**“Marks Hard to Erase”: The Troubled Reclamation of “Absorbed” Armenian Women, 1919-1927**

The story of Zumroot echoes the stories of many thousands of Armenian women and girls during and after World War I.[[1]](#footnote-1) She was twenty when her father was killed by the Young Turks in the summer of 1915, and she was deported on foot from her home in Urfa in southern Turkey, with her mother and sisters, towards Rakka and the Syrian desert. Somewhere along the way her sisters were lost; Zumroot and her mother seized an opportunity to hide themselves in a pit while the deportation caravan moved on. They sheltered in a mill, but soon afterwards her mother died; some Arabs found Zumroot and took her to their village, where one of them married her. Four months later she was sold for five sheep to another Arab, with whom she lived for eight years. At some point, Zumroot was tattooed on her face by her captors—small, simple patterns inked into her forehead, her cheeks, her chin, and underneath her lips—a tribal custom which marked her as a woman and a wife, and also, symbolically and visually, completed her absorption into the Bedouin community.

In 1923 an Armenian carriage driver passed through, and told Zumroot he would save her if she married him. She escaped with him to Rakka, but on their arrival some Armenians told her the man was in fact a Turk, not an Armenian. She fled the same night to an Armenian family, and was sent on to the League of Nations Reception House in Aleppo. Reception House was run by Karen Jeppe, a former Danish missionary, who in 1921 was appointed to the League’s newly-formed Commission for the Protection of Women and Children. It was set up to recover Armenian women and children who had been forcibly “absorbed” into Turkish, Kurdish, and Bedouin households during the genocide, and to reintegrate them into the Armenian community.[[2]](#footnote-2) There Zumroot joined roughly 100 other women, girls, and boys, was given Bible and Armenian language classes, and was taught a trade in order to become self-supporting. She stayed a little longer than most—eighteen months—working in the sewing room to pay her way, and left in 1925 to marry an Armenian farmer in one of the agricultural colonies Jeppe established to provide Armenians with the means to make a new life.

Zumroot’s story is chronicled in one of the marble-bