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# Saving the Remnant or Building Socialism? Transnational Humanitarian Relief in Early Soviet Armenia

## ABSTRACT

Drawing on research in the National Archive of Armenia, the League of Nations Archive and the Archives of the Save the Children Fund, this article examines the work of international relief organisations in Soviet Armenia during the 1920s, focusing on the work of the British Lord Mayor's Fund for Armenian Refugees. This organisation provided shelter, food, education, healthcare and work for refugees in Soviet Armenia until the end of 1926. The article first considers the origins of the Lord Mayor's Fund's work in the region and goes on to examine the dynamics of the encounter between British relief agents and the Soviet authorities, considering to what extent they were able to reconcile their priorities and visions of the Armenian future and establish a practical working relationship. Examining this ostensibly unlikely encounter offers a fresh perspective on inter-war humanitarian relief, illuminating the new modes of envisioning "national" futures and discourses and practices of managing displacement which emerged both in the Soviet Union and the "west". More broadly, this article contributes to the development of more nuanced understandings of the place of the Soviet Union in emerging transnational histories of humanitarianism.

Keywords: *Armenia, Humanitarianism, Soviet Union, refugees*

In November 1925 Mr. L. B. Golden, General Secretary of the Save the Children Fund, described population displacement as "a world problem of first magnitude." He cited the Armenians as one of five nations that had been "wandering for years" and whose position constituted "at once a reproach and a menace to civilisation."<sup>1</sup> His perspective reflected the enduring scale of the Armenian refugee problem. In the mid-1920s communities of

1 L.B. Golden: The Outlook (based on a paper submitted to the 12th international conference of the Red Cross), in: *The World's Children* 6:2 (1925), p. 23. *The World's Children* (previously *The Record of Save the Children*) was the Save the Children Fund's journal.

Armenian refugees were still found across the mandate states of Syria and Lebanon, the Soviet South Caucasus, Greece, the Balkans and beyond.<sup>2</sup> It also captured a widespread assessment that the “world problem” of displacement demanded a solution which went beyond the actions of states which sheltered refugees.

International attempts to aid displaced Armenians began soon after the commencement of genocidal massacres and deportations by the Ottoman authorities in spring 1915.<sup>3</sup> When the news reached Europe and the United States, charities and relief organisations new and old mobilised. In the United States the response was dominated by Near East Relief.<sup>4</sup> In Britain charitable efforts were brought together under the auspices of the Armenian Refugees Lord Mayor’s Fund (LMF). The Armenian diaspora also mobilised, the philanthropic organisation the Armenian General Benevolent Union, for example raised funds and cared for orphans. In the Russian Empire, meanwhile, Armenian communities in Tbilisi and Moscow along with the Armenian Patriarchate at Etchmiadsin provided relief for Armenian refugees in the South Caucasus. When the problem of Armenian displacement persisted into the post-war period, mandate authorities, the Soviet Union and the League of Nations were drawn into the task of finding a long-term solution.

To describe the response to the Armenian Genocide as transnational is thus not simply to highlight a cross-border relationship between international donors and Armenian recipients. Nor is it to describe the straightforward flow of funds and resources from the “west” to the global south which is often assumed to characterise modern humanitarianism. Rather it describes interactions across and between state and non-state actors, organisations and individuals, and the circulation of people, ideas and practices between the “west” and the communist world. Relief workers moved between countries and organisations and post-war upheavals meant that refugees and entire relief operations were repeatedly displaced.<sup>5</sup> Neither should the term “transnational” suggest a picture of straightforward and enthusiastic co-operation. Organisations and individuals sometimes struggled to carve a space for their particular endeavours. Nor should a transnational lens minimise the

- 2 The Armenian National Delegation in Paris provided the League with the following estimate: Syria 150,000 Greece 120,000, Bulgaria 20,000, Cyprus 2,000, Palestine 1,200, Mesopotamia –8,000, Europe –20,000. Archives of the League of Nations, Geneva, (ALON) Fonds Nansen, R1763/48/36375/25899 Situation of Armenian Refugees Dr. Nansen’s Report, Geneva May 1st 1924.
- 3 On the history of the Genocide see Raymond Kevorkian: *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, London 2011 and Ronald Grigor Suny: *They Can Live in the Desert and Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide*, Princeton 2015.
- 4 Near East Relief (Originally American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, then American Committee for Relief in the Near East) evolved from missionary networks in the Ottoman Empire.
- 5 In one case 1000 orphans from Cilicia were evacuated to Cyprus when the region came under Turkish rule. They were then returned to Constantinople but with the rise of the new Turkish Republic were transferred to Corfu. Some of these orphans were transferred to Soviet Armenia.

centrality of nationality and the nation-state. Attempts to address Armenian displacement respected the principle of a world order based on nation states and solutions were virtually always framed in national terms.<sup>6</sup>

This article traces the transnational dynamics of Armenian relief through the work of one agency, the Lord Mayor's Fund. The Lord Mayor's Fund was founded in October 1915. At its helm were a group of British Armenophiles, including the MP Aneurin Williams and the brothers Noel, Harold and Charles Buxton.<sup>7</sup> The Lord Mayor's Fund maintained one office and only a few members of staff in London, nonetheless their geographical reach was wide. Their work began with fundraising and extended to providing relief on the ground, firstly through a medical expedition to the Russian front and later through relief in Cilicia and the care of orphans in Constantinople and Cyprus. In 1921 they commenced a relief programme in Soviet Armenia which lasted until 1926. This ostensibly unlikely episode is the focus of this article.

