that the Russian patriarchal system had been disrupted by forced displacement: instead of being protected, women ended up providing for their fathers, husbands, and sons.⁶³

On the other hand, Burnier contested that all Russian women working in public spaces were prostitutes and reported that, in addition to the registered and unregistered prostitutes, some Russian women who already had remunerated jobs turned

⁵⁸ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, November 16, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁵⁹ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, November 23, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁰ ALON, R1738, Rumbold to Nansen, November 25, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶¹ For an example in the 1920s, see Siobhan Hearne, "The 'Black Spot' on the Crimea: Venereal Diseases in the Black Sea Fleet in the 1920s," *Social History* 42, no. 2 (2017): 181–204.

⁶² ALON, R1738, Astroff and Panine to Frick, December 13, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶³ Hetherington, *op. cit.*

to prostitution “of their own free will and without constraint.”⁶⁴ To confuse structural poverty with personal agency—as Burnier did—is problematic. As historian Julia Laite argues, the separation of women’s labor migration and sex trafficking “willfully ignored or suppressed moments when they obviously intersected and downplayed the role of other exploited and badly paid licit work that sustained the global economy.”⁶⁵ The same applied to the contours of rehabilitation: in a moralizing and racialized language, Burnier stressed that only Russian women who would leave the “path of vice” should be assisted and offered a job.⁶⁶ This suggests that the precariousness and exploitation of refugee women’s labor conditions were not met with the same urgency as sex trafficking.

Once more, employment was central to the moral and physical rehabilitation of women refugees. To this end, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), one of the many aid organizations that were present in Constantinople, replied to Nansen’s appeal and brought to his attention to have a small office in the city. There, a social worker, Ruth F. Woodsmall, had opened a small hostel for Russian girls, where they lived at a reduced price; moreover, an employment bureau helped them find “honest work.”⁶⁷ A few months later, Woodsmall undertook a detailed report whose goal was to establish whether it would be advisable to organize training courses (nursing and office work) for Russian women in Constantinople.

Investing in their training is a sound business proposition in lifting them out of the refugee class and thus saving financially in the long run...Whether they remain[ed] in Constantinople if they can find work or [were] evacuated, is a matter of indifference, providing that they can be helped to take care of themselves.⁶⁸

Woodsmall’s extremely careful plan had a pragmatic component: once trained, Russian women would have to be easily employed either in Constantinople or in any other country. Moreover, the cost of the training would be contained, as the many American relief workers in the city, including doctors, nurses, and clerks, could act as teachers. One should not forget the moral component: acknowledging “demoralization resulting from the continuous state of being a refugee,” in

⁶⁴ ALON, R1738, Burnier to Nansen, November 23, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁵ Julia Laite, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: Women’s Labour Migration and Sex Trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (2017): 37–65.

⁶⁶ ALON, R1738, Charrier and Burnier to Nansen, May 2, 1922, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁷ ALON, R1738, Charlotte Niven to Nansen, November 23, 1921, 45.17871.x.

⁶⁸ ALON, R1738, Report by Ruth F. Woodsmall, Investigation on the advisability of establishing training courses for Russian women in Constantinople and plan for organizing workshops for making hospital supplies, August 28, 1922, 45.22868.17871.

a language which anticipates the “DP apathy” in post-WWII camps, the training course would also contribute to the morale of women.⁶⁹

The proposals were enthusiastically received by the LON Social Section and, personally, by Rachel Crowdy.⁷⁰ However, it is unclear if any of these plans were ever implemented, especially since Crowdy was “horrified” to realize, in October 1922, that the YWCA proposal had been left unanswered.⁷¹ This is yet another example of a good plan that turned sour due to an inter-institutional lack of coordination, which had direct consequences for the lives and bodies of Russian refugee women.

5.3 The local HCR office: feeding and evacuation plans

As we have seen, as soon as Nansen was appointed as the high commissioner for Russian refugees in September 1921, he was alerted about the dramatic conditions of 25,000 Russian refugees in Constantinople. Lacking resources, the high commissioner begged France and the American Red Cross to continue their feeding programs. The appeal had mixed results: France agreed, whereas the ARC was reticent. In turn, Great Britain, which at first had refused to assist the military under the responsibility of the French army, changed its mind, thanks to the pressure of the LON and of the British high commissioner in Constantinople, Sir Horace Rumbold.⁷² In order to coordinate the efforts, the Briton, Colonel James Procter, the former Director General of the Imperial Ottoman Bank in Constantinople, chaired the International Relief Committee (or Constantinople Relief Fund), which centralized American and British private and government resources to feed 4,500 and 5,000 Russians, respectively.⁷³

Meanwhile, Nansen established a local office of the High Commissariat for refugees in Constantinople under the joint responsibility of Procter and Burnier.⁷⁴ Having a Briton on board was meant to ease the relationship with the British government, which, upon Nansen’s insistence, allocated £20,000 in cash and kind,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ALON, R1738, Crowdy to Baker, 15 Avril 1922, 45-17871.x.

⁷¹ ALON, R1738, Crowdy to Johnson, October 19, 1922, 45-17871.x.

⁷² Skran, *op. cit.*, 185–189. In the words of General Charles Harington, the British Commander in Chief of the Allied Occupation Army, “...our Government had said that the responsibility had rested on the French and that we were not to assist, but I defy anyone who witnessed that scene to have refused help.” Charles Harington, *Tim Harington Looks Back* (London: J. Murray, 1940): 101.

⁷³ ALON, R1723, The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople by Samuel Hoare, February 8, 1922, 45-19759-13913.

⁷⁴ ALON, R1723, Report no. 3, Memorandum of the work done by the Constantinople Relief Fund for Russian Refugees, from November 30, 1921 to January 31, 1922, submitted to the Committee, 45-19656x-13913.

less out of humanitarian compassion and more out of the concrete and conceptual dangers that Russian refugees were deemed to pose (including Russian prostitutes who endangered the health of British soldiers). Thanks to an additional contribution of £9,000 from other humanitarian organizations, Nansen could feed 10,000 Russian refugees for a period of two months, while he also hoped that Britain's contribution would prompt France's reaction. We shall remember that providing direct relief did not fit into Nansen's mandate.

However, the problem was far from being solved; it even became more and more dramatic by the hour. This pushed Nansen to consider any plans which might bring money to the HCR. In the fall of 1921, the high commissioner was asked whether he would feed and resettle to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes the remaining "old family" of Denikin's followers, 4,432 Russians who were under British responsibility.⁷⁵ Indeed, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes which, at first, had accepted Denikin's Russians upon the payment of a lump sum, grew reticent, especially since the massive evacuation of Russians in November 1920, after which Great Britain and Wrangel competed over the resettlement of their *protégés*. Britain solved the impasse by paying £150,000 to the League of Nations to get rid of its responsibility towards Denikin's followers.⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, the assignment of British money to the HCR came with the "British way of doing things." It was no mystery that Britain had been skeptical of Nansen's ability, and this explains why Procter was charged to administer British money.⁷⁷ The latter relied on experienced colleagues: Burnier as well as Captain Lawford Childs—who had acted as a British military intelligence officer in Russia during WWI and who had managed British agricultural colonization plans for Russian refugees in the Balkans.⁷⁸ In the course of a few months, Denikin's followers were resettled from the island of Lemnos, Egypt, and Cyprus to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The management proved to be particularly efficient: out of £150,000 only £78,170 was used; the balance was partially refunded to the British government and partially used by the LON to feed refugees.⁷⁹ Such a success

⁷⁵ NA, FO, 371.8154, N1753.43-38, Memorandum, Liquidation of His Majesty's Government Russian Refugees Obligation, Part I Numbers and Cost by Childs.

⁷⁶ NA, FO, 371.8159, N8453.43-38, Childs to Evans, Sofia, September 4, 1922.

⁷⁷ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43-38, Handwritten note by R.A. Leeper, March 3, 1922. Embodying the pivotal role of Britons in the plan, some correspondence also referred to the Office of the High Commissariat as "Procter's office in Constantinople." NBKR, 4/472, Baker to Charles Tufton of the Offices of the Cabinet, Paris, March 27, 1922.

⁷⁸ NA, FO, 371.8155, N3519.43-38, Handwritten note by Evans, April 4, 1922. ACICR, C.R.87/5/282 généralités, de Watteville to ICRC, March 17, 1922. Huntford, *Nansen*, 636. Skran, *op. cit.*, 187.

⁷⁹ This is how British money was spent. To the Istanbul Relief Fund for Russian refugees (the organization created by Colonel Procter) to relieve 196 children, £30 per head: £5,880; to Yugoslavia

does not mean, though, that all went smoothly: despite the fact that the British government had “no right to interfere [...] unless the money [was] actually being wasted,” it also made sure that Procter and Childs sent regular updates.⁸⁰ This patronizing attitude bothered Nansen, especially since the British government seemed to have a hard time recognizing that the League of Nations succeeded where it had failed.⁸¹

In the same busy fall of 1921, knowing that, in addition to Denikin’s soldiers, 25,000 more Russian refugees in Istanbul had to be resettled, Nansen asked Sir Samuel Hoare, a British MP, to investigate where “there [were] good prospects of securing [Russian refugees] productive employment and a tolerable life” in the Balkans.⁸² By then, the LON possessed enough data to assess the situation and might not have needed external advice. It is safe to argue that, by appointing Hoare, Nansen hoped that the British government would be convinced of the gravity of the situation and would provide additional financial resources. Hoare’s trip began in December 1921 and lasted a couple of weeks: he started off in Prague, where there was a concentration of Russian refugees, and traveled to Constantinople where he met with the representatives of the many international organizations stationed in the city. Eventually, he headed to Athens, Sofia, and Belgrade where he met with the local HCR offices and with national authorities.⁸³

In March 1922, Hoare submitted a report to the LON Council. He first began by ruling out two impracticable proposals—the repatriation of 2,000 Siberians to Vladivostok, as too expensive, and the settlement in Thrace, which was already congested with Ottoman Greek refugees. Based on Burnier’s census, Hoare concentrated on two solutions: repatriation and resettlement. As for the former, while he believed that “the great majority of the Refugees [...] will wish to return to Russia at the first safe opportunity,” it would have been necessary to negotiate a general political amnesty. This, indeed, happened on a small scale only—for a group of Cossacks

for preliminary liquidation expenses: £6,630; to Yugoslavia for the final settlement of 1,500 refugees kept in the camp of Lemnos: £18,000; liquidation expenses in Yugoslavia: £29,320; to Childs for the evacuation and transport of Russian refugees from Egypt and Cyprus until September 20, 1922: £1,000; contribution to the expenses of headquarters: £1,000; for refugees’ winter clothes: £3,000; reserve fund for eventual claims: £7,000; total: £71,830; balance available out of the initial grant of £150,000: £78,170. NA, FO 371.9335, N1939.46.38, Provisional statement as of December 31, 1922 of the expenditure incurred by the High Commissioner for refugees under the League of Nations in connection with the Russian refugees taken over by the British government, Geneva, February 1, 1923.

⁸⁰ NA, FO, 371.8158, N7066.43.38, Handwritten note by Evans, July 7, 1922.

⁸¹ ALON, R1715, Johnson to Avenol, 28 April 1923, 45.28099.12319. NA, FO, T160.225, Refugees, general, League of Nations activities in connection therewith 1 November 1923 – 12 October 1925, F8415, Russian refugees, 8 December 1923.

⁸² ALON, R1736, Frick to Hoare, 22 November 1921, 45.17555.x.

⁸³ ALON, R1736, Memorandum, undated, 45.17555.x.

who repatriated from Bulgaria under the international protection of the LON and of the ICRC.⁸⁴ It was on resettlement that the LON should concentrate its efforts. To fight against the reluctance of Balkan countries to accept refugees *en masse*, the LON would have to submit “specific requests at the most suitable moment, for the admission of special categories.” Bulgaria could accept children and intellectuals, from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes the remaining White armies, and from Czechoslovakia 700 students in addition to the remaining agriculturists.⁸⁵

Hoare had two practical suggestions. The first was to provide a “continuity of efforts,” namely the creation of a local HCR office. This proposal is a bit surprising as an office already existed under the leadership of Burnier and Procter; yet Hoare seemed to suggest that the office should stay in touch with all the other HCR offices in the region to ease the dispersion of Russians. Moreover, within the existing office, Procter created an Advisory Committee composed of the Allied High Commissioners and all private organizations working on behalf of Russian refugees, including Russian ones.⁸⁶ Second, the LON would have to negotiate individual visas for the refugees. “It is almost impossible for a Russian in Constantinople, even though he has some means and a good reason for entering a neighboring country, to obtain the necessary visas.”⁸⁷ To do so, Hoare pressed for a sum of £30,000 to be allocated to the HCR Constantinople office and used exclusively for administration, visa, and relief programs upon refugees’ arrival in the new country.

What the LON could not foresee was that Hoare’s report would create tensions.⁸⁸ Back in London, speaking in the House of Commons and in the articles and letters that he addressed to the British papers, including the *Northcliffe Press* and *The Times*, Hoare denounced the inactivity of the League of Nations in humanitarian

⁸⁴ Simpson, *op. cit.*, 68–74. Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea”. Martyn Housden, “Humanitarian Endeavour in the Black Sea Region. The League of Nations, White Russian Refugees and Constantinople, 1920–23,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 6, no. 4 (2008): 109–115.

⁸⁵ ALON, R1723, The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople, 45.19759.13913.

⁸⁶ Particularly, in the Advisory Committee, we find the Russian Committee of Turkey, composed of 80 organizations, charged with coordinating and assisting the relief and evacuation plans. The *Comité Russe de Turquie* was chaired by His Grace, the Archbishop Anastassy. According to the prevalent approach to humanitarianism, the committee claimed to be apolitical. It launched several appeals to different governments and humanitarian organizations to facilitate the evacuation of Russian refugees from Constantinople and to find the necessary funds to pay for the transport and maintenance of the refugees during and after their evacuation. ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922–1924, volume 8, Russian Committee in Turkey, Materials concerning the evacuation of Russian refugees from Constantinople, November 1922. This document traces the story of the Russian presence in Constantinople since 1920. ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F4a, Nansen fil og fra, Mitchell Anna, Comité Russe de Turquie signé par Archeveque Anastassy, Professeur Alexinsky, N. Kieselbasch, Constantinople, November 2, 1922.

⁸⁷ ALON, R1723, The League and the Russian refugees in Constantinople, 45.19759.13913.

⁸⁸ NA, FO, 371.8154, N2120.43.38, Russian refugees at Constantinople and elsewhere, March 10, 1922.

emergencies.⁸⁹ The British MP rightly observed that the work of the organization was greatly limited by the willingness of governments to financially contribute to refugee work—which was a fair observation. “[...] The financial side of the question is the basis of the whole problem and if the League is not prepared to have it faced, the League had better abandon its attempts to deal with the Refugee problem [...],” wrote Hoare.⁹⁰ His attitude created embarrassment; his public denouncement obliged Eric Drummond to contact J. D. Gregory of the Foreign Office Northern Department and suggest that Hoare was to be kept “on [the] right lines.”⁹¹

Meanwhile, the League of Nations tried to collect the sum of £30,000 that Hoare had estimated would “liquidate” the Russian refugee problem in Constantinople. To Drummond, the evacuation of refugees was “very solid work, which [was] well worthwhile to continue even if it [was] carried out under circumstances of anxiety.”⁹² As it did for the repatriation of POWs, Britain offered £10,000, provided that France and Italy gave the same amount; not only did this not happen, but it also froze British contributions. Nansen ended up obtaining £11,700 from various LON members and small contributions from Brazil, Belgium, China, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, and Switzerland. What really changed the course of events was that the ARC stepped in and contributed a grant of £12,500. The HCR office in Constantinople had £26,700 at its disposal for the implementation of evacuation plans.⁹³

The involvement of the ARC created a channel for the LON to reach other American institutions. Procter asked the American Relief Administration, which was already financing Russian organizations thanks to a donation of the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, whether it could organize feeding plans for a period of four months starting from June 1, 1922, while the LON arranged and implemented their evacuation.⁹⁴ The ARA agreed not without a certain caution; the American high commissioner, Admiral Mark Lambert Bristol, suggested going “very slow in accepting responsibility feeding Russian Constantinople pending negotiations of Procter for evacuation of refugees.”⁹⁵ To keep track of the whole operation,

⁸⁹ NBKR 4/472, Secretary-General, Russian refugees at the next Council meeting, March 22, 1922.

⁹⁰ NBKR, 4/472, Hoare to Nansen, March 6, 1922.

⁹¹ NA, FO, 371.8155, N2537.43.38, Drummond to J.D. Gregory, Geneva, March 6, 1922.

⁹² NA, FO, 371.8155, N2537.43.38, Drummond to Hoare, Geneva, March 7, 1922.

⁹³ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, General report submitted to the Advisory Committee of Private Organizations at its meeting in Geneva on April 20, 1923, C.R.R.49, 45.27914.12319.

⁹⁴ NA, FO, 371.8156, N4265.43.38, Walter Lyman Brown to H.A.L. Fisher, London, April 28, 1922. Two American officials working for the LON Secretariat, Mr. Arthur Sweetser and Mr. Huntington Gilchrist, also facilitated the connection between the ARA and the LON. On the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, see ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10G1, Confidential report on Russian refugees addressed to Nansen, undated and unsigned.

⁹⁵ HA, American Relief Administration, Russian operations, Box 86, Folder 6. Cablegram from Bristol: “If we take over Procter work and negotiations fail would be in embarrassing position with all

a Constantinople Evacuation Committee—composed of Procter and Burnier for the League of Nations, Arthur Cuming Ringland of the American Relief Administration, and Davis of the American Red Cross—met weekly for four months.⁹⁶

Regarding the feeding plans, the Constantinople Evacuation Committee decided whom, among the refugees, waiting to be evacuated, had the right to be fed. Yet another body, a Russian Feeding Commission, organized refugees into categories: hospital patients, residents of children's homes, those who could not work (invalids, convalescents, men over 55, and women over 40), able-bodied adults, children under four, and nursing or expectant mothers. Parallel to the scientific approach to the diet of exchanged POWs in Narva, the most fragile categories, including hospital patients, residents of children's homes, and those who could not work, received a full ration, ranging from 1,466 to 2,000 calories per day. Able-bodied men received less, ca. 1,133 calories, and would have to work for the balance. The last category—children and pregnant and nursing mothers—received more milk, cocoa, and rice. Food was dispatched from warehouses every two weeks and distributed to 39 feeding stations in Constantinople, which also received precise instructions about cooking and feeding processes. A system of control was created, with Russians appointed to check on the development of the operations, and daily reports for each feeding station were compiled.⁹⁷ Even the baking of bread was carried out according to a precise (American) formula.⁹⁸

Despite the creation of joint committees and control mechanisms, problems emerged. In September 1922, the ARC asked the LON to send updates on the evacuation plans.⁹⁹ Not only did the American organization wish to widely publicize its work, but it also competed with the ARA and did not want to beg for news.¹⁰⁰ From its end, the LON had all interests to comply, as, in the meantime, the Eastern Mediterranean region was undergoing another unexpected humanitarian catastrophe, the massive expulsion of Ottoman Christians from Asia Minor, the Pontus, and Eastern Thrace directed to Greece. Inter-institutional cooperation paid off: in November 1922, the ARC provided another grant of \$10,000 to hasten the evacuation plans for Russian refugees.

refugees our hands and no way escape as red cross did last September," April 25, 1922.

⁹⁶ ALON, R1723, Bristol to Procter, August 4, 1922, 45.22228x.13913.

⁹⁷ HA, American Relief Administration, Russian operations, Box 86, Folder 6, The American Relief Administration in Constantinople, September 8, 1922.

⁹⁸ HA, American Relief Administration, Russian operations, Box 86, Folder 6, Russian refugees in Constantinople. A report on the operations of the American Relief Administration acting for the trustees of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, first program – July 1 to November 1, 1922, by Arthur C. Ringland, December 13, 1922.

⁹⁹ ALON, R1723, Ross Hill to de Watteville, September 9, 1922, 45.22228.13931.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, R1724, Baker to Childs, Athens, November 10, 1922, 45.24989.13913.

While Russians had been fed, Burnier negotiated evacuation plans, paid travel expenses, and helped refugees obtain visas. It was a group resettlement, not an individual one—something which the HCR favored as it brought immediate results, but which resulted in being expensive. Resettlement countries expected a payment for each refugee, especially for the invalid ones, who would fall within the charge of the state. Between 1921 and 1922, Bulgaria accepted 1,000 invalid Russian refugees together with their families; 1,000 men who were employed in the Pernik mines; and some children. The local integration of men/workers proved difficult though, as they were seen as being Bolshevik agents. Tensions in Bulgaria obliged Burnier to screen refugees and to guarantee that they would not affect the national security of the country.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, Hungary accepted 1,000 men from Gallipoli; 1,200 Siberians were sent from Constantinople to Vladivostok; in the fall of 1922, 5,000 more refugees were evacuated to Bulgaria and 5,000 to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

The following is a detailed breakdown of a group of Russians evacuated from Constantinople. During the second week of March 1922, among the 155 evacuated Russians, 106 were men and 49 women. The largest number included agriculturists (20), teachers (18), and engineers (15), as well as those who had not had any specific training (32).¹⁰² Regarding age, 60 ranged from 21 to 30 years old, while 76 were in the age range of 31 to 55.¹⁰³ Only six were illiterate, whereas the majority went to school (30 to primary school, 29 to high school, and 44 to university).¹⁰⁴ Ethnic Russians were the majority (127), followed by Calmucks (17), with a small number of Poles, Ukrainians, Jewish, and Armenians.¹⁰⁵ Most of them were resettled in the Balkans.¹⁰⁶

The HCR was well aware that the geopolitics of resettlement targeted countries including Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which would be soon saturated. To take the pressure off, the HCR office in Constantinople initiated the “Individual Departure Scheme,” which allowed a small number of Russians into America, Australia, and Canada, the three countries which had

¹⁰¹ ALON, R1718, *Mémoire sur la situation des travailleurs russes dans les mines de l’Etat “Pernik”*, 45.24899x.12608. NA, FO, 371.9335. N260.46.38, Report by Nansen respecting Russian refugees, communicated to the LON, January 30, 1923.

¹⁰² ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau V d’après les professions*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰³ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau VI d’après l’âge*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰⁴ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau VII d’après l’éducation*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰⁵ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau II d’après les nationalités*, 45.19656x.13913.

¹⁰⁶ ALON, R1723, *Tableau des réfugiés russes quittant Constantinople (à partir de 8 au 15 mars 1922), tableau I d’après les pays où on se rend*, 45.19656x.13913.

recently approved anti-immigration laws. Differently from the above-mentioned schemes, which worked on a collective basis, this other one was individually organized. However, this type of evacuation was more economical, as no lump sum was to be paid, and was addressed to a “deserving class who should not be deprived of opportunities of evacuation because they [had] chosen to work instead of living on a charitable relief.”¹⁰⁷ Thanks to the collaboration of the LON, the ARC, the ARA, and Bristol Disaster Relief Committee, a first group of 598 Russians was selected and evacuated to the US. The plan’s success opened for other trips: up to 1,800 Russians were individually resettled. As the cost of the overseas trip was high, refugees agreed to return the money once they had become self-supporting.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile, French charities, including the controversial catholic *Placement familial*, run by abbé Joseph Santol, contacted the HCR over the resettlement of Russian boys¹⁰⁹. Santol suggested that Russians could be resettled in farms and industries of the French areas devastated by the war. This would allow them to become self-supportive and to incidentally expand the local labor market. In the summer of 1922, at the peak of the refugee crises in Constantinople, the local office of the HCR jumped on the occasion and proceeded with the transfer. Hence, two groups of Russian children (46 in total) were sent to France: while the trip was paid for by the League of Nations, *Placement familial* took care of them upon arrival and before they were distributed to their assigned families.

Unsurprisingly, the decision was met with the ostracism of Russian aid organizations, which feared that the boys would be exploited, forced to forget their language and culture, or to lose their national and religious identity.¹¹⁰ The publications of mistreatments and abuses in a Russian journal in Paris intensified the dispute.¹¹¹ This criticism did not go down well with the representative of the High Commissariat for refugees in France, Maurice Hainglaise. In his words, rather than children, Russians aged between 12 and 28, had fought during the civil war, and risked being sent back to Russia,¹¹² were not sold but placed with French families; and they were provided with clothing and medically treated upon arrival. While he was ready to admit that the families had not been carefully chosen and

¹⁰⁷ ALON, R1743, Childs to Baker, letter and annex, December 6, 1922, 45.20706.20706.

¹⁰⁸ ALON, R1715, Russian refugees, Report to the 25th session of the Council on the work accomplished by the HCR on behalf of Russian refugees since the last meeting of the Council, C.473.1923, 45.29424.12319.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth White, *op. cit.*, 207–211.

¹¹⁰ ALON, R1720, Hainglaise to Johnson, January 19, 1923, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹¹ ALON, R1720, “La traite des blancs” signed V.V. and published in *Poslédnia Novosti*, undated, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹² Ten out of 100 were legally adults, as they had declared the wrong age upon selection and embarkation. ALON, R1720, Hainglaise to Johnson, March 14, 1923, 45.19757.12930, jacket 3.

that contracts should have been signed, Hainglaise highlighted several times that Russians should simply be thankful for the interest that France showed them instead of complaining about the living conditions.¹¹³ New policies were negotiated for a third group of Russians (54 refugees), including follow-up visits in the families and in the workplace.¹¹⁴ Though the ongoing dispute between the HCR and Russian organizations put an end to the project, it continued to be implemented elsewhere.

