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TRANSIT BEIRUT: UNHCR, DIASPORA NETWORKS, AND THE COVERT RESETTLEMENT OF ARMENIANS DURING THE COLD WAR

Abstract

A “most extraordinary” resettlement operation occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, during which thousands of Armenians from Bulgaria and Romania were systematically and discreetly resettled to the United States via Lebanon. This article explores how and why this small Levantine country became central to such a scheme and examines the roles of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the broader refugee regime in this resettlement process. Through an archive-based study of the Armenian resettlement scheme, the article foregrounds Beirut as a significant site for the articulation and development of the modern refugee regime. By highlighting the contributions of diaspora organizations such as the Armenian National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA), it demonstrates the intricate involvement of non-state actors in this regime.

The article argues that the Armenian diaspora not only facilitated but also significantly shaped the work of the UNHCR. Diaspora networks effectively advocated for the inclusion of transiting Armenians in Lebanon within the UNHCR’s mandate. They were also pivotal in persuading UNHCR to lobby the US Department of State to designate Lebanon as a processing country under the 1960 Fair Share Refugee Act. The subsequent extension of the act to Lebanon led to unprecedented UNHCR involvement in the country, establishing Lebanon as a key transit site for Eastern European Armenians on their routes to the United States.

خلاصة

شهدت خمسينيات وستينيات القرن الماضي عملية إعادة توطين “استثنائية للغاية”، أُعيد خلالها توطين آلاف الأرمن من بلغاريا ورومانيا بشكل منهجي وسري في الولايات المتحدة عبر لبنان. يستكشف هذا المقال كيف ولماذا أصبح هذا البلد الصغير محورياً لمثل هذا المخطط، ويدرس أدوار مفوضية الأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين ونظام اللاجئين الأوسع في عملية إعادة التوطين هذه. يبرز المقال، من خلال دراسة أرشيفية لخطة إعادة توطين الأرمن، بيروت كموقع مهم لصياغة وتطوير نظام اللاجئين الحديث. ومن خلال تسليط الضوء على مساهمات منظمات الشتات، مثل اللجنة الوطنية الأرمنية لمساعدة الأرمن المشردين (ANCHA)، يُظهر المقال التورط المعقد للجهات الفاعلة غير الحكومية في هذا النظام.

يجادل المقال بأن الشتات الأرمني لم يُسهّل عمل مفوضية الأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين فحسب، بل شارك في تكوينه أيضاً بشكل كبير. وقد دعت شبكات الشتات بفعالية إلى إدراج الأرمن العابرين في لبنان ضمن ولاية مفوضية الأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين. كما كان لهم دور

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محوري في إقناع مفوضية الأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين بالضغط على وزارة الخارجية الأمريكية لتصنيف لبنان كدولة معالجة بموجب قانون المشاركة العادلة للاجئين لعام ١٩٦٠. وأدى توسيع نطاق القانون لاحقاً ليشمل لبنان إلى مشاركة غير مسبقة من مفوضية الأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين في البلاد، مما جعل لبنان نقطة عبور رئيسية للأرمن من أوروبا الشرقية في طريقهم إلى الولايات المتحدة.



INTRODUCTION

Thousands of Armenians were resettled from Bulgaria and Romania to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s in what was described by representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as “one of the most extraordinary operations.”¹ The migration scheme was certainly noteworthy. It was part-and-parcel of US anti-communist activities. It was both systematic and discreet. But perhaps most intriguingly, the movement took place through Lebanon. How and why did this small Levantine country become so central in this scheme? And what was the role of UNHCR and the broader refugee regime in this resettlement?

The covert resettlement scheme unfolded at a pivotal moment of transition within the global refugee regime. This regime, generally viewed as a set of institutional actors governed by international norms based on an agreed definition of “the refugee,” was in its modern form developed by the United Nations (UN) following World War II.² UNHCR was established by the UN General Assembly in 1950, with its Statute and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees providing it with the moral authority and monopoly on legal and protection issues regarding refugees.³ The 1951 Convention was nonetheless limited both temporally and geographically, with these limitations only lifted through the passage of a protocol in 1967.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, UNHCR had become “the key element” in the post-war refugee regime, rapidly evolving into both a pragmatic and creative organization.⁴ This period marked the end of UNHCR’s major assistance programs to refugees in Europe and a shift in focus to “the new problems” of refugees outside Europe. Under High Commissioners August R. Lindt (1956–1960) and Felix Schnyder (1960–1965), UNHCR also became more experimental in its working methods.⁵ In 1961, for example, the organization was granted the

authority to assist both refugees within its mandate and those to whom the High Commissioner extended their good offices.⁶

Despite the significance of these developments for the global refugee regime, few scholars have explored UNHCR's early operations beyond Europe in detail. To date, seminal works include those of Cecilia Ruthström-Ruin, Gil Loescher, and Peter Gatrell.⁷ This scholarship examines the formation of the refugee regime post-World War II and how it was influenced by Cold War politics. It demonstrates how the post-war refugee situation rapidly became politicized, despite UNHCR's attempts to remain apolitical and humanitarian.⁸ Resettlement, for example, emerged as a particularly useful instrument of the Cold War, with the Soviet Union and the United States both attempting to position themselves as the "savior" of refugees. In this context, UNHCR appears to have played a significant role, particularly in the implementation of US interests.⁹

When it comes to understanding the intricate details of UNHCR's global development, we are only in the early stages, however. Knowledge on certain contexts and regions remain scant or missing altogether.¹⁰ Certainly, a nascent strand of literature has advanced our understanding of the complexities and transformation of UNHCR, attempting to write its history from "the margins" and in the context of decolonization.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Middle East has been identified as a region requiring more historical examination in terms of UNHCR's past operations and evolution.¹² Admittedly, we know very little about the extension of UNHCR's work to places like Cairo in the mid-1950s and Beirut in the early 1960s.

This article provides crucial insights into the expansion of the modern refugee regime in the Middle East by foregrounding Beirut as an important site for its articulation and development. During the decade between 1958 and 1967, Lebanon experienced relative prosperity and security, having gained independence from France in 1943 and recovered from its first civil war in 1958.¹³ Although the country was involved in both the creation of UNHCR and the drafting the 1951 Convention, it remained reluctant to accede to the main refugee protection instruments.¹⁴ Despite this, Lebanon sought to promote itself regionally as a "land of asylum and dialogue," long having offered refuge to minority groups such as the Armenians.¹⁵ In this context, my contribution demonstrates how the Armenian diaspora viewed Beirut as a valuable point of transit and as a convenient site for engagement with UNHCR.

Focusing on the role that diaspora organizations, networks, and individuals played as migration brokers, the article underscores the

importance of the Middle East for understanding global transformations during the second part of the twentieth century. My examination of the Armenian resettlement scheme not only uncovers a more comprehensive history of the evolution of the global refugee regime but also challenges the conventional understanding of the actors and processes recognized as forming this regime. Increasingly, scholars have called for a more “inclusive”¹⁶ and “holistic”¹⁷ approach to understanding the international refugee regime—one that recognizes the importance of institutions, relationships, and power dynamics beyond the framework of UNHCR and the 1951 Convention. My contribution highlights the Armenian National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA) as the primary driver behind the resettlement scheme, lobbying key actors in Washington, Geneva, and Beirut. ANCHA was led by American Armenian George Mardikian, known as one of the United States’ first celebrity chefs and a respected philanthropist. The transnational ANCHA experience illustrates that the refugee regime consisted not only of states and international organizations but was also intertwined with numerous non-state actors who helped organize and shape refugee assistance, protection, and durable solutions.

