

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 preventable [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 Agnides' 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. Watenpugh, “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, *Réfugiés 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, legg 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 Kır, 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 Kır 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, A5.A, 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 Duguët, 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 Tyr, 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 Watenpau, "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, Shemmastian, *op. cit.*; Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire*, 147–151; Watenpugh, “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 Crowley, 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 men 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 Pasha (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-Jacket2.

¹²³ ALON, C1427, The following message was telephoned from Zurich by Mister Johnson to Miss Klocker at 2 p.m. today, October 28, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket2.

¹²⁴ ALON, C1427, Zwerner to Childs, October 8, 1925, 323-Ra-412-1-26-1-Jacket2.

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-Jacket2.

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-Colonial 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.