As historian Elizabeth White has correctly argued, this example shows the diverging agendas around the resettlement of Russian children. The HCR wanted to get rid of them at the lowest possible cost, and it considered the scheme successful, especially in the light of other pressing issues. Hainglaise lamented to have postponed the negotiations for the resettlement of 600 Russians from Constantinople to French farms due to the ongoing dispute. In turn, Russian aid organizations attached moral and political values to the sort of their fellow citizens, who were called to contribute to the future of their national community.¹¹⁵ We do not know how Russian children, teenagers, and young adults experienced the migration and the placement. Their paths are mediated by the words of the relief workers of the League of Nations: while the majority seemed to have adapted, a few were mistreated, others ran away, and others were unwilling to work. Yet, a few individual documents (*fiche individuelle*)—which contained biometrical data, a photograph, and references to the family and to education—restituted some paths. We read about Ageii A., 15, who traveled unaccompanied, while his family stayed behind in Russia, and wished to become a taxi driver.¹¹⁶ Georges P., born in Kharkov, had lost contact with his parents in 1919, and wished to learn a technical profession.¹¹⁷ Nicolas A. was a 16-year-old orphan: the Bolsheviks killed his mother, his father fought in the civil war, and his brother died after reaching Constantinople. Nicolas A. had worked for the British High Commissioner, and played the trumpet, hoping to become a professional musician.¹¹⁸ Beyond inter-institutional disputes, these fiches tell of difficult lives, steady survivals, and fragile hopes for the future. The eyes of these Russian teenagers let us wonder where they would end up and what would happen to them.

¹¹³ ALON, R1720, Letter by Hainglaise, February 12, 1923, 45-19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁴ ALON, R1720, Note sur l'hospitalisation dans les familles françaises de garçons russes abandonnés à Constantinople ou ailleurs, 45-19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth White, *op. cit.*, 207–211.

¹¹⁶ ALON, R1720, Fiche individuelle de Ageii A. No. 32, 45-19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁷ ALON, R1720, Fiche individuelle de Georges, No. 31, 45-19757.12930, jacket 3.

¹¹⁸ ALON, R1720, Fiche individuelle de Nicolas A., No. 34, 45-19757.12930, jacket 3.

5.4 Refugee work during the first years of the Turkish Republic

During the inter-Allied occupation of Constantinople, the reports produced by the ICRC delegates or by the LON/ILO experts contained only a few mentions of Ottoman authorities. We are only let to know that Russian refugees were exempted from paying local taxes in Constantinople, except for exit visa fees. Things changed immediately after the end of the Greco-Turkish war and in coincidence with the “exchange of populations” between Greece and Turkey. During the Lausanne Peace Conference, Hamid Bey, the Ottoman representative in Constantinople, expressed the desire to see Russians leave within two or three months. Understandably, the declaration produced panic among Russian refugees, who feared being forcibly extradited to Soviet Russia. Those who could pay spontaneously decided to leave; the others hoped that the Turkish government would not engage in any violent or repressive measures.

Meanwhile, the HCR tried to find a solution through different channels. Nansen appealed to Western governments, asking them to soften their migration policies; he wished that the LON’s member states would pressure Turkey into granting asylum to refugees; and he lobbied the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to welcome 5,000 refugees upon a meager payment of £10,000. Since none of the three options worked, paradoxically it was Soviet Russia which provided a temporary solution.¹¹⁹ In the bilateral negotiations between Russia and Turkey, it was agreed that Russian refugees would not be repatriated against their will. On the contrary, Russia preferred for refugees to stay in Constantinople “where, in due course, our representatives [would] be able to carry out the filtration of the refugees and organize their repatriation to Russia.”¹²⁰

Nevertheless, before leaving Constantinople, the occupation powers tried to make sure that Russian refugees would not forcefully repatriate. To this end, the British high commissioner, Rumbold, talked to General Ismet Pacha, one of the members of the Turkish delegation to the Lausanne Conference, stressing that forced repatriation would be against the Turkish asylum tradition.¹²¹ As we have seen in Chapter 4, Nansen asked that the occupation powers grant identity certificates to Russian refugees, since the Ottoman authorities had not adhered to the Nansen passport system.¹²² Welcomed

¹¹⁹ NA, FO, 371.9335, N1117.46.38, Note by the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, January 25, 1923.

¹²⁰ NA, FO, 371.9335, N260.46.38, Report by Nansen respecting Russian refugees, communicated to the LON, January 30, 1923.

¹²¹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F4a, Nansen fil Hoare, Samuel (London), Astroff to de Watteville, Geneva, December 18, 1922.

¹²² ALON, C1443, Note concerning the Provision of Identity Certificates for Russian Refugees in Constantinople, circulated to the High Commissioners of the Principal Allied Powers by Nansen, High

by the Italian and British governments, France rejected the proposal, on account of not formally governing the city.¹²³ Hence, the Inter-Allied Bureau of Passports intervened and delivered passports to Russian refugees.¹²⁴ The post-imperial transition and Turkey's independence did not make it better. Turkey did not adhere to the Nansen passport system, and it decided to only grant Russian refugees "Turkish" identity certificates. Difficulties immediately appeared. For instance, in October 1923, a Russian refugee student who was in Belgrade wished to re-enter Constantinople, as he had received a scholarship for the Robert College. Yet, the visa was denied on account of the Turkish authorities not recognizing the identity certificate issued by the Serbian government.¹²⁵ Worse, the Turkish documents did not guarantee that asylum countries would accept them, and they were only supposed to last six months, during which refugees should organize their evacuation.¹²⁶ Moreover, the Turkish authorities handed over the Russian Embassy and Consulate in Constantinople to the Soviets—a thing which fragilized stateless Russians even further.

Meanwhile, the conditions of those Russians who were still in Constantinople after the city was integrated into the Turkish state continued to deteriorate. As it had been the case of many more before, letters were addressed to the League of Nations, asking for immediate relief. Writing to Nansen, General Nicolas D. explained that he was already retired by the time the monarchy collapsed; despite the fact that he kept himself away from political struggle, he was jailed by the Bolsheviks in December 1917, on account of having served the tsarist army. Soon liberated, he went with his family to Georgia before making his way to Constantinople.

Thrown by a merciless destiny to Constantinople without any means of subsistence, my family, which is made up of five people, is very worried about its future. To protect ourselves from death from famine, my wife and my daughters sold everything they had on them that had any value, that is to say all the jewelry. We currently have nothing left to sell.¹²⁷

In the letter, Nicolas D. begged the League of Nations to pay the monthly pension which the Russian government owed him; the money would be returned to the inter-governmental organization once the Bolsheviks were defeated. With his words, the Russian general described himself as a victim—he was old, invalid, and

Commissioner of the League of Nations, R409/06/1.

¹²³ ALON, C1443, Poincaré to Nansen, December 5, 1922, R409/06/1.

¹²⁴ ALON, C1443, Oungre to Wolf, September 24, 1922, R409/06/1.

¹²⁵ ALON, R1717, Johnson to Childs, October 15, 1923, 45.18425.12542.

¹²⁶ NA, FO, 371.9335, N1117.46.38, Note by the High Commissariat for Russian refugees, January 25, 1923.

¹²⁷ ALON, R1717, Nicolas D. to the League of Nations, March 15, 1923, 45.18163.13913.

in distress—but he also appealed to his contribution to Russia and to the right to be allocated a pension.

When the inter-Allied occupation finished, in October 1923, there were still 7,000 Russian refugees in Constantinople. A few hundred of them were resettled in Canada, France, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and the United States.¹²⁸ In spite of all the efforts, Russians amounted to between 3,000 and 5,000 Russians.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, a Turkish law restricted the movement of Russians, who were denied the possibility of finding remunerated employment outside the city of Constantinople. At the same time, those Russians who had already left Constantinople, temporarily leaving them behind, were not permitted to travel back and fetch their family.¹³⁰ If, during the inter-Allied occupation, Constantinople was a place of restriction because Russians neither had a passport nor the means to cross states' borders, as of 1923, Turkish nation-building processes contributed to further restricting Russians.

The context in which the HCR office in Constantinople happened to work was not easy. Procter knew well that the negotiations with the countries of resettlement were complex—and this explains why he was annoyed when Russians refused to leave. For instance, in 1923, he arranged for 900 Russian invalids to evacuate to Bulgaria, an option which they opposed. Despite Procter's policy, according to which refugees who refused to evacuate might not be given a second chance until all of the others would leave, a compromise was reached. Invalids would be sent to Serbia, provided that Russian aid organizations would take care of their relief.¹³¹ This example is interesting for two reasons: first, Procter's attitude was spurred by the pressure that the League of Nations received from the American Relief Administration regarding the correct and efficient use of money. Second, clearly international officers disliked Russian refugees' self-determination.

A changed context—alongside the transfer of the technical services of refugee work from the LON to the ILO—shaped refugee work: as of the mid-1920s, the HCR office acted “as a clearing house of offers of work and requests for employment.” To

¹²⁸ ACICR, C.R.87/SDN 1922-1924, volume 8, Letter from the delegate of the High Commissioner in Constantinople regarding the present Russian refugee situation by Childs, October 22, 1923, C.676.M.273.1923 (C.R.R.62). Two tables were annexed to the letter: the first one showed the number of Russian refugees who left Constantinople through the intermediary of the LON during the period from August 1 to September 1, 1923; the second one emphasized the departure of refugees during the period from September 1 to October 2, 1923. ALON, R1716, Tableau no. 1, Évacuation des Russes de Constantinople à partir du I/IX/23 au I/III/24.

¹²⁹ ALON, C1398, Memorandum sur la question d'organisation du travail des réfugiés russes en Turquie, R402/1/66/1.

¹³⁰ ALON, C1418, La question russe en Turquie par Lemtiougov, January 5, 1927, R410/66/0/1.

¹³¹ ALON, R1717, Letter to Zwerner, February 7, 1923, 45.18425.12542.

cope with the structural lack of money, various fundraising activities were organized, from concerts to exhibitions showcasing handicrafts produced by Russian refugees.¹³² Other institutions helped: the ARC organized workshops where Russian refugees did embroidery and sewing work, as well as wood carving and furniture making;¹³³ Russian organizations made “various products” available for potential clients;¹³⁴ the American institution, Russian Refugee Relief, managed by Anna Mitchell and Alma Ruggles, provided money and in-kind contributions.¹³⁵

Constant obstacles and recurrent problems convinced international officers of one crucial thing: no international agreement could be implemented without the green light of the Turkish authorities. This explains why the LON/ILO officers frequently traveled to Ankara, privileging personal connections over a correspondence that might lead to misunderstandings and hasty decisions. For instance, when Nousret Bey, the diplomatic delegate in Constantinople, received a higher appointment and moved to Ankara, there were hopes that their consolidated cordial connections could ease refugee work.¹³⁶ At times, even Thomas Frank Johnson, the assistant high commissioner, made his way from Geneva to Ankara, hoping to dissuade Turkey from expelling Russian refugees.

Zooming specifically into the HCR office, it had evolved since the early involvement of Procter and Burnier. In April 1924, Childs experienced a career advancement and was appointed as a delegate for all of the Balkan delegations: based in Constantinople, he traveled to Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and organized evacuation plans.¹³⁷ In the following months, the turnover of international officers would be quick; there would be J.M. Charpentier, Raymond Schlemmer, and Guillaume Zwerner. Their task was to guarantee a constant liaison with the ILO offices in Europe and Latin America, with Turkish authorities *in loco*, and with the headquarters of international organizations in Geneva.

Differently to what happened with POWs and Armenian refugees, after 1925 no direct relief was given to Russians. In Constantinople, the space of protection was an office in the Pera neighborhood, where a small cohort of local and refugee staff completed the international equipe: Mr. Hesse, chief of the office; Mr. Nicolas Lemtiougov, a Russian refugee who turned into liaison officer; Mr. Killesse,

¹³² ALON, C1398, Fonctions du Bureau de Constantinople: Bureau International du Travail, Service des réfugiés, mois de février 1925.

¹³³ ALON, C1437, Extracts from Mrs. Miles report, undated, possibly 1925, R404/1/66/1.

¹³⁴ ALON, C1398, Letter signed by Childs and Glasoff, 1925, R402/6/66/1.

¹³⁵ ALON, C1397, Mitchell to Charpentier, June 1, 1926, R402/1/66/3.

¹³⁶ ALON, C1400, Lemtiougov to Johnson, July 8, 1927, R402/8/66/2.

¹³⁷ ALON, C1396, Burnier to Johnson, April 15, 1924, 45.19586.x. ALON, C1380, Childs to Johnson, May 20, 1924.

concierge and porter; and Mrs. Papazian, the typist.¹³⁸ Among the four of them, it is on Lemtiougov that we have some information. By acting as a liaison officer, a refugee turned into a provider of protection for his fellow citizens. While we do not know about his education or professional skills, Lemtiougov certainly appeared to be a good fit to the League of Nations that hired him in 1921 and to the ILO, which confirmed its appointment in 1925. His day-to-day work in Constantinople was quintessential: he negotiated with local and foreign institutions, kept the financial books, discussed matters with the shipping companies, and prepared all the necessary arrangements for evacuation trips. In 1927, when Charpentier took two months of leave, Lemtiougov was appointed as “acting delegate,” waiting for a new Red Cross delegate, Schlemmer, to arrive.¹³⁹

However, Lemtiougov’s life was different from that of his international colleagues. First, he could not move freely, as crossing international borders on a Turkish identity card and not on a Nansen passport exposed him to the risk of being denied return. It was only in 1928 that Lemtiougov took a vacation to France, where he applied for naturalization since he was married to a French woman. To make the trip possible, both Anna Mitchell, the American relief worker who closely collaborated with the LON, and Johnson appealed to Turkish authorities for a special permission.¹⁴⁰ Second, his salary was lower than the one allocated to the international staff. This became a matter of discussion when, in May 1928, the Red Cross delegate in charge of the office, Zwerner, left. By then, the LON-ILO office, run thanks to American private donations, would be used for more evacuation plans. The position was then offered to Lemtiougov, who accepted it and who asked for an increase in his salary. In his own words:

As you were kind enough to point out yourself, I already have six years of service, and I have never bothered you with this question. Today, however, I find myself in the need to raise this question, especially since I will have, due to the fact that I must remain alone here, more responsibility and will be obliged to pay various essential costs relating to our work...¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ ALON, C1397, Constantinople sub-delegation administrative account December 1925, R402/1/66/1.

¹³⁹ ALON, C1400, Letter to Lemtiougov, June 10, 1927, R402/8/66/2.

¹⁴⁰ ALON, C1400, Mitchell to Johnson, June 8, 1927, R402/8/66/2. In the words of Anna Mitchell, the American relief worker who closely collaborated with the LON, Lemtiougov was rather overwhelmed by the job’s demands. She hoped that he could receive a visa which allowed him to travel. “I know after being here, you can realize what the strain of this job would be for five years on an end without a break, never able to get out of sight as it were of one’s office; at the end of such time the human machine needs a real breathing spell”.

¹⁴¹ ALON, C1400, Lemtiougov to Johnson, May 23, 1928, R402/8/66/1.

Thanks to a slightly increased salary, Lemtiougov continued to work for one year in Constantinople. In September 1929, though, his contract was terminated due to lack of funds. In taking the initiative to leave for Geneva, Lemtiougov left the office in the hands of Mrs. Papazian, the typist, who found herself acting as a delegate.¹⁴² Meanwhile, in the Swiss city, he talked to all who mattered, asking for an indemnity, which would buy him some time in order to find other employment. Lemtiougov denounced that, over the years, the salaries of the local staff had been reduced in order to meet the increasing cost of the correspondence, as well as of the water, the electricity, and the telephone bills, while the salaries of the international staff had remained unchanged.¹⁴³

A Lemtiougov case arose in Geneva. After meeting with him, Thomas, the director of the ILO, was shocked to realize that the disparities between the treatment reserved to the local and to the international staff had not been adequately addressed. Since he could not do anything, he launched the ball into Nansen's court, questioning the high commissioner's apparent indifference to the situation.¹⁴⁴ While Nansen was, in principle, not against having the same salary for all, there was a widespread preoccupation that Lemtiougov's request would create a precedent for other members of the local delegations, for which there was no money. The archival documents suggest that no payment was made in favor of Lemtiougov. After early 1930, we do not know what happened to him.

More than a simple anecdote, Lemtiougov's litigation allows the imagining of the professional and personal relations emerging from refugee work, relations which otherwise risk being obscured by the self-referential nature of liberal internationalism. From the many letters, reports, and accounts that contain his name, we easily understand that Lemtiougov's work had been central during the nine years when he was employed by the League of Nations and by the International Labour Organization. On a few occasions, he was left in charge of the whole office, when the Red Cross delegates left on vacation or when the turnover of international officers had not been well organized. And, yet, the crucial difference, was that, being a refugee, Lemtiougov was deeply affected by the precarious nature of refugee work and by the decisions made in Geneva.

¹⁴² ALON, C1400, Lemtiougov to Papazian, September 25, 1929, R402/8/66/4.

¹⁴³ ALON, C1397, Charpentier to Johnson, April 13, 1926, R402/1/66/3.

¹⁴⁴ ALON, C1400, Thomas to Johnson, October 8, 1929, R402/8/66/4.

5.5 Evacuation plans against xenophobia

The growing xenophobia in Turkey extended to Russians in Constantinople as well. In an attempt to protect Constantinople's fragile labor market over the lower wages that foreigners were inclined to accept, in December 1925, a Turkish law came into force which prohibited all foreign workers from being employed in Turkish restaurants, shops, and factories, or from driving cabs. In early 1926, the HCR office sadly realized that the law was strictly enforced. Lemtiougov noticed that 700 Russians alone, working in the American colleges and in the Pera restaurants, could lose their jobs. Yet, differently from other foreigners who might leave, Russians could not easily resettle abroad.¹⁴⁵ Hence, Lemtiougov tried to intercede with Turkish authorities, yet with little effect. Russian refugees were so panicked that they besieged the office of the HCR, for which the police were called.¹⁴⁶

The local refugee office was in the best position to observe the consequences of the law on Russian refugees. A Greek chauffeur saw its license taken away; an Albanian man, who had worked for 30 years as the gateman of the American Constantinople College, was dismissed; in late December 1925, the Standard Oil was forced to fire all foreign workers, including Russians, and to keep only the Muslim ones. In January 1926, when the law enforcement became vigorous, it became clear that Russians could not stay behind. While their evacuation to France looked promising, as the cost of the travel would be contained, by the mid-1920s the country was saturated and did not need foreign labor as it used to. Russians did not stay unactive though. A group of them applied to the ILO to be resettled to Paraguay and guaranteed that they would pay back the cost of the travel. The case of Paul C. is particularly telling. Fired by the Anatolian Railroad when the company decided not to employ non-Muslims, he was later employed by Standard Oil, yet he soon lost his job again due to the enforcement of the 1925 law. Together with other Russians, Paul C. turned to the HCR office, which offered the possibility to migrate to Latin America, where a job would be awaiting him thanks to which he would pay back the cost of the visa and of the travel.¹⁴⁷

The emergency was not yet over that the situation precipitated a few months later. A new Turkish decree stipulated that Russian refugees were supposed to move back to Russia, stay in Turkey with adequate documents, or move to a third country by August 1, 1927.¹⁴⁸ The first solution was impinged by the Soviet government, which was no longer interested in having refugees back. Regarding

¹⁴⁵ ALON, C1418, De Giers to Nansen, February 28, 1926, R410/66/0/1.

¹⁴⁶ ALON, C1418, Ruggles to Johnson, January 13, 1926, R410/66/0/1.

¹⁴⁷ ALON, C1418, Ruggles to Butler, February 17, 1926, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁴⁸ ALON, C1402, Schlemmer to Johnson, August 6, 1927, R402/10/66/1.

Turkish citizenship, even if naturalization was possible, non-Muslims had little chance to obtain it.¹⁴⁹ Last, moving abroad was hindered by having to obtain a visa and pay for the travel.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, France, which had been the main country of immigration, closed its doors due to the economic crisis. Hence, in early 1928 the Turkish government granted an extension: the last group of 3,000 Russian refugees should leave by February 6, 1929.¹⁵¹

By that time, the LON-ILO office had carried out a new census of Russian refugees. They were 2,879: 1,555 men, 956 women, and 368 children. There were a large number of unqualified workers, in addition to peasants, taxi drivers, woodworkers, sailors, painters and decorators, builders, electricians, domestic workers, secretaries, business owners, intellectuals and medical doctors, and those who did not have a profession such as the invalids and the children.¹⁵² While some refugees were voluntarily repatriated, pending the authorization of the Soviet authorities, many were evacuated to countries where they could be employed. The refugee office negotiated visas and work contracts; established contacts with governments; pressured the Turkish police to provide passports for departure; and tried to lower the price of the sea trip for destinations like Latin America. Thanks to the mediation of the ILO, France offered 600 visas, Tunisia 250 work contracts, Bulgaria 500 visas, and Bolivia 50 work contracts.¹⁵³ There was also hope that Russians could be resettled in Cyprus and Palestine and other countries.¹⁵⁴

Cases were treated through a group approach, especially when it pertained to agriculturists, whereas they were treated individually when it came to specific professions. For instance, the Paraguayan railroad asked for five specialists. Léonide G., a fitter, received a technical education in Russia, worked in the Samaro-Zlato railroad, before he took the road of exile. In Constantinople, he worked as a mechanic. Basile K. was a blacksmith both in Russia and in Turkey; Kosma C. a carpenter; Michael Z. a turner; and Nikifiore P. a boilermaker. Three out of five could financially contribute to pay for the travel, whereas two did not have any resources.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Üre, "Remnants of Empires".

¹⁵⁰ ALON, C1418, Memorandum les réfugiés russes, May 24, 1927, R410/10/0/1.

¹⁵¹ ALON, C1443, The problem of the last 3,000 Russian refugees in Constantinople, December 16, 1927, R409/56/1.

¹⁵² ALON, C1470, Le problème des derniers réfugiés russes de Constantinople, undated.

¹⁵³ ALON, C1470, Bolivian concessions LTD, an agreement between the Company and the Settler.

¹⁵⁴ ALON, C1470, Bureau International du Travail, 38ème session du Conseil d'administration, Genève, février 1928, 6ème question à l'ordre du jour: Organisation et programme du Service des réfugiés, G.B. 38/264.

¹⁵⁵ ALON, C1452, List signed by Lemtiougov, undated but likely 1927, 348-Rr-412-2-47-1.

Money, or the lack thereof, remained one of the most pressing problems. It was calculated that the sum of £47,250 was necessary for resettling all Russians. Since governments continued to be reluctant, American organizations intervened, as they had already done in 1922. These were the ARC, the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, and the Russian Refugee Relief.¹⁵⁶ While only invalid refugees would directly benefit from the collection, the others would have to enroll in the so-called “revolving fund”: refugees received a small sum to pay for the tickets and for the first few weeks in their new country; the sum would be repaid from the salaries, within the limit of 1/10 of their full monthly wage.¹⁵⁷ By means of this system, Russian refugees were not just receiving humanitarian aid, but were also fully involved in the implementation of the project and in the resettlement of more compatriots. In other words, visas and work contracts were two sides of the same coin.¹⁵⁸

The refugee office also had to fight the recalcitrance or, worse, the antagonist position of Russians. Indeed, some refused to be resettled overseas, hoping that Turkey would eventually agree on granting them citizenship. Yet, an unexpected element created a new rush: as we have seen for the “Lemtiougov case,” the ILO announced that the local office would close down by May 1928. This news, together with the pressure of Russian organizations from the old regime, pushed refugees to leave.¹⁵⁹ In turn, the ILO evacuated political prisoners and prostitutes, and guaranteed that it would find a way to continue assisting Russians in the future.¹⁶⁰ The small office continued to work for some time on a reduced staff and budget. Indeed, more petitions from Russian refugees would be sent in the following months, when the Turkish government confiscated their properties.¹⁶¹ Isaac Z., who was evacuated from Crimea to Constantinople, could save enough money to buy a house in the city. He later resettled in France, and he continued to live on the monthly allowances from renting the house in Constantinople, at least until 1925, when the Turkish government requisitioned them. Isaac Z. was painfully aware that, as a refugee, he could not be represented by the Russian council in the city; hence, he addressed his

¹⁵⁶ ALON, C1470, Le problème des derniers réfugiés russes de Constantinople, undated.

¹⁵⁷ ALON, C1419, Evacuation by Lemtiougov, January 2, 1927, C412/1/666/2.

¹⁵⁸ ALON, C1397, Childs to Hesse, June 18, 1925, R402/1/66/3.

¹⁵⁹ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés. Procès-verbal de la séance du 22 mai 1928 tenue au Bureau International du Travail à Genève, A/C.5-1928.

¹⁶⁰ ALON, C1470, Comité consultatif pour les réfugiés, rapport du Haut-Commissaire pour les Réfugiés sur la situation des réfugiés russes en Turquie et sur l'établissement des réfugiés russes et arméniens en France et en Tunisie (point 8 b et c) de l'ordre du jour, A/C.-2-1928, 21 mai 1928.

¹⁶¹ ALON, C1440, Loi no. 1062 concernant l'application de mesures de représailles à l'endroit des biens en Turquie des ressortissants des états étrangers qui ont saisi les biens des sujets turques à l'intérieur des leurs propres frontières (journal officiel no. 608 du 15 juin 1927), 336-Rr-409-0-3-1. Translated from French.

request to the League of Nations, acting as a putative government. “I have the honor to explain to you that I bought my house while already a refugee. Victim myself of the Russian revolution, I cannot be held responsible for the losses that this revolution caused to Ottoman subjects.”¹⁶² Isaac Z. referred to himself as a victim of the revolution and of the discriminatory decisions made by the Turkish government.