My contribution offers a distinct perspective on UNHCR-non-state interactions by focusing on an instance where diaspora actors *called on UNHCR*. While a growing body of historiography explores UNHCR’s interactions with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), this scholarship has largely focused on instances where UNHCR has tasked NGOs with *implementing* its programs.¹⁸ Indeed, in its early stages, UNHCR was intended to be “non-operational” and therefore relied on such NGOs. As noted by Gatrell et al., for instance, diaspora networks were “often co-opted by the refugee regime into providing support for refugees.”¹⁹ This article, however, demonstrates how the Armenian diaspora not only facilitated but also *shaped* UNHCR’s work in significant ways. First, through unsolicited lobbying for certain categories of Armenians in Lebanon to be included within UNHCR’s mandate, diaspora organizations effectively resisted the constraints initially imposed by the refugee regime. Second, diaspora organizations successfully leveraged the pinnacles of the regime—namely, the refugee definition—to legitimize their claims. This lobbying ultimately led the US Department of State to include Lebanon as a processing country under the 1960 Fair Share Refugee Act. The subsequent extension of the act to Lebanon resulted in unprecedented UNHCR involvement in the country, with UNHCR processing an average of 1,000 Armenian refugees for resettlement annually.²⁰ These

findings complement and extend scholarship on the role of diaspora networks in refugee resettlement during the Cold War.²¹

In examining the Armenian resettlement scheme, I primarily draw on sources from the archives of UNHCR and the World Council of Churches (WCC), both located in Geneva. This material is complemented by an analysis of the annual reports of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Lebanese newspaper *Daily Star*. Certainly, past experiences are consciously and unconsciously curated in the archives—not every story is told, and some voices are not heard.²² Admittedly, my sources mainly reflect the perspectives of those responding to refugees rather than the experiences of refugees themselves. ANCHA, for example, is the organization that, in its correspondence with states and UNHCR, represented the refugees' experiences. In speaking on behalf of the refugees, ANCHA mediated these experiences in a manner that suited its political aims and used a script that made the refugees legible as objects of humanitarian concern.²³ This gap in the available sources sits uneasily with the growing recognition that the question of “refugee voice” remains central to writing refugee histories.²⁴ But as Gatrell has noted, “Refugee history cannot just be about refugees;” it is also “bound up with a broader set of relations and practices.”²⁵ Thus, by focusing on the relations and practices of UNHCR and non-state actors such as ANCHA, this article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the global refugee regime.

From the vantage point of those who responded to the Armenian refugees, this article follows the journey undertaken by resettled Armenians. The story begins in Eastern Europe and takes us to the United States via Lebanon. Along the way, I spotlight the work of the diaspora as key migration brokers and explore how US policy changes expanded the role of UNHCR in Lebanon. Before doing so, however, I will set the scene with an overview of US refugee policies during the Cold War and a brief history of Armenian displacement.

US Refugee Policies and the Cold War

To understand the framework supporting the Armenian resettlement scheme, a few words must first be said about US refugee policies during the Cold War and how these relate to the UNHCR-led refugee regime. At the time, US refugee policy was largely driven by a prioritization of those fleeing communism and concerns about the growing threat of the Soviet Union.²⁶ As *Bon Tempo* has emphasized, the Cold War was “vital to the construction and maintenance of an American commitment to refugees.”²⁷ By the mid-1950s, for instance,

the US National Security Council was publicly encouraging defections from the Soviet bloc and asylum seekers to come to the United States.²⁸

Much has been written about US Cold War refugee policy through the lens of international relations and foreign policy.²⁹ Of interest here is how the US stance affected the development of a global refugee regime. While the United States had been a strong supporter of UNHCR's predecessor, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), it was unenthusiastic about UNHCR and chose not to ratify the 1951 Convention, despite participating in its drafting.³⁰ Instead, it adopted a unilateral approach to refugee policy and created competing refugee assistance organizations, such as the United States Escapee Program (USEP) and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM).³¹ Refugee programs and admission guidelines were developed by officials from the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and officials abroad implemented these programs.³²

In 1953, Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act, establishing a US refugee resettlement bureaucracy.³³ The act defined refugees, escapees, and expellees as distinct types of beneficiaries. As Hamlin has noted, however, "The United States admitted people based on its own refugee definition that paid homage to, but was much more ideologically restrictive than, the definition in the UN Refugee Convention."³⁴ While the 1951 Convention safeguarded the rights and welfare of persons "outside the country of their nationality," provided they could establish a "well-founded fear of being persecuted on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion," the US Relief Act defined a "refugee" as:

any person in a country or area which is neither Communist nor Communist-dominated, who because of persecution, fear of persecution, natural calamity or military operations is out of his usual place of abode and unable to return thereto, who has not been firmly resettled, and who is in urgent need of assistance for the essentials of life or for transportation.³⁵

An "escapee," on the other hand, was defined as:

any refugee who, because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, or political opinion, fled from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or other Communist, Communist-dominated or Communist-occupied area of Europe including those parts of Germany under military occupation by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and who cannot return thereto because of fear of persecution on account of race, religion or political opinion.³⁶

The Refugee Relief Act also provided for the admission of a small number of refugees from Asia and the Middle East.

From the perspective of UNHCR-US relations, US refugee policies took a decisively different turn in June 1959 when the UN proclaimed 1959–60 World Refugee Year (WRY). The campaign aimed to encourage states to focus on the issue of refugees in camps, provide additional financial support, and foster humanitarian solutions for resettlement.³⁷ By this time, the moral authority of the global refugee regime was gaining momentum worldwide, including in the United States.³⁸ In response to WRY, the Fair Share Refugee Act (sometimes referred to as the Walter Bill) was passed, enabling the United States to participate globally in the resettlement of certain refugees.³⁹ The act authorized the parole of up to 25 percent of the number of eligible refugee-escapees who had availed themselves of resettlement opportunities offered by other nations and was extended by the 1962 Migration and Refugee Assistance Act.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the passing of the Fair Share Refugee Act had a significant influence on the Armenian resettlement scheme; as this article will show, Armenians transiting in Beirut now needed to be found eligible for refugee status within UNHCR's mandate. This policy change arguably brought both Lebanon and the United States closer to the global refugee regime.

Armenians: Behind and Beyond the Iron Curtain

Migration and displacement are distinctive features of Armenian history.⁴¹ Following the Armenian Genocide of 1915–16 and World War I, for instance, many were displaced from their homes in the Ottoman Empire.⁴² Due to their global dispersal, Armenians have often been described as an “archetypal diaspora,”⁴³ with large communities in countries like the United States, France, and across the Middle East.⁴⁴ While they are certainly not a homogenous group, this article focuses on specific Armenian communities from Romania and Bulgaria and, to

the extent that they act as migration brokers, defined Armenian diaspora communities in Lebanon and the United States.