Thus far, analyses of post-Genocide humanitarianism have focused on the Middle East, addressing the gendered nature of humanitarian practice, the impact of the League of Nations and the relationship between humanitarianism, nationalism and colonialism.<sup>8</sup> However, the aftermaths of war and Genocide spilled beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the war the South Caucasus had become home to over 300,000 Armenian refugees.<sup>9</sup> Examining responses to their plight offers a different set of insights, highlighting the diversity of motivations which underpinned relief, the complexity and variety of transnational connections, the blurred boundaries between relief and state

- 6 On inter-war transnationalism see Daniel Laqua: Preface, in: Daniel Laqua (eds.): *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, London 2011, pp. xi-xvii, p. xv. Patricia Clavin suggests that "The nation does not stand in opposition to transnationalism as a border-crossing understanding of the latter term implies, but rather is an essential element in shaping the phenomenon." Patricia Clavin: *Conceptualising Internationalism between the Two World Wars*, in: Daniel Laqua (eds.): *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, London 2011, pp. 1–14, p. 3.
- 7 Other supporters included Viscount James Bryce and Bishop Gore of Oxford.
- 8 Dzovinar Kevonian: *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: Les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orient pendant l'entre-deux-guerres*, Paris 2004; Michelle Tusan: *Smyrna's Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide and the Birth of the Middle East*, Berkeley 2012; Keith Watenpugh: *The League of Nations Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1027*, in: *American Historical Review* 115:5 (2010), pp. 1315–1339.
- 9 "Transcaucasia" was usually used during the Soviet and imperial periods. In December 1921 a Soviet report listed 1,100,000 natives, 300,000 refugees, 200,000 "registered" refugees, 75,000 orphans, 30,000 of whom are cared for by Near East Relief. National Archives of Armenia, Yerevan (Hayastani Azgayin Arkhiv, HAA) f. 114, Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, op.2, d.89, l. 2.

building and the unevenness of any shift towards “modern” humanitarianism prompted by the war. Finally, it provides a starting point for considering how the place of the Soviet Union in transnational histories of humanitarianism might be better understood.<sup>10</sup>

## Encountering Armenia

The political and diplomatic interventions of the European powers on behalf of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire have been traced by Davide Rodogno.<sup>11</sup> These interventions were never exclusively political, and were frequently entangled with the provision of aid. Relief projects overlapped with European and American missionary activity in the region, which was at least as concerned with welfare, education and social development as with saving souls. The work of the Lord Mayor’s Fund was a legacy of these different forms of intervention. It connected ideas of Christian charity and responsibility and discourses of a “civilising mission” with conceptions of national rights which were ill-defined, yet powerful. In the context of the First World War the treatment of Armenians was reframed as a war atrocity and providing aid as a British national duty. The notion of Armenian national rights was recast in the light of Wilsonian discourses of self-determination and the Lord Mayor’s Fund’s relief work was accompanied by appeals for the British government to secure the future of the Armenians by providing them with a nation-state of their own.<sup>12</sup> The activities of the Lord Mayor’s Fund were then far from the supposed humanitarian ideal of impartiality. They made explicit their concern for a particular nation, and viewed political advocacy as an integral part of their work.<sup>13</sup>

- 10 Davide Rodogno points out that “humanitarianism of the Soviet and/or Communist brand” is neglected in Michael Barnett’s purportedly global history of humanitarianism “Empire of Humanity”, see Davide Rodogno: Review of Michael Barnett: *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, in: *Journal of International Organisation Studies* 3:1 (2012), p. 76.
- 11 Davide Rodogno: *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Intervention in the Ottoman Empire 1815–1914*, Princeton 2011. See also Jo Laycock: *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention*, Manchester 2009.
- 12 Prior to the First World War the Armenian population was divided between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. An Armenian nationalist movement had been growing since the mid-19th century but had had limited reach amongst the wider population.
- 13 They were closely connected to the British Armenia Committee, whose agenda was specifically political. Branden Little has argued that “most humanitarian actors in the First World War era generally considered their work to have a profound political resonance”, Branden Little: *An Explosion of New Endeavours: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era*, in: *First World War Studies* 5:1 (2014), pp. 1–16, p. 6.

The Lord Mayor's Fund's encounter with the South Caucasus began in 1916. There, in the Ottoman/Russian borderlands there was, in the words of Near East Relief director James Barton, "an assemblage of more than 200,000 Armenians, Assyrians and Nestorians in abject destitution [...] under a friendly government and accessible for relief purposes."<sup>14</sup> A "hospital unit" was despatched by the Lord Mayor's Fund with Rev. Harold Buxton as director of relief.<sup>15</sup> In the Transcaucasian borderlands they worked alongside a variety of local organisations and institutions including the Etchmiadzin Patriarchate, Armenian 'Brotherly Aid' committees, Armenian diaspora organisations, the Unions of Towns and the Red Cross as well as the Russian imperial and military administrations.<sup>16</sup> By May 1918 the situation had changed radically and the First Republic of Armenia had been established in the vacuum left by revolution and imperial collapse. The new Republic was a small, fragile territory which lacked the infrastructure or resources to care for refugees. After the Armistice the situation stabilised. British troops arrived in late 1918, in April 1919 food supplies began to arrive from the American Relief Administration and Near East Relief returned. Stability was, however, short lived and as Turkish nationalist forces advanced in autumn 1919 most international relief workers were evacuated. By December 1920 Armenia had been sovietised. Nonetheless, in August 1921 Rev. Hubert Harcourt, former British military chaplain in Transcaucasia, had returned to Armenia on behalf of the Lord Mayor's Fund, armed with medical supplies, a set of spinning wheels and plans to open an orphanage and a hospital.<sup>17</sup>

The work that Hubert Harcourt began was initially carried out under the auspices of the British Relief Mission in the Caucasus, through which the Save the Children Fund provided funds to the Lord Mayor's Fund on the basis that they would use their local

- 14 James Barton: *The Story of Near East Relief*, New York 1930, p. 10. Relations between Near East Relief and LMF were sometimes tense. In 1916 Charles Vickery of Near East Relief expressed his suspicions that Noel Buxton of the LMF had a "political" aim and wanted Russian rule in Armenia. Burke Theological Library, Columbia MRL2, Near East Relief Committee Records 1904–1950, Box 1, Folder 3, Letter Vickery to Rockwell, June 15th 1927.
- 15 The team consisted of Harold Buxton, Colonel Graham Aspland as medical officer, George Hodgkin, Alfred Backhouse and others and was attached to the army of the Grand Duke Nicholas on the Russo-Turkish front. Harold Buxton: *Trans-Caucasia*, London 1926, p. xi. Harold Buxton was an Anglican priest who became Bishop of Gibraltar in 1933.
- 16 Under the Russian occupation General Mikhail Tamamshev was responsible for relief in the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia. Peter Holquist: *The Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia 1915–May 1917*, in: Ronald Grigor Suny/Fatma Muge Gocek/Norman Naimark (eds.): *A Question of Genocide*, Oxford 2011, pp. 157–174, p. 168. For the response in the Russian Empire see Peter Gatrell: *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I*, Bloomington 1999, especially pp. 152–154.
- 17 His arrival is described in *The Record*, 1:18 (August 1921), p. 281.

contacts and expertise to provide relief.<sup>18</sup> This arrangement continued until 1926. It echoed a broader overlap of causes, funds, practices and personnel which, despite a trend towards increasing institutionalisation, characterised liberal humanitarian circles during the inter-war period. The connections between the two organisations were personal as well as practical. The founders of Save the Children moved in the same circles as the leading lights of the Lord Mayor's Fund, circles which had been engaged in a variety of pre-war causes, including relief during the South African and Balkan wars.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the Save the Children Fund's aid to "Bolshevik babies" during the Russian famine, aid to Soviet Armenia did not provoke an outcry.<sup>20</sup> This was because there was a well-established image in Britain of the Armenians as a deserving Christian minority.<sup>21</sup> During the war, the Armenians had been portrayed as archetypal victims of war atrocity and Armenian women and children had acquired a deep symbolic value.<sup>22</sup> Armenian children mattered because they were members of the endangered Armenian nation or race as well as representatives of suffering humanity. However, whilst the *raison d'être* of the Lord Mayor's Fund was to rescue and rehabilitate suffering Armenians, their main sponsor, the Save the Children Fund, professed to provide relief in a universal manner without reference to nationality, race, religion or political affiliation. The Lord Mayor's Fund's

- 18 The name "British Relief Mission" gradually fell out of usage. The Friends of Armenia and Armenian Red Cross (not a national Red Cross society) were smaller agencies focused on fundraising in Britain.
- 19 The Buxton brothers were closely involved with the Save the Children Fund. Charles Roden Buxton was married to one of the organisation's founders, Dorothy Buxton. Rebecca Gill charts the evolution of some of these British liberal humanitarian networks. See Rebecca Gill: *Calculating Compassion, Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870–1914*, Manchester 2013, especially pp. 203–204. In a recent review essay Abigail Green argues that humanitarianism has a history which reaches beyond the liberal Protestant circles which have been the focus of much recent work. This is an important point but both the Save the Children Fund and the LMF were a product of this specific tradition. Abigail Green: *Humanitarianism in Nineteenth Century Context: Religious, Gendered, National*, in: *The Historical Journal* 57:4 (2014), pp. 157–1175.
- 20 On criticism of famine relief see Rodney Breen: *Saving Enemy Children: Save the Children's Russian Relief Operation*, in: *Disasters* 18:3 (1994), pp. 221–237.
- 21 The Save the Children Fund acknowledged that many British supporters subscribed to an Armenian fund "because being Christians they cannot contemplate unmoved the persecution of their co-religionists by the protagonists of an alien faith." *The Outlook: The Refugee Problem: Maintaining Family Life for the Children's Sake*, in: *The World's Children* 6:9 (June 1926), p. 130.
- 22 On the gendered iconography of Armenian suffering, Jo Laycock: *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention*, pp. 99–13. On reclaiming women and children in post-Genocide Armenian societies and its national significance see Lerna Ekmekçioğlu: *A Climate for Abduction, A Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55:3 (2013), pp. 522–553.

emphasis on Armenian relief therefore co-existed, especially in Save the Children Fund publications, with a recognition that they were at the same time aiding other populations, even the “enemies” of the Armenians.<sup>23</sup> Thus internationalism and responsibilities to particular nations may have been in tension but they were not mutually exclusive and could be mobilised in flexible and strategic ways.<sup>24</sup>

## Engaging with “the Bolsheviks”

The Lord Mayor’s Fund, with their commitment to Armenians as a suffering Christian nation, were not the natural partners of Soviet Communists. Indeed, Hubert Harcourt’s initial encounters with the Soviet authorities were strained. He was uneasy about working with “Bolsheviks” and demanded a formal mandate: “permission to use the British flag and to myself personally and other British workers who may join me, permission to move freely within Armenia, to go outside her borders if necessary and to return without hindrance” and a paper to show “any officials who may question my right of working here or refuse a request for assistance.”<sup>25</sup> Relations thawed relatively quickly and Hubert Harcourt built up local connections which proved key to acquiring permissions, premises and supplies.<sup>26</sup> By 1922 the Lord Mayor’s Fund had headquarters and warehouses in Yerevan and ran an orphanage for 150 children, a shelter for 68 homeless children, a

- 23 “In Constantinople, side by side with caring for the Armenian orphans, the Save the Children Fund is helping the children of the Turk”, Edward Fuller: *Good and Evil: The Story of the Work in Transcaucasia*, in: *The World’s Children 3:1* (1922), p. 40.
- 24 Edward Fuller, Secretary of Save the Children Fund wrote that LMF had been established “on an essentially humanitarian basis, non-political and unsectarian, but as a British work based upon the sense of British responsibility (to quote one of the fund’s own manifestos), it will be seen how closely the aims and ideals of the Lord Mayor’s fund, within its own peculiar limits, harmonise with those of the Save the Children Fund with which, in process of time, it was to be brought into such close liaison.” *The World’s Children 3:1* (1922), p. 36. Emily Baughan has explored the co-existence of imperialism and internationalism in the Save the Children Fund’s work. Emily Baughan: *Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children! Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain*, in: *Historical Research* 86:231 (2013), pp. 116–137.
- 25 HAA f.114, op.2, d.104, 19 Letter from Harcourt, 19th September 1921. He also complained about the delays in providing him with premises, suggesting the “housing department” did not take his work seriously HAA f.114, op. 2, d.104, 30 Letter from Harcourt, 26th October 1921.
- 26 By January 1922 he was writing to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in more cordial tones. “I am obliged to leave for Constantinople tomorrow for about a week and would wish this morning to call and bid you farewell, I should also like to know if there is anything I can do for you at Constantinople while I am there.” HAA f. 114, op.2, d.104, 41 Letter from Harcourt 5th May 1922.

feeding station in Yerevan for 470 children. They also employed 150 refugee women in lace-making, knitting and sewing, provided work renovating gardens in Yerevan with the Commissariat for Agriculture and provided food and seed for 1615 people in Ashtarak.<sup>27</sup> From early 1922 they also managed the resettlement of around 6,000 refugees from a British refugee camp in Baqubah, Iraq in an “agricultural colony” at Gamarloo (Ghamarlu, now Artashat) close to the Turkish border.<sup>28</sup> The British Government provided 35,000 Pounds to fund the settlement.