Far from being an isolated accident, more letters are to be found in the archives. Writing on behalf of a group of white Russians, B. was very vocal in denouncing the situation, for which the LON and the ILO could not do much:

White Russians are exposed to an almost oppressive and stigmatized law which is dictated under the impulse and auspices of Soviet Embassy. Driven from our paternal domain, expelled from our native abodes, we are hunted like wild beasts, and we are contemned and sent to the grave. Our spirits are humiliated, and we are debased by the last scene of your life. Our rights have not been appreciated or respected by the Turkish Government who found easier to exterminate than to help us and who forget that the purpose of every Government is to make men better and happier and not infamous and miserable.¹⁶³

Negotiating and implementing the evacuation of Russian refugees was a massive exercise in red tape. A kaleidoscope of tables, different in the quality and in the amount of data that they contained, emerges from it. Cases were treated individually, and, in doing so, reconstitute a few words about the single person, while others refer more generally to a family or to a group. Some contain the names of Russian refugees, in addition to their profession and family configuration.¹⁶⁴ Recurrent tables show the countries where refugees were evacuated, pushing our imagination across the world.¹⁶⁵ Others open more directly to the history of labor, by matching refugees with their future employers.¹⁶⁶ The most complete lists contain the name of the refugee, nationality, date of departure, country of destination, information on the contract, the name of the person who paid for the travel, and the admin work provided by the LON/ILO office.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² ALON, C1440, Isaac Z. to Drummond, July 31, 1928, 336-Rr-409-0-3-1. Translated from French.

¹⁶³ ALON, C1440, B. to Drummond, October 1, 1929, 336-Rr-409-0-3-1. Translated from French.

¹⁶⁴ ALON, R1402, Contrats pour la France, R402/10/66/1. See also ALON, R1402, Agriculteurs pour l'Argentine, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁶⁵ ALON, C1402, Tableau des évacuations de Turquie par pays de destination du 1er juillet 1928 au 30 juin 1929, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁶⁶ ALON, C1402, Situation of the Russian refugee question in Stamboul, undated, likely 1929, R402/10/66/1.

¹⁶⁷ ALON, C1419, Bureau international du travail, section des réfugiés, Société des Nations, liste des réfugiés évacués de Constantinople le mois de juin 1925, R412/1/66/2.

After all, the question of Russian refugees in Constantinople remained “unsorted”: by 1928, when the LON/ILO office was closed down, 1,800 Russians still remained in the city, of whom 1,000 had applied for Turkish nationality (only 10 Russian refugees obtained it). The LON-ILO then addressed a formal request to the Tewfik Ruchdy Bey, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, urging him to accept the 1,000 requests for naturalization and allow the office to find solutions for the remaining 800 refugees.¹⁶⁸ This was partially achieved, since we know that the situation of Russian refugees continued to be discussed by the Nansen Office throughout the 1930s, as well as by post-WWII humanitarian organizations, including UNRRA and IRO.

After the formal withdrawal of the LON/ILO from the city, a small office continued to work, thanks to the financial resources of the American Committee managed by Miss Mitchell. Once again, in 1932, the Turkish government approved a law which forbade foreigners from specific employments, putting Russian refugees out of work. The LON intervened with Turkey, which by then had become a member state, asking to accept demands of naturalization.¹⁶⁹ The question was dragged on for a long time with no formal engagement from the Turkish side.¹⁷⁰ Despite more than one decade of humanitarian programs to relieve, rehabilitate, protect, repatriate, or resettle Russian refugees in Constantinople, the question remained “unliquidated,” to use the words of the LON.

5.6 Conclusion

The exchange of POWs across Europe and beyond was still underway when the Red Cross delegates started reporting on the dire conditions of Russian refugees in Constantinople. Spontaneously, they extended their limited resources to assist Russians, among whom were many children. Meanwhile, reports written by Russian organizations in exile reached the desks of the ICRC in Geneva, giving alarming numbers and asking for a response. Interestingly, the ICRC first turned to the ILO that—it was believed—could resettle Russians alongside the needs of postwar labor markets; when the ILO declined the offer, the ICRC contacted the LON where the HCR

¹⁶⁸ ALON, C1470, League of Nations, High Commission for Refugees, Advisory Committee of Private Organizations for Refugees, meeting held at Geneva February 15, 1929, note by the assistant high commissioner on the situation of the Russian Refugees in Turkey, A/C 2-1929.

¹⁶⁹ ALON, C1475, Office international Nansen pour les réfugiés sous l'autorité de la Société des Nations, Conseil d'administration, dixième session, compte rendu de la séance du 31 octobre 1934 présidée par M.L.B. Golden, vice-président, C.A.-82-1934.

¹⁷⁰ ALON, C1475, Nansen International Office for Refugees under the authority of the League of Nations, Managing committee and finance commission, 15th joint session convened at Geneva on October 28, 1935, situation of the Russian refugees in Turkey, J.C.141-1935.

was eventually created in September 1921, framing the question of Russian refugees in the inter-governmental realm.

Both in Geneva and in Constantinople—where the followers of Generals Denikin and Wrangel had found asylum at the crossroad of the city's inter-Allied occupation and of its integration into modern Turkey—gendered inequalities and racial hierarchies fueled humanitarian protection. Lederrey stressed that only self-reliant Russian refugees could receive international assistance thanks to which they might reach the higher civilizational standards of their saviors. Similarly, only those Russian prostitutes willing to leave behind their “path of vice” might undergo physical and moral recovery. Instead of protecting women, humanitarian aid further marginalized them: not only had Russian refugee women chosen prostitution to survive, but the same Western men who potentially benefited from their services were also those who decided whether they were worthy of assistance.

Regarding Russians, they were far from being helpless. Fortunately, the international organizations' red tape opened breaches into agencies and forms of resistance. When interviewed prior to resettlement, the Russian youth in Constantinople recounted how they overcame dramatic events and expressed hopes for the future. Russian organizations were vocal in opposing resettlement plans in Brazil, fearing that refugees would be exploited on the plantations. The officer in Constantinople, Lemtiougov, protested against the fact that his contract was not renewed, whereas many others asked for help to have their confiscated properties restored.

Within the square kilometers of Constantinople and its broader region, the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO formulated a series of discourses on displaced Russians—being victims, threats, and vectors of postwar reconstruction—which influenced the solutions agreed on their behalf. They also became acutely aware of the challenges that Russian refugees faced: they could not resettle, as they lacked passports and entry visas, and, after Turkey regained control of the city, they had a hard time locally integrating. It was in the peculiar context of Constantinople that “permanent solutions” for the “refugee problem” were designed, implemented, tested, and—when they worked—exported elsewhere. Taken together, Constantinople and its broader region appeared to be a massive space of forced displacement, humanitarian protection, and containment, from which it was extremely difficult to leave in the direction of the West, where anti-immigration laws had been approved, and where it became increasingly challenging to stay.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ For a discussion of space, see Timur Saitov, “Constructing a Refugee Through Producing a Refugee Space: Russian Migrants in Occupied Istanbul (1919–22),” *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 10, no. Dis-Placed (2021): 337–360.

PART III

The rescue and
the resettlement of
Armenian refugees

International politics for Armenians: multiple discourses, different responses

Abstract

This chapter analyzes the discourses formulated around the conditions of post-genocide Armenians scattered throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region. International humanitarian organizations and the many actors which gravitated around them saw Armenians as trafficked women and children, refugees, and economic migrants. Rather than emerging in isolation, these discourses cohabitated, provoking policy responses across a global geography. A larger expertise concurred in formulating solutions: in addition to relief workers, agronomists and engineers were associated with refugee politics. Plans were formulated across each other, waiting for financial and political consensus.

Keywords: post-genocide Armenians, trafficked women and children, refugees, economic migrants, expertise.

It is incomprehensible that all the Conferences and meetings of the Supreme Council & the League of Nations have not resulted in anything whatsoever being done for Armenia. Armenians have no spot in the world where they can go for safety. The people who fled for their lives from Turkish Armenia to the Caucasus are still unable to return to their homes as no provision whatsoever has been made to protect them & their property is still in the hands of the Turks. The overcrowding in Armenia causes a great deal of infectious sickness which is preventible [sic]. No compensation has been made to any Armenian anywhere. These people are innocent victims of the war...¹

—Emily Robinson of the Armenian Red Cross & Refugee
Fund to Rachel Crowdy of the LON.

Between 1915 and 1923, against the setting of WWI and of the Greco-Turkish war, the Ottoman government tried to annihilate its Armenian minority, which supposedly collaborated with the Russian enemy, aiming at creating an independent Armenia.²

¹ ALON, R640, Robinson to Crowdy, August 24, 1922, 12.22326.4631.

² On the Armenian genocide, see Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997). Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish*

Out of the 2,000,000 Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, between 800,000 and 1,500,000 perished. The survivors, among whom was a large number of women and children, as men had been killed, were scattered throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region, the Anatolian Plateau, and the South Caucasus. Pushed in death marches towards the Mesopotamian desert, women were abducted, forced into marriage and concubinage, raped, or starved to death; children went through processes of Islamization and assimilation. Soon after, Turkey expropriated the properties which were “abandoned” by deported Armenians.³

Information about the massacres and deportations of Armenians reached Western diplomats in the Sublime Port through consulate, business, and missionary networks.⁴ This heterogeneous group of foreigners witnessed the genocide and generated spontaneous rescue programs.⁵ Humanitarian initiatives were also generated

Responsibility (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books/Holt, 2006). Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Chatty, *op. cit.* Suny, Göçek, Naimark (eds), *A Question of Genocide*. Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes*. Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else”: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Vicken Cheterian, *Open Wounds: Armenians, Turks, and a Century of Genocide* (London, UK: Hurst & Company, 2015). Thomas De Waal, *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³ Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011). For transitional justice, Henry C. Theriault, “Legal Avenues for Armenian Genocide Reparations,” *International Criminal Law Review* 14, no. 2 (2014): 219–231.

⁴ James Bryce, Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce* (Uncensored Edition) aka “The Blue Book,” ed. Ara Sarafian, Uncensored edition (Princeton, N.J.; Reading: Taderon Pr., 2000). See also the memories by the American ambassador to the Sublime Port, Henry Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929). For other sources, see Henry H. Riggs, *Days of Tragedy in Armenia: Personal Experiences in Harpoot, 1915-1917* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Gomidas Institute, 1997). Mabel Evelyn Elliott, *Beginning Again at Ararat* (New York, Chicago [etc.]: Fleming H. Revell company, 1924). Maria Jacobsen, *Diaries of a Danish Missionary: Harpoot, 1907-1919*, ed. Ara Sarafian, trans. Kristen Vind (Princeton; Reading, England: Taderon Pr., 2001).

⁵ On American missionary and philanthropy in the Near East, see Merle Curti, “The History of American Philanthropy as a Field of Research,” *The American Historical Review* 62, no. 2 (1957): 352–363. Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad; a History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963). Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East; Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810-1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971). Robert L. Daniel, *American Philanthropy in the Near East, 1820-1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1970). Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010). Ussama Samir Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

from within the Armenian community.⁶ As of 1917, Allied armies, the British in particular, participated in the “rescue movement,” a transnational endeavor which aimed to free women and children from the status of slavery in Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab households, protect them, and foster family reunion.⁷ The Armistice of Mudros, signed on October 31, 1918, and the Peace Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10, 1920 between the Allied and Associated Powers and Ottoman Empire, established its legal basis. In Article 142 of the peace treaty, conversions to Islam prior to November 1, 1914 were invalidated; the Ottoman authorities had to assist “in the search for and deliverance of all persons, of whatever race or religion, who [had] disappeared, [had] been carried off, interned or placed in captivity”; mixed commissions appointed by the LON Council would receive complaints by the victims, make enquiries, and “order the liberation of the persons in question.” Moreover, Article 144 invalidated the law on abandoned properties, voted in 1915, by which Ottoman authorities expropriated Armenian “immovable or movable properties.”⁸

Meanwhile, projects of Armenian nationhood emerged. In the South Caucasus, following Lenin’s principle of self-determination, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic emerged in April 1918, composed of present-day Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. From the short-lived federation, in May 1918, the Republic of Armenia was created: squeezed by the Russo-Turkish rivalry, the first republic lasted until December 2, 1920, when Soviet Armenia was proclaimed, to be integrated into the URSS in 1922.⁹ In January 1919, the Paris Peace Conference resolved that Eastern Anatolia, detached from the Ottoman Empire, should be put under the authority of the League of Nations. A few months later, the Treaty of Sèvres confirmed the creation of an independent Armenia (art. 88), a decision which was followed by the establishment of a group of experts, headed by Woodrow Wilson, mandated to draw the new borders (art. 89).¹⁰

Both questions, the Armenian National Home and the rescue of surviving Armenians, were on the LON agenda from the start.¹¹ Regular discussions took place

⁶ For assistance from within the Armenian community, see Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁷ Vahram L. Shemmassian, “The League of Nations and the Reclamation of Armenian Genocide Survivors,” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 81–112.

⁸ The Treaty of Sèvres, 1920 (The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey signed at Sèvres August 10, 1920).

⁹ Anahide Ter Minassian, *La République d’Arménie: 1918-1920* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1989).

¹⁰ On the actors and arguments regarding the American mandate on Armenia, see Charlie Laderman, “Sharing the Burden? The American Solution to the Armenian Question, 1918-1920,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 4 (2016): 664–694.

¹¹ Watenpugh, “Between Communal Survival and National Aspiration”.

around the creation of an Armenian state, due to the work of lobbying by Armenians who advocated the Wilsonian principle of self-determination and who tried to capitalize upon Western governments' responsibility for remaining inactive during the genocide. Meanwhile, the League of Nations addressed its attention to abused and deported Armenian women and children who were scattered throughout the whole Middle East: before any action could be undertaken, newly appointed commissioners were asked to undertake investigations and to report back to Geneva. As of 1923, in coincidence with the end of the Greco-Turkish War and with denationalizing policies of the Turkish Republic, which turned the project of a Wilsonian Armenia into dead letter and which denied refugees the possibility of return, an array of individuals and institutions started framing displaced Armenians as refugees. Soon enough, alongside the programs undertaken for Russian refugees, Armenians were not only extended the Nansen passport but also the possibility to resettle in France and Latin America, or the chance to locally integrate into the French mandatory territories.

This chapter examines the institutions and the actors, from within and outside the League of Nations, which concurred in framing the responses to the conditions of Armenians in terms of (white) slavery, rescue work, forced displacement, and unemployment. Taken together—something which the literature has seldom done—the reports that resulted from the expert knowledge and the geopolitical understanding of international officers and relief workers are a testament to the articulation of the Armenian refugee question in Western liberal, missionary, and philanthropic circles. They also suggest that solutions were not easily found and that responses were fragmented and uncoordinated, coupled with governments' (dis)interest and nation-building projects. By looking at these many reports, it appears that, even more than in regard to the Russian refugee question, experts in various capacities, particularly agronomists and engineers, contributed to assess the feasibility of settlement and agricultural programs. While the genocide forcibly displaced Armenians across the Middle East and the South Caucasus, humanitarian aid further globalized their exile and, in doing so, laid the foundation of a racialized, eurocentric, and patriarchal governance of refugee protection.

6.1 Armenians as (white) slaves

In May 1920, the British feminist Helena Swanwick, the vice-president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, transmitted to the League of Nations a pamphlet entitled, "The Liberation of Non-Mohammedan Women and Children in Turkey."¹² Written by an anonymous "Armenian lady of Constantinople"

¹² ALON, R638, Swanwick to Sir Robert Cecil, May 20, 1920, 12.4631.4631.

who had escaped deportations thanks to the protection of the British army, the pamphlet described the circumstances where Armenian women and children had been abducted, sold, and abused; while a few women could escape, others preferred “death to dishonor.” It was suggested that an international commission should be created, supported by the “Armenian ladies of Russian Armenia, Constantinople, Smyrna, and of the colonies in Europe, Egypt, and America.”¹³

The report attracted the attention of Rachel Crowdy of the League’s Social Section who requested a report from Zaven, the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople. There, we read that, even before the Armistice of Mudros was signed, Zaven and the British Allied police had created special commissions which liberated Armenian orphans from Muslim households in and around Constantinople. Since the commissions’ activities were hindered by the hostile attitude of the Ottoman authorities, a Neutral House was created. There a small group composed of observers—an Armenian, a Turkish, and an American or British one—investigated the identity of children when it was unclear. Newspapers’ articles, attached to the report, gave a few examples. In “The Orient News,” we read about Azadouhie, who had been liberated from a Muslim family and who called herself Turkish until she was confronted by Vahridj, whose traits were similar to hers. “The boy looked first from the girl to the other persons in the room, and then from them to the girl, in an obvious agony of doubt.” Eventually, sister and brother, whose whole family had been exterminated, recognized each other and tenderly hugged.¹⁴ For a few successful stories, many more Armenians had to be found, liberated, and identified: according to Zaven, there were up to 63,000 Armenians who were deprived of “all national education or family care” and who were scattered throughout the Ottoman territory, as well as an equally large number of women kept captive in Turkish harems.¹⁵

How were Armenians represented in Zaven’s report? Soaked in late-nineteenth-century discourses, spurred by the missionary *milieu* and Western capitulations, Armenians were portrayed as Christian martyrs, enslaved by barbarous Muslims, who had already tried to decimate them during the Hamidian and Adana massacres. Armenians were also seen as vectors of Western values of progress and of civilization in the barbarous Ottoman lands, on account of belonging to the “white race.”¹⁶ Interestingly, these representations, shaped by gender and racism, resonated within the anti-trafficking movement which converged at

¹³ ALON, R638, The liberation of non-Mohammedan women and children in Turkey, Geneva 1920, 12.4631.4631.

¹⁴ ALON, R638, The Orient News. July 25, 1920, vol. 2, no. 38, by A.K.T., 12.4631.9640.

¹⁵ ALON, R638, Zaven to the LON Social Section, November 1, 1920, 12.4631.9640.

¹⁶ Ann Marie Wilson, “In the Name of God, Civilization, and Humanity: The United States and the Armenian Massacres of the 1890s,” *Le Mouvement Social* 227, no. 2 (2009): 27–44. Stéphanie Prévost, “Espaces et processus de politisation de l’humanitaire. L’Armenian Relief Fund et le National Armenian

the LON Social Section. While the movement's focus was on women who were told to be wrongfully trafficked across states' borders, a double exception was made for Armenians who were deported and abused within the states' borders and who counted not only women but also children.

Zaven's report was timely discussed at the first Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1920, where it was framed within the white slavery question. The ground was fertile, as both the Danish and Rumanian delegations provided evidence of Armenians having been sold in "Eastern slave markets" during the war.¹⁷ The Assembly voted on a two-fold resolution. First, the Secretariat was asked to distribute a questionnaire to all member states on current and future anti-trafficking measures, according to the dispositions of the 1904 Agreement and 1910 Conventions for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic; duly prepared countries' reports would lay the foundation for an International Conference to be organized in the summer of 1921. Second, the Council was asked to create a Commission of Enquiry, composed of three recognized personalities residing locally (one of them being a woman), to "do much useful work by collecting further information" in Armenia, Asia Minor, Turkey, and the adjoining territories about the number and the conditions of Armenian women and children.¹⁸

Constructing Armenians as white slaves was not monolithic. To the LON Secretariat, and particularly to Drummond, this was of secondary importance; crucial was rather understanding the implications of Articles 142 and 144 of the Treaty of Sevres, still to be ratified, on the Assembly's resolution. For that, Drummond mandated the Greek diplomat, Thanassis Aghnides, who had a vast knowledge of the region and of its recent history, to investigate. His assessment was merciless. According to him, the Assembly's resolution, drawn by "an amateurish, happy-go-lucky spirit," was hindered by several problems: the Commission of Enquiry was restricted to the mere collection of information, while the Treaty of Sèvres requested actual restitution work; the commission would never be allowed to access the areas controlled by the Turkish army, where the majority of Armenian women and children were still detained, due to the ongoing war with Greece; and, it should be composed of citizens of neutral countries, supported by "native" assistants, instead of by representatives of countries which had missionary or economic

Relief Committee (1895-1896): un miroir transatlantique?," *Transatlantica. Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal*, no. 2 (2018).

¹⁷ ALON, R638, Report by the delegate of Rumania. Notes on international measures to be taken for the suppression of traffic in women and children, 12.9711.4631.

¹⁸ ALON, R638, League of Nations, traffic in women and children, resolution adopted by the Assembly at its meeting held on Wednesday, December 15, 1920 (morning), 12.9654.4631.

interests in the Near East.¹⁹ All in all, Aghnides stressed that nothing could be done before the ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres.²⁰

Despite the fact that Drummond shared Aghnides' view, on the account that the League of Nations had "no actual right to appoint a Commission of Enquiry in the former Ottoman Empire without the consent of the Powers now exercising sovereignty in the respective territories," he did not overtly oppose its establishment.²¹ Drummond might have thought it to be detrimental to criticize the LON, which had just become operational; moreover, he was aware that the dire conditions of Armenians had arisen sympathy in Western public discourse, which did not have to be alienated.²² The secretary-general limited himself to preparing a memorandum, which laid a clearer legal foundation for the work ahead: investigations should start in occupied Constantinople, as "it [was] clearly impossible for the Commission of Enquiry to begin work immediately in all countries enumerated in the resolution of the Assembly."²³ It was also necessary to avoid any confusion and distinguish between the Commission of Enquiry and the Mixed Commissions, which would be created by the League of Nations after the ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres in order to carry out an inquiry and liberate Armenian women and children.²⁴

Meanwhile, in February 1921, Drummond's questionnaire was broadly distributed.²⁵ The first replies, which arrived in the spring, were discussed at the International Conference on the trafficking of women and children taking place in Geneva in June and July 1921. On this occasion, the Greek delegate, Vassili Dendramis, addressed the "strategic reasons" why Armenian and Greek women

¹⁹ ALON, R638, Relationship between the resolution adopted by the Assembly of the League of Nations at its meeting held on Wednesday, December 15, 1920 (morning) and Article 142 of the Turkish Treaty (memorandum to the secretary-general) by Thanassis Aghnides, December 18, 1920, 12.9711.4631.

²⁰ ALON, R638, Aghnides to Mantoux, January 5, 1921, 12.9711.4631.

²¹ ALON, R638, Drummond to Mantoux, January 2, 1921, 12.9711.4631.

²² Drummond was contacted by the Joint Committee of the British Armenia Society. ALON, R638, Letter to Drummond, February 2, 1921, 12.10740.4631.

²³ ALON, R638, Deported Women and Children in Turkey and Neighboring Countries, memorandum by the Secretary General, 12.10589.4631.

²⁴ The Treaty of Sèvres, 1920 (The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey signed at Sèvres August 10, 1920).

²⁵ In February 1921, the questionnaire was broadly distributed. Question 1 asked if it was "a criminal offence" under the national law to "(a) procure women and girls underage whether with or without their consent", and "(b) procure by fraud or violence women or girls over age"; question 2 asked if governments proposed "to take any further legislative or administrative steps against the evil"; and question 4 asked if any special measure had been taken to control ports and railway stations where abuses had greater chances to happen. ALON, R645, National conference on the traffic in women and children, revised report presented by M. Regnault, delegate of the French Republic, on the replies submitted by the various states to the questionnaire of the Secretariat, July 4, 1921, 12.11622.13829.

and children had been deported, lobbied for their evacuation, and appealed to the LON to avoid future violence. A resolution followed, by which the League of Nations was requested to prevent the deportations of women and children for political or military purposes and in respect of the “laws of humanity.”²⁶ Generally, governments and private organizations which had already implemented the terms of the 1904 and 1910 Conventions for the suppression of the white slave traffic were encouraged to pursue their efforts, while it was hoped that new governments would join.²⁷ The expression “white slaves” was changed to “trafficked women” and children were added to the equation, since the Great War had a heavy toll on them.²⁸ Moreover, an advisory committee on the trafficking of women and children became operational in 1922, and, the following year, launched a major investigation. What turned out to be known as the Paul Kinsie reports were spurred by the necessity to have first-hand data on prostitution across the world thanks to the work of “agents of high standing with special training and experience to make personal and unofficial investigations.”²⁹ In the reports, there are a few scant references to Armenian prostitutes in the cities of Constantinople and Port Said, yet no mention of the rescue movement.

6.2 Investigations of the rescue work in Constantinople and Aleppo

In the spring of 1921, the American, Emma Darling Cushman, the Briton, Dr. William A. Kennedy, and the Dane, Karen Jeppe, were the three members appointed to the Commission of Enquiry.³⁰ Their appointment created discontentment in Armenian circles, whose two delegations in Paris had suggested a few internal

²⁶ ALON, R645, Records of the international conference on traffic in women and children, Geneva, 1921, p. 100, 12.18324.13845.

²⁷ ALON, R645, National conference on the traffic in women and children, revised report presented by M. Regnault, the delegate of the French Republic, on the replies submitted by the various states to the questionnaire of the Secretariat, July 4, 1921, 12.11622.13829.

²⁸ ALON, R645, Records of the international conference on traffic in women and children, Geneva, 1921, p. 10–11, 12.18324.13845. For children during the genocide, With a focus on children, Keith David Watenpaugh, “‘Are There Any Children for Sale?’: Genocide and the Transfer of Armenian Children (1915–1922),” *Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 3 (2013): 283–295. Joy Damousi, “Humanitarianism in the Interwar Years. How Australians Responded to the Child Refugees of the Armenian Genocide and the Greek-Turkish Exchange,” *History Australia* 12, no. 1 (2015): 95–115. ALON, R645, Clouzot to Crowdy, June 17, 1921, 12.13892.13892.

²⁹ Jean-Michel Chaumont, Magaly Rodríguez García, Paul Servais (eds.), *Trafficking in Women 1924–1926. The Paul Kinsie reports for the League of Nations vol. I and II* (United Nations: 2017).

³⁰ ALON, R638, Drummond to da Cunha, April 2, 1921, 12.11391x.4631. At the beginning, there had to be a French woman on the commission as well, which was going to be Miss Berthe Georges Gaulis. This

names. As was the case for Russians, who would have preferred having a Russian high commissioner at the head of the HCR, Armenians would have wanted to be represented—and for good reasons—in the Commission of Enquiry.³¹ Contrary to Aghnides' comments, the commissioners were not the citizens of neutral countries, except for Jeppe. The fact that two out of three commissioners were women equally responded to the fact that displaced Armenians were women and children and to the Western missionary tradition, which, since the late nineteenth century, saw an increasing number of women go global as teachers, nurses, administrators, and doctors.³² Moreover, the fact that among the commissioners were two Americans, first Cushman and then Miss Caris Mills, aligns with the literature which has analyzed the many ways in which the US collaborated with the LON, despite not having ratified the Covenant.

Emma Cushman was an American teacher and nurse, whose appointment was endorsed by the Robert College, the missionary-born American university in Constantinople.³³ Hired by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a major American missionary organization, she was first assigned to the Anatolian cities of Talas and Konia, where she stayed in wartime and cared for Allied prisoners and deported Armenians.³⁴ “Of large physical proportions, jolly disposition, sophisticated in her judgement of others, and with unlimited administrative and business capabilities,” Cushman chose missionary

person was supposed to politically balance the commission with her pro-Turkish position. However, the final choice was not Gaulis but Jeppe.

³¹ ALON, R638, Papazian to Drummond, February 28, 1921, 12.11505.4631.

³² Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996). Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie Anne Shemo (eds), *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960* (London: Duke University Press, 2010). Julia Hauser, Christine B. Lindner, and Esther Möller, *Entangled Education Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon (19–20th centuries)* (Beirut, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2016). Dimitra Giannuli, “Errand of Mercy: American Women Missionaries and Philanthropists in the Near East, 1820–1930,” *Balkan Studies* 39, no. 2 (1998): 223–62. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Karène Sanchez Summerer (eds), *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism in the Middle East, 1850–1950: Ideologies, Rhetoric, and Practices* (Leiden; Brill, 2020). Ellen Fleischmann, “‘I Only Wish I Had a Home on This Globe’: Transnational Biography and Dr. Mary Eddy,” *Journal of Women’s History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 108–30. Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford University Press, 2014).

³³ ALON, R638, Letter from Robert College to Drummond, March 16, 1921, 12/11634/4631. “Emma D. Cushman: AJN The American Journal of Nursing,” *LWW*, accessed November 13, 2016.

³⁴ Recollection of Emma D. Cushman by Charles T. Riggs, October 7, 1935, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABC 77.1.18), Houghton Library, Harvard University. There, she played “a man’s part,” being the only representative of the Allies. Acting consul of seventeen nations, *Missionary Herald*, February 1931, ABCFM (ABC 77.1.18), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

work out of “economic necessity” and an “adventurous spirit.”³⁵ Commentators wrote that, in the same position, “the cleverest and bravest man [...] would have suffered fifty deaths and accomplished nothing.”³⁶ Cushman had strong credentials for the delicate and highly political task to accomplish.

The second commissioner, Kennedy, worked as administrator of the British Lord Mayor’s Fund in the region. Sir Horace Rumbold, the British high commissioner in Constantinople, had supported his appointment.³⁷ Kennedy’s expertise was less “full hands” than Cushman and Jeppe, yet he was well connected with British political circles and regularly traveled to Geneva and London. He proved able to network and put pressure on the LON to obtain political and financial support on behalf of Armenians. After serving in the Commission of Enquiry, Kennedy continued to manage the LON Neutral House in Constantinople until 1926, also thanks to the daily practices of care implemented by the American relief worker, Miss Caris Mills.

Jeppe, the third commissioner, on whom much history has been written, was a Danish aid worker for the Orient Mission, who did not refer to herself as a missionary, but rather, in historian Matthias Bjørnlund’s words, as “an activist working for national self-determination for the oppressed and dispelled Armenians who had been first colonized and finally almost completely eradicated by the Ottoman Empire.”³⁸ Belonging to a Danish Lutheran movement where ideas of an ethnic and cultural nation were grounded on personal freedom, education, and human

³⁵ ABCFM (ABC 77.1.18), Houghton Library, Harvard University, “Miss Valiant” by Lucius E. Thayer in the Andover Newton Quarterly, March 1967.

³⁶ Miss Valiant by Lucius E. Thayer ABCFM (ABC 77.1.18), Houghton Library, Harvard University. In the last period of her life, Cushman created a large orphanage in Corinth, Greece for the NER, where she occupied abandoned barracks and sheltered, nourished, and created vocational programs for 1,000 Armenian and Greek children. When the NER closed the program down due to lack of funds, Cushman came up with the idea of creating a chicken factory to support herself. Documents contained at the Houghton Library maintain that, towards the end of her life, Cushman lost her faith and passed away alone and sick in Egypt in 1930. Decades later, the ABCFM was dismayed not to know where Cushman was buried.

³⁷ Katherine Storr, *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees and Relief, 1914-1929* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 272.

³⁸ Matthias Bjørnlund, “Karen Jeppe, Aage Meyer Benedictsen, and the Ottoman Armenians: National Survival in Imperial and Colonial Settings,” *Haigazian Armenological Review* 28 (2008): 9, 9–43. See the doctoral dissertation of Jonas Kauffeldt, *Danes, Orientalism and the Modern Middle East: Perspectives from the Nordic Periphery* (Dissertation, Florida State University, 2006). Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 151–159. Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors.” Inger Marie Okkenhaug, “Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927–1934,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 432–454. Simon Jackson, “Transformative Relief: Imperial Humanitarianism and Mandatory Development in Syria-Lebanon, 1915–1925,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 8, no. 2 (2017): 247–268. Jinks, “Marks Hard to Erase”.

nature, Jeppe reached Urfa, in south-eastern Anatolia, in 1902, where she focused on education.³⁹ In 1921, Jeppe was compelled to evacuate south towards Aleppo alongside deported Armenians: supported by Protestant organizations, the Armenian Delegation in Paris, the Lord Mayor's Fund, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, she immediately undertook rescue work.⁴⁰ This explains why, once she was contacted by the LON in the spring of 1921, and in order to accept the appointment, she wrote directly to Drummond to clarify a few points. Was the Commission of Enquiry only expected to collect information? Could it liberate women and children? In Jeppe's understanding, there was no point in a social investigation which did not immediately liberate Armenians.⁴¹

In late spring of 1921, Kennedy and Cushman started collecting data in Constantinople, with Kennedy being in command and reporting on the whole enquiry, and Cushman sharing "personal observations." Lacking evidence for such a division of tasks, we can speculate that, by acting as an administration for a major British institution, Kennedy's professionalism was kept in higher esteem than Cushman's, whose observations, though, turned out to be equally pertinent. The work method was mixed. The two commissioners collected data from the occupation powers, particularly the British, as well from humanitarian organizations, including the Near East Relief and the Lord Mayor's Fund, and from the Armenian Patriarch. They witnessed the interviews undertaken in the Neutral House in order to verify the children's identities. And they visited a few institutions where the children were hosted, accompanied by translators.⁴²

From the outset, Kennedy and Cushman were confronted with proof in support of the allegations. Zaven showed the two commissioners official birth certificates falsified by Turkish authorities, orphanages' fake declarations about children's identities, and lists where Armenian names had been changed to Turkish and Kurdish ones. During an inspection trip, Cushman's Turkish secretary, of whom we only know the initials, A. R., checked the registry of the hospital in Mekteb Harbieh, in Constantinople: out of the names of 572 children, from age five to 15, 81 had been changed from Greek and Armenian to Turkish names (only three were Greeks). A.R. believed that Kurdish names hid Armenian children too, due to the cohabitation of both communities in Eastern Anatolia and to the Kurds' role in the genocide. He also wrote that Turkish families had adopted some of the children

³⁹ Bjørnlund, *op. cit.*, 17–18.

⁴⁰ ALON, R638, Robinson to Drummond, March 20, 1921, 12.11391.4631.

⁴¹ ALON, R638, Jeppe to Drummond, May 13, 1921, 12.11391X.4631.

⁴² ALON, R640, Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey and Neighboring Countries, memorandum by the secretary-general. Report on the work of the commission of enquiry with regard to the deportation of women and children, September 5, 1921, A.35.1921.IV (C.281.M.218.1921.IV).

medically treated in the hospital.⁴³ This corroborates the fact that a special association affiliated with the Ottoman Red Crescent, under the direction of Talaat Pasha, Enver Pasha, and Halide Edib, the famous Turkish novelist, had distributed 2,000 Armenian children to Ottoman households.⁴⁴

Cushman described in length how rescue work was done, denouncing how the Turks aimed for a “complete change of mind in the child.” She reported on a boy brought from a Turkish orphanage to an American ophthalmologist ward, where, after a while, he sang in Armenian and gave his true name. Cushman was keen to highlight that nobody had forced the boy “by suggestion or persuasion” and that a change in the place where he lived had led to a change in his personality. Emphatically, it was written that “the child had discovered himself.”⁴⁵ Kennedy and Cushman also described the management and supervision of the Neutral House, supported by both Armenian and Greek Patriarchs: Armenian and Greek teachers verified the children’s identities, by singing folk songs and reciting prayers.⁴⁶ Once the identification was completed, Armenian women and children stayed a few more weeks in the Neutral House and were then restituted to their families or resettled.⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, Turkish authorities formally protested against the Commission of Enquiry: Djevad Bey, the Turkish ambassador in Switzerland, challenged the impartiality of the LON and the exclusion of data from Turkish sources. He also lobbied that Turks should be “allowed to defend themselves and express freely their points of view.”⁴⁸ To the Greek delegate, Dendramis, and to many others, the option of seeking “news of the victims from the executioners” did not make any sense and would risk alienating public opinion.⁴⁹

Throughout the report, Armenians were told to have experienced “deportation,” “retention,” and “detention,” while humanitarian programs were supposed to bring “recognition,” “reclamation,” “return,” and “recovery.” Far from being

⁴³ ALON, R638, Examination of one of the registers of the Turkish hospital for orphan children at Harbieh, Istanbul, undated, signed A.R., 12.15100.4631.

⁴⁴ ALON, R638, Letter from the Armenian Red Cross & Refugee Fund to Drummond, March 20, 1921, 12.11391X.4631. Selim Deringil, “‘Your Religion Is Worn and Outdated’. Orphans, Orphanages and Halide Edib during the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Antoura,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 12 (2019): 33–65.

⁴⁵ ALON, R638, Work of the commission of enquiry with regard to the deportation of women and children in Turkey and adjacent countries, report by Cushman, July 16, 1921, 12.15100.4631.

⁴⁶ ALON, R638, Cushman and Kennedy to Drummond, August 20, 1921, A.V.1.1921. ALON, R638, Second Assembly of the League of Nations, deportation of women and children in Turkey and the neighbouring countries, resolutions adopted by the Assembly at its meeting held on Friday, September 23, 1921, A.127.1921, 12.15998, 4631.

⁴⁷ ALON, R638, Index of children brought to the Neutral House (no dates).

⁴⁸ ALON, R640, Djevad to Drummond, March 17, 1922, 12.19620.4631.

⁴⁹ ALON, R640, Dendramis to Drummond, July 6, 1922, 12.21156.4631.

anodyne, the choice of words bridges the overlapping contexts where the rescue work emerged, the personal and political understanding that the commissioners developed, and the complexity of the situation that they faced. Discourses refer to the long missionary tradition in the Ottoman Empire, where American and European Christian organizations, especially Protestant ones, had tried to convert non-Muslim minorities; they epitomized the uncertainty around the disruption of the Ottoman Empire, at a time when the future of the Near East was still open; and they also embodied the contested shift towards a nation-state model from which former Ottoman minorities, such as Armenians and Kurds, would be excluded.

The report's main takeaway lay in the data that Kennedy and Cushman shared. Liberated Armenian children amounted to 90,819, of whom 12,480 were in the unoccupied territories, 11,339 were in the occupied areas, and 67,000 were in Cyprus, Egypt, Armenia, and Georgia. There were still 73,350 Armenian children in Turkish houses and orphanages, 60,750 in unoccupied territories, and 12,600 in occupied ones.⁵⁰ However, both commissioners were skeptical about the results: not only were houses difficult to access, but there was also "a reiteration of the information already obtained by the British High Commissariat" in occupied Constantinople.⁵¹ Strikingly, Kennedy and Cushman did not distinguish between the number of women and children, despite the fact that the Commission of Enquiry relied upon separate data.⁵² Why so? It is possible that both women and children were conflated in the final number, as many deported girls were underage. It is also possible that with the word 'children,' Kennedy and Cushman referred to the Armenian *vorp*, meaning orphan, which, due to the genocide, included both children without parents and women without husbands.⁵³ Even if these two hypotheses are plausible,

⁵⁰ ALON, R638, Work of the commission of enquiry with regard to the deportation of women and children in Turkey and adjacent countries, table showing numbers of Armenian children reclaimed from and numbers still retained in Turkish homes, August 25, 1921, 12.15100.4631.

⁵¹ ALON, R638, Cushman to Drummond, July 16, 1921, 12.14796.4631. ALON, R639, Memorandum explanatory Commission of Enquiry on Deported Women and Children by Kennedy, undated, likely end of September 1921, 12.16512.4631.

⁵² ALON, R638, Nombre des femmes et orphelins Arméniens islamisés qui sont retournés au sein de leur Église Mère, 12.15100.4631. For example, from other documents we learn that British authorities had previously liberated 10,000 children and 5,000 women; American authorities had liberated 7,000 children and 1,000 women; Armenian authorities had liberated 10,000 children and 18,000 women; and the Armenian army had liberated 3,000 children and 3,000 women.

⁵³ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 28. Anna Aleksanyan, "The Issue of Identity of Surviving Armenian Women and Children after WWI," paper given at the workshop "Aid to Armenia: Armenia and Armenians in International History," Birkbeck College, London, June 3, 2016. Anna Aleksanyan, "Between Love, Pain and Identity: Armenian Women After World War I," in Ulrike Ziemer (ed.), *Women's Everyday Lives in War and Peace in the South Caucasus* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020): 103–127.

we are left with no information on the children born from Armenian mothers and Turkish fathers and on the attitude of the Armenian community towards rescued women—a topic which Jeppe addressed and on which the literature has offered diverging interpretations.⁵⁴

Kennedy and Cushman also shared with the headquarters in Geneva a document called “index of children brought to the Neutral House,” which contained 50 rescue stories, of which the majority pertained to children and only a few to teenage girls. For each child, we read the name, followed by a paragraph where the story is recalled, and closed by another one where there is a judgment on the child’s character and potential. Sadika, who was six or seven years old, was referred to as having been used to transport water. On the evening of her rescue, she confessed to be Armenian and that her name was Marie. In the relief worker’s judgment, Sadika was “a very simple and good soul.” Gulistan (her real name being Haiganoush) was a few years older: her father died in the bombardment of Bitlis, and her mother was killed during the massacres. She was “worth special attention,” as being “clever and extremely sensible.” Djeman, Virgin being her Armenian name, was originally from Ankara and was deported to Aleppo with her family, from which she was separated and brought to Constantinople. Being clever and affectionate, it was suggested to keep her in the Neutral House as a helper.⁵⁵

Interestingly, the two League’s commissioners omitted mentioning that not all of the cases were successful, and that three out of 50 were contested. Vigdan, 13 years old, lived in the house of a Turkish doctor, who “showed a legal document to prove that the girl was a Turk.” Thinking that she was Armenian, Vigdan was kept in the Neutral House for a couple of days, yet she continued to be silent; hence, she had to be returned to her Turkish family. Kerime Serma who was slightly older, 16 years old, and who was engaged to a Turkish military man, was taken to the Neutral House against her will. Gayrie, between 18 and 20 years old, declared to come from Ankara and to have been adopted by a Christian couple who lived by the sea, from where she was abducted and brought to Constantinople. Despite her recollections, Gayrie changed her mind, so she was forcefully sent to the Patriarch. Albeit the

⁵⁴ Vahé Tachjian suggests that, while orphans were generally included in the post-genocide community, “corrupted” Armenian women and girls were not. Vahé Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2009): 65, 60–80. Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, whose work is limited to Constantinople, shows that the bodies of Armenian women/mothers were instrumental to winning the demographic struggle in the multi-ethnic post-Ottoman Empire. See also how Lerna Ekmekçioğlu engages with Tachjian’s argument. Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, “A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (2013): 525, ft. 6, 522–553.

⁵⁵ ALON, R638, Index of children brought to the Neutral House (no dates), 12.15100.4631.

minority, these three cases suggest that rescue stories were plural and could embody coercion, as the forced reintegration into the Armenian community proves.⁵⁶

While the work of Kennedy and Cushman was quite rapid, Jeppe took some extra time and submitted the report in January 1922. Her methodology was more time consuming: she relied on data collected by the Armenian National Union and undertook first-hand interviews both in Aleppo and in Northern Syrian countryside. Indeed, by the time that she was associated with the LON, Jeppe had been undertaking rescue work for two years, thanks to the assistance of local men, who, by means of their gender, and cultural and social skills, easily negotiated with the local Arab population. According to Jeppe, in the French Occupation Zone, there were between 5,000 and 6,000 detained Armenians, and 30,000 in the whole region around Aleppo. These numbers did not include the Ottoman provinces of Diyarbakir and Harpoot, through which deportees had passed, and Cilicia, where survivors of the massacres of Hadjin and Marash had found refuge. Jeppe pictured a complex situation where:

Some women became the beloved wives of the Moslems, the honored mistresses of the harems. Some children were adopted and treated as well as any child could be. But the great number of them were but slaves, given entirely in the hands of their masters without any right or protection at all, ill-treated and misused in every way.⁵⁷

Differently from Kennedy and Cushman, Jeppe explicitly addressed the question of women married to Arabs or Bedouins and was worried about the children of mixed parentage.⁵⁸ Rather than building on the anti-trafficking repertoire, her political imaginary was built on American slavery as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* book.⁵⁹ Moreover, Jeppe endorsed a missionary call when she wrote that Armenians had to be rescued “from the slavery in the Mohammedan world” and restituted “to the Christian world.”⁶⁰ Being “strong” and having survived “a life of struggle and hardship,” Armenians could be vectors of progress, enabling the export of Christian values

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ALON, R640, Deportation of women and children in Turkey and the neighboring countries, memorandum by the secretary-general, September 4, 1922, A.28.1922.III, 12.23010.4631.

⁵⁸ Bjørnlund, *op. cit.*, 16–17.

⁵⁹ ALON, R640, Account of the situation of Armenians in Syria and my work among them from May 1 till September 1, 1922 by Karen Jeppe, 24/8 1922, p. 10, 12.30066.4631. On the question of trafficking and slavery, upon the lobbying of the British activist, Emily Robinson, an issue of the *Slave Market News* was dedicated to the work of Jeppe in Aleppo particularly dedicated to tattooed Armenian women. ALON, R641, *The Slave Market News*, vol. I, no. 3, December 1924, 12.41714.4631.

⁶⁰ ALON, R641, Annual report of the Rescue-House in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, work carried on by contributions from various societies and friends coming forward to complete the budget allotted by the League of Nations for this purpose by Jeppe, 12.42731.4631.

to the “uncivilized” East.⁶¹ At least at the beginning, Jeppe wished for Armenians to settle among the “foreign people” of Syria, waiting to resettle in an independent or Soviet Armenia.⁶²

In the fall of 1921, on the occasion of the LON’s second Assembly, the Constantinople-based report was discussed.⁶³ The outcome was pretty disappointing; instead of deciding how to concretely organize the rescue work, the Assembly suggested to appoint yet another commissioner, who would continue the enquiry and who would reorganize the existing Neutral House, with a mixed board guaranteeing the representation of each community.⁶⁴ The American William W. Peet was seen as the suitable candidate: he had been the treasurer of a major American missionary organization, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, for 35 years, was a member of the American Bible Mission, and was knowledgeable in international and Turkish law. Moreover, he was one of the indirect witnesses of the genocide as, by being in Constantinople, he had kept a tight correspondence with the various missions scattered through the Ottoman lands.⁶⁵

When the League of Nations contacted Peet, it found an opinioned man who did not shy away from highlighting that “other phases of the tragedy in Asia Minor [...] require[d] earnest and immediate attention” and that the LON had failed in guaranteeing “the Christian minorities a fair degree of safety and freedom.”⁶⁶ Yet, the inter-governmental organization did not wish to call Turkey out since the Greco-Turkish War was turning to its advantage and, at the same time, did not want to commit to longer projects for which there was no money.⁶⁷ To meet Peet midway, the Council approved an investigation of the atrocities possibly committed “by Turkish and non-Turkish inhabitants in Turkish and Greek territories...”⁶⁸ As

⁶¹ ALON, R639, Interim report from the Aleppo-section of the Commission of Enquiry by Jeppe, January 11, 1922, 12.19111.4631.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16–17.

⁶³ ALON, R638, Drummond to Jeppe, October 27, 1921, 12.11391X.4631.

⁶⁴ ALON, R638, Second assembly of the League of Nations. Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey and Neighboring Countries. Resolutions adopted by the Assembly at its meeting held on Friday, September 23, 1921, A.127.1921, 12.15988.4631.

⁶⁵ ALON, R638, Drummond to Peet, November 2, 1921, 12.16513.4631. For an example of the communication between Peet and the mission in Harpoot, see Riggs to Peet, November 10, 1915, box 132, NEF, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁶⁶ ALON, R639, Peet to Drummond, December 7, 1921, 12.18192.4631.

⁶⁷ Kévonian, *Réugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 147–148.

⁶⁸ ALON, R638, The appointment of Dr. Peet as commissioner on the League in Constantinople for deported women and children, May 5, 1922, C.230.1922.IV, 12.16513.4631. An inter-Allied commission of enquiry into the atrocities committed by the Greek army was sent in the spring of 1921 to the peninsula of Samanli Dag, Ismid, Mudania, and lake Iznik. Analyzing the diaries written by the ICRC delegate, Maurice Gehri, who accompanied an inter-Allied mission, Davide Rodogno shows how the situation

Drummond privately explained to Peet, the British suggested using the terms “Non-Turks” and “Turks,” instead of “Christians” and “Muslims,” officially not to irritate the LON’s Muslim member states but also the Muslim inhabitants of the British Empire.⁶⁹ As historian Dzovinar Kévonian correctly highlights, had atrocities been verified, it was unclear how Western governments would have reacted vis-à-vis Greece and Turkey.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, to accept the LON’s proposal, Peet would have wanted an extended mandate: in terms of time, a contract of up to 3 or 4 years, and in terms of tasks, those which would encompass any activities in late Ottoman territories.⁷¹ Since Peet’s conditions were difficult to meet, he eventually declined.⁷² In the spring of 1922, the preliminary peace negotiations between Greece and Turkey postponed the official beginning of rescue work.⁷³

6.3 Armenians as refugees

Between 1923 and 1924, in parallel to the rescue work that converged at the LON Social Section, diverse actors—including the Soviet government, the Armenian National Delegation, and the Greek government—lobbied to extend Nansen’s mandate to Armenians. By then, Nansen was acting as the high commissioner for Russian refugees and was also involved with the forced displacements of Ottoman refugees to Greece. The timing of the various requests is crucial: the end of the Greco-Turkish war and Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923 after a long seven-month conference, recognized the frontiers of modern-day Turkey and turned the Wilsonian Armenian project into a dead letter; moreover, the Turkish

that the delegate encountered was far more complex than expected. Without dismissing the atrocities committed by the Turkish army to the Greeks and the Armenians, Rodogno highlights that the Greek occupation army and irregular groups committed atrocities against the Turkish population and displaced many of them in order to make the Marmara peninsula a fully Greek territory. Thanks to Gehri’s intervention, nearly 3,000 Turkish women, men, and children were removed and brought to Constantinople. Davide Rodogno, “L’enquête du délégué du CICR qui déjoua un mensonge historique,” *La Cité*, November 2011, 14–17.

⁶⁹ ALON, R638, Drummond to Peet, January 19, 1922, 12.16513.4631. ALON, R638, Fischer to Drummond, December 16, 1921, 12.16513.x.4631.

⁷⁰ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 147–148.

⁷¹ ALON, R639, The appointment of Peet as commissioner of the League in Constantinople for deported women and children, C.230.1922.IV, May 5, 1922, 12.16513x.4631.

⁷² ALON, R639, Drummond to Peet, C.267(1).M.147.1922.IV, May 12, 1922, 12.16513x.4631. ALON, R639, Kennedy to Drummond, July 3, 1922, 12.16513x.4631. ALON, R640, League of Nations, Deportations of Women and Children in Turkey and Neighboring Countries, memorandum by the Secretary-General, A.28.1922.III, September 4, 1922, 12.22101.4631.