The settlement of Armenians in Bulgaria and Romania dates back to Byzantine times, but significant numbers sought refuge in these countries following the genocides of 1896. The new arrivals found support in small, long-established Armenian communities well-integrated into Romanian and Bulgarian societies. In Romania, approximately 20,000 arrivals fled Ottoman persecutions, while about 25,000 Armenians settled in Bulgaria following the opening of borders to refugees in 1922.⁴⁵ Many refugees carried Nansen passports – travel documents issued by the League of Nations to address the numerous problems of stateless refugees.⁴⁶

Increasing ethno-nationalist policies and accompanying legal discrimination, however, had a severe negative impact on minorities and those deemed “foreigners.”⁴⁷ In Romania, the “Nansen Armenians” were in an especially vulnerable position.⁴⁸ Many struggled with legal status and faced restrictions in employment, business, and real estate.⁴⁹ With the establishment of communist rule after World War II, Armenians experienced further economic marginalization and strict limitations on community life.⁵⁰ An internal UNHCR memo in 1960 described the situation of “foreign residents” in both Bulgaria and Romania as “intolerable” in the post-war period.⁵¹

During the 1950s–1970s, many Armenians fled to Western countries, particularly the United States.⁵² At the same time, the Soviet Union made strong attempts to resettle and/or repatriate Armenian communities to modern Armenia, which was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union between 1936 and 1990.⁵³ The Cold War was, in Scott’s words, “a battle for refugees.”⁵⁴ One aspect of this dynamic was the role of Armenian exiles in supporting the United States during the Cold War; for instance, ANCHA was established in 1947 to assist around 4,000 Armenian Displaced Persons (DPs) in Europe to settle in the US, including by securing sponsors who ensured housing and jobs for the newcomers.⁵⁵ As Laycock has explained, the inclusion of the term “homeless” in the organization’s name challenged the status of Soviet Armenia as homeland and helped argue that the United States was the best possible “home” for displaced Armenians.⁵⁶

Elsewhere in the post-Ottoman regional order, Lebanon and Syria provided refuge to a substantial number of Armenian genocide survivors. Since 1930, the headquarters of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia) has also been in the Lebanese town of Antelias, and its ministry covers most Armenian communities in the Armenian diaspora. By World War II Beirut had become the largest

urban concentration of Armenians in the Arab world.⁵⁷ In 1951, UNHCR estimated that there were some 80,000 Armenians in Lebanon, of whom all but about 10,000 had acquired Lebanese nationality.⁵⁸ However, UNHCR was reluctant to engage with this latter group. In fact, the original instructions for establishing UNHCR's Branch Office for the Middle East in Cairo in 1954 explicitly excluded Armenian stateless persons and refugees in both Lebanon and Syria.⁵⁹ UNHCR reasoned that

technically, perhaps, this . . . group may be determined, after full investigation, to be within the Mandate by virtue of the fact that they were covered by various pre-war conventions expressly mentioned in the High Commissioner's Statute. In practice, however, most of this group are considered as integrated (or in the process of integration).⁶⁰

Hence, when the Armenian Prelature in Lebanon contacted UNHCR in 1954 regarding assistance to Armenian political refugees from behind the "Iron Curtain" who had managed to escape to Lebanon and now sought emigration opportunities elsewhere, UNHCR flatly rejected the idea that they would be of concern to the office and recommended reaching out to WCC and ANCHA instead.⁶¹

The mid-1950s marked one of the first substantial interventions by Armenian diaspora organizations in the work of UNHCR. In 1957, the Portugal-based Gulbenkian Foundation—founded by British Armenian businessman and philanthropist Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian—sought cooperation with UNHCR in connection with a housing project for Armenian refugees in Beirut. In numerous letters, the foundation deplored UNHCR's detached approach to the Armenians and urged the organization to reconsider its position.⁶² The foundation even contributed \$10,000 for a UNHCR survey to study the Armenian group in Lebanon with a view to their inclusion within UNHCR's mandate. With money on the table, UNHCR eventually conceded. A survey materialized in 1959, exposing several categories of Armenian refugees, including "Armenians from Bulgaria and Romania, who have arrived in Lebanon with the ultimate intention of emigrating to the United States and who generally obtained Lebanese transit visas with the assistance of the American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA)."⁶³ It is this group whose journeys we will now follow.

EASTERN EUROPE TO LEBANON

Migration Brokers

"The whole movement," UNHCR's Gilbert Jaeger wrote in a 1960 internal memo, "seems . . . to be operated in its initial stage through a kind of secret Armenian network."⁶⁴ Indeed, discreet diasporic connections underpinned the movement of Armenians between Eastern Europe and the United States via Lebanon. For over a decade, the scheme was largely directed from Beirut by members of the Armenian community and local representatives of ANCHA, in close collaboration with the US Embassy in Beirut, and, from 1961, with the WCC and UNHCR. As long as the operation remained discreet, Lebanese authorities also sanctioned it; government institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Security Directorate—Lebanon's intelligence agency—were directly involved in issuing visas and granting permission for onward travel. I will now examine more closely the role of these actors in the first migration phase—the movement of Armenians from Eastern Europe to Lebanon.

ANCHA's George Mardikian was without doubt the foremost driver behind the Armenian resettlement scheme. The UNHCR archives are replete with examples of him coordinating efforts and—when needed—pressuring key actors in Washington, Geneva, and Beirut. Within UNHCR, Mardikian was described as an "influential personality in the States," having "important friends in the Senate, the Congress, the U.S. Government and the Press."⁶⁵ He also enjoyed "the friendship and esteem of the Arab countries."⁶⁶ That said, he was not an uncontroversial figure. I found ample discussion within UNHCR—including at the High Commissioner level—about how to manage the constant flow of requests made by Mardikian.⁶⁷

Most concerning to UNHCR were Mardikian's blatant attempts to impose his political views on UNHCR's operations. The records describe how Mardikian frequently visited UNHCR's Geneva headquarters as well as its branch office for the Middle East in Cairo in the late 1950s, with the "obvious purpose . . . to persuade the Branch Office to support only his group and not the opposition whom he had described as Communist merely because of the location of the Patriarchate."⁶⁸ At the time, the Armenian Orthodox community was roughly divided into two opposing groups: one supporting the patriarch in Soviet Armenia and the other supporting the patriarch in Lebanon.⁶⁹ UNHCR staff believed Mardikian sought to discredit other Armenian actors with whom UNHCR cooperated, such as the Swiss Friends of Armenia and the Howard Karagheusian Institute.⁷⁰ Despite this pressure, ANCHA was not disqualified from collaborating with

UNHCR, whose overall approach was to be “ready to cooperate with each and every group that is trying to help needy refugees irrespective of their backgrounds or beliefs.”⁷¹

While not a political organization per se, in Lebanon, ANCHA was closely connected with the nationalist Dashnak (Tashnag) Party, affiliated with President Camille Chamoun (1952–58).⁷² The party was seen as supportive of the US administration and hostile to Arab nationalism, socialism, and the Soviet Union.⁷³ The local ANCHA representative, Lucie Tosbath, was also the wife of Dikran Tosbath, a prominent Armenian member of parliament and director of one of Lebanon’s two major French-language dailies, *Le Soir*.⁷⁴ The records indicate that Dikran Tosbath and his parliamentary colleague Khatchig Babikian held exceptionally close ties with UNHCR and were instrumental in securing domestic acceptance and legitimacy for the organization’s early work in Lebanon.⁷⁵ For years, Babikian also acted as the legal consultant for several of UNHCR’s projects in Lebanon.⁷⁶

Visas for Lebanon

The migration process typically began with an Armenian in Bulgaria or Romania obtaining permission from the authorities to leave the country. A notable feature of the exit from Romania was the possibility of a legalized process involving the acquisition of a travel document and an exit visa.⁷⁷ This was no straightforward task, as both Romania and Bulgaria had developed into closed societies from the late 1940s, strictly controlling and limiting the mobility of their citizens.⁷⁸ In a 1960 letter to UNHCR, Mardikian described how, in order to obtain a visa or a passport, many Armenians resorted to bribing “petty officers of the Communist Government,” offering “money or gifts of their tools of the trade, household furniture and equipment.”⁷⁹ Permission to leave was generally granted only for short visits to “relatives or life-long friends” in Beirut or Athens, and never for the purpose of seeking political asylum.⁸⁰

Once approval to leave was granted, prospective migrants would write to their connections in Beirut, asking the Armenian community to obtain a Lebanese entry (transit) visa for them.⁸¹ Initially, such requests were referred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by individual relatives. However, due to the acceptance of “some doubtful cases (suspected Communists),” the Lebanese General Security Directorate requested a procedural change around 1960. The new procedure required Lebanese authorities to accept applications only from a nominated committee from within the Armenian community. This added an additional layer of screening, akin to the “moral

screening” described by Nowak in her research on the role of Polish diaspora organizations as mediators in mid-century resettlement processes to the United States.⁸² In Beirut, the committee notably comprised members of the Dashnak party. While assurances were given to UNHCR that committee decisions were not influenced by “domestic politics” but based solely on “international politics,” the screening favored the transit—and resettlement—of individuals deemed worthy (i.e., anti-communist), and excluded those considered unfit (i.e., suspected communists).⁸³

In addition to obtaining a favorable decision from the committee, applications were channeled through a specific travel agent. In the early days, an “operator” in Beirut would transfer funds to the relevant individuals in Bulgaria and Romania to enable them to purchase tickets and/or to obtain exit permits.⁸⁴ With the amended procedure, however, payments were largely made in Beirut. This meant that prospective migrants depended on relatives or others to conduct these transactions, including a “fee” to the travel agent of four-five dollars. UNHCR observed that those unable to make these arrangements were unlikely to be accepted for travel to Lebanon.⁸⁵

Despite these screening procedures, Lebanese authorities had considerable leverage in deciding how many visas to issue and when. In 1959, the General Security Directorate showed UNHCR staff “lists of several hundred Armenians who had come to the Lebanon for eventual movement to the United States.”⁸⁶ With the new procedures, however, those selected by the committee were, in principle, to be issued an entry visa by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided that there were not more than 200 such refugees in Lebanon at one time. That said, Lebanese authorities showed flexibility with these numbers, with UNHCR noting in 1961 that “there are at present 250 persons in the Lebanon and still visas have been issued for more.”⁸⁷ Yet, this flexibility could also tighten; in 1959, UNHCR’s Jaeger observed that Lebanese authorities were occasionally reluctant to issue transit visas because the Armenians concerned had not always been able to obtain visas for onward travel in a timely manner, and also because “others linger[ed] in Lebanon.”⁸⁸ Lebanese authorities remained adamant about preserving the country’s position as a transit site.

Armenians holding Lebanese entry visas were permitted to leave Romania and Bulgaria either directly to Beirut by ship or via Athens.⁸⁹ Most, however, were required to travel through Athens. The majority held Nansen passports and were thus considered *prima facie* within UNHCR’s mandate.⁹⁰ While UNHCR’s branch office in Athens initially struggled to fully understand the origins and scope of the

movement – let alone who was behind it – the Nansen passports meant that UNHCR became involved whenever issues arose.⁹¹ A recurring concern was that the travelers rarely had funds to cover their onward passage to Beirut or even their maintenance costs while in Greek transit. UNHCR was reluctant to assume responsibility for care and maintenance in Athens, as was the local branch of the United States Escapee Program (USEP).⁹² Eventually, USEP agreed to an unofficial arrangement with ANCHA, which, from 1961 onward, covered the costs in Greece on the condition that USEP formally considered the group eligible and paid the expenses associated with their migration from Lebanon to the United States.⁹³

Care and Maintenance in Beirut

Once in Beirut, new arrivals reported to the local ANCHA Representative, Lucie Tosbath, who collaborated closely with the US Embassy and the Beirut-based WCC Representative in the Middle East, Ruth Black.⁹⁴ Tosbath headed a “small unofficial committee” that had been set up specifically to assist Armenian refugees arriving from Romania and Bulgaria.⁹⁵ This committee included, in addition to Tosbath, a Jesuit father and a group of women: two representatives from the Hayg Club, one from the Lebanese Red Cross, and one from the Howard Karagheusian Foundation.⁹⁶

As in Athens, in Beirut there was a “serious problem of care and maintenance.”⁹⁷ UNHCR described the material conditions of some individuals as “quite precarious,”⁹⁸ worsened by the transit periods stretching up to a year or two in the more difficult cases.⁹⁹ To improve the situation, the Tosbath-led committee raised support from a wide range of organizations and individuals. The Lebanese Red Cross, for example, contributed free medication, milk, laboratory examinations, and half of all hospitalization bills, while the Gulbenkian Foundation covered the expenses for one year’s institutional care for “a mental case.” Individuals assisted with tasks ranging from purchasing sewing machines to arranging stay or work permits.¹⁰⁰

Despite this support, by 1961 the Tosbath committee was struggling: “The constant flow of refugees has been bringing up increasing problems which range from shelter, employment, schooling, to serious health problems involving hospitalization, surgical and institutional care, and which are beyond the facilities made available by the goodwill of local agencies and private individuals.”¹⁰¹ While Tosbath reached out to UNHCR with a request for financial support for the program, UNHCR remained hesitant to back the self-styled committee, preferring to channel financial assistance through the

WCC.¹⁰² Indeed, when UNHCR became properly involved in the resettlement scheme in 1961, it funded several WCC projects aimed at improving the situation of needy refugees in transit.¹⁰³

The entire operation was moreover a highly secret endeavor, tolerated by the Lebanese authorities only as long as it was discreetly carried out. Publicity was avoided at all costs.¹⁰⁴ In a 1966 conversation with UNHCR, for example, Armenian MP Babikian stressed that “when he, and other members of the Armenian community, first obtained permission for the issue of transit visas for Armenians from Eastern Europe it was on the understanding that the whole operation would be undertaken quietly because of the potential embarrassment to the Government of any advertisement of the operation.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in a 1963 letter to WCC Headquarters, Ruth Black described an encounter with “one of the top-ranking officials in the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs” at the office of UNHCR’s Beirut representative, Assad K. Sadry. According to Black, the official “expressed to me his great satisfaction with the way in which our Office here is carrying out this programme, particularly, he said, the tactful and discreet way in which our work is done in connection with the Sûrete-Generale, and the complete lack of publicity.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the Lebanese authorities not only sanctioned the resettlement scheme, but appeared to be closely and discreetly involved.

LEBANON TO THE UNITED STATES

US Policy Changes

Upon their arrival in Beirut, the Armenians from Bulgaria and Romania immediately began preparations for the next leg of their journey—traveling from Lebanon to the United States. As the resettlement scheme’s implementation from the early 1950s to the latter half of the 1960s coincided with a busy period in US migration politics, the Armenians and their brokers had to contend with constantly fluctuating policies. Prior to 1960, Armenians in transit in Beirut obtained immigration visas for the United States under the provisions of the 1953 and 1955 Refugee Relief Act (RRA), including the 1958 amendment to the act.¹⁰⁷ These visas were processed by the US Embassy in Beirut. There were well-established relationships between officers at the embassy and Armenian migration brokers, with UNHCR commenting internally that the embassy was “exceedingly understanding in granting visas under the RRA in many exceptional cases.”¹⁰⁸

In the summer of 1960, however, the entire resettlement scheme was jeopardized due to a significant policy change in the United States.

The passing of the Fair Share Refugee Act meant that, to qualify for emigration to the United States, the Armenians needed to be found eligible for refugee status within UNHCR's mandate.¹⁰⁹ While UNHCR had until this point largely been at the sidelines of the resettlement scheme, as the act was limited to the parole of refugees under the mandate of UNHCR, the organization now found itself unexpectedly center stage. More importantly, under the act, refugees needed to apply for "parole while physically present within the limits of any country which is not Communist dominated or Communist occupied" and not be "a National of the area in which the application is made."¹¹⁰ Centers where the INS and UNHCR sent representatives to conduct eligibility assessments and process resettlement cases were set up in five European countries: Greece (Athens), Italy (Rome), Austria (Vienna), Germany (Berlin), and France (Paris).¹¹¹ Lebanon was notably *not* on this list. This meant that about 1,000 Armenians from Romania and Bulgaria were not covered by the Fair Share Refugee Act and were de facto stranded in Beirut.¹¹² In response to this momentous dilemma, ANCHA launched a significant lobbying effort, directed first and foremost towards UNHCR.¹¹³ As I will show, these efforts soon paid off.

UNHCR's Expanding Role

The Armenian resettlement scheme unfolded at a time when UNHCR's activities in the Middle East were still relatively modest, with the region undoubtedly constituting the organization's smallest budget post.¹¹⁴ Out of a total of 1,300,000 refugees globally in 1962, for example, a mere 3,500 were presumed to be under UNHCR's mandate in Jordan, Lebanon, the United Arab Republic, and Syria combined.¹¹⁵ With such numbers, the situation in Beirut of an estimated 1,000 Armenians thought to be under UNHCR's mandate did unlikely go unnoticed in 1960. Even if it had, ANCHA's George Mardikian ensured that UNHCR was well-informed of the dilemma rooted in the Fair Share Refugee Act's list of processing countries. Writing to High Commissioner August R. Lindt in August 1960, Mardikian explained frankly:

Our problem: The number of qualified refugees of Armenian descent presently in these five countries may be counted on the fingers of a few hands and in our opinion, cannot exceed 100. But, at the same time, we have over 1,000 qualified Rumanian and Bulgarian escapees of Armenian descent who have

sought temporary haven in Beirut, Lebanon, pending resettlement. These refugees have gone into Beirut during the last 18 to 24 months, after having through one means or another escaped the Communist yoke.¹¹⁶

These stranded refugees, Mardikian argued, were eligible under UNHCR's mandate, and UNHCR therefore needed to take action:

In our opinion, these Armenian refugees are as deserving and as qualified and eligible as the best of any of the refugees that your office will protect or be instrumental in removing to permanent homes and havens of safety. They are eligible in all respects but nothing can be done to assist them until the High Commissioner and the Immigration and Naturalization Service dispatches its respective representatives to Beirut to prove these cases.¹¹⁷

Despite ANCHA's insistence that UNHCR be involved in its resettlement scheme, UNHCR approached the matter with caution. After all, the organization already had a policy on the Cairo branch office level not to provide protection and assistance to Armenians in the Middle East. However, with pressure from ANCHA and consistent requests from the Gulbenkian Foundation to engage with other groups of needy Armenians in Lebanon, UNHCR felt compelled to reconsider its hesitant stance. In the autumn of 1960, lengthy discussions took place at the highest level of UNHCR in Geneva. Head of UNHCR's legal division, Paul Weis, seemed to agree with Mardikian that the Armenians concerned were *prima facie* eligible. Moreover, Weis pointed out that there was nothing in the Fair Share Refugee Act that prevented the extension of the number of countries for processing:

If it is considered that this would be a desirable solution to the problem of refugees within the mandate of the Office, in a country not on the list, to include them under the operation of the Walter Bill, there appears no legal reason to prevent this Office recommending the extension of the plan to cover that country.¹¹⁸

UNHCR discussed the possibility of recommending that the US Department of State to consider Lebanon under the Fair Share Refugee Act. High Commissioner Lindt was positive about this extension.¹¹⁹ However, as the first step of this process, UNHCR needed to be satisfied that a substantial number of the Armenians concerned fell within UNHCR's mandate. Thus, while high-level discussions continued in the United States and in Geneva about a possible extension of the operation to Lebanon, UNHCR undertook assessments to ensure that the Armenians concerned were indeed *prima facie* under its mandate.

With the status of the Armenians affirmed, UNHCR formally recommended the US State Department to extend the Fair Share Refugee Act to Lebanon.¹²⁰ By December 1960, reports circulated that the State Department was favorably disposed towards declaring Lebanon "as a country deemed to have a refugee situation for the purpose of Public Law 86-648."¹²¹ By the end of January 1961, all expenses and activities in Beirut had been officially integrated into normal USEP procedures.¹²² This formality marked the beginning of UNHCR's direct involvement in eligibility determination and coordination of migration activities from Lebanon to the United States. It allowed UNHCR to solidify its presence in Lebanon and arguably contributed to the decision to open an office there the following year. Internally, UNHCR credited itself for the US policy change occurring "on the basis of reports from UNHCR."¹²³ However, as I've demonstrated, ANCHA's lobbying of UNHCR was crucial for UNHCR's initial decision to engage, and ANCHA arguably shaped the development of the refugee regime as a whole, including the direction of US refugee policy.

Eligibility and Resettlement

Following the decision to extend the Fair Share Refugee Act to Lebanon, UNHCR's deputy representative in Greece, Leslie Goodyear, conducted his first visit to Beirut in January 1961. Coordinating with the Athens-based INS representative, he interviewed and registered around 260 persons.¹²⁴ From that point on, Goodyear regularly undertook eligibility determinations and coordinated migration activities from Lebanon to the United States.¹²⁵ In 1963, for example, he made four visits to Beirut, each lasting about a week.¹²⁶ Until UNHCR opened its own office in Beirut in May 1962, office space and facilities were provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).¹²⁷ Goodyear's visits

continued until 1965, when he relocated to Beirut to become UNHCR's deputy representative for the Middle East.¹²⁸

For UNHCR, the examination, registration, and follow-up of an average of 1,000 refugees a year proved to be a resource-intensive task.¹²⁹ As Goodyear explained in a 1967 memorandum, maintaining statistics was essential to keep abreast of the situation and take appropriate action when cases were unduly delayed:

This became particularly important as the system used by the U.S. authorities is passive, in the sense that a case will get immediate attention when all documentation is complete, but if one paper is missing it will never be brought forward. As each person over 16 needs approximately ten different documents, this means that sometimes a family of five persons can still be held up even though 49 of the 50 papers are to hand.¹³⁰

Apart from UNHCR eligibility assessments, the resettlement scheme involved numerous formalities, including medical examinations, police checks, and requests for travel documents. The medical checks were conducted in cooperation with WCC at the American University Hospital, and the security assessments were done by the US Embassy in Beirut.¹³¹

UNHCR's eligibility assessments were generally straightforward. Mardikian had argued in his August 1960 letter to the High Commissioner that the Armenians concerned required international protection "because of the well-founded fear that they have had of persecution because of race, religion and nationality, and especially political opinion."¹³² Having "undergone untold hardships," and "political persecution," they escaped discrimination due to "purported membership in anti-Communist organizations or parties," with some having served jail time "for no other reasons than having committed political crimes, to wit, of being friendly to Western causes and against the political regime."¹³³ While the motivations and individual experiences of the Armenian refugees were certainly more complex than Mardikian conveyed,¹³⁴ Paul Weis at UNHCR headquarters agreed with Mardikian's views:

In our opinion it would appear that the Armenians concerned will be eligible as far as they are statutory

refugees under the terms of Article 1A(1) of the Convention, unless they fall under an exclusion or cessation clause, in particular unless they have acquired a new nationality and enjoy the protection of that nationality. Those who are new refugees from Romania and Bulgaria will also be *prima facie* eligible if they can show well-founded fear and their nationality is either Armenian, Romanian or Bulgarian or if they have no nationality.¹³⁵

The most complicated issue in these eligibility assessments arose from cases where the Armenians held foreign passports. Many carried Nansen passports, which UNHCR did not find problematic. Others had traveled from Romania and Bulgaria via Greece on Iranian passports. In these cases, UNHCR needed to determine the authenticity of the Iranian documents. During Goodyear's first assessments in January 1961, he found that 6 out of 9 families with Iranian passports held false documents.¹³⁶ These had their refugee status certified, while the documents of the remaining families were sent to the Iranian authorities for confirmation. This was done to establish whether the passports believed to be authentic also actually conveyed Iranian nationality proper. Weis at UNHCR headquarters opined that it was important to determine whether such passports were granted "merely 'par complaisance' to make possible the refugee's travel or whether they raise a presumption of nationality."¹³⁷ The possession of Iranian passports, Weis reasoned, might not prevent the persons concerned from being considered refugees within UNHCR's mandate. Weis' logic, though unsettling today, relates to what he perceived as differing concepts of nationality:

If the normal concept of nationality referable to these people is that of racial origin, it would seem that the possession of a passport need not necessarily raise the normal presumption of nationality which would be the case if the passport was issued by a country with the European idea of nationality.¹³⁸

In anticipation that these individuals would not be seen as Iranian citizens proper, the INS began processing these cases unofficially even before receiving final confirmation.¹³⁹ Overall, few UNHCR-registered refugees were rejected by the INS. Among the 240–250 acceptances in

March 1961, only a handful were declined, prompting Goodyear to remark that “this result is very satisfactory.”¹⁴⁰ Similarly, in July 1963, Goodyear interviewed 257 refugees and declared 222 eligible.¹⁴¹ Of the few rejected by the INS, most were on security grounds.¹⁴² Other cases were held back due to health issues, commonly tuberculosis.¹⁴³ As these individuals were still considered refugees within UNHCR mandate, UNHCR made efforts to provide care and, in certain cases, find permanent solutions elsewhere.¹⁴⁴

While Lebanese authorities occasionally expressed concern about the lengthy stays of some Armenians, chartered flights regularly left Beirut for New York, sometimes as often as once a month. In December 1962, for example, one plane carried 86 individuals, while in January 1963, another flight departed with 83 passengers.¹⁴⁵ UNHCR’s internal records indicate that throughout 1963, there were six flights carrying a total of 456 people.¹⁴⁶ The total number of departures increased in the following years—634 in 1965, 756 in 1966, and 751 in 1967.¹⁴⁷ With thousands of Armenians resettled in this manner, it was indeed “one of the most extraordinary operations.”¹⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

“When I say good-by, I know their troubles are just beginning,” WCC Representative Ruth Black remarked to members of Saint George’s Guild in Beirut on a January day in 1966.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, it was not always easy for the resettled Armenians to build new lives in the United States and to “leave their homes, their background and their culture completely.”¹⁵⁰ Upon their arrival in New York, they were aided financially and socially by WCC and ANCHA. Subsequently, many Armenians settled in California, their journeys having spanned three continents.¹⁵¹ If one listens to ANCHA, however, most appear to have thrived. In a letter to High Commissioner Lindt in 1960, George Mardikian described how:

Many of them have, within a very short time, purchased their own homes, farms, furniture and automobiles. Some have gone to work in factories and manufacturing plants. Others have gone into divers [sic] businesses such as grocery, restaurant, shoe repairing, garbage disposal, shoe and dress manufacturing, etc. Briefly, they have had no difficulties in being assimilated into the American economy and becoming good law-abiding citizens.¹⁵²

In this article, I have followed the Armenians' resettlement journeys in a transnational twentieth-century world, highlighting Beirut as an important site for the articulation and development of the global refugee regime. By adopting the perspectives and experiences of those who respond to refugees, I have demonstrated how the mid-century refugee regime comprised not only of states and international organizations but was also interwoven with a multitude of non-state actors who helped organize refugee assistance, protection, and durable solutions. My contribution showed how Armenian diaspora organizations not only facilitated the Armenian resettlement scheme but also shaped the work of UNHCR; they lobbied for certain categories of Armenians in Lebanon to be included within UNHCR's mandate and strategically utilized the pinnacles of the refugee regime—namely, the refugee definition—to legitimize their claims. Initially hesitant to engage with Armenian refugees in the Middle East, UNHCR eventually yielded following pressure from the diaspora.

I identified the adoption of the US Fair Share Refugee Act in 1960 as a pivotal moment of UNHCR engagement. While UNHCR successfully lobbied for the US Department of State to include Lebanon as a processing country under this act—thus allowing thousands of Armenians to continue using Lebanon as the main transit site on their resettlement journey to the United States—I demonstrated that this lobbying by UNHCR would have been unlikely without persistent pressure from ANCHA and George Mardikian. This perspective not only contributes to a more comprehensive history of how the global refugee regime has evolved but also offers significant insights into how local and transnational histories provide alternative understandings of how that regime was mobilized also by diaspora networks, organizations, and individuals.

The Armenian diaspora considered Beirut a valuable point of transit and a convenient site for engagement with UNHCR. At a crucial time of UNHCR expansion, the Armenian resettlement scheme not only enabled UNHCR to solidify its presence in Lebanon but also contributed to shaping the perception of Lebanon as a country of *transit*. Future research should explore in more detail this aspect of Lebanese asylum and refuge, particularly how notions of a Lebanese transit state intersect with instances of Lebanese “tolerance” of *temporary* refugee presences, a distinct preference of discreet and informal arrangements in handling of refugee affairs, and a substantial reliance on non-state actors for refugee care and maintenance.

