Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[7] Dzovinar Kévonian, "Les réfugiés de la paix. La question des réfugiés au début du XXè siècle," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 36, no. 1 (1994): 2–10.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The politics of humanitarianism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[32] Rodogno, *Night on Earth*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Refugee politics

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

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

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

[50] Rodogno, *Night on Earth*.

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

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

In the Near East, the disruption of the Ottoman Empire and the Greco-Turkish War, followed by the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed on July 24, 1923, had long-lasting consequences.[54] Turkey emerged as an independent state which abolished Ottoman capitulations and rejected foreign interferences.[55] Post-Ottoman Greater Syria, which includes Syria and Lebanon, as well as Iraq and Palestine, were put under French and British mandates, respectively.[56] In turn, the South Caucasus experienced long years of inter-imperial rivalry, internal tensions, and massive refugee flows. The short experiment of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, where Eastern Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia attempted to bond, was followed by the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia in May 1918.[57] Soon enough, the Allied promises over the "Wilsonian Armenia" were crushed by Turkish military forces and by a Soviet invasion. In March 1922, Armenia was incorporated into the URSS.[58]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[71] Gatrell, *Whole Empire Walking*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[76] Liisa H. Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523.

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

[78] Robson, *Human Capital.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[86] Soguk, *op. cit.*, 116–122.

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

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

Connected geographies

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

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

[88] Soguk, *op. cit.*, 118.

[89] Rodogno, *Night on Earth*, 5–12.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Archives and agents

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[99] For the LONTAD, there is total digital access to the League of Nations Archives, https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lontad (last seen, July 7, 2024).

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

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

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

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

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

[101] Peter Gatrell et al., "Reckoning with Refugeedom: Refugee Voices in Modern History," *Social History* 46, no. 1 (2021): 70–95.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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