⁷³ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 148–149.

policies of spoliation of Armenian properties and of denationalization made return impossible. This helps contextualize the numerous ideas presented to the League of Nations about the future of Armenians as refugees.⁷⁴

In January 1923, the Soviet government contacted the League of Nations. It suggested that displaced Ottoman Armenians would resettle in the north or south of Russia, where they would enjoy some form of local autonomy, and where they could become agriculturists. However, the Soviet authorities made clear that it would not provide any financial support for the cost of travel and of their resettlement. When the proposal was rejected, Armenians scattered in the Near East were invited to join those who had crossed the borders towards Soviet Armenia since the beginning of the genocide in 1915.⁷⁵ Russia's supposed generosity was addressed to the economic development of underpopulated and backward areas of the country. It also has to be seen in a larger context: the Soviet government had denied white Russians the possibility to return, by approving a law which stripped them of their nationality.⁷⁶

From its end, the Armenian community actively participated in the negotiations. In January 1923, the United National Delegations appealed on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Armenians who had been forced to leave Turkey and found refuge across the region, and who were "deprived of resources, home, and legal status."⁷⁷ After the Treaty of Lausanne was ratified, in the summer of 1923, Gabriel Noradounghian, the president of the Armenian National Delegation, addressed two letters to the League's Council, where he reported on the conditions of his stateless fellows. While 1,200,000 Armenians had perished during the massacres of 1915-1916, a large number of survivors were in need of a passport: 150,000 of them were in Syria, 120,000 in Greece, 20,000 in Bulgaria, 2,000 in Cyprus, 1,200 in Palestine, 8,000 in Mesopotamia, and 20,000 in various European countries.⁷⁸ Depicted as both victims and as vectors of postwar reconstruction, Noradounghian expressed the desire that Armenians would be resettled in the South Caucasus. For that, he highlighted:

The act of humanity that we are asking for the goodwill of the Allies – and to which the United States of America and other countries which have so often demonstrated their interest in the Armenian cause would certainly provide their assistance – would put an end to a lamentable situation to which we have continued to draw the attention of the Allied Powers. It would at the same time be an act of justice towards a people who have

⁷⁴ ALON, C1424, Memorandum on the action taken by the League in connection with the various schemes for the settlement of Armenian refugees, 320-Ra-404-1-25.

⁷⁵ ALON, JO, Procès-Verbaux de la 23ème session du Conseil, 17ème séance privée.

⁷⁶ Ginsburgs, *op. cit.*, 343–344.

⁷⁷ ALON, C-99-M-39-1923-VII_EN, Letters from the United Armenian Delegations, January 25, 1923.

⁷⁸ AILO, R201.20.5 jacket 2, Dénombrement des réfugiés arméniens en Grèce, Bulgarie, Constantinople, Syrie, Chypre, Palestine et Mésopotamie, July 1923.

made so many sacrifices to remain faithful to the allies and whose suffering has stirred the universal conscience.⁷⁹

On September 25, 1923, the French representative, Gabriel Hanotaux, who had reported on the Russian refugee question two years earlier, contacted the League's Council and shared Noradounghian's proposals. In turn, the Council contacted Nansen; it asked his opinion on the possible extension of the work of the High Commissariat for Russian refugees to Armenians and it sought advice on the settlement plans in Soviet Armenia.⁸⁰ The high commissioner did not hesitate to endorse the immediate extension of the Nansen passport, waiting to see whether governments would provide financing for relief and resettlement plans. Meanwhile, on September 28, 1923, the Council approved the proposal and mandated the Legal Session to identify whom, among displaced Armenians, would be eligible for the Nansen passport.⁸¹ The extension was eventually put to a vote on May 31, 1924, and was supported by 38 states.

By then, the High Commissariat for refugees was still a small, understaffed, and underfinanced body, with a handful of delegates scattered throughout Europe and the Middle East.⁸² In accepting the mandate's extension, Nansen might have thought that the number of Armenians to be resettled, being lower than the number of Russians, would make the task easy. From the outset, the high commissioner was alerted about the dire conditions of 50,000 Armenian refugees who happened to be in Greece, having been "exchanged" alongside Ottoman Greeks from Asia Minor, the Black Sea districts, and Cilicia.⁸³ Indeed, the Greek government hoped that all Armenians would leave, possibly directed to Soviet Armenia, which appeared to

⁷⁹ ALON, R1428, Lettre adressée à Mr. Hanotaux par le président de la Délégation nationale arménienne, August 24, 1923, 324-Ra-413-1-1-Jacket1.

⁸⁰ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, leg 4, Armenian refugees, annex to document A.8-A.8(a)1924, Extract 4, Part III, 9–10, A.V./5/1924.

⁸¹ ALON, C1321, folder 11, Johnson to the Legal Section on Armenian refugees, October 16, 1923. Five categories of refugees were identified: refugees who left the Ottoman borders before the armistice of Mudros with Ottoman passports which would expire in the following year and which would not be renewed; refugees who left the Ottoman territory after the armistice of Mudros with identity certificates that were provided by the Allied authorities and that were not valid anymore; refugees who left the Ottoman territories with passports provided by the representative of the former Armenian Republic in Constantinople; refugees who left Asia Minor after the events of Smyrna of 1922 and who numbered approximately 100,000; and refugees who received passports from the Turkish authorities and whose passports contained the mention that they could not go back to Turkey.

⁸² ALON, JO, Projet d'installation de 50,000 Arméniens dans le Caucase, 28^{ème} séance privée du Conseil de la SDN, September 28, 1923.

⁸³ This number would be contested by the British organization, the Lord Mayor's Fund, according to which Armenians in Greece numbered no more than 50,000, of whom 40,000 had a job whereas

be the preferred destination. In order to strengthen its argument, Greece reminded the LON that it had had refused a mandate on Armenia, but, in exchange, had accepted a general commitment to the fate of the Armenian people.⁸⁴ In addition to the placet of Armenian organizations, the transfer of Armenians from Greece to the South Caucasus was also endorsed by the Near East Relief. According to his president, Charles V. Vickery, who had just toured the country, “it could support twice its present population if capital and leadership were made available to develop its wonderful waterpower and the land waiting for irrigation.”⁸⁵ The main idea was to raise a loan similar to the one that had just been raised for Greece.

Faced with several requests, the Council of the League of Nations offered a diplomatic response: it would be ready to offer its technical expertise provided that the necessary money would be raised. It suggested that member states would create national committees for fundraising purposes. Belgium, France, and Italy did so, while Great Britain relied on the services of the British Lord Mayor’s Fund.⁸⁶ Each national committee was charged to contact the church, philanthropies, industries, and banks, as well as to organize an “Armenian day.” The ultimate goal was to collect at least £1 million.⁸⁷ This also explains Nansen’s fundraising trip to North America in the fall of 1923. Waiting to see whether Western states would contribute, the LON did not hasten to intervene. Rather, it mandated John Gorvin, who had played a role in the financial negotiations for the repatriation of POWs, to leave on a mission in Soviet Armenia, which he toured on a motorbike in August 1924. During the mission, he studied the opportunity for settlement plans and established preliminary contacts with national and local authorities.⁸⁸ Gorvin’s was the first of many reports that, between 1924 and 1926, either the LON or the ILO commissioned, or were sent to them by external sources, including other humanitarian organizations and experts in various capacities.

only 10,000 were unemployed. ALON, C1424, Record of conversation, present Bliss, Harold Buxton, Northcote, Butler, Johnson, November 26, 1924, 320-Ra-404-1-25.

⁸⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, Letter from Harold Buxton, the Secretary of the Armenian Refugees Lord Mayor’s Fund, to Mr. Morgenthau, March 26, 1924.

⁸⁵ ALON, R1428, Vickery to Noradounghian, September 15, 1923, 324-Ra-413-1-1-Jacket1.

⁸⁶ The Belgian committee asked Belgian philo-Armenian organizations to organize collections for refugees with the help of the press and would welcome Armenian refugees who wanted to work in Belgium. The French government stated that it had placed 337,000 French francs at the disposal of its national committee. The Italian government stated that it had created a committee for the transport and settlement of refugees.

⁸⁷ ALON, C1424, Projet d’appel, 320-Ra-404-1-25.

⁸⁸ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A.5, General Report on the Possibilities of the Settlement of Armenian Refugees in Soviet Armenia based on the Visit to Erivan, Tiflis, Sardarabad Plain, and a motor trip through the country in August 1924 by Gorvin.

6.4 Investigations of resettlement

One year after the extension of Nansen's mandate to Armenian refugees, on September 25, 1924, the League's Assembly decided to send a commission to Soviet Armenia which would examine the details of the settlement plan.⁸⁹ Nansen acted as the president, upon the express request of Albert Thomas; the other commissioners were Georges Carle, recommended by the French Ministry of Agriculture; C. E. Dupuis who was the British Adviser to the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works; the Italian, M. Pio Lo Savio, recommended by the Italian Commission for Emigration; and the Norwegian, Captain Vidkun Quisling, who acted as secretary and would later be an infamous collaborationist with the Nazis. The Red Cross, the Lord Mayor's Fund, and the Near East Relief offered their services in an advisory capacity.⁹⁰

The work of the commission and its experts was based on the general understanding that the settlement of Armenians would be implemented provided that technical measures were put in place, political decisions were made, and financial resources were collected.⁹¹ The three appointed experts, Dupuis, Lo Savio, and Carle, elaborated both common and diverging ideas on the feasibility of the plan. Dupuis suggested that the Kara Su and Zangabassar lands could produce crops and host a larger population if "a really scientific system of irrigation and drainage, and a proper control of water were introduced."⁹² Lo Savio was reluctant to give a clear-cut opinion, as he felt that the information collected was partial. He deemed the irrigation of the Sardarabad Plain, situated 50 kilometers west of Yerevan, to be too difficult, long, and expensive, while the only feasible project was to drain the Kara Su and irrigate the Kirr, located east and west of Yerevan.⁹³ From his end, Carle examined the land condition in Armenia and provided a detailed report containing data on climate and soil, the quantity of rain, temperature, and water supply; he claimed that irrigating the Kirr region and preparing the Kara Su and

⁸⁹ ALON, JO, Assembly Resolution 1925, loan for the settlement in Armenia of Armenian refugees. On humanitarian aid in the south of the Caucasus, see Nora N. Nercessian, *The City of Orphans: Relief Workers, Commissars and the "Builders of the New Armenia" Alexandropol/Leninakan 1919-1931* (Hollis, NH, 2016).

⁹⁰ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 3, Report by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, president of the Commission appointed to Study the Question of the Settlement of Armenian Refugees, July 28, 1925.

⁹¹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2.A, Hand-written note by Nansen to Johnson, July 18, 1925.

⁹² ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 3, Report by Mr. C.E. Dupuis on the scheme for the development of Armenia, with a view to settling Armenian refugees to the Confederation of the Nansen Commission by the Armenian government at Erivan in June 1925, July 9, 1925.

⁹³ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 3, Report by Signor Pio Lo Savio, possible irrigation and improvement works to be affected on territory of the Armenian Republic with a view to the repatriation of 15,000 Armenian refugees, July 1925.

Zangabassar districts for cultivation were a possibility, while the Sardarabad Plain project appeared to be too difficult to implement.⁹⁴

In his report, Quisling summarized the conditions of the first groups of Armenian refugees who resettled in Soviet Armenia from Persia, Georgia, Constantinople, and Greece. Upon arrival, refugees were settled in a camp, south of Yerevan, from which they resettled across the country. A few stayed in the capital, where they opened shops and restaurants; others, merchants and tradesmen, distributed across Armenia; the great majority were employed in general agriculture and in silk and tobacco cultivation. The refugees who temporarily stayed in the camp worked in irrigation and construction works. The Armenian government, which had provided resources for their reception, feeding, and preliminary housing, felt that it had already reached its limits. In Quisling's words,

The refugees are received with sympathy by the population and have been given in every respects the same rights as ordinary citizens of Armenia. Whether those who have gone hither more or less of their free will, are pleased to for having done so is of course difficult to ascertain. My impression – based on occasional questions – is that by far the greater number is content to be in a country of their own, even if the conditions are not brilliant. They also have the satisfaction of partaking into the reconstruction of their country and seeing the situation improving little by little.⁹⁵

The commission's final report, compiled by Nansen, suggested that 10,000 Armenians from Greece and 5,000 Armenians from Constantinople could be resettled in Soviet Armenia and that more would follow.⁹⁶ Thanks to the combined expertise of the three specialists, it was decided that Sardarabad Plain and the Kirr districts could be irrigated, and that the Kars Su and Zangabassar swamps in the southeastern area of Yerevan could be equally drained. As both Carle and Lo Savio suggested, since the irrigation of the Sardarabad Plain risked being expensive and long, priority should be given to other projects. It was also agreed that, after preparing the land, houses were to be built, cattle and seeds were to be provided to those refugees who had agricultural skills, whereas the unskilled ones would be employed for the irrigation and drainage works, thanks to which they would pay

⁹⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 3, Report by Mr. Carle on agricultural conditions in Southern Armenia (the Sardarabad Plain), July 11, 1925.

⁹⁵ ALON, C1348, Armenian refugees in Armenia. Notes on late arrivals (1925) by Quisling, February 16, 1926, 324-Ra-413-1-1

⁹⁶ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, legg 2, Armenian refugees in Greece, October 8, 1925. These numbers were provided by Sir John Campbell, Greek Refugee Settlement Commission.

for the travel. Humanitarian assistance combined with industrial and financial investments was provided for the region's development.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, in May 1925, John Voris for the Near East Relief, the powerful American humanitarian organization, traveled to Greece, Armenia, and Syria, the main areas where Armenians were scattered, and shared his observations with Major Johnson of the HCR.⁹⁸ Starting in Greece, he argued for "the necessity of proceeding with the evacuation of Armenian refugees" as they were settled in the lands that the Refugee Settlement Commission had made available for expelled and exchanged Ottoman Greeks. This news was also confirmed by Zwerner, the delegate of the High Commissariat for Refugees based in Greece, who reported that 2,000 Armenians risked being deported from Thrace to Peloponnesus and should instead be evacuated to Armenia.⁹⁹ When Voris reached Syria, he noticed that "the situation of the Armenian refugees equaled at least the seriousness of the Armenian conditions in Greece." Regarding the South Caucasus, Voris was rather positive about the 300,000 Armenian refugees who had found refuge there during the first phases of the genocide; he suggested that more Armenians should be resettled in what was by then Soviet Armenia, provided that they would be "absorbed into the economic life of the country."¹⁰⁰

On his way back to France from the South Caucasus, in the summer of 1925, Georges Carle took a detour through Syria. Carle gave an accurate description of the situation, reporting on the number and on the living conditions of Armenians, as well as enumerating the institutions and the individuals that had provided assistance since 1915. He noticed that Armenians who lived in Aleppo and Beirut refugee camps actively improved their living conditions by building houses, streets, fountains, and sewers out of tents and barracks, and they also organized retail trades. Carle believed that the future of Armenians was in Syria, where, based on the abovementioned positive experiences, new villages could be built, and the land could be cultivated. And this was despite the fact that Armenians were not the only

⁹⁷ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A5A, Thomas to Nansen, April 24, 1925. Reports reached the High Commissariat regarding the development of industry and agriculture as a consequence of the settlement. Giacomo Gorrini, then the Italian consul to Armenia from 1920 to 1921, wrote one of these reports. *Assainissement, repeuplement et concessions industrielles dans l'Arménie russe, note pour la mission Nansen et pour le rapatriement des réfugiés arméniens par Giacomo Gorrini, March 21, 1925.*

⁹⁸ Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

⁹⁹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, Cable from Johnson to Nansen (undated but likely the spring of 1925).

¹⁰⁰ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, legg 2, Record of a conversation between the director, Mr. Voris, Associate General Secretary of the NER and Mr. Johnson, May 25, 1925. Voris even suggested a further change in the newly established international borders: that the Turkish government cede the territory south of the Ararat River to Soviet Armenia, where Armenian refugees could be put into productive employment, in exchange for complete control of the Aleppo district.

refugees in the region: there were also other groups, such as Assyrians, Assyro-Chaldeans, Catholic and Orthodox Syrians, Alawites, Kurds, Greeks, and Russians.¹⁰¹

Around the same time, Joseph Burt of the British Society of Friends equally toured the Middle East and shared its report with the LON. He was far less optimistic than Carle.¹⁰² Burt wrote of “the crowded camps, tattered tents, leaking hovels in summer and cold in winter; packing-case shelters covered with kerosene tins, rooms containing four or five families, shortage of water, open sewers, wells in areas crowded with undrained houses, constant shortage of work, illness, lack of food, dejected women, starving children.” In a report transmitted by the United British Committee to the League Nations, and discussed at the 1926 Assembly, Burt suggested the transfer of 5,000 Armenians from Constantinople and of 15,000 refugees from Greece to Soviet Armenia. Of the 100,000 Armenians residing in Syria, 40,000 could be settled in agricultural colonies across the country, modeled on the villages built by Karen Jeppe. Indeed, the British Society of Friends knew Jeppe’s work very well, for having financially and politically supported her.¹⁰³

The League of Nations and the Labour Organization also explored whether Armenian refugees, alongside Russians, could be resettled in Latin America. As we have seen in Chapter 4, in 1925, Procter, Varlez, and a few others undertook a five-month investigation trip and visited Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. They reported that these countries were, in principle, willing to receive specific groups of refugees, provided that their moral character, technical skills, and propensity to work were verified. Three immediate steps were undertaken. First, the League of Nations made sure that the Nansen passport would be accepted in Latin American countries in order to give refugees some form of legal protection. Second, it created two temporary delegations, which would coordinate with the local office in Athens and Constantinople, and which supervised the technical aspects of the resettlement, especially when it came to visas, the cost of travel, and the signing of employment contracts. Last, further financial negotiations were undertaken to decide how such an expensive trip could be paid for.¹⁰⁴

Procter’s report from Latin America did not have the last word on the future of Armenian refugees. In April 1926, the Red Cross delegate, Georges Burnier, who used to be based in Constantinople, turned his attention to Armenian refugees in Syria. This happened after the ICRC discontinued its activities in favor of the

¹⁰¹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 3, Report by Mr. Carle on the present position of Armenian refugees in Syria, July 11, 1925.

¹⁰² Joseph Burt, *The People of Ararat* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926).

¹⁰³ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 4, Preliminary report on the Armenian question in the Near East by Joseph Burt of the British Society of Friends, private and confidential, May 1925.

¹⁰⁴ ALON, R1601, Draft report of the fifth committee to the Assembly, rapporteur, M. Bandeira de Mello (Brazil), AV/11(2)1925, 40-46339-41465.

local population, both Christian and Muslim, displaced by the Druze revolt, which rebelled (and failed) against the French army.¹⁰⁵ The Red Cross delegate—who had gained invaluable experience during the Druze revolt, when he negotiated with the French mandatory authorities, missionary, philanthropic, communal institutions, as well as pro-Christian and pro-Muslim associations—saw in Armenian refugees a destitute group to be assisted as well as an opportunity for the Red Cross to intervene.¹⁰⁶

In the spring of 1926, together with Colonel Duguet, the director of the French Health Department for the mandated territories, Burnier toured Syria and Lebanon. He reported that only a few Armenians had found employment, especially in Beirut, whereas those in Aleppo would have to be helped to settle in agricultural colonies.¹⁰⁷ Alongside the French authorities, which favored the creation of Armenian colonies being separated from the majority Muslim population, Burnier abandoned the idea of establishing settlements in the north of Syria, where Jeppe had created the first villages, due to the proximity with the Turkish border and to the presence of Kurdish and Bedouin tribes.¹⁰⁸ Burnier instead advised the creation of “a big Armenian center in the South of the Lebanon” in the districts of Hasbaya, Marjayoun, and Tyre, where 5,500 families could be settled. For that, the League of Nations, France, and local authorities would have to negotiate a loan that Armenians would pay back—as Burnier explained to the Labour Organization.¹⁰⁹ Mirroring missionary discourses, Burnier believed that Armenian neighbors and villages were instrumental in preserving their culture and avoiding assimilation.

¹⁰⁵ As Kévonian neatly argues, the uprising which happened in the State of Syria and Greater Lebanon against the French mandatory powers created an unexpected opportunity for the ICRC to intervene during a civil war. In the mandated territory, following resolution XVI voted on at the 10th Conference of the Red Cross movement in 1921, and it helped the organization strengthen its position in the ongoing fight against the LRCS. Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 421–455.

¹⁰⁶ The French feared that the resources coming from the Muslim community and centralized under the *Comité de secours en Syrie* would be distributed less to the victims of the Druze Revolt and more to the insurgents. ACICR, MIS 76.5/73, de Jouvenel to Burnier, March 4, 1926.

¹⁰⁷ ACICR, MIS 76.5/90, Burnier to ICRC, Questions arméniennes, ne pas employer pour la publicité, April 12, 1926.

¹⁰⁸ Henry de Jouvenel, the French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, signed an agreement with Turkey not to create any Armenian colony less than 50 kilometers from the border. ACICR, MIS 76.5/101, Burnier to ICRC, May 4, 1926.

¹⁰⁹ ACICR, MIS 76.5/104, Arméniens réfugiés en Syrie et au Grand Liban, rapport par Burnier. ACICR, MIS 76.5/119bis, Burnier to Johnson, Beirut, August 7, 1926.

6.5 Conclusion

The Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization became aware of the forced dispersion of Armenians while they were addressing the humanitarian needs of prisoners of war and Russian refugees. This chapter has proved that, on the one hand, international responses to the conditions of Armenian survivors were specific to the genocide: rescuing, protecting, settling, and resettling Armenians were carried out with a strong ethnic, communal, and national perspective.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, as soon as Armenians became legally stateless, due to the Turkish decree of denationalization, their needs were equated to the conditions of Russians. This explains why the Nansen passport was extended to them, as well as the work of the High Commissariat for refugees of the League of Nations.

Framing together a panoply of reports that were written by relief workers, lawyers, agronomists, and engineers on their investigation trips to the South Caucasus, the Eastern Mediterranean region, and Latin America between 1924 and 1926 suggests that international humanitarian organizations did not have a pre-determined plan and that any viable option was taken into consideration. Around these options, which we will study in Chapter 7, we can see the convergence of different agendas. For the League of Nations, it was imperative to assist Armenians in the more time- and money-efficient way. The frequent appeals that Nansen issued over the years calling for Western responsibility for the displacements of Armenians were received with political pragmatism and decreasing interest. For governments, both member and non-member, their priorities were elsewhere: Greece wished to get rid of Armenians as soon as possible; Soviet Armenia was in favor of settlement plans, provided that money would come from abroad; France, Tunisia, and Argentina opened discretionary doors to instrumentalize refugees for economic purposes; and French mandatory authorities capitalized on Armenians to strengthen its control over a difficult territory. With regard to Armenian organizations, they reluctantly accepted settlement plans in Europe and in Latin America, upon the guarantee that, once the conditions were met, the League of Nations would pay for the final resettlement of fellow citizens in Soviet Armenia.¹¹¹ This was seen as the second-best option after Wilsonian Armenia became a dead letter.

The fact that several missions were sent out at the same time is not surprising but rather symptomatic of one crucial aspect: international humanitarian organizations did not know what to do. Yet, often, the experts did not know neither. In the case of the first mission to Soviet Armenia, Dupuis, Lo Savio, and Carle developed both common and diverging ideas on the irrigation of the Sardarabad

¹¹⁰ Watenpaugh, "Between Communal Survival and National Aspiration".

¹¹¹ ALON, C1427, Aghassian to Johnson, December 28, 1926, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket 3.

Plain, the irrigation of the Kirr districts, and the drainage and irrigation of the Kars Su and Zangabassar swamps. As for Syria and Lebanon, Johnson, the deputy high commissioner, left on a short mission in November 1926, after the Red Cross delegate, Burnier, had already presented a report to the Labour Organization, as we will see in Chapter 7. Both Johnson and Burnier preferred targeting the south of Lebanon; however, while Johnson supported a sharecroppers' system, Burnier believed that the land should be bought or leased for a long period in order to give Armenian settlers some stability. Even there, a compromise seemed difficult to reach and was complicated by the French mandatory power, which wanted to maintain strict control over any humanitarian program and use it as a tool for colonization, stability, and growth.

A fragmented global exile: humanitarian protection and refugee politics for displaced Armenians

Abstract

This chapter juxtaposes and analyzes several programs implemented on behalf of Armenians, alongside the overlapping discourses formulated by international humanitarian organizations. The coexistence of resettlement plans in different parts of the world—from Soviet Armenia to mandated Syria and Lebanon, and from France to Latin America—points at the difficulty to find an adequate solution and at the discretionary attitude of governments. As it was for Russians, pushing Armenians in what the West viewed as peripheral vacant lands was seen as instrumental to maintain peace in Europe as well as to economically develop states and to uplift “backward” societies. Such a process was often contested and problematic.

Keywords: Armenians, international humanitarian organizations, rescue work, resettlement, global geography.

It is the handicraft, the skill, which always assist the Armenian to recover every time he is knocked down. It is this ability the young people must learn when settling out for the world; then they have been well cared for.
—Report by Karen Jeppe.¹

If the result should be that the League will have to decide to drop the whole question of settling Armenian refugees in Armenia without being able to do anything for it, I am afraid it will do much harm to the League, and its prestige, especially in the East, will suffer badly.
—Nansen to Drummond.²

¹ ALON, R640, Account of the situation of Armenians in Syria and my work among them from May 1 till September 1, 1922 by Karen Jeppe, 24/8 1922, p. 18, 12.30066.4631.

² ALON, R698, Nansen to Drummond, August 22, 1927, 12.60675.46805.

The three organizations at the core of this book—the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the Labour Organization—concurred in understanding and in constructing Armenian women and children in a plurality of ways, as helpless (white) slaves, as refugees, and as unemployed migrants. Discourses did not emerge in a vacuum. On the one hand, they point in the direction of prevailing “questions” in postwar international reformist, feminist, and missionary circles where Armenian women and children were framed as victims. On the other hand, they suggest that, after Armenians were denationalized, their exile was equated to the conditions of Russian refugees. This explains the extension of the Nansen passport and of the High Commissariat’s work to Armenians. This also explains why, alongside Russians, Armenians were resettled as unemployed migrants.

Chapter 7 examines several humanitarian programs within the same analytical framework and across each other. It starts by paying attention to the rescue work, first in Constantinople, from the inter-Allied period to modern Turkey, under the supervision of the American relief worker, Caris E. Mills, and then in and around Aleppo, under the coordination of the Danish relief worker, Karen Jeppe. It then follows Jeppe’s personal initiative in Syria and Lebanon, where, thanks to the financial support of a few private organizations, vocational programs and agricultural colonies were created, where rescued boys and girls could be resettled. As of 1926, settlement plans and agricultural colonies in the Middle East were taken over by the League of Nations and the Labour Organization, in cooperation with the French mandated authorities. Meanwhile, the League of Nations and the Labour Organization also worked towards resettling Armenians, especially those in Greece and in Constantinople, in Soviet Armenia. When it became evident that this plan would be difficult to implement, France and Latin America were targeted instead.