The Lord Mayor’s Fund’s initial perceptions of Soviet rule in Armenia were ambivalent. Many of their leading members still believed that a true Armenia had to include the lands in Eastern Anatolia inhabited by Armenians prior to the genocide as well as Soviet Armenian territories. In July 1922 Hubert Harcourt described his work in the Soviet Union as a temporary fix, suggesting it would last “until there is a proper political settlement which will allow the refugees to return to their homes either in an extended Armenia or in a controlled Turkey.”<sup>29</sup> After the Treaty of Lausanne and creation of the Turkish Republic had made clear that an Armenian Republic would not become a reality, Lord Mayor’s Fund circles became increasingly accepting of Soviet rule. By 1925 their secretary Edward Carlile had reached the conclusion that,

it is not possible for Armenia to be independent until she is strong enough to safeguard her individual and national interests. Moreover, grave divisions exist between Armenians themselves and until these are lost sight of in the real issues affecting their true wellbeing it will be necessary for another nation to protect them.<sup>30</sup>

The extent to which co-operation was possible surprised the London based Lord Mayor’s Fund administration, who wrote to one of their returning relief agents thanking them for “the patience with which you have carried on in the face of passive if not active

27 HAA f.114 op.2 d.35 Report on the work of the British Relief Mission for the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, 18th May 1922, D. S. Northcote.

28 On the fraught negotiations between the British Government, the LMF, the Armenian diaspora and the Soviet authorities over the fate of these refugees, HAA f.113 op. 2 d. 89. Pamphlet by Dr. Armstrong-Smith: *Famine in Transcaucasia*, London 1922, p. 15. The closure was condemned by Armenian organisations and relief agencies alike; the Baghdad Armenian community and the Armenian non-profit organization as well as Near East Relief and the LMF were drawn into the attempt to find new homes for its inhabitants. Armenian non-profit organization and Near East Relief transferred around 400 orphans from Baqubah to an orphanage in Jerusalem.

29 News from Relief Areas in: *The Record* 2:20 (1922), p. 313.

30 The Archives of the Save the Children Fund (Save the Children Fund) Eglantyne Jebb Papers EJ23 Letters to press, including cuttings and agency correspondence, Letter to Percy Alden from Secretary Edward Carlile 10th March 1925.

oppression.”<sup>31</sup> Relief agents had a more nuanced view. Winifred Christie was employed in Soviet Armenia in the early 1920s. When she returned to Britain in 1926 she told the secretary of the Lord Mayor’s Fund:

We certainly had uphill work in Erivan (Yerevan) and were driven almost desperate over the delays in fitting in with our work. Although the authorities would not tell us much they never interfered with us in any way and expressed their gratitude for our efforts to help there. They were always kind and polite and would promise anything, although they did not always fulfil their promises. Personally I am glad I went although I would not like to live there long.<sup>32</sup>

## Soviet Responses

The principle of self-determination shaped the post-war Soviet world as well as the west. Sovietisation finally provided Armenians who had lived for years as citizens of the multi-ethnic Russian and Ottoman Empires with at least some national territory. Yet the problem of displacement was not simply a problem for the new national territory of Soviet Armenia. Armenian refugees in Turkey, Mesopotamia and the North Caucasus sought sanctuary in the Soviet Republic and over the coming year their numbers were augmented by refugees from the famine-struck Volga region.<sup>33</sup> Nor was it simply an Armenian problem. The Muslim populations of the Caucasus (usually referred to at this time as Tatars or Turks) had also been displaced during the war and its aftermaths. Following the revolution, the private organisations which had responded to mass displacement across the Russian Empire were replaced by the state-led and centralised Central Committee for Prisoners

31 Save the Children Fund EJ23 Letter Carlile to Mrs. M. Fraser 15th June 1926.

32 Save the Children Fund, EJ 5 Armenia Correspondence 1926–1927 10th June 1926 Letter from Miss Fraser to E. Carlile. She was originally part of the British Quaker Mary Ann Burgess’ Friends Armenian Mission in Constantinople.

33 In 1921 an agreement was made to extend famine relief to Armenia. HAA f.113, op. 3, d.46. Copy of agreement between Nansen and Kamenev extending agreement between Chicherin and Nansen to send famine relief to Russia to Armenia on 19th December 1921. 1st March 1922.

of War and Refugees (*Tsentropfenbezh*), later renamed the Central Evacuation Committee (*Tsentrevak*).<sup>34</sup> A regional branch, the Caucasian Evacuation Committee (*Kavevak*) were responsible for resettlement in the North and South Caucasus.<sup>35</sup>

The Revolutionary Committee (*Revkom*) government which initially took power in Soviet Armenia in December 1920, undertook radical policies which alienated much of the local population and culminated in a nationalist uprising in February 1921. In its aftermath the *Revkom* were replaced by a new, more moderate government, a shift which reflected the movement to the New Economic Policy across the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> Lenin's "letter to the Caucasian Communists", identified the South Caucasus as a region in which the transition to Socialism had to be managed in a particular way. The three Republics of the South Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, were identified as well placed to develop relations with the west, facilitating international trade which could play a vital role in the development of a Soviet industrial economy. Amongst the British relief organisations, the letter was interpreted as a sign of the willingness of the Soviet authorities to co-operate.<sup>37</sup>

The management of the Armenian refugee problem would be shaped as much by Union-wide and regional concerns as it was by questions of Armenian national self-determination and nation building. Ultimate sanction for the presence of international agencies in Armenia came from Moscow. The work of Nansen, the League of Nations' first High Commissioner for Refugees, negotiating exchanges of prisoners of war, the repatriation of Russian refugees and famine relief played an important role in opening channels of communications with Moscow. It had established terms under which international agencies could operate on Soviet territory and set precedents that paved the way for relief

- 34 Peter Gatrell: *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I*, pp.188–189. In general, see Peter Gatrell/Nick Baron (eds.): *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia*, London 2004, p. 159. This approach extended beyond refugee relief, David Hoffmann explains that in summer 1918 Soviet leaders "renamed all relief organisations, hospitals, orphanages and other philanthropic agencies and placed them under the authority of a commission for social security" David Hoffmann: *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism*, Ithaca 2011, p. 51.
- 35 On their work with Armenians displaced in the North Caucasus see for example HAA f.113 SovNarKom ASSR op.3 d.58. Letter from Commissariat of Internal Affairs, Moscow to Sahak Ter Gabrielyan, representative of the Armenian SSR to the RSFSR, April 1921.
- 36 Ronald Grigor Suny: *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, Bloomington 1993, p. 140. See also Mary Kilbourne Matossian: *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, Leiden 1962, ch. 2.
- 37 Lenin's letter was published in the *Manchester Guardian* in July 1921. It stated Transcaucasia should "utilise economically the capitalist west by concession policy and foreign trading [...]. There is full potential for broader development of concessions and trading with the west. To do this is imperative, particularly for improving the workers and peasants conditions and for attracting the intelligentsia to economic reconstruction", quoted in: Harold Buxton: *Trans-Caucasia*, p. 67.