NOTES

- ¹ Sadry to High Commissioner, 9 October 1964, F11-S1-B69, ARC-2/A40, Missions to Various Countries of DHC 62-65, UNHCR Archives, Geneva.
- ² Claudena Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ³ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 150; Statute of the Office of the UNHCR, 14 December 1950, UNGA Res 428(v).
- ⁴ Peter Gatrell, Anindita Ghoshal, Katarzyna Nowak, and Alex Dowdall, "Reckoning with Refugeeedom: Refugee Voices in Modern History," *Social History* 46 (2021): 70–95.
- ⁵ Felix Schnyder, "Statement by Mr. Felix Schnyder, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to the Thirty-Seventh Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 1 May 1964," Speeches and Statements, UNHCR, accessed 19 June 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/statement-mr-felix-schnyder-United-nations-high-commissioner-refugees-thirty-seventh>.
- ⁶ Gil Loescher, "UNHCR's Origins and Early History: Agency, Influence, and Power in Global Refugee Policy," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 33 (2017): 82.
- ⁷ Cecilia Ruthström-Ruin, *Beyond Europe: The Globalization of Refugee Aid* (Lund: Lund Studies in International History, 1993); Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gatrell, *Making of the Modern Refugee*.
- ⁸ Gatrell, *Making of the Modern Refugee*.
- ⁹ Carl Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Philip E. Wolgin, "Beyond National Origins: The Development of Modern Immigration Policymaking, 1948–1968" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011); Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Introduction: UNHCR and the Global Cold War," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27 (2008): 3; Loescher, *UNHCR and World Politics*.
- ¹⁰ Loescher, "UNHCR's Origins," 77. See also Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak, and Peter Gatrell, "What Is Refugee History, Now?," *Journal of Global History* 17 (2022): 1–19.
- ¹¹ Ria Kapoor, *Making Refugees in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Laura Madokoro, *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Glenn Peterson, "The Uneven Development of the International Refugee Regime in Postwar Asia: Evidence from China, Hong Kong and Indonesia," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25 (2012): 326–43; Malika Rahal and Benjamin T. White, "UNHCR and the Algerian War of Independence: Postcolonial Sovereignty and the

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¹² Jordi Tejel and Ramazan H. 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 (2020): 1–15.

¹³ Caroline Attié, *Struggle in the Levant: Lebanon in the 1950s* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); Imad Salamey, *The Government and Politics of Lebanon* (London: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁴ Maja Janmyr, “No Country of Asylum: ‘Legitimizing’ Lebanon’s Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 29 (2017): 438–65; Maja Janmyr, “Lebanon and the Establishment of International Refugee Law,” in *Refugee Governance in the Arab World: The International Refugee Regime and Global Politics*, eds. Tamirace Fakhoury and Dawn Chatty (London: I. B. Tauris, 2025), 103.

¹⁵ Kirsten E. Schulze, *The Jews of Lebanon: Between Coexistence & Conflict* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 101. See also Jihane Sfeir, “Le Liban, Pays de Refuge: Généalogie des Réfugiés Arméniens, Palestiniens et Syriens (1915–2015),” *Relations Internationales* 172 (2017): 39–50.

¹⁶ Peter Gatrell, “Refugeedom: Making Room in the Crowded Conceptual Terrain,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 91(2024): 630.

¹⁷ Rebecca Hamlin, *Let Me Be a Refugee: Administrative Justice and the Politics of Asylum in the United States, Canada, and Australia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

¹⁸ Peter Gatrell, “The World-Wide Web of Humanitarianism: NGOs and Population Displacement in the Third Quarter of the Twentieth Century,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 23 (2016): 101–15.

¹⁹ Gatrell et al., “Reckoning with Refugeedom,” 87.

²⁰ Staffing UNHCR BO Beirut, 31 January 1967, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.

²¹ 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 (2019): 621–42; Jo Laycock, “Armenian Homelands and Homecomings, 1945–9,” *Cultural and Social History* 9 (2012): 103–23.

²² Anne Irfan, “Historical Silencing and Epistemic In/Justice through the UNRWA Archive,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (2023): 13–33.

²³ For an overview of mediated representations of Armenian refugees in the archives of humanitarian organizations in the United States, see Veronika Zablotzky, “Affecting Appeals: Armenian Refugee Narratives in the Archives of Early Humanitarian Discourse,” in *The Routledge Handbook of*

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²⁴ Gatrell et al., “Reckoning with Refugeedom.”

²⁵ Peter Gatrell, “Refugees – What’s Wrong with History?,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30 (2017): 178.

²⁶ Rebecca Hamlin, “Ideology, International Law, and the INS: The Development of American Asylum Politics 1948–Present,” *Polity* 47 (2015): 322–23.

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²⁸ Wolgin, “Beyond National Origins,” 141–43. See also Erik Scott, *Defectors: How the Illicit Flight of Soviet Citizens Built the Borders of the Cold War World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

²⁹ Donna Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Monique Laney, *German Rocketeers in the Heart of Dixie: Making Sense of the Nazi Past during the Civil Rights Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); María Cristina García, *The Refugee Challenge in Post-Cold War America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Maddalena Marinari, *Unwanted: Italian and Jewish Mobilization Against Restrictive Immigration Laws, 1882–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America’s Half-Open Door: 1945 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

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³² Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*, 6.

³³ Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*; Hamlin, “Ideology,” 323.

³⁴ Hamlin, “Ideology,” 324.

³⁵ Refugee Relief Act of 1953, Section 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees 1956–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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⁴⁰ Public Law 87-510, 28 June 1962.

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⁴³ Laycock, "Armenian Homelands," 105.

⁴⁴ Anny Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993); Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Richard Hovannisian, "The Ebb and Flow of the Armenian Minority in the Arab Middle East," *Middle Eastern Journal* 28 (1974): 19–32; Migliorino, *(Re)Constructing Armenia*; Tsolin Nalbantian, *Armenians Beyond Diaspora: Making Lebanon Their Own* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 5.

⁴⁵ Ștefan C. Ionescu, "Loyal Citizens or Dangerous Stateless Refugees? The 'Armenian Question' in World War II Romania, 1940–44," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19 (2017): 320; Evgenia Miceva, "The Armenians in Bulgaria: A Community Portrait," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 179 (2006): 91.

⁴⁶ Ionescu, "Loyal Citizens," 319.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 330.

⁵⁰ István Horváth and Ilke Veress, "The Armenians in Romania: Cultural Strategies and State Policies," in *Armenians in Post-Socialist Europe*, ed. Konrad Siekierski and Stefan Troebst (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 182.

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⁵² Yura Konstantinova and Ivaylo Nachev, eds., *С Поглед към Америка: Изселването на Български Арменци от Социалистическа България* [Looking at America: The emigration of Bulgarian Armenians from socialist Bulgaria] (Sofia: Факел, 2019), 43–55.

⁵³ Laycock, "Armenian Homelands."

⁵⁴ Scott, *Defectors*, 3.

⁵⁵ Mardikian to Lindt, 31 August 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.

⁵⁶ Laycock, "Armenian Homelands," 111.

⁵⁷ Migliorino, *(Re)Constructing Armenia*, 89; Nalbantian, *Armenians Beyond Diaspora*.

- ⁵⁸ Gulbenkian Foundation, 6 December 1957, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Parovian to Hoveyda, 2 June 1954, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁶² Gulbenkian to Sadry, 6 October 1958, F11-S1-B285, 15.LEB.ARM, UNHCR Archives; Essayan to Lindt, 21 February 1959, F11-S1-B285, 15.LEB.ARM, UNHCR Archives; Read to Essayan, 2 April 1959, F11-S1-B285, 15.LEB.ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁶³ Jaeger to Weis, 31 August 1959, F11-S1-B159, 6/1/LEB Protection Lebanon, UNHCR Archives. Translated from French by the author.
- ⁶⁴ Visit of Mr. Saroyan, Vice-President of ANCHA, 18 July 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁶⁵ Sharaf to High Commissioner – Armenian Refugees in North Africa, 13 March 1963, F11-S1-B268 15/39, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ See for example Sadry to High Commissioner – Permanent Solutions for Armenian Refugees, 9 December 1958, F11-S1-B268 15/39, UNHCR Archives; Beerman to Deputy High Commissioner – Permanent Solutions for Armenian Refugees, 19 November 1958, F11-S1-B268 15/39, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Sadry to High Commissioner, 9 December 1958.
- ⁷⁰ Beerman to Deputy High Commissioner, 19 November 1958.
- ⁷¹ Sadry to High Commissioner, 9 December 1958.
- ⁷² Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960. For more on Dashnak, see also Nalbantian, *Armenians Beyond Diaspora*, 4.
- ⁷³ Nalbantian, *Armenians Beyond Diaspora*, 4.
- ⁷⁴ Jaeger to Weis, 31 August 1959.
- ⁷⁵ Monthly Report, July 1963, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁷⁶ Monthly Report, June 1966, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives; Monthly Report, March 1967, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ⁷⁷ Armenian Refugees Transiting Greece, 9 August 1960.
- ⁷⁸ To an extent, however, the communist system of state-governed migration also incorporated certain “preferential” exit options for members of ethnic minorities, Armenians included. See for example Rainer Ohliger and Cătălin Turliuc, “Minorities into Migrants: Emigration and Ethnic Unmixing in Twentieth-Century Romania,” in *European Encounters: Migrants, Migration and European Societies Since 1945*, eds. Rainer Ohliger, Karen Schönwälder, and Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos (London: Routledge, 2017).