The chapter pays attention to the specificities of each local context, where international, national, community institutions and actors interacted. Within each context, Armenians were hosted in a variety of spaces—from houses to camps, and from cities’ neighbours to new villages and agricultural colonies—where they were simultaneously protected and contained. Alongside the richness of spaces, we will hear a cacophony of discourses formulated about the conditions of Armenians, discourses which attempted to spur policy responses. The result of these diverse programs was a fragmented global exile, where the conditions of Armenians greatly varied according to the local contexts and to the agendas of the actors involved.

7.1 Rescue work in Constantinople

According to the volume “Constantinople Today,” edited by sociology professor Clarence Richard Johnson, in 1922, there were 25 orphanages for Armenians, and

others for Greek, Russian, and Turkish children.³ The Neutral House of the League of Nations was the smallest one: created in 1918 upon the initiative of the British High Commissioner, it had rescued Armenian women and children with the cooperation of the Armenian Patriarch.⁴ Yet, a few years later, a completely changed geopolitical context had repercussions on the rescue work: Turkey was emerging victorious from the war with Greece, the occupation powers were preparing to leave Constantinople, and the League failed to have a clear politics towards the Near East.⁵ This explains why, in May 1922, the LON took over the Neutral House; open to all (Armenians, Greeks, and Turks), it ended up being an “Armenian institution.”⁶

The Neutral House had two locations in downtown Constantinople: the office was in Galata, near the British Lord Mayor’s Relief Fund, proof of the importance of British connections, and a house in Pera which hosted 20 persons. It was a temporary home for women and children, financed by national authorities and charitable organizations, particularly the Armenian Patriarch, and run by a resident foreign matron, the American Caris E. Mills, who had worked for the NER publicity department.⁷ Mills was assisted by Colonel Robert Graves, who had managed the Armenian-Greek section of the British High Commission and had already implemented rescue work;⁸ the Frenchman, Felix Friand, who acted as the secretary of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration; and a resident staff, composed of liberated Armenian women and children. While the rescue house was protected, as there was the risk that liberated women and children would be abducted once more, it was also a space of exchange, embedded in the city of Constantinople and shaped by a volatile social and political context.

³ Clarence Richard Johnson (ed.), *Constantinople Today or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople. A Study in Oriental Social Life* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922), 3. On the occupation of Istanbul, Criss, *op. cit.*, and Edmond, *op. cit.* Anna Welles Brown, “Orphanages,” in Johnson (ed.), *Constantinople Today*, 229. See also Nazan Maksudyan, “The Orphan Nation: Gendered Humanitarianism for Armenian Survivor Children in Istanbul, 1919–1922,” in Möller, Paulmann, and Stornig (eds), *op. cit.*, 117–142.

⁴ On the early history of the Neutral House, see Edita Gzoyan, Regina Galustyan, and Shushan Khachatryan, “Reclaiming Children after the Armenian Genocide: Neutral House in Istanbul,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 33, no. 3 (2019): 395–411. See also, Shemmajian, *op. cit.*; Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 147–151; Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors”.

⁵ ALON, R640, League of Nations, Deportations of Women and Children in Turkey and Neighboring Countries, memorandum by the Secretary-General, A.28.1922.III, September 4, 1922, 12.22101.4631.

⁶ ALON, R640, Neutral House at Constantinople by Crowdy, November 28, 1922, 12.25950.4631.

⁷ ALON, R640, Mills to Helm, July 28, 1924, 12.38216.4631.

⁸ ALON, R640, Drummond to Kennedy, August 17, 1922, 12.22256.4631. ALON, R638, untitled and undated document containing the CV of Graves and Peet, 12.16513.4631. ALON, R638, Drummond to Kennedy, November 2, 1921, 12.16513.4631.

In the late summer of 1922, Kennedy and Mills, who had just refurbished the Neutral House, hastened to close it down in coincidence with the destruction of Smyrna during the last phase of the Greco-Turkish war. Indeed, fearing that the British government's support to Greece might cause retaliations against British subjects, Kennedy temporarily moved to Corfu;⁹ he also negotiated with the local HCR office, charged with the protection of Russian refugees, to pursue rescue work.¹⁰ The responsibility of running the house ended up falling on Mills, who, being American, was allowed to stay. Mills was left alone during a delicate phase: she decided to place the children of the Neutral House in temporary shelters, helped nearly 100 Armenian women to emigrate, and secured food for needy (Christian) children.¹¹

In a letter addressed to Kennedy, Mills recounted the rescue story of an Armenian woman, known under her husband's name, Garabed B. After being abducted during the Armenian genocide and forced to live in a harem in an unspecified locality of Anatolia, Mrs. Garabed B. convinced her Turkish owner to move to Constantinople, by then under inter-Allied occupation. There, the Armenian woman took the initiative to contact other Armenians, who liberated and brought her to the Neutral House. Mills was able to negotiate, through the quota meshes, a visa to the United States, where her Armenian husband lived, on the basis of "religious cruelty." Even then, the danger was not over: Mills had to move the Armenian woman from one hiding place to another as she was searched for, before she was able to embark on a boat headed overseas.¹²

As soon as the Neutral House reopened, Mills turned her attention to the Armenians and Greeks who had reached Constantinople from the Black Sea. Hastily established camps hosted "women and children lying in mud and water with the rain pouring on them through the holes in the roof."¹³ The rescue worker decided to assist the most vulnerable children who were brought to the Neutral House, where they got rid of their filthy clothes, were bathed, and had a copious meal—all activities financed by the League of Nations and by American donors. Mills was proud to see the children "dressed attractively" in contrast to those assisted by the Near East Relief who were "like a herd of animals with shaved heads, dull uniform, and no personality."¹⁴ Yet, one could barely compare the small number of Armenians assisted by the LON with the huge number of those assisted by the NER.¹⁵

⁹ ALON, R640, Kennedy to Childs, November 17, 1922, 12.24787.4631.

¹⁰ ALON, R640, Childs to Kennedy, November 22, 1922, 12.24787x.4631. ALON, R640, Kennedy to Cushman, December 7, 1922, 12.16489x.4631.

¹¹ ALON, R640, Mills to Kennedy, May 26, 1923, 12.30066.4631.

¹² ALON, R640, Mills to Kennedy, May 26, 1923, 12.30066.4631.

¹³ ALON, R640, The League of Nations house for deported women and children Constantinople, narrative report to Dr. William Kennedy, chairman of the commission, May 26, 1923, 12.30066.4631.

¹⁴ ALON, R640, Mills to Kennedy, May 26, 1923, 12.30066.4631.

¹⁵ On the NER, Rodogno, "Beyond Relief".

Traditional rescue work continued to be implemented. A mixed commission composed of a representative of the Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, and Turkish communities undertook investigations in the Neutral House and made the ultimate decision about the children's ethnicities. Institutional documents refer to unsettling situations, where the children were disputed and were caught up in political struggles. For instance, Kennedy was alerted about the Armenian Orphan & Refugee Relief, where two representatives, one Armenian and one Turkish, interacted with a group of 25 orphans and decided that two were Turkish and six were Armenians, and the remaining were to be resettled in Romania. However, in disrespect for the investigation's outcomes, Turkish institutions took away all the orphans, on account that 3,000 Turkish children had been allegedly made Armenians after the Armistice.¹⁶ Far from being an isolated example, rescue work could at times be unsettling for the children involved, who, on account of being integrated into the Armenian community, were forced to awake confused memories or underwent further hardship.¹⁷

After the Treaty of Lausanne was signed on July 24, 1923, when Constantinople was integrated into modern Turkey, the Commission of enquiry was renamed the Commission for the protection of women and children of the Near East, which depended on the Advisory commission for the protection and welfare of children and young people, and the Neutral House was changed into the House of the League of Nations.¹⁸ Both Kennedy and Mills stressed that the house was open to all; they abandoned the word "rescue" or "restitution" for the more inclusive "protection." In May 1924, Mills wrote that "sixty women and children of all nationalities [had] been at the house [...] for aid, advice, etc."¹⁹ She continued to rely on the assistance of foreign institutions, including the American Women's Hospitals, the Christian Science Relief of America, and the British Save the Children Fund.²⁰ Others volunteered: a Greek priest was called for Greek cases, a French one for the Armenians, and a Russian one for Russians. Moreover, Mills intensified the collaboration with Turkish organizations that were paying increasing attention to child welfare.²¹

Similarly to what happened to the mundane practices of care in Narva and in Constantinople, the League of Nations House was run by Armenian boys and girls who had been previously rescued. Mills referred to them as her staff: they played a crucial role in undertaking the daily actions of protection, from cooking to cleaning

¹⁶ ALON, R640, H.H. Khachadoorian to Kennedy, May 5, 1923, 12.30066.4631.

¹⁷ ALON, R640, Work of the commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, report by Kennedy, September 11, 1923, A.69.1923.IV, 12.29903.4631.

¹⁸ ALON, Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey, Asia Minor and the Neighboring Territories, Report presented by the Fifth Committee, Geneva, September 21, 1921.

¹⁹ ALON, R640, Mills to Figgs, May 21, 1924, 12.34449X.4631.

²⁰ ALON, R640, Report by the chairman of the League of Nations commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, from July 1923 to July 1924, 12.37507.4631.

²¹ ALON, R640, Mills to Figgs, May 21, 1924, 12.34449X.4631.

to bookkeeping. The relationship between the American relief worker and the Armenian children was multifaceted and soaked in a highly gendered language. In this rather long quote:

I have four children in this house that I am dressing and educating. They are my 'staff' this year. It is interesting to know that 'Froso', or her real name, Ephrosyne, was a League case 4 ½ years ago. She was 12 then. I have sent her to an American school, and she is very clever. She will be my secretary for the coming year. She speaks English, Turkish like a Turk, Greek like a Greek, and some French. Her English is probably American. George, my adopted boy, is now 16 ½ and has graduated from Robert Academy and he is ready for College, if I can find the funds. He aids in the house with bookkeeping, translating, fixing fires, cleaning, etc. He is a handsome, talented boy, with the old Greek type of features. He speaks French, English, Turkish, and Greek. Erito, aged 14, is the youngest. She came to us when she was nine. She is the sister of Froso, love dancing and sports, and I am entering her as soon as possible for a trained nurse in the American Hospital. As I write Rosa, just from Anatolia, is sitting here waiting to go to the French school. I am enclosing a snapshot of my latest. She has such big enquiring eyes and thin little legs²²

Echoing missionary traditions, Mills created a family for herself, responding with creativity to the challenges of being single in a patriarchal society. While she certainly relied on the work of the children, she also took care of them, by securing a roof over their heads and an education. We do not know how Froso, George, Erito, and young Rosa experienced the life and the work in the Neutral House. Yet, they appeared to be the “lucky ones” compared to the many other rescued children who were not given the same opportunities.

From 1923 to 1927, Mills, her assistants, and the volunteers rescued nearly 8,000 persons—half women and half children. Even if official data do not distinguish between Armenians, Greeks, and Turks, Christian women and children were certainly the majority. When the League of Nations discontinued the rescue activities in Constantinople and Aleppo in 1927, Mills pursued “the old League work” and transformed the house into a social center open to all regardless of race and religion.²³ “Any woman or child, of any nationality or religion, may come to this house to ask help and we meet it if we can,” Mills wrote. The center hosted various humanitarian programs under Mills’ leadership: she helped hospitalize Russian patients suffering from mental illness or tuberculosis, thanks to a grant of the American Women’s Hospitals; she ensured that elderly women were admitted to a home; she arranged

²² ALON, R641, Mills to Crowdy, July 20, 1927, 12.43683x.4631.

²³ ALON, R641, Supervisory commission. Commission for destitute women and children, Neutral House at Constantinople, August 31, 1927, C.C.278, 12.43683.4631.

for a few children to be adopted thanks to the collaboration of the SCF; she raised money for Turkish child welfare stations and collaborated with the Christian Science Relief and the Anti Saloon League.²⁴ Mills proved to be a resourceful and driven woman, building on the separate sphere of women's work for women to carve for herself a place in the world. The exceptional circumstances where she worked and lived gave her unexpected possibilities of agency and personal freedom.

7.2 Rescue work and agricultural colonies in Syria

After the Great War, Aleppo, a city of nearly 250,000 inhabitants, underwent a difficult transition from Ottoman to French rule.²⁵ The Sykes–Picot agreement, secretly signed in 1916 between France and Great Britain, had defined the spheres of influence in the Middle East, with France being attributed southeastern Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon, and Great Britain controlling Palestine, Jordan, southern Iraq, and the ports of Haifa and Acre.²⁶ However, in October 1918, the transient Arab Kingdom of Syria was created by Faysal bin Husayn: when the initial British support faded away in late 1919, Faysal prepared to attack French forces. In April 1920, the St. Remo Conference confirmed the division of the Arab Ottoman provinces and placed them under the LON mandate, alongside Article 22 of the Covenant. In July 1921, Faysal eventually surrendered to France which could officially establish its mandate over the State of Syria, the Alawite State, and Jabal Al-Druze State, and Greater Lebanon.²⁷ However, France continued having a hard time controlling the region, as the infamous bombardment of Damascus during the Druze Revolt in 1925 proves.²⁸

When Jeppe arrived in Aleppo in April 1921, the nationalist and French forces were still fighting, and refugees, old and new, tried to survive in a region that had little to offer. Since May 1915, Ottoman Armenians had reached the Mesopotamian desert, pushed south by the death marches; the Armenians of Cilicia were evacuated by France from November 1921 to January 1922; and the Armenians still in

²⁴ ALON, R641, Mills to Crowdy, July 20, 1927, 12.43683x.4631.

²⁵ See also Melanie Schulze Tanielian, "Politics of Wartime Relief in Ottoman Beirut (1914–1918)," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 69–82. Melanie Schulze Tanielian, *The Charity of War: Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

²⁶ Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (Columbia University Press, 1999). Benjamin T. White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

²⁸ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 421–455. Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 35–40, 142–168.

Turkey headed towards Syria as soon as the peace talks started in the spring of 1922.²⁹ Refugees who lived in camps or scattered through the city of Aleppo were assisted by Armenian and international institutions, while they also tried to find remunerated employment in a stagnant job market.³⁰ This explains why, upon arrival, Jeppe hastened to create a workshop where 60 Armenian women did embroidery, reproducing the traditional patterns of their regions of origin; crafted goods were sold in Denmark and elsewhere. Indeed, Jeppe considered handicraft to be instrumental to gaining economic independence and psychological recovery—“it is the handicraft, the skill, which always assist the Armenian to recover every time he is knocked down.”³¹ She also continued implementing rescue work and became increasingly anxious that Armenians, by then settled in new families, would refuse to leave and face further uncertainty.

Which discourses did Jeppe formulate on Armenians? Rescued women and children came across as the ultimate victims, who arrived “in perfect rags and so infected with vermin that it seem[ed] impossible to shelter them even one night without providing them with fresh clothing.”³² Replicating the missionary repertoire, Jeppe believed that Armenians were superior to the local Arab population, since some had preferred death or torture instead of converting to Islam or of being forcibly married to Muslim men. However, Armenians were not all the same: Jeppe preferred those who had liberated themselves, proving to be self-sufficient, as well as those living in the countryside, who, by breathing fresh air, were deemed to be mentally and physically fit. She went as far as preferring saving a smaller number of “pure” Armenians than a greater number of “degenerated individuals.” Eugenics, Christian compassion, and a nationalist twist were the driving forces behind the reconstruction of the Armenian community of Syria.³³

When, in the summer of 1921, the League of Nations suggested that Jeppe investigate the conditions of Armenian women and children in Aleppo, she

²⁹ Benjamin T. White, “A Grudging Rescue: France, the Armenians of Cilicia, and the History of Humanitarian Evacuations,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 10, no. 1 (2019): 1–27.

³⁰ On Armenian responses, see Khatchig Mouradian, “Genocide and Humanitarian Resistance in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1916,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, no. 7 (2016): 87–103. Khatchig Mouradian, *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1918* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021).

³¹ ALON, R640, Account of the situation of Armenians in Syria and my work among them from May 1 till September 1, 1922 by Karen Jeppe, 24/8 1922, p. 18, 12.30066.4631.

³² ALON, R641, Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, September 1, 1924, A.46.1924. IV, 12.38236.4631.

³³ ALON, R639, Interim report from the Aleppo section of the Commission of Enquiry by Jeppe, January 11, 1922, 12.19111.4631. Maria Småberg, “On Mission in the Cosmopolitan World,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 405–431. Okkenhaug, “Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria”.

hesitated; a pragmatic woman, she saw little interest in gathering data without proceeding with the immediate release of women and children. Yet, she started to see value in it, hoping that the League would pave the way for a larger political and financial consensus. As we have seen in Chapter 6, Jeppe's report reached the desk of the LON Social Section in January 1922. Meanwhile, in September 1921, the Second Assembly of the LON had discussed the Constantinople report and decided to appoint a new commissioner. The negotiations with Dr. Peet continued until the spring of 1922 when the peace talks between Turkey, the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, and the Allies started; waiting for the situation to stabilize, the LON authorized the Constantinople and Aleppo houses to implement rescue work. From April to August 1922, Jeppe cared for 100 boys and girls, as well as a few adult women, some of whom were settled with their relatives, who were found through advertisements in local newspapers, while others stayed in Aleppo: the boys were trained in carpentry and tannery, while the girls joined embroidery workshops.³⁴



Fig. 8. Photograph of Armenian children in Aleppo. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.³⁵

³⁴ ALON, R640, Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey and the Neighboring Countries, memorandum by the secretary-general, September 4, 1922, A.28.1922.III, 12.23010.4631.

³⁵ ALON, R641, Annual report "B" supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

Eventually, in September 1922, Jeppe was officially mandated to run the Rescue House in Aleppo, where a “housemother,” a “housefather,” and some rescued girls undertook daily activities, from cooking to cleaning, from bathing children to distributing clothing. In time, Jeppe’s staff grew. In 1925, there was a secretary, Mr. Gaszczyk, and another foreign worker, the Dane, Jenny Jensen, who was described as “a real mother to [the] poor refugees.”³⁶ Outside the house, a few Armenian men left on excursions in the Syrian desert and ran rescue points throughout the territory, at times crossing the Turkish borders. One of them was Misak Melkonian, Jeppe’s adopted son from Urfa, who traveled from one station to another.³⁷ The French authorities provided rescued Armenians with a passport to travel to Aleppo and helped establish a house in Deir ez-Zor where the identity of critical cases could be verified.³⁸ Being a relief worker was not an easy job. Krikor Haygian, based in the station of Deir ez-Zor, passed away of a heart attack; his widow, who stayed behind, redirected Armenian women and children through a different route. In the meantime, Jeppe closed down the station of Al-Hasakah for lack of funds. There, Vasil Sabagh—an Armenian merchant of Catholic faith from Urfa who was jailed by the Ottoman authorities in Diyarbakir in 1921—had ensured the connection with the Turkish town of Mardin, from where Armenians crossed the borders into Syria.³⁹ Sabagh then went to Deir ez-Zor to help Agha’s wife but was murdered on the way back to Aleppo in revenge for the liberations that had been carried out. Jeppe had words of admiration and gratitude for both men: Agha was a “man of the purest and the most unselfish character who [had] helped a great number of Armenian women and children to freedom”; Sabagh was “a very daring man, who would brave every danger to rescue a girl or a child in distress.”⁴⁰ The League’s documents do not give more information about who these relief workers were or what they did before becoming involved in the rescue work. Figure 9 shows a photograph of the deceased Vasil Sabagh.

³⁶ ALON, R641, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 1925, 12.42731.4631. ALON, R641, Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, August 24, 1925, A.32.1925.IV, 12.46041.4631. Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 5, no. 2 (1993), 110–113; id., “Maternalism as a Paradigm,” *Journal of Women’s History* 5, no. 2 (1993).

³⁷ ALON, R640, Account of the remittances sent to the Aleppo section of the Commission of Enquiry, 1922, 12.16489x.4631.

³⁸ ALON, R640, Report by the chairman of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, from July 1923 to July 1924, 12.37507.4631.

³⁹ Ephraim K. Jernazian, *Judgment Unto Truth. Witnessing the Armenian Genocide* (NYC: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁰ ALON, R641, Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, August 24, 1925, A.32.1925.IV, 12.46041.4631.



Fig. 9. Photograph of the Armenian relief worker Vasil Sabagh. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.⁴¹

A crucial moment after being rescued was the medical examination, which was entrusted to Dr. Vahram Katchperouni. He reported that 80% of Armenian women and children had contracted malaria, 30% trachoma, and 20% syphilis. There were fewer cases of pneumonia, dysentery, psoriasis and favus, skin diseases, tuberculosis, and typhus. In a few cases, Dr. Katchperouni had to run laboratory tests, and, for that, he relied on the collaboration of the hospital founded by the Syrian-Armenian doctor Altounian, hence proving how different institutions in the city were connected.⁴² Tattooed Armenian women also had a place in Dr. Katchperouni's report: he explained the circumstances where tattoos were made—during the time when

⁴¹ ALON, R641, Annual report "B" supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

⁴² ALON, R641, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 1925, 12.42731.4631.

the women lived with the Bedouins—and that the women wished to erase them.⁴³ As historian Rebecca Jinks has neatly written, Jeppe stressed that the Armenian community was inclined to reintegrate tattooed women on account of their pure character.⁴⁴

In the 1922 annual report, 194 Armenians passed through the house, 46 girls and 59 boys, while 89 quickly left. In this last group, 35 joined their families or other orphanages, 37 found remunerated employment, 12 returned from where they had escaped, and five boys were sent away, as they did not “fit.” Jeppe proudly reported that only two boys converted to Islam.⁴⁵ Rescue work would continue steadily over the years; until 1927, Jeppe individually interviewed up to 1,600 Armenians—1,400 liberated by the LON staff and 200 by the direct involvement of their families.⁴⁶ These interviews are kept in 10 precious volumes at the League’s archives (1,880 cases are to be found).⁴⁷ The front page contains the first and family name, birth town, age, date of admission to the house, and a picture; biometrical data are followed by individual stories of deportation, abduction, and liberation. On the back page, we read about the amount of time that the person spent in the house, and, in a few cases, what happened afterwards, since Jeppe kept in touch with some rescued women and children.

Individual registration forms tell of suffering, killing, and hardship. Yet, there are also stories of strengthening, self-determination, and courage. Panos S., aged 19, entered the Rescue House in late September 1922 and stayed there for three months. A native of Adana, his father was killed before the war, whereas his mother remarried. Panos S. lived at his grandparents’ when the genocide began: they were all deported to Deir ez-Zor, yet he was the only one who survived. Panos S. would spend the next seven years in an Arab’s house until he traveled to Aleppo, where he got in touch with the Armenian community. His stay in the Rescue House was

⁴³ ALON, R641, Rapport médical de la Maison de Réception de la Ligue des Nations à Alep, 1925-1926, 12.49505.4631.

⁴⁴ Jinks, “‘Marks Hard to Erase’.” ALON, R641, Annual report “B” supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

⁴⁵ ALON, R640, Report of the work of the Aleppo section of the Commission of Enquiry in the year 1922 by Jeppe, January 1923, 12.26833.4631.

⁴⁶ ALON, A.29.1927.IV, Karen Jeppe, Report of the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East: Aleppo July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927. Other documents compiled by Jeppe reported the number of 17,000 Armenians who were rescued. ALON, R641, Annual report of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, February 21, 1928, 12.63896.4631.

⁴⁷ For an oral history, see Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: an Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

a short one, as he found a job and became self-supportive.⁴⁸ Noyenzar H., a native of Sivas, was 24 when she entered the Rescue House. Her husband was killed at the beginning of the genocide, while the whole family was deported and then massacred. She was married to an Arab for seven years and it appears that she did not have children with him. One day, going to the village's fountain, she was approached by an Armenian man who helped her escape. Once in Aleppo, she worked in the Rescue House for almost one year; she would then find a job as a servant, before marrying again to an Armenian man.⁴⁹

Rescue work continued throughout the 1920s; this means that some Armenians were liberated more than a decade after the beginning of the genocide. Khatoun S. was 40 when she reached the Rescue House in May 1929: her Armenian husband was killed, while she and her two children, a daughter and a son, were abducted and lived with a Turkish man. When he passed away, Khatoun was left with neither means nor protection; her 12-year-old daughter, Mariam, was taken away by a Kurd. The three of them were eventually able to escape and reach Aleppo.⁵⁰ Varter Y. was 35 and a mother of two: her Armenian husband was killed early on, and she took the road with her mother and brother. One day, the mother disappeared, and the brother was taken into an Arab house. "He was a good man who treated them well, but his wife was a bad woman." Varter Y. later married another Armenian man and had two children. After her husband was killed, Varter Y. was able to bring the two children to Aleppo, where her sister lived.⁵¹

Jeppe did not limit herself to rescuing Armenians but also committed to their rehabilitation.⁵² Thanks to the financial support of the Danish Friends of Armenians, a school was opened, and vocation training was organized, thanks to which children could learn a trade and become self-sufficient.⁵³ In the refugee camp of Aleppo, Jeppe not only built facilities such as a soup kitchen, a medical center, and a special space for ill children, but she also set up workshops for boys and women where they were able to make Armenian handicrafts. The underlying idea was that manual work, where Armenian handicraft traditions were perpetuated, would contribute both to refugees' moral and physical rehabilitation. The running of workshops was also instrumental to financially support Jeppe's work: while, at the beginning, the LON paid for 41.4% of the expenses, in time it would only give *ad*

⁴⁸ ALON, C1601, 101 Panos S. from Gieben, admission date September 26, 1922, 497-101-200.