in Armenia.<sup>38</sup> At the end of 1922, Armenia entered the Soviet Union alongside Georgia and Azerbaijan as a constituent member of the Transcaucasian Federation and questions of refugee relief were increasingly managed at Federation level. Whilst there appears to have been a consensus regarding the general utility of international aid, relief workers were by no means above suspicion. Concerns that they were encouraging the wrong kinds of nationalism among the Armenians meant that their presence was carefully monitored.<sup>39</sup>

As the 1920s progressed, the Soviet Armenian authorities began to cultivate the personnel of the Lord Mayor's Fund. "Liaison officers" were assigned to manage communications and their international representatives were warmly welcomed.<sup>40</sup> When the secretary of the Lord Mayor's Fund Magda Coe visited Soviet Armenia in 1925 she was accorded special treatment and returned with a keen awareness of the country's "needs."<sup>41</sup> For the Soviet Union, engaging with international relief agencies had an immediate value in aiding the vast task of post-war reconstruction. It also had a secondary propaganda value. By allowing the Soviet Union to represent itself as protector of Armenians whose sufferings had been brought about by self-interested imperialism, it helped counter negative western images of Bolshevism. Caring for refugees in Soviet Armenia and even taking in refugees from abroad also provided a way to demonstrate to diaspora communities that the Soviet Union was committed to Armenia.<sup>42</sup> Thus, even if

- 38 On famine relief see Bertrand Patenaude: *The Big Show in Bololand*, Stanford 2002; on prisoners of war, Martin Houseden: *When the Black Sea was a Bridge for humanitarian action: The League of Nations, the Red Cross and the repatriation of prisoners of war between Russia and Central Europe 1920–22*, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38 (2007) pp. 61–83; on repatriation see Katy Long: *Early Repatriation Policy: Russian Refugee Return 1922–24*, in: *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22:2 (2009), pp. 133–154.
- 39 HAA f.114 op.2 d. 28, request for information on foreign missions and consulates. Arrests of local personnel working for the LMF were occasionally a source of tension, in 1924 Dudley Stafford Northcote, an LMF relief agent complained of the arrest of a member of his staff Shahbaghlian to Papazian "Secretary to the Council of Commissars and Liaison Officer with Foreign Relief Societies." HAA f.113 op. 3 d.217, Letter Northcote-Papazian, 15th Feb 1924. When Near East Relief left the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s relations with authorities had begun to sour. They reported that 30 of their local staff remained under arrest and 5 or 6 had been shot. Rockefeller Archive Centre, Near East Foundation, Box 134, Misc., Situation in the Caucasus, Communication from NY to Field Directors, March 10th 1931.
- 40 James Barton referred to Ter Ghazarian as "Government Commissioner for Co-operation with Near East Relief", James Barton: *The Story of Near East Relief*, p. 136.
- 41 *Save the Children Fund EJ24 Armenia 1924: Reports, minutes and Meetings 1920–27*, The Medical Situation in Armenia, Magda Coe, June 1925.
- 42 Many Armenians displaced during the genocide viewed Eastern Anatolia rather than the Soviet territory of Transcaucasia as their true "homeland", others were ideologically opposed to the Soviet Union and relations between homeland and diaspora were a cause of a great deal of tension. In 1921 the Armenian aid Committee (HOG) was formed in order to facilitate links between the diaspora and the Soviet "homeland." Even after

state-led, centralised Soviet approach to managing displacement appeared to be radically different to international approaches, the Soviet authorities were willing and able to speak the language of western humanitarianism in order to achieve their ends.

## From “saving the remnant” to National Development

The presence of international relief agencies in Soviet Armenia was enabled by a series of compromises. The Lord Mayor’s Fund’s return to the region was the product of their longstanding sense of responsibility towards Armenians as a deserving minority. A Soviet state was not the Armenian future they had imagined but it was better than no Armenia. Neither local nor central Soviet authorities shared in international relief agencies’ focus on the Armenians as a particularly deserving Christian nation. Their emphasis rather was on resolving a crisis and creating stability across the region. Despite this, they co-operated as the work of the Lord Mayor’s Fund developed into a programme of reconstruction and rehabilitation. This included education and training, public health initiatives, agricultural schemes and resettlement. Near East Relief’s work followed a similar trajectory, albeit on a grander scale. Neither the Lord Mayor’s Fund nor the Soviet authorities drew a clear distinction between emergency relief and “development”, or what Michael Barnett has termed “alchemical” and “emergency” relief.<sup>43</sup>

Even before the war the South Caucasus had been almost entirely agrarian and was widely considered a “primitive” corner of the Russian Empire.<sup>44</sup> The new Soviet authorities sought to transform the region into a modern, industrial and socialist society. The first step towards this was thought to be was the development of modern agriculture.<sup>45</sup> The Lord Mayor’s Fund had a similarly transformative agenda. They too desired to create from the refugee population Armenian citizens who could play an active role in creating a modern, productive society. Harold Buxton framed the role of “Russia” in the South Caucasus as similar to that of the mandatory powers, guiding a people who were “in many ways [...]

international relief in Armenia had ceased in the late 1920s Soviet engagement with the diaspora continued into the early 1930s and resumed after the Second World War.

- 43 Michael Barnett: *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, pp. 37–41. On the interconnectedness of emergency relief and development or “protection” and “betterment” in the post-Cold War period and the historical roots of these connections see Mark Duffield: *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*, Cambridge 2007, ch. 2. Duffield suggests the two categories are “mutually conditioning” and move in and out of each other”, p. 51.
- 44 According to Kilbourne Matossian, in 1922 the cultivated area was only 29 per cent of what it had been in 1914. See Kilbourne Matossian: *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, p. 53.
- 45 See Astghik Mirzakhanyan: *Economic and Social Development*, in: Edmund Herzig/Marina Kurchiyan (eds.): *The Armenians, Past and Present in the Making of National Identity*, London 2005, pp. 196–210.

exceedingly young”<sup>46</sup> on the path to modernity and civilisation. He and his peers viewed the Lord Mayor’s Fund as providing a guiding hand to Soviet authorities. Their approach was strongly reminiscent of imperial discourses of development and progress. It was also frequently inflected by Orientalist discourses. Returning from his trip to Armenia, the Save the Children Fund’s Director of Continental Relief, Dr. Armstrong-Smith, reported

The other day [...] I saw an American tractor ploughing a field, while within a stone’s throw was an Armenian peasant turning over the soil with his primitive wooden plough, just as his forefathers did centuries before America was discovered. It was a striking instance of East meeting West.<sup>47</sup>

Whilst accepting the power of the Soviets, the Lord Mayor’s Fund continued to frame relief in Soviet Armenia in national terms. In the aftermath of genocide, the Armenians were thought to still be at risk, if not of physical, then at least of cultural extermination. Preserving nationality through the maintenance of Armenian language, culture, and tradition was high on the Lord Mayor’s Fund’s agenda.<sup>48</sup> This aspect of their work was less controversial than may be expected. Lenin as well as Wilson had envisioned a post-war order shaped by the self-determination of nations (albeit in different form) and the early Soviet policy of indigenisation (*Korenizatsiia*) was directed at building nations through the promotion of local languages and cultures and the development of local cadres. In Armenia, rather than suppressing Armenian identities this policy was, in the words of Ronald Grigor Suny, “directed toward preserving, indeed nourishing, many aspects of Armenian national life.”<sup>49</sup> Still, the work of national reconstruction had its limits. Soviet fears that displaced populations both within and beyond the borders of Armenia were vulnerable to anti-Soviet forms of nationalism meant that these populations were closely monitored.<sup>50</sup>

46 Harold Buxton: *Trans-Caucasia*, p. 92.

47 Armstrong-Smith: *A Doctor’s Rounds*, in: *The World’s Children* 19 (June 1922), p. 292.

48 Language sometimes proved contentious. In 1923 the Armenian General Benevolent Union protested that they believed that one Near East Relief institution was providing Armenian orphans with an education that was “essentially Greek” without teaching the Armenian language. *Bibliothèque Nubar*, Paris, AGBU Correspondence Book, January—September 1923, 320/20865, Letter from secretary to Nubar Pacha, 16th March 1923.

49 Ronald Grigor Suny: *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, p.145. For a survey of nationalities policy during this period see Jeremy Smith: *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*, Cambridge 2013, ch. 4.

50 The Dashnaksutioun (Dashnaks, Armenian Revolutionary Federation) was an Armenian nationalist party founded in the late nineteenth century. It had been at the helm of the Armenian Republic which had existed between the Russian imperial collapse and the imposition of Soviet rule. After Sovietisation relations between the Dashnaks and the Soviets became hostile and many Dashnak supporters fled to Persia after the failed uprising in 1921.

## Transforming Armenians, Transforming Armenia

Orphaned children were frequently the object of these transformative agendas. Orphaned and abandoned children were a widespread problem for the early Soviet Union and in Armenia the aftermaths of Genocide meant this problem was much larger.<sup>51</sup> Catriona Kelly has explained how across the Soviet Union “The Bolsheviks determination to efface all traces of the past and to construct a radically different new society meant that, from the first, young people and children were pushed to the forefront of ideological discussion.”<sup>52</sup> The Lord Mayor’s Fund attached similar importance to the fate of children. When Hubert Harcourt arrived in Armenia he observed that he was “impressed with the necessity of giving the children a technical training in those home industries of the country which shall make them useful citizens of town and village.”<sup>53</sup> Whilst the number of orphans in their care was dwarfed by Near East Relief’s operations in the “orphan city” of Alexandropol (Leninakan, now Gyumri), this work was imbued with a particular significance. One pamphlet explained to their supporters that if the British public ignored the fate of Armenian children they would create problems for the future, “some little one will perish of the diseases of hunger and neglect, or some other will survive these present miseries only to grow up to a life of crime and vice.”<sup>54</sup>

The idealised *rezhim* of the Soviet orphanage and the Lord Mayor’s Fund’s ordered, rational approach to care and education and emphasis on hard work and self-improvement appear to have had much in common. Differences nonetheless emerged in the emphasis placed on political education in Soviet institutions and in the understandings of the relationship of the individual to the collective which framed each setting. Whereas for the Soviet authorities raising children collectively was presented as a more progressive, transformative option than the family home, the Lord Mayor’s Fund sought to replicate the benefits of family life within institutions and viewed its work as setting an example

- 51 Catriona Kelly: *Children’s World: Growing Up in Russia 1890–1991*, New Haven 2007, p. 193. In the former Ottoman Empire reclaiming Armenian children (and sometimes their mothers) from Turkish and Kurdish homes was a formative part of both Armenian and international responses to the Genocide. In general see Keith Watenpaugh: *The League of Nations Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*; Lerna Ekmekçioğlu: *A Climate for Abduction, A Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide*.
- 52 Catriona Kelly: *Shaping the Future Race Regulating the Daily Life of Children in Early Soviet Russia*, in: Christina Kiaer/Eric Naiman (eds.): *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, Bloomington 2006, pp. 256–281, p. 256.
- 53 HAA f.114 o.2, d.104 Harcourt to Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, August 1921.
- 54 *The Child of the East Appeals to You*, London: Lord Mayor’s Fund. Undated pamphlet.

for the local Soviet institutions. Armstrong Smith remarked after his visit to the Lord Mayor's Fund orphanage at Yerevan that "it is an advantage for Armenia to have such an institution in its midst to create a standard for government orphanages."<sup>55</sup>

Whilst Soviet and international agendas for children overlapped significantly, some elements of their education proved to be a source of tension. Religious education had been forbidden under the 1921 mandate and over the course of 1924 the Lord Mayor's Fund vacillated over whether or not to resettle a group of orphans in Soviet Armenia because they feared they would not be able to continue their religious education. Harold Buxton perhaps overestimated the strength of his position,

I think we must appeal to Moscow if necessary, over the heads of the Caucasian government about the religious question. The Bolsheviks will not permit any religious teaching by the state. But [...] The Bolshevik government does not forbid parents to teach Christian doctrine and Christian morality to their children. Orphans have not natural homes or parents. We are the parents. If we represented this to Moscow, perhaps we could secure a modification of their terms.<sup>56</sup>

By 1926 the rules were being enforced more strictly and a small orphanage operated by the Scandinavian missionary relief worker Bodil Biorne was closed for flouting them.<sup>57</sup> Near East Relief had little sympathy with her fate, the closure, they told the League, was due to "tactlessness on her part in giving her religious instruction in a manner offensive to the Soviet Government."<sup>58</sup>

Although the Lord Mayor's Fund did not have an explicitly religious agenda, their work was far from secular and they had strong connections to the Anglican Church and the Society of Friends. The discourses of "civilising mission" which shaped their work were underpinned by Christianity and their practices drew heavily on those developed by European and American missions in the Ottoman Empire during the late nineteenth century. These practices were part of a broader process of "propagating modernity" which was intrinsic to the mission movement and emphasised ending dependence on charity,

55 Pamphlet by Dr. Armstrong-Smith: Famine in Transcaucasia, p. 14.

56 Save the Children Fund, EJ16 Correspondence, Notes and reports of Rev. H Buxton 1920–28, Letter, Harold Buxton to Magda Coe, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1924.

57 Inger Marie Okkenhaug: Refugees, Relief and the Restoration of a Nation: Norwegian Mission in the Armenian Republic 1922–25, in: Hilde Nielssen/Inger Marie Okkenhaug/Karina Hestad Skeie (eds.): Protestant Missions and Local Encounters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Leiden 2011, pp. 207–232.

58 ALON, International Labour Office, C1424/320/Ra.404/25/1 Relations with Friends of Armenia, Notes of interview with Mr. Murphy, April 1925.

shaping characters and producing active citizens.<sup>59</sup> Such practices were employed in Armenian relief settings across the former Ottoman Empire by Near East Relief and the General Benevolent Union. Their deployment across such a wide range of geographical and political contexts is testament not only to the endurance of nineteenth century practices, but also to the way in which ideas and personnel circulated between sites of relief during the inter-war period.

Re-constructing the Armenian nation was not simply a matter of cultural and religious identity. Not only was the Armenian race thought to be endangered because its numbers had been so reduced, the condition of displacement was in itself thought to be damaging to health. In 1925 *The World's Children* emphasised the long term, physical impacts of displacement,

Inevitably the years of homeless wandering, the physical privation and the lack of mental discipline inseparable from a precarious and harassed existence will leave their impress on the lives of the children who have passed through this tragedy. If, over and above such disabilities, enfeebled physique is to be encouraged by lack of food, the outlook for the refugee children both as individual sufferers and as potential parents of the next generation is disastrous indeed.<sup>60</sup>

Restoring the health and physical wellbeing of not only refugees but the wider population of Soviet Armenia had by then become part of the work of the Lord Mayor's Fund. Paying attention to their work in this field reveals the ways in which their relief workers had espoused the rational, scientific approaches to relief thought characteristic of modern humanitarianism.

The scientific or rational improvement of public health in Soviet Armenia first of all meant gathering and assessing information about the condition of the population. A report from a relief worker who visited the villages on the outskirts of Yerevan in 1922 stated that "Health conditions are critical and everywhere gastric and intestinal troubles are prevalent [...] A large percentage of the population is suffering from skin disease. One-fourth of the adults are incapacitated and only one in fifty of the population is *normal*."<sup>61</sup> The practice of measuring the refugee population against pre-defined "norms" extended beyond health into social welfare more generally. James Barton, director of Near East Relief's vast operations, conveyed this approach bluntly. Relief for orphans, he said, was "a rotary process by which the maximum number of waifs were transformed into

59 Hilde Nielssen/Inger Marie Okkenhaug/Karina Hestad Skeie: Introduction, in: Hilde Nielssen/Inger Marie Okkenhaug/Karina Hestad Skeie (eds.): *Protestant Missions and Local Encounters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, pp. 1–22, p. 12.

60 Golden: *The Outlook*, p. 23.

61 Letter from a Relief Worker, in: *The Record* 2:16 (1st May 1922), p. 248.

normal children.”<sup>62</sup> In this respect too, Soviet and humanitarian approaches were not worlds apart. As David Hoffmann has demonstrated, Soviet social policies also “reflected a new ethos by which state officials and nongovernment professionals sought to reshape their societies in accordance with scientific and aesthetic norms.”<sup>63</sup>

As in the case of orphan care, the Lord Mayor’s Fund viewed themselves as a beacon of progress in the field of public health and medical care, sharing expert knowledge and guiding Soviet Armenia towards British standards. In the pro-natalist context of the post-war years, maternal care and child health acquired a particular significance. The Lord Mayor’s Fund claimed that,

At Erivan (Yerevan), where the national standard of nursing is very low, the Lord Mayor’s Fund has just opened the first infant welfare centre, where trained nurses, one of whom is a fully qualified midwife, are instructing the future mothers of the Armenian race in hygiene, motherhood and the care of infant life.<sup>64</sup>

The centre, which eventually was brought under the remit of the Commissariat of Public Health, also acted as a training school for young women who were sent out to establish similar centres in other districts. Near East Relief undertook similar projects, training nurses and providing medical care in rural regions whilst the General Benevolent Union funded an eye clinic. Through this work, international agencies became entangled or even instrumentalised in the project of building socialism in Soviet Armenia.

This entanglement culminated in the evolution of the “Nansen schemes” to resettle around 50,000 Armenian refugees on newly irrigated land in Soviet Armenia.<sup>65</sup> These schemes were developed under the auspices of the League of Nations’ High Commission for Refugees, but were a product of co-operation and negotiation between the League, Armenian diaspora organisations, relief agencies and the Soviet Union. Having worked “on the ground” in Soviet Armenia and having had their own experience of resettlement, the Lord Mayor’s Fund were consulted in an advisory capacity for this project. From 1924, they supported the scheme enthusiastically, advocating and fundraising in Britain. In 1926 the Lord Mayor’s Fund appointed its last relief agent to Soviet Armenia.<sup>66</sup> His task was to wind up their work and close their remaining feeding stations and “industrial

62 James Barton: *The Story of Near East Relief*, p. 136.

63 David Hoffmann: *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism*, p. 2.

64 News from the Stricken Lands in: *The Record* 1:2 (November 1920), p. 25.

65 The schemes are outlined in Michael Marrus: *The Unwanted: European Refugees from the First World War through the Cold War*, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 114–121.

66 Save the Children Fund EJ16 Notes and reports of Rev. H Buxton 1920–28, Letter Carlile to Buxton 23rd November 1926.

project” training young women in the textile industry.<sup>67</sup> Their withdrawal was a result of both the stabilisation of Soviet Armenia and the diminishing financial means of the Lord Mayor’s Fund.

By 1926, after a prolonged series of investigations, it had become clear that the Nansen scheme would not become a reality. The International Labour Organisation and the International Committee of the Red Cross began to look to the mandate states of Syria and Lebanon as an alternative site for Armenian resettlement. The leadership of the Lord Mayor’s Fund, however, remained attached to the Nansen plans and were ambivalent about settlement in the French administered mandates. Committee member Alfred Backhouse remarked to Edward Carlile, secretary of the Lord Mayor’s Fund in summer 1926, “My knowledge which you and the committee share, of French methods and my experience of their administration in Cilicia would make me hesitate to propose adding largely to the number of Armenians under their protection [...]”.<sup>68</sup> The Soviet authorities’ response to this shift was hostile. Armenian refugees, they claimed, still wanted to settle in a Soviet Armenia that was experiencing economic and political “rebirth.” Casting themselves again as the genuine humanitarians or saviours of the Armenians the Soviet authorities decried the Middle Eastern schemes as “bribery and adventurism” with the aim of “achieving imperialist politics in Syria, Mesopotamia and the near east in general.”<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusions

As Rebecca Gill has observed, it is easy to assume that

aid organisations are simply timeless compassion given administrative form. Instead, ideals and aspirations varied, and they repay historical scrutiny. The novel refrain of neutrality and impartiality may have been heard over and again among late nineteenth-century relief workers, but it would be a mistake to assume that this arose from a common imperative or a shared response to human suffering.<sup>70</sup>

67 Save the Children Fund EJ 5 Armenia Correspondence, 1926–27, Letter to Ruth Fry 13th January 1926.

68 Save the Children Fund EJ1 Armenian Correspondence B 1923–27, Letter Backhouse to Carlile, 7th June 1926.

69 HAA f. 113, op.3, d.56, l. 63 Report on League Settlement Plans, 1927.

70 Rebecca Gill: *Calculating Compassion, Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870–1914*, p. 3.

Small relief agencies like the Lord Mayor's Fund proliferated during and after the First World War, yet they receive relatively little attention in the existing historiography,<sup>71</sup> The case of the Lord Mayor's Fund demonstrates that to neglect small agencies is to neglect the complexities of the post-war humanitarian landscape. The Lord Mayor's Fund were amongst those agencies that did not ground their work in claims to impartiality or neutrality, they remained firmly, explicitly on the side of the Armenians. Their motivations combined compassion, faith, and a commitment to a "civilising mission" that was heavily informed by imperial discourses with a specific sense of duty towards the Armenians as a nation. That they were willing to engage with Soviet approaches to managing displacement underpinned by very different principles is indicative of the complexities of inter-war humanitarianism and the disjuncture between ideals and practice.

In his ground-breaking research on Armenian refugees in the Middle East Keith Watenpaugh suggests that war and its aftermaths created conditions in which a specifically modern form of humanitarianism could flourish. According to Watenpaugh the protagonists of "modern humanitarianism" envisioned it as "permanent, transnational, institutional, neutral and secular", committed to tackling the "root causes" of suffering.<sup>72</sup> In some ways this characterisation reflects the case of the Lord Mayor's Fund. Their work was indeed embedded in and enabled by wider transnational networks of humanitarian actors. But whilst the new organisations and institutions of the inter-war period, notably the League's High Commission for Refugees, played a vital role in these networks it is important to remember that they were also built upon local and international connections which had their roots in the 19th century. In addition, the Lord Mayor's Fund were certainly committed to tackling "root causes"; their emphasis on education, agriculture and health was underpinned by a desire to create a stable and prosperous future in which conflict and suffering was less likely to occur. But whilst their espousal of expert knowledge and the "scientific" approach to relief reflected inter-war trends, other aspects of their approach—education, labour and self-help—were deeply indebted to 19<sup>th</sup>-century philanthropic and missionary practices. Even though the Lord Mayor's Fund operated within a highly secular environment, their ethos was far from secular, and Christianity continued to underpin their work

Whilst at first sight the Lord Mayor's Fund and the Soviet Armenian authorities appeared to be pursuing radically different aims through their assistance of displaced and dispossessed of Soviet Armenia, the practices and objectives in reality had a great deal in common. Thus, the case of Armenia suggests that we need to think beyond cold war

71 "Only a handful of organizations became leading entities, however, and it is predominantly these successful groups that historians are now investigating." Branden Little: *An Explosion of New Endeavours: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era*, p. 9.

72 Keith Watenpaugh: *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*, Oakland 2015, p. 5.

frames of reference and consider in more nuanced ways the Soviet Union's place in the history of transnational humanitarianism. Taking the encounters between the Lord Mayor's Fund and Soviet Armenia seriously can, like the work of Erez Manela on disease control initiatives which crossed Cold War borders, help us to "interrogate some of the literatures fundamental categories and interpretive schemes" and "stretch the boundaries of current narratives."<sup>73</sup> In particular, this case study disrupts the accepted narrative of humanitarian relief flowing exclusively from a capitalist "west" to a less developed "south" and suggests a need to further investigate the ways that the Soviet Union positioned itself as an actor on the stage of international relief and development.

The Soviet Armenian authorities sought to represent themselves as a "humanitarian" actor, sheltering and protecting Armenian refugees and shaping this population into one fit for a Soviet future. Meanwhile, British providers of relief on the ground in Armenia and their benefactors in London were also prepared to "see like a state", seeking to cultivate a particular kind of Armenian population fit for life in an idealised Armenian nation.<sup>74</sup> Both the Lord Mayor's Fund and the Soviet Union both sought to realise, albeit in different ways, the utopian goal of building a modern Armenian state founded on the principle of a territorialised national identity. In *Empire of Humanity* Michael Barnett highlights the common assumption that it was the only in the post-cold war period "as humanitarianism began imagining how to build peace after war, they slipped into building states."<sup>75</sup> The case of Armenia demonstrates clearly how this process in fact began much earlier. Even in the years that followed the First World War the boundaries between the transformative visions of humanitarians and the modernising and nationalising agendas of modern states were porous; humanitarian practices of relief and resettlement and the population politics of modern states could appear remarkably similar.

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73 Erez Manela: A Pox on Your Narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History, in: *Diplomatic History* 34:2 (2010), pp. 299–233, p. 323.

74 I borrow this phrase from the title of James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*, New Haven 1998.

75 Michael Barnett: *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, p. 3.