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⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Lebanon – Fourth Report. Migration of Armenian Refugees from Lebanon to the U.S.A.," Attachment, in Migration from Lebanon – ICEM, 06 February 1961, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives. See also Armenian Refugees Transiting Greece, 9 August 1960.

⁸² Nowak, "To Reach the Lands of Freedom," 636.

⁸³ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 06 February 1961.

⁸⁴ Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960.

⁸⁵ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 06 February 1961. See also Armenian Refugees Transiting Greece, 9 August 1960. On the historical role of travel agents as migration brokers in Eastern Europe, see generally Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017).

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⁸⁷ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961.

⁸⁸ Jaeger to Weis, 31 August 1959.

⁸⁹ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961. See also Armenian Refugees Transiting Greece, 9 August 1960; Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960; Arrival of Armenian refugees from Rumania in the Lebanon (through Greece), 19 April 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives; Armenian refugees in transit in Greece on the way to Lebanon, 24 May 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.

⁹⁰ See Statute of the Office of the UNHCR, 14 December 1950, UNGA Res 428(v), para. 6(A).

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⁹⁴ Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960.

⁹⁵ Request for Assistance to Refugees in Lebanon Rejected by the USA, 27 January 1961, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.

⁹⁶ Request for Assistance to Refugees in Lebanon, 27 January 1961.

⁹⁷ Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960.

⁹⁸ Armenian Refugees Transiting Greece, 08 July 1960.

⁹⁹ Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960.

- ¹⁰⁰ Request for Assistance to Refugees in Lebanon, 27 January 1961.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.; Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960; Mardikian to Lindt, 31 August 1960.
- ¹⁰³ Monthly Report, December 1963, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives; Monthly Report, January 1964, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁰⁴ Publicity Regarding Escape from Russia of Two Armenian Refugees, 4 October 1966, F11-S2-B121, 100/LEB/ARE Refugees from the Arab Republic of Egypt, UNHCR Archives. See also Publicity – Armenians from Eastern Europe, 25 October 1966, 100/LEB/ARE, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁰⁵ Publicity – Armenians from Eastern Europe, 11 October 1966, 100/LEB/ARE, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁰⁶ Black to Jaboor, 6 March 1963, 425.5.089 Lebanon Zahle Project, Near East Zahle Project II, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva.
- ¹⁰⁷ Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960.
- ¹⁰⁸ Armenian Refugees Transiting Greece, 9 August 1960.
- ¹⁰⁹ The Fair Share Refugee Act, Public Law 86-648, 14 July 1960. The act lasted through July 1962 before it was extended indefinitely by the act dated to 28 June 1962. See United States, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), *Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, DC: US Government Publishing Office, 1962), 4, <https://archive.org/details/annualreportofim1962unit/page/4/mode/2up>.
- ¹¹⁰ The Fair Share Refugee Act authorized the Attorney General to parole refugees into the United States under the provisions of section 212(d)(5) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5) (1964).
- ¹¹¹ Mardikian to Lindt, 31 August 1960.
- ¹¹² Visit of Mr. Saroyan, 18 July 1960.
- ¹¹³ Armenians in Beyrouth, 18 August 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹¹⁴ See, for example, General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, A/6311/Rev. 1, 1 January 1966, Refworld – Global Law & Policy Database, UNHCR, accessed 10 June 2025, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/unhcr/1966/en/42200>.
- ¹¹⁵ General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, A/5511/Rev.1, 1 January 1964, Refworld – Global Law & Policy Database, UNHCR, accessed 10 June 2025, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/unhcr/1964/en/42097>.
- ¹¹⁶ Mardikian to Lindt, 31 August 1960.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ Armenians and the Walter Bill, 12 October 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives. See also Eligibility of Armenians under Public Law 86-648, 26

October 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives; Draft Letter to Mr. Mardikian – President of ANCHA, 9 November 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.

¹¹⁹ Incoming Cable, 12 November 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.

¹²⁰ Armenians and the Walter Bill, 12 October 1960; Eligibility of Armenians under Public Law 86-648, 26 October 1960; Draft Letter to Mr. Mardikian – President of ANCHA, 9 November 1960.

¹²¹ Jamieson to Davis, 6 December 1960, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.

¹²² Ibid. The INS Annual Report for 1961 mentions Lebanon along with the five original European countries for INS processing. See INS, *Annual Report*, 4.

¹²³ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961.

¹²⁴ Request for Assistance to Refugees in Lebanon, 27 January 1961; Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961.

¹²⁵ Jaeger to Mardikian, 20 December 1960, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives. See also Staffing UNHCR BO Beirut, 31 January 1967, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.

¹²⁶ Monthly Report, December 1963, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.

¹²⁷ Jamieson to Davis, 6 December 1960, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.

¹²⁸ Staffing UNHCR BO Beirut, 31 January 1967, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961.

¹³² Mardikian to Lindt, 31 August 1960.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The framing of the refugees might not wholly be correct and must be understood in context, where the norms and expectations of the refugee regime and diaspora communities were particularly influential. For a discussion, see Gatrell et al., “Reckoning with Refugeedom”; Nowak, “To Reach the Lands of Freedom.”

¹³⁵ Armenians and the Walter Bill, 12 October 1960.

¹³⁶ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961.

¹³⁷ Armenians and the Walter Bill, 12 October 1960.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Lebanon – Fourth Report, 6 February 1961.

¹⁴⁰ Migration of Armenian Refugees from Lebanon, 30 March 1961, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives. See also Assistance to refugees in Lebanon rejected under P.L. 86-648, 4 May 1961, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.

- ¹⁴¹ Monthly Report, July 1963, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴² Assistance to Refugees in Lebanon Rejected under P.L. 86-648, 4 May 1961, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴³ See for example, Monthly Report, June 1966; Monthly Report, October 1967, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴⁴ Assistance to Armenian Refugees in Lebanon, 3 August 1961, 15/LEB/ARM, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴⁵ Beirut Monthly Report, December 1961, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives; Monthly Report, January 1963, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴⁶ Monthly Report, December 1963, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴⁷ Monthly Report, November 1965, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives; Monthly Report, December 1966, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives; Monthly Report, December 1967, F20-SF4-PERHQ, UNHCR Archives.
- ¹⁴⁸ Sadry to High Commissioner, 9 October 1964.
- ¹⁴⁹ Darla Brooks, "Her Work is to Aid European Refugees," *Daily Star Lebanon*, 12 January 1966.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁵¹ See Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans*.
- ¹⁵² Mardikian to Lindt, 31 August 1960.