⁴⁹ ALON, C1601, 104 Noyenzar H. from Sivas, admission date November 1, 1922, 497-101-200.

⁵⁰ ALON, C1603, 1811 Khatoun S., admission date May 3, 1929, 499-1801-1900.

⁵¹ ALON, C1603, 1836 Varter Y., admission date November 27, 1929, 499-1801-1900.

⁵² ALON, R641, Report of the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, August 24, 1925, C.451.1925.IV, 12.42731.4631.

⁵³ ALON, R641, Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, September 1, 1924, A.46.1924. IV, 12.38236.4631.

hoc donations; hence, Jeppe turned to private organizations, including Danish and Swedish organizations, and the London-based Armenian Red Cross, which became increasingly central to support her work.⁵⁴ For fundraising purposes, the Danish relief worker provided her supporters with photographs that were taken in and around Aleppo and that were included in public campaigns as a strategy to communicate and raise empathy. These photographs not only epitomize the emergence of the iconography of humanitarian aid but also offer precious glimpses to observe moments of daily life, from needlework to plowing or the houses' construction, from schooltime to leisure time.⁵⁵

As of 1922, Jeppe also took the personal initiative to start colonies in the Syrian countryside where rescued Armenians could be located—a rehabilitation process that would take up an unimaginable proportion of Greek Macedonia in the following years.⁵⁶ Believing that Armenians could act as “an organic link between the Arab and the Armenian world,” Jeppe started a colony four hours from Rakka thanks to a Swedish donation.⁵⁷ At first, a school was opened where rescued boys studied, while cottages were built, and the land was cultivated. The project expanded in 1924, under the League of Nations, when 60 peasant Armenian families, originally from Urfa, relocated to the then village of Tel Samen.⁵⁸ For that, an agreement was signed between Jeppe and the landowner, Hadjim Pasha, a Bedouin chief of the Anaze tribe: Armenians built provisional houses, which were improved over time by the use of baked mudbricks; they cultivated the land and bought cattle.⁵⁹ Jeppe eased the work with a second-hand tractor and car, oxen, donkeys, horses and plows, a sewing machine, and seeds (see fig. 10).⁶⁰ She happily reported that the “Armenians [were] on a very friendly footing both with the Arab fellahs and with

⁵⁴ ALON, R641, Financial statement of contributions and expenses of the League of Nations for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, Aleppo by Jeppe, December 31, 1925, 12.49505.4631.

⁵⁵ ALON, R641, Annual report “B” supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

⁵⁶ ALON, R640, Account of the situation of Armenians in Syria and my work among them from May 1 till September 1, 1922 by Karen Jeppe, 24/8 1922, p. 17, 12.30066.4631. ALON, R639, Report of Miss Jeppe on the work of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, January 31, 1926, 12.16489x.4631.

⁵⁷ ALON, R640, Report by the chairman of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, from July 1923 to July 1924, 12.37507.4631.

⁵⁸ ALON, R639, Report of Miss Jeppe on the work of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, January 31, 1926, 12.16489x.4631.

⁵⁹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2.D, legg 1, Jeppe to the Armenian Benevolent Union, letter undated.

⁶⁰ ALON, R639, Financial statement of contributions and expenses of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, Aleppo, March 20, 1926, 12.16489x.4631.

the Bedouins, and [were] highly respected by them.”⁶¹ Soon enough, the village of Tel Samen was divided into two, Tel Samen and Tel Armen. The following year, 10 of the initial 60 families created another village, Charb Bedros, a larger settlement, hosting both families and rescued boys from the Rescue House. Figure 10 depicts an Armenian boy driving a tractor.



Fig. 10. Photograph of an Armenian boy driving a tractor. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.⁶²

The various programs of immediate relief, moral and physical rehabilitation, and economic reconstruction which gravitated around the driven, strong-willed Jeppe offer the opportunity to ask about the place of Armenians across the Near East. At first, she hoped that an independent Armenian state would be created in

⁶¹ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2.D, legg 1, Jeppe to the Armenian Benevolent Union, letter undated.

⁶² ALON, R641, Annual report “B” supplement concerning the pictures by Jeppe, 1925, Annual Report of the Rescue Homes in Aleppo conducted by the League of Nations, 12.42731.4631.

Eastern Anatolia, as Wilson had mentioned in the 14 points and as the Allies had promised in the stipulations of the Treaty of Sèvres. When the Treaty of Lausanne was approved in July 1923, hence invalidating previous agreements, Jeppe—and she was not the only one—was inclined to see in Soviet Armenia a place where Ottoman Armenians could be resettled.⁶³ This explains why the agricultural settlements in Syria were considered to be a provisional measure that would allow Armenians to be productive and self-sufficient, waiting to join their fellows in the South Caucasus.⁶⁴ Moreover, such settlements were also a win-win, as “the future of Syria depend[ed] upon intense cultivation of her fertile soil.”⁶⁵

While, at first, France seconded Jeppe’s initiatives and aimed at instrumentalizing Armenian villages to economically expand the region and to control the territory, by the mid-1920s, discontent started growing, as the mandated authorities expressed concerns over the relief workers’ independence.⁶⁶ In this, they were not alone: in 1927, Georges Burnier, the Red Cross delegate in Constantinople by then reassigned to Syria, referred to Jeppe as “an adventurer” and lobbied for her expulsion.⁶⁷ The League of Nations closed down Jeppe’s mission, yet it allowed her to stay in the Rescue House for one more year. Jeppe would continue her activities in Syria until 1935, when she passed away.⁶⁸ Alongside Mills, Jeppe showed a deep personal and professional commitment towards the difficult paths of surviving Armenians. She understood the specific context where she operated through a mixture of religious and geopolitical considerations. In her case, and in many others, these were not antithetic, but coexisted, nourished each other, and evolved over time, not privy to tensions or “contradictions.”

⁶³ ALON, R641, Report on the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, from July 1, 1925 to June 30, 1926, A.25.1926, 12.53032.4631.

⁶⁴ Bjørnlund, *op. cit.*, 25.

⁶⁵ ALON, R641, Report of the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, August 24, 1925, C.451.1925.IV.12.42731.4631.

⁶⁶ ALON, R639, Report of Miss Jeppe on the work of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East, January 31, 1926, 12.16489x.4631. ALON, JO, Huitième Séance Publique de la Trente-Cinquième Session du Conseil, September 5, 1925. For a detailed account of the relationship between Jeppe and the French authorities on rescue work and on the agricultural settlement in Syria, see Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 396–410.

⁶⁷ ACICR, MIS 76.5/155, Burnier to Schlemmer, January 28, 1927.

⁶⁸ ALON, R641, Jeppe to Drummond, November 15, 1927, 12.61735.4631.

7.3 Settlements in Syria and Lebanon

As we have seen in Chapter 6, as of 1923, an increasing number of actors saw Armenians as refugees: since repatriation was not possible, and local integration was difficult, the governance stabilized around the urgency to resettle them. The French agricultural expert, Carle, the British Quaker, Burt, and the Swiss humanitarian, Burnier, agreed that Armenians could settle in agricultural colonies in mandated Syria and Lebanon, where they would contribute to the region's economic development. Meanwhile, the Red Cross delegate, Schlemmer, presented the project to the HCR and to the ILO and tried to convince the French high commissioner in Beirut, Henri de Jouvenel.⁶⁹ This multilayered diplomacy was productive, since the French government advanced a cooperation request to the ILO at the inter-governmental conference on refugees in May 1926, hinting—as Kévonian neatly suggests—at employment rather than at settlement plans for Armenian refugees in Syria.⁷⁰ The rationale was twofold: skipping the word “settlement” was meant not to alienate Arab nationalists, which were hostile to the French mandatory authorities, as well as meaning to maintain good relationships with Turkey, which had protested against the creation of Armenian settlements close to the borders.⁷¹ This explains why, despite being involved in stopping the Druze Revolt, in 1925, France committed to preventing Armenians from settling within 30 km of the Turkish border and a year later signed a friendship agreement with Turkey. For the same reasons, the League's documents perpetuated a certain ambiguity and only mentioned the improvement of refugee camps and not the settlement of Armenians across the territory.⁷²

After an initial skepticism over de Jouvenel's independent initiative, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs aligned with the French mandated authorities and supported agricultural settlements, to which international organizations would provide moral and financial support. The project would first concentrate on Lebanon, waiting for the situation in Syria to calm down. From his end, Burnier made it clear that the Armenian refugee question was “completely beyond [his] remit” and that

⁶⁹ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 456–457.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁷¹ To better understand how Arab communities reacted to the presence of Armenian refugees, see Victoria Abrahamyan, “Citizen Strangers: Identity Labelling and Discourse in the French Mandatory Syria, 1920–1932,” *Journal of Migration History* 6 (2020): 40–61.

⁷² Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 460. See also Soheila Mameli-Ghaderi, “Le tracé de la frontière entre la Syrie et la Turquie (1921-1929),” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 207, no. 3 (2002): 125–138.

he could only “achieve something,” had money been made available.⁷³ The lack and availability of money was indeed a major obstacle.⁷⁴ The Lebanese government, which had promised £25,000, had to overcome the opposition of nationalist forces according to which Armenians should be dispersed rather than concentrated in a specific area and for which the local population was equally in need of assistance.⁷⁵ The other obstacle pertained to the sum of £3,000 promised by the High Commissariat for refugees at the LON; the advanced sum was supposed to start a system by which Armenian refugees bought a Nansen stamp and contributed to creating a fund, thanks to which they were given money to settle, later to be reimbursed.⁷⁶ Or it was only then that the LON and the ILO realized a crucial aspect: Armenians in Syria and Lebanon were not legally stateless, as they were offered, early on, Lebanese and Syrian citizenship. Faced with a question of legitimacy, after lengthy discussions, Thomas decided to take the personal responsibility for considering Armenians in the French mandated territories as refugees on account of their needs, and hence worthy of receiving international protection.⁷⁷

However, the approval of settlement plans did not mean that the implementation would be quick, as Burnier came to understand. In the following months, the ICRC delegate begged Johnson for news and instructions, which were late in arriving.⁷⁸ Hoping to provoke a policy reaction, the delegate reported of three refugees who died of the plague in the Beirut camp, implying that more would die had health facilities not been improved.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the Armenian refugee question prompted the creation of *ad hoc* committees, both in Geneva and in Greater Syria, where institutions and their agents participated in a dance with variable geometries. In November 1926, Johnson announced the creation of an Armenian Sub-Committee (ASC) of the ACPO, for which British philo-Armenian organizations had lobbied and which obtained *the placet* of Nansen and Thomas.⁸⁰ As we have seen in Chapter 4, first created in 1921, the ACPO was meant to give private organizations a voice, create a space for coordination, and support the HCR.

At the first meeting of the ASC, Thomas was the chairperson, Miss E. Pye and Mr. A.E. Backhouse represented British philo-Armenian organizations, while the

⁷³ ACICR, MIS 76.5/90, Burnier to ICRC, Questions arméniennes, ne pas employer pour la publicité, April 12, 1926.

⁷⁴ ACICR, MIS 76.5/109, Burnier to Schlemmer, May 11, 1926. ACICR, MIS 76.5/109, Burnier to Schlemmer, July 2, 1926.

⁷⁵ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 463.

⁷⁶ ACICR, MIS 76.5/122, Burnier to Johnson, August 29, 1926.

⁷⁷ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 464–466.

⁷⁸ ACICR, MIS 76.5/125, Burnier to Johnson, September 21, 1926.

⁷⁹ ACICR, MIS 76.5/125, Burnier to Johnson, October 13, 1926.

⁸⁰ ACICR, MIS 76.5/134, Johnson to Ador, November 6, 1926.

International Committee of the Red Cross was represented by Schlemmer and Armenian organizations were represented by Pachalian. During the meeting, it was decided that Johnson would leave on an investigation mission to Syria and Lebanon in order to study the condition of Armenian refugees and plan for a solution—a mission which looked pretty unnecessary due to the amount of information already available.⁸¹ A few weeks later, in December 1926, the Central Committee for the Relief of Armenian refugees (CCRAR) was created, headed by Paul Verchère de Reffye, the secretary of the French high commissioner, and charged to study the conditions of Armenian refugees, improve their settlement, and collect information.⁸² The CCRAR—which worked by means of a central office and three sub-committees, one in Aleppo, one in Alexandretta, and one in Beirut—was called to coordinate different institutions: besides the French mandated authorities, it was composed of representatives of the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO, American, Armenian, British, and French humanitarian organizations, as well as local authorities.⁸³

Johnson left immediately for Syria and Lebanon. According to his report, there were at least 86,500 Armenian refugees in Syria and Lebanon; some were self-sufficient, while others were in need of humanitarian assistance. Johnson suggested settling 20,000 refugees for a total cost of £120,000, which could be paid using the grant already offered by the Lebanese government, in addition to grants from British humanitarian organizations and the LON HCR.⁸⁴ Yet, where should the settlements be? The fertile region in the northeast of Syria was dismissed as Armenians would have to settle among Muslims. In Johnson's words, "there would, moreover, be every danger of history repeating itself, and of the comparative prosperity of the Armenians provoking the cupidity of the less industrious Mussulman [sic] populations with disastrous results."⁸⁵ Alongside the French mandatory authorities, Johnson believed that Armenians could be settled in the Tyr and Sidon districts in the south of Lebanon on the border with Palestine: the solution was also supported by the local population which had proved its loyalty to France during

⁸¹ ALON, C1470, Armenian sub-committee of the Advisory Committee for Refugees, minutes of the first meeting held at the International Labor Office, Paris, on Saturday, November 6, at 11:30, SC/AC/1-1926.

⁸² ACICR, MIS 76.5/148, Burnier to Johnson, December 29, 1926. ACICR, MIS 76.5/153, Burnier to Johnson, January 26, 1927. ACICR, MIS 76.5/160, Memorandum sur la situation du Comité Central de Beyrouth.

⁸³ ALON, R698, La situation des réfugiés au Liban et en Syrie par Duguet, membre du Comité central de Beyrouth, Genève 1927, 12.61353.46805. For the composition of the CCRAR, see Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 471.

⁸⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 10, Report on a mission undertaken for the purpose of studying the question of Armenian refugees in the Mandated States of Lebanon and Syria, and of submitting proposals for its progressive solution by Johnson, December 31, 1926, S.C/A.C-3.1926.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

the Druze Revolt; moreover, a group of 100 Armenian families had already settled there in 1921 after escaping from Cilicia and were living in prosperous conditions.⁸⁶ Another option was the marshes in Sandjak of Alexandretta, where Armenians from Cilicia had already settled, and which could be drained. There were vacant lands between Meskene and Aleppo that could be irrigated and cultivated, as long as Armenians would be protected from the “jealousy of neighboring populations.”⁸⁷ Last, negotiations had begun around purchasing lands on the hills around Beirut, where Armenian artisans could live.

Settling refugees was not enough. Building on the employment offices that were established in Constantinople for Russian refugees, Johnson suggested conducting a census which would collect information in order to match refugees’ skills with the market’s needs. Making a direct connection to the revolving fund, it would be possible to negotiate a contract for the workers and to advance the money that they would pay back in three to ten years. In doing so, Johnson saw Armenians as actively contributing to a new start in life and to the region’s development.⁸⁸ As for the money behind the plan, British humanitarian organizations would give £5,000 and the LON £3,000 on the understanding that the money would be equally divided between Syria and Lebanon, in addition to the £25,000 that the Lebanese government had already provided (hoping that the same amount would be given by the Syrian government).⁸⁹ In Johnson’s words:

If this second contribution materialises, the Mandatory Power will have secured a contribution of no less than £50,000 to the Central Fund, and as the Geneva Committee initiated the pound for pound scheme, it would appear to be incumbent on them to consider whether there is not a *moral obligation* on their part to endeavour to raise a further £42,000.⁹⁰

As this book shows, appeals for moral obligation produced mixed results. How was Johnson’s plan received? While the ICRC and the ILO, alongside the French mandatory authorities, were in favor of Armenian settlements in Syria and in Lebanon, the League of Nations and Armenian organizations favored settlement

⁸⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁹ The British cabinet refused to contribute directly to the scheme, as it did not want to contribute to refugees who were under the formal responsibility of the French government. It is thus easy to understand why British contributions only came from private organizations and were directly addressed to the Refugee Section of the ILO, not to the French mandatory authorities.

⁹⁰ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10.A, legg 10, Report on mission undertaken for the purpose of studying the question of Armenian refugees in the Mandated States of Lebanon and Syria, and of submitting proposals for its progressive solution by Johnson, December 31, 1926, S.C/A.C-3.1926., p. 22.

in Soviet Armenia or, when this was not an option anymore, resettlement in France and Latin America. At the first meeting of the ASC, Pachalian considered settling Armenians in the Middle East a viable solution, lacking a better alternative.⁹¹ At the second meeting of the ASC, Nansen expressed skepticism towards settlements in Syria and Lebanon, as he foresaw “difficulties in the future between the Armenians and the Natives.”⁹² Moreover, Armenians would have to be defended by the French military, whereas they would not encounter such a risk had they settled among their peers in Soviet Armenia. It was only later that Nansen endorsed the settlements in Syria and Lebanon when the projects in the South Caucasus would prove to be even more difficult to implement.⁹³

The LON Assembly officially approved the settlement plan in Syria and Lebanon in September 1927. By then, Burnier was working closely with Henri Ponsot, the new French high commissioner after de Jouvenel’s mandate ended, an account clerk, and an Armenian district manager.⁹⁴ However, the Red Cross delegate was appealed to report that further problems hindered the plan’s implementation. First, the three Geneva-based organizations—the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO—feared losing control of the operations to the benefit of the CCRAR and its local branches. Burnier used a lot of ink to reassure Albert Thomas that the CCRAR was charged exclusively with investigation and execution as it represented “the safest, quickest, most economical way to fulfill [Thomas’s] instructions.” For instance, he reported that the sub-committee of Alexandretta was mandated to deal with the formalities, and lend or buy the land, while the sub-committee of Aleppo chose the refugees and arranged for their transport.⁹⁵ Second, Burnier was vocal with the French mandatory authorities to associate American and British humanitarian organizations (particularly the powerful Near East Relief) with the work of the CCRAR, arguing that they would not jeopardize the French control of the plan and that they would provide much-needed resources. All in all, these tensions were the result of different approaches to international cooperation: on the one hand, the French mandatory authorities

⁹¹ ALON, C1470, Armenian sub-committee of the Advisory Committee for Refugees, minutes of the first meeting held at the International Labor Office, Paris, on Saturday, November 6, at 11:30, SC/AC/1-1926.

⁹² ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2.D, legg 3-4, Nansen to Thomas, January 4, 1927.

⁹³ ALON, C1470, Minutes of the second meeting of the Armenian Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee to the High Commissioner for Refugees, held in Paris on Tuesday, January 11, 1927, at 11 a.m., a/C-S-C-1927.

⁹⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2.D, Extracts from Dr. Kennedy’s report on Armenian settlement in Syria, December 1927. British Society of Friends, ARM/P/5 Armenian Committee, papers April-December 1927, Report of the Armenian Committee of the Meeting of Sufferings (the executive committee of the Society of Friends) for 1926 and 1927, by Hilda Clark.

⁹⁵ ACICR, MIS 76.5/150, Burnier to Thomas, January 16, 1926 (it was rather 1927).

instrumentalized inter-governmental and private organizations to finance and legitimize the settlement of Armenians; on the other hand, the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO committed to the plan as it allowed them to carve out a growing place in international relations.⁹⁶ We should not, however, be mistaken in thinking that the three organizations perfectly aligned: Burnier was bewildered to read an article in the *Journal de Genève* which attributed the plan to Nansen and Johnson for the LON, in disregard for his work and for the work of the ICRC.⁹⁷

Even before the money from Geneva arrived, the CCRAR hastened to close down the camp in Beirut, as 150 houses had been burned the previous year on account of the plague epidemics and needed to be reconstructed.⁹⁸ The archives leave some trace of protests arising from the Armenian community. Johnson expressed the vague principle that, before proceeding with settlement plans, the ILO should consider the numerous observations formulated by Armenian organizations—at least on paper. For instance, in 1927, Burnier discussed with the French representative the possibility of creating agricultural colonies for Armenians around Aleppo in the Oronte valley: the region could be cultivated with vines, olive, and fig trees; the closest town, Kalaat-el-Moudik, inhabited by Muslims, did not oppose the settlement of Armenians. The only hiccup was the lack of water and infrastructures, as cisterns were in bad shape.⁹⁹ This explains why Armenian organizations opposed the settlement in Kalaat-el-Moudik which was “deficient in water and generally unhealthy”.¹⁰⁰

In 1929, the agricultural colonies in Northern Syria were “so well established that they [had] become self-supporting.” Only a small number of families had decided to leave the settlement as they could not work for their living and pay back the debt to the LON–ILO. However, those who stayed, despite some difficulties, had started building houses. In the urban context of Aleppo, 389 houses were constructed, and 96 more houses were built in Damascus. As for Beirut, thanks to the money provided by the Lebanese government, the first quarter was fully completed and inhabited, whereas the second was under construction. In Alexandretta, 40 houses were built. In addition, other settlements saw the light thanks to financial resources coming from the US or thanks to the collective self-financing among the Armenian community.¹⁰¹ The settlement of Armenian refugees in mandated Syria and Lebanon continued for ten more years in both urban and rural settings.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 477–478.

⁹⁷ ACICR, MIS 76.5/162, Burnier to Schlemmer, February 10, 1927.

⁹⁸ ACICR, MIS 76.5/158, Burnier to Johnson, February 12, 1927.

⁹⁹ ALON, C1431, Report by Burnier, April 3, 1927, 2-327-Ra-413-70-13.

¹⁰⁰ ALON, C1431, Johnson to Burnier, January 31, 1928, 2-327-Ra-413-70-13.

¹⁰¹ ALON, C1471, Progress report of the refugee settlement in Syria, situation up to November 30, 1929, S.A.C.17-1929.

¹⁰² Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 478–499.

7.4 Settlements in Soviet Armenia

As we have seen in Chapter 6, building on the recommendations provided by the 1925 Commission of Enquiry, Nansen committed to negotiating a loan for settling Armenian refugees in Soviet Armenia. To convince governments and international organizations alike, the high commissioner received crucial promises by the Soviet authorities. It was decided that half of the land would be reserved for cereals and the other half for cotton; taxes would not be collected on the lands cultivated with cereals for a period of three years, and only half of the cultivated cotton would be taxed.¹⁰³ Moreover, the Soviet authorities agreed not to draft resettled Armenian men of military age for one or two years, allowing them to work and to repay the loan.¹⁰⁴ Nansen also praised the stability of the local Armenian government, which committed to securing a bank guarantee and which declared that the loan would be used for the sole benefit of refugees. However, despite the fact that many Western states had started resuming diplomatic relationships with Soviet Russia (France and Britain did so in 1924), suspicion was still widespread. Echoing the pro-Soviet accusations that were addressed to Nansen when he engaged in protecting Russian refugees and in relieving the famine-stricken region of the Volga, a few years later he continued to be accused of being pro-Soviet.¹⁰⁵

How was the plan received? The British and Italian authorities believed that the preliminary investigations with the Soviet authorities did not give a sufficient guarantee; the British government, in particular, refused to participate in a project which would indirectly benefit Soviet Armenia. In turn, France was ready to contribute, provided that the other LON members contributed their share. In 1925, settlement plans were discussed at the Fifth Commission of the LON Assembly. The choice of irrigating the land to cultivate cotton and the opportunity of raising a loan of £900,000 were questioned. Eventually, the commission made a few recommendations: more expert knowledge was needed, and private initiatives should be endorsed before the LON took any “technical” or “financial” responsibility.¹⁰⁶ To

¹⁰³ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2.A, *Aperçu sur le projet d'irrigation du Docteur Fri. Nansen Président de la Commission chargée d'étudier l'installation des Réfugiés arméniens de Grèce en Arménie, Présenté à la Société des Nations par Yervant Agathon, agronome spécialiste pour la culture du coton, September 12, 1925.*

¹⁰⁴ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, *Report by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, president for the Commission for Studying the Settlement of Armenian Refugees, July 28, 1925.*

¹⁰⁵ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A1, *Nansen to Baker, August 17, 1926.*

¹⁰⁶ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, *Société des Nations, Vième assemblée, cinquième commission, première sous-commission, procès-verbal de la séance du 19 septembre 1925.* ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, A2A, *Société des Nations, Vième assemblée, cinquième commission, première sous-commission, procès-verbal de la séance du 22 septembre 1925.*

Nansen, these recommendations marked the beginning of the end for the “humanitarian loan” for Armenia.¹⁰⁷

The more tangible result ended up being the creation of yet another body, called the Commission for the settlement of Armenian refugees (CSAR), whose commissioners were chosen on the basis of their expertise and nationality: the Frenchman, Jules Pams, was the president of the French Committee for Armenian refugees; the Briton, Sir Murdoch MacDonald, was the former Minister for Public Works in Egypt; the Italian, Count Rossini, had been a state counselor and the Minister of Public Finance; and the German, M. Bergmann, had been the Under Secretary of State for the Ministry of Finance.¹⁰⁸ The commissioners were to provide expertise, to discuss matters with their own governments, and create connections with any institution interested in the settlement plan. Moreover, the CSAR relied on the collaboration of the Armenian organizations and authorities; soon after, an autonomous Body of Trustees would be mandated to manage the loan and to maintain industrial contracts.¹⁰⁹

Two more experts were sent on a mission to Armenia: William McIntosh, a British technical engineer, was charged with investigating the drainage and irrigation for East Zangibassar;¹¹⁰ and the Norwegian, Captain Vidkun Quisling, collected data on finances and the land regime, and made preliminary estimates of the crops that would grow on the lands designated for Nansen’s project.¹¹¹ In April 1926, Quisling even went to Moscow to negotiate with the Soviet government, which officially accepted the settlement plans for Armenian refugees and authorized the raising of the loan, with the Russian State Bank as a guarantor. The Soviet government also made clear that no restrictions on the sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia on financial matters would be accepted.¹¹² Long discussions took place within the CSAR on political, financial, and technical matters. As usual, money

¹⁰⁷ Nansen, Fridtjof, *Brev, Utgitt for Nansenfondet av cand. Philol. Steinar Kjærheim, V, 1926-1930 Tillegg 1888-1925*, Universitetsforlaget, Aktietrykkriet i Trondhjem, 1978. Letter from Nansen to Baker, Lysaker, June 3, 1926.

¹⁰⁸ Germany was not yet a member of the LON; it was Nansen who insisted on having a German member. ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10A, legg 7, Armenian Refugee Settlement Commission, minutes of the first meeting held at 35, rue Vernet, Paris, on Friday, October 30, 1925, at 11 a.m., C.A./1st session/PV.1.(1):5(1).

¹⁰⁹ ALON, Documents of the ACPO, *Rapport de la commission d’établissement des réfugiés arméniens*, Geneva, December 1, 1925 C.747.1925.IV.C.A.4.

¹¹⁰ ALON, Documents of the ACPO, *Exploratory Data on the Irrigation and Drainage Scheme for the Zangibassar area by McIntosh*.

¹¹¹ ALON, Documents of the ACPO, *Commission d’établissement des réfugiés arméniens, rapport du capitaine Quisling*, December 28, 1925, C.A.5.

¹¹² ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10A, legg 8, Soviet of the People’s Commissaries of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Armenia, Malhasian to the representatives of the Armenian Refugee Commission, February 4, 1926.

was one of the most pressing issues: while governments were reluctant to provide money for the loan, with the exception of Germany which gave £50,000, Armenian organizations confirmed that they were ready to contribute £100,000, thanks to the Armenian General Benevolent Union.¹¹³ Indeed, such sum was considered a guarantee to raise the remaining nine-tenths of the loan.

Although it became increasingly clear that the settlement plans in Soviet Armenia would never be implemented in full, Nansen kept advocating with politicians and international officers, stressing that settling Armenians in the South Caucasus was a partial reparation for the failed creation of the Armenian state.¹¹⁴ In that, he counted on Rachel Crowdy who investigated whether American organizations, in particular the NER, would be willing to contribute to the loan. Nevertheless, in 1928, the LON Assembly ended up voting on a sum of 50,000 francs for the administrative expenses generated by the scheme, without endorsing any formal provision. The fact that the attention of all was directed towards settling Armenians in Syria and Lebanon did not help. Hence, building on the previous fundraising experiences in connection with the displacement of POWs and of Russian refugees, Nansen tried to win the support of the British government, hoping that it would have a spillover effect.¹¹⁵ It is not difficult to understand the high commissioner's disappointment at Sir Austen Chamberlain's indifference and at the British cabinet's opposition, especially after Stanley Baldwin and Herbert Asquith, the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal parties, respectively, had previously pressed Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald to help the Armenians.¹¹⁶ In September 1929, Nansen finally had to admit that the settlement plans for Armenians in Soviet Armenia had failed. Indeed, he disposed of £155,000 (coming from Armenian organizations, Germany, and small sums from Norway and Romania) out of the necessary £900,000. The scheme, which was abandoned, would be implemented on a smaller scale years later.

¹¹³ Half of the sum came from the American branch of Pasha's organization. ANB, Ms. 1988, A5.A, Record of a conversation between Nansen (LON), Johnson (ILO), Nubar Pacha (Association de Bienfaisance), Pachalian (Central Committee for Armenian refugees), and one other Armenian, September 7, 1925.

¹¹⁴ ALON, R705, Letter from Drummond on the "projet d'établissement des réfugiés arméniens dans la République d'Erivan," October 31, 1927, 12.62845.62845.

¹¹⁵ ALON, R698, Nansen to Drummond, private, August 22, 1927, 12.60675.46805.

¹¹⁶ Skran, *op. cit.*, 173.

7.5 Global dispersion

While the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the International Labour Organization, together with aid workers, politicians, and experts in various capacities, negotiated settlement plans in Soviet Armenia, Syria, and Lebanon, they also explored the possibility of resettling Armenians in Europe, particularly in France and in Latin America.¹¹⁷ As we have seen, the Greek government formalized a request to the LON, asking for help in resettling Armenian refugees, who had been exchanged after the tragedy of Smyrna in the fall of 1922 and who happened to be in congested Greek cities.¹¹⁸ Greece stressed that it had already proven to be generous towards displaced Armenians, hence needy foreigners, and that all of its efforts should be addressed to its own people. In turn, the two local offices of the High Commissariat for refugees, one located in Athens and the other in Salonika, distributed a questionnaire to Armenian refugees. Bilingual in French and in Greek, the questionnaire asked about possible emigration plans—the options were Soviet Armenia, Latin America, Turkey (this could not possibly be an option), France, and other countries—and about education, labor skills, and family obligations.¹¹⁹ The HCR delegates then re-elaborated the data and prepared new documents, where Armenian refugees in Greece were organized by gender and by profession: there were nurses, engineers, laborers, weavers, carpet makers, basket makers, tailors and dressmakers, blacksmiths, agriculturists, bakers, and more.¹²⁰

In the following months, individuals and families made their way abroad thanks to the mediation of the local office of the ILO, which prepared both individual and collective passports. Between September 1924 and December 1925, 8,236 Armenians left: 4,089 went to the Soviet Union, 2,950 to France, 228 to Syria, 160 to Egypt, 123 to Brazil, and 112 to Argentina.¹²¹ The largest number of refugees reached Soviet Armenia before the League of Nations even decided what to do with the

¹¹⁷ ANB, Ms. fol. 1988, F10A, legg 4, Armenian refugees, Memorandum by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, High Commissioner for refugees, A.V./5/1924.

¹¹⁸ Merih Erol, “Between Memories of Persecution and Refugee Experience: The Armenians in Greece in the Aftermath of the Greek-Turkish War,” in Konstantinos Travlos (ed.), *Salvation and Catastrophe: The Greek-Turkish War, 1919–1922* Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020): 341–368. Merih Erol, “Armenians in 1920s Greece: Turkey’s Unwanted Minority, the League of Nations’ Burden, Greece’s ‘Other’ Refugees,” *Turkish Historical Review* 1 (2023): 1–23.

¹¹⁹ ALON, C1125, commission files, 1924–1925, Nansen office for refugees, Delegation to Greece of the High Commissioner for Refugees/Refugee Section of the Int. Labour office, Questionnaires of Armenian refugees in Greece, no. 7.

¹²⁰ ALON, C1125, Commission files, 1924, Nansen office for refugees, Delegation in Greece of the High Commissioner for refugees, 9 camps of the Salonica area.

¹²¹ ALON, C1427, Liste des réfugiés arméniens évacués de la Grèce à partir du 1 septembre 1924 jusqu’au 15 décembre 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

technical reports that it had received after Nansen's mission returned to Geneva. This suggests a rather significant discrepancy between the decisions made at the headquarters of international organizations in Geneva and the actions in places of displacement and intervention.

How did Armenian refugees in Greece receive the plan? Some of them were enthusiastic, as we can read from a thank you note: "500 Armenian refugees leaving hospital ground in Greece for Armenia send you through our sincere expressions of thanks for all the facilities offered by your office."¹²² However, not everything went smoothly: abuses happened on the way and numerous protests were addressed by Armenian refugees to Childs of the local HCR office in Athens. Some refugees were registered for resettlement against their consent, especially those who did not want to repatriate as they had been involved in political plots against the Soviet Armenian government; others were asked to pay for the transport and registration—which went against the agreement previously reached.¹²³ Many more, those living in the Kozana and Western Macedonia area, were given three days to "liquidate their affairs," after which they were brought to camps in Salonika, where they waited to embark with no means whatsoever.¹²⁴ A group of four Armenian families from the village of Frankotchay in Kallaria wrote that a Greek government agent and police gave them a few days to prepare for the evacuation and that, at first, they did not allow Armenians to sell the tobacco that they had cultivated. With their appeal, evacuated Armenians hoped that future plans would be implemented with respect for the refugees:

We kindly ask you to do what is necessary so that the other refugees who have not yet come and who are following us have enough time to liquidate their belongings or that they have permission to transport to Salonica these few things that they have...¹²⁵

An experienced delegate, Childs, was horrified to realize that refugees were "exploited in an abominable manner, apparently with the cognizance of the Greek and Soviet authorities." He talked of a "Balkan affair;" particularly in relation to the voluntary departure certificates that the local office of the HCR asked refugees to sign before embarkation. These documents had no meaning, due to the attitude of both

¹²² ALON, C1427, Telegram from Boyadjian to LON, November 23, 1924, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacketz.

¹²³ ALON, C1427, The following message was telephoned from Zurich by Mister Johnson to Miss Knocker at 2 p.m. today, October 28, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacketz.

¹²⁴ ALON, C1427, Zwerner to Childs, October 8, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacketz.

¹²⁵ ALON, C1427, Pour quatre familles de Frankotchay à honorable monsieur représentant de la Société des Nations en ville, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacketz.

Greece, which wanted to get rid of refugees, and of Soviet Russia, which was allowed to send a representative working on the Greek soil for the selection of refugees:

In view of these circumstances I am sorry that I am not in agreement with your instructions to Zwerner that he should offer his services to obtain voluntary departure certificates. To offer to do this unless in a position to take measures to preserve the value of such certificates, which under the present circumstances we should not be able to do, would appear to me to be useless and in fact give us the position of scapegoat. At the least we should appear to be conniving at facts and procedures which apparently we are powerless to avert and should only deplore.¹²⁶

As of late 1925, a new phase started for the resettlement of Armenians from Greece, less because of institutional changes in Geneva and more due to changes “in the field.” According to A. Kotelnikof of the ILO Greek office, in 1925, there were still 800-1,000 Armenian families that were ready to leave for France. The ILO delegate was particularly keen on the plan, as he believed that Armenians would easily settle as agriculturists in France; he knew that the Greek government was ready to ease the exit procedure; he also committed to finding a way to pay for the travel for those refugees who did not have any means.¹²⁷ However, Kotelnikof met the strong opposition of Armenian organizations in Greece which pushed for their fellow citizens to continue their “repatriation plans” to Soviet Armenia, as they were concerned about the community’s survival and unity.¹²⁸ Further resettlement plans were about to be implemented when an earthquake struck the small Soviet republic. By then, perceptions had drastically changed: the Soviet authorities stopped resettlement plans and preferred Armenians to stay in Greece, waiting for more favorable circumstances.¹²⁹ In an unexpected twist, Armenian organizations in Greece were then favorable to resettlement plans in France, upon certain conditions:

In view of the deplorable economic conditions currently prevailing in this country and Armenia not currently in a position to receive refugees, we would like to help you in

¹²⁶ ALON, C1427, Childs to Johnson, October 19, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket2.

¹²⁷ ALON, C1427, Kotelnikof to Charpentier, May 7, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3. To ease the procedure, the Greek government committed to simplifying the procedures that allowed refugees to obtain a free Greek stamp on their passport. ALON, C1427, Kotelnikof to Johnson, June 10, 1926, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

¹²⁸ ALON, C1427, L'évacuation des Arméniens de Grèce vue par la colonie arménienne par Kotelnikof, January 5, 1927, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3. For a later period, on the question of “repatriation,” see Jo Laycock, “Saving the Remnant or Building Socialism? Transnational Humanitarian Relief in Early Soviet Armenia,” *Moving the Social* 57, no. 0 (2017): 77–96.

¹²⁹ ALON, C1427, Kotelnikof to Thomas, December 14, 1926, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

your efforts to make life less difficult for our children by providing them with work in France but you would be obliged to facilitate our task for this purpose by providing us with the guarantee of the International Labor Office that, as soon as the repatriation of the Armenians becomes feasible again, it would take the necessary measures so that the Armenian refugees from all the countries where they will then find themselves installed be transported to their national home (by mobilizing the necessary working capital for this purpose).¹³⁰

However, in 1926 and early 1927, France was not as interested as it used to be in welcoming refugees in agriculture and in the industries. Faced with France's reluctance, the HCR's preoccupation was that "refugees transferred for employment in France correspond in all respects to the wishes of the French authorities, both in regard to professional and physical qualifications."¹³¹ In other words, governments' satisfaction was kept in higher esteem than refugees' conditions and rights. To the regret of the Greek government, Armenian refugees remained in Greece. In late 1927, a group of 1,300 persons eventually made their way to Soviet Armenia thanks to a bilateral agreement between Greece and the Soviets.¹³² The refugees who stayed behind in Greece continued to live in barracks, from where they were expelled, hoping to eventually resettle in Soviet Armenia.¹³³

Meanwhile, resettlement plans in Latin America continued, even if in smaller scale than expected. In 1928, Child, by then the director of the South American delegation of the Refugee Service, considered Argentina as the most promising option, due to a combination of climate, possibilities of work, and favorable legislation. There were two Armenian organizations in Argentina, the *Union Nationale Arménienne* and the *Centro-Coloniale Armenio*, according to which about 10,000 persons of Armenian origin lived there. Those who arrived from 1926 to 1927 numbered 950, from Syria, Greece, Turkey, and France. They had found employment in meatpacking houses and industrial organizations, in addition to trade, artisan, and agriculture. According to a common description, Armenians were a "fairly prosperous, independent, and self-supporting community."¹³⁴

¹³⁰ ALON, C1427, Aghassian to Johnson, December 28, 1926, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

¹³¹ ALON, S546-2, Johnson to Kotelnikof, June 1, 1926.

¹³² ALON, C1427, Kotelnikof to Thomas, December 30, 1927, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

¹³³ ALON, C1427, Kotelnikof to Thomas, March 31, 1929, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket3.

¹³⁴ ALON, C1470, Refugee advisory committee, note by Mr. Childs, director of the South American Delegation of the Refugee Service, A/C-3-1928, May 21, 1928.

7.6 Conclusion

The Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the International Labour Organization formulated different discourses on Armenians, who had survived the genocide, were trafficked, and forcibly displaced. These discourses emerged in an unpredictable context, where the project for a Wilsonian Armenia never materialized, and where the massive resettlement to Soviet Armenia proved to be more difficult than expected. With the literature has mainly examined humanitarian programs for displaced Armenians in specific regions, this chapter has adopted a larger geography. This allows to see that different humanitarian operations ran, largely uncoordinated, in parallel: in Constantinople, Mills rescued Armenian women and children, returning them to their families, if they still existed, or placing them in other institutions in the city or abroad; in Aleppo, Jeppe believed that rescued Armenians should settle in the region as a minority group in agricultural colonies, waiting to be resettled in Soviet Armenia. From Geneva, Nansen supported resettlement plans in Soviet Armenia as ethnic homogeneity was instrumental to peace and stability, whereas Thomas favored agricultural settlement in the Middle East, in France, and in Latin America. Lacking a comprehensive plan, solutions were rather the result of overlapping agendas, including “shared economic and political interests of national states, international organizations, and private capital.”¹³⁵

There was a unifying element though: international humanitarian organizations largely preferred for Armenians to stay in Europe’s “border-regions”, as a way to protect the West from labor competition, illnesses, or subversive ideas. (Re)settlement depended on governments’ interests: Greece wished to get rid of Armenian refugees and evacuated them to Soviet Armenia; Soviet Armenia opened its doors until the earthquake struck, and upon the condition that foreign money would finance agricultural settlement; France welcomed Armenians as long as they contributed to its economy, while French mandatory authorities saw in Armenians economic, social, and political stabilizers against the Arab population of Syria and Lebanon; Latin American states, particularly Argentina and Brazil, saw in refugees colonists or agriculturists who would produce wealth, control the territory, and counteract the power of trade unions. Across a global geography, racial hierarchies, building on civilizational language, fueled resettlement plans. For instance, Burnier praised Armenians as “workers, enterprising and terribly prolific,” differently from the Muslims who were considered to be “lazy, backward, and refractory to Western civilization”.¹³⁶ Armenians were also seen as vectors of

¹³⁵ Robson, *Human Capital*, 63–64.

¹³⁶ AICRC, MIS 76.5/154, Burnier to Schlemmer, Beirut, January 22, 1927.

Western civilization in Latin America, where local governments wished for their good health and morality.

This chapter has offered additional examples of humanitarian protection and refugee politics being a space of multiple encounters. In Constantinople, the house's staff was composed of rescued Armenian children, towards whom Mills had words of affection. The children crucially performed daily practices of protection, probably unpaid, yet they were also offered a Western education. In and around Aleppo, Jeppe relied on a few Armenian men, who actively participated in the rescue of their own community and who died or were killed on missions. Once liberated, some Armenians stayed in the house as staff, others were employed in the workshops, others played a role in the colonization programs, and a few were resettled abroad. In Greece, the HCR officers, Childs and Zwerner, visited camps where Armenians waited to be evacuated towards Soviet Armenia, and denounced cases of abuses and mistreatment.

Thinking across regions and continents, it appears that Armenian refugees were hosted, protected, and contained in a plurality of spaces. We read about the two houses in Constantinople and Aleppo, about refugee camps turned into city's neighbors in the Middle East, and about agricultural colonies built in the desert. We read of Armenians in Greece living in pre-existing villages and working on the tobacco farms, across from their Greek neighbors. We read of more camps in Soviet Armenia, from where refugees made their ways into the cities and across the country. And, finally, we read about colonies, fazendas, and construction sites in Latin America. These examples point in the direction of a plurality of spaces of displacement and humanitarian intervention, which were often surveilled, but which were also closely embedded in the local context.

All in all, the Armenian example adds an extra layer to the development of the global governance of refugee protection, which emerged from a fragmented and a vast geography, where a plethora of actors engaged in refugee politics for a set of different reasons, some noble, others rather exploitative and disruptive. Once more, Armenian refugees spoke—some were thankful, while many more were enraged and critical. Other voices are mediated through the lines of the red tape. Even if I cannot possibly reconstruct every single path, I still hope to have done justice to so much suffering, courage, and strength.

Conclusion

This book has shown that, during the Greater War era, millions of military and civilians were forcibly moved across Europe, the Middle East, and the South Caucasus due to warfare, politics of ethnic cleansing and genocide, revolution, and economic unrest. The cessation of the hostilities in Europe did not translate into an immediate peace: not only did regional wars break out in Central and Eastern Europe for the determination of the new states' borders after the crumbling of continental empires, but the partition of the Ottoman Empire also had far longer consequences. Indeed, Greece attacked the Turkish National Movement in May 1919, and it was only in September 1922, with the destruction of Smyrna by the Turkish cavalry, that warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean region slowly came to an end. To an attentive observer, both the Paris and the Lausanne peace settlements already contained the seeds of future instabilities: the artificial drawing of states' borders in ethnically mixed regions created large numbers of minorities; furthermore, millions of "new" refugees, who found themselves on the wrong side of the border, frantically attempted to join their state, often signing up for a life as second-class citizens.

Against such an unstable context, Russian and Armenian refugees embodied both the rule and its exception. After a small window during which they were offered the possibility of return, the new Soviet and Kemalist states proceeded with their denationalization *en masse*, hence abruptly severing the relation of the state with its supposedly disloyal citizens. Being stateless, in disarray, and privy to identity documents in a world of nation-states, where passports had become compulsory and anti-immigration laws hindered mass migration, was far from ideal. The immense humanitarian needs of hundreds of thousands of POWs and refugees, scattered throughout Europe and beyond, left governments—old and new, solid and fragile—in distress. In assistance came a large set of local and international institutions, private or inter-governmental. The Red Cross was one of them: anchored in the Geneva Conventions, the organization which had assisted both civilians and POWs during the war, questioned its role in peacetime; by protecting all victims, the ICRC wished to strengthen its role in international relations. In contrast, the LON and the ILO were new inter-governmental organizations that emerged from the Treaty of Versailles. If the LON had a humanitarian vocation and agreed to the protection of specific refugee groups whose displacement originated from WWI, the ILO hesitantly engaged in humanitarian aid and did so out of its interest for Soviet Russia and to test the articulation of political and technical cooperation.

This book argues that, in protecting POWs and refugees, the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO accepted a shared set of ideas, which emerged from inter-institutional, international, and transnational negotiations, and which were also the outcome of the day-to-day practices of care that the international, refugee, and local staff implemented. Humanitarian aid encompassed the provision of food, clothing, shelter, hygienic measures, and medical assistance. Such a crystallization of humanitarian practices was a response to the double goal of assisting and protecting POWs and refugees and controlling the exact use of human and logistical resources. This explains why the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO made large use of statistics to determine, for example, the ingredients and calories for an adequate diet, check the numbers of those repatriated or resettled, or be accountable to donors. Nevertheless, the scientific dimension of postwar humanitarianism should not detract from ideas of compassion, fuelled by Christian rhetoric and beliefs, which pushed institutions and individuals towards the assistance and protection of needy strangers.

From the outset, humanitarianism went beyond relief and aimed at rehabilitating morally and physically “fallen” persons. Across the diverse crises that the book examines, refugees were supposed to “help themselves,” meaning that they should participate in actions and programs that would restore their dignity, stop their dependence on foreign aid, and reconstruct the host societies. Rehabilitation became particularly central for the group of Russians in Constantinople, experiencing a limbo situation, uncertain whether they would be sent back to Russia, allowed to stay, or be resettled, or for Armenian women and children who were taught a profession in order to become self-sufficient. Gendered discourses and identities crucially shaped rehabilitation: the Russian refugee men for which the American Red Cross established workshops in Constantinople worked the wood, whereas women were employed in sewing and embroidery, according to a traditional understanding of gendered roles.

Did the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO succeed or fail in assisting and protecting POWs and refugees? This book provides a nuanced answer. On one hand, humanitarian aid saved many POWs and refugees, helped them repatriate or resettle, and invented new instruments such as the Nansen passport thanks to which borders could be legally crossed. Some of the innovations of the 1920s, such as the creation of the High Commissariat for refugees, the beginning of international refugee law, and the association of private, voluntary organizations with inter-governmental politics, epitomized drastic innovations. On the other hand, the humanitarian assistance that emerged at the crossroad of the ICRC, the LON, and the ILO did not save or protect all: it targeted specific groups, leaving others at the margins of international politics; even among the statutory groups, protection emerged as a selective, pernicious, and discriminatory practice. For instance, protection might

depend on unforeseeable circumstances, such as the availability of money at a precise time and place, the success of one humanitarian agent's advocacy, or the political interests of a specific organization. Moreover, protection badly tolerated critical thinking or personal initiatives: international officers pretty much disliked being challenged or contested.

This is a story of institutions but also a story of individuals. While, so far, much of the literature has paid attention to prominent personalities, such as Gustave Ador, Fridtjof Nansen, and Albert Thomas, this book brings to life other agencies within the structures of international organizations. Among the cohort of experts, delegates, and representatives of national governments or of private organizations, there were those who had previous experience in humanitarian matters and others who were neophytes; those who had received formal education and others who possessed lay knowledge; those who were paid and those who were not; most were men, and a few were women. National and international officers, relief workers, lawyers, missionaries, and a large array of experts examined the conditions of forcibly displaced populations, putting their knowledge to use and experiencing processes of professionalization. By trying to understand refugees' needs and conditions, and attempting to elaborate permanent solutions, international officers identified problems, created institutions, and laid the foundation of the global governance of refugee protection.

One of the pernicious consequences of the making of humanitarian heroes—no matter whether men or women—has been the oblivion of the local, refugee staff, as well as of prisoners of war and refugees. The book sheds new light on the Estonian personnel working in the camp of Narva, on the Russian refugees employed by the HCR office in Constantinople, and on the rescued Armenians working in the Neutral and Rescue Houses. Combined with class, race, and ethnicity, a gendered perspective explains why institutions of Western liberalism did not pay tribute to this group of men and women, without whom no camp, institution, or program could possibly have been run. Similar methodological preoccupations have driven me towards bringing to life the agency of prisoners of war and refugees. In addition to letters and petitions, traces of individual paths can be found in statistics, in identity documents, and in biometrical cards. Though the documents of international humanitarian organizations tend to present refugees as passive agents, a close examination of the archives allows for a sounded, more nuanced narrative: prisoners of war in Narva wrote letters denouncing the terms of their internment; Russian refugees in Constantinople refused to be resettled in faraway countries like Brazil; Armenian women and children played a great role in liberating themselves and in rebuilding their lives.

By scaling up and down, this book offers a localized international history, moving the focus from Geneva to places of displacement and intervention, including

Narva, Constantinople, and Aleppo, hence connecting Europe with the Middle East, the South Caucasus, and Latin America. What unifies this global geography is humanitarian organizations' ideological and geopolitical underpinning: the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and the International Labour Organization concurred to create camps, villages, and colonies at what they believed to be the physical and civilizational borders of Europe in order to assist needy persons and to protect world peace. Moreover, international refugee politics—in terms of integration, (re) settlement, or repatriation—very much depended on the political, economic, and ideological interests of the countries which wished to get rid of refugees and of those which welcomed them. Gendered discriminations and racist biases shaped long-term solutions, where refugees became vectors for the reenactment of civilizational categories, economic development, and traditional gender norms.

Through the lens of humanitarian protection, Europe emerges as a continent with porous borders, where experiments in managing socially and politically marginal populations could be implemented, hence participating in the incomplete, malleable, and plural emergence of the global governance of refugee protection. This was fragmented and partial, resulting from a plethora of institutions, agencies, and individuals, including both the provider and the “recipient” of aid. The governance protected the refugee, it concurred in creating her identity and needs, it transformed the refugee into a poorly protected migrant, and it attempted to contain the perceived threats that might come from forced displacement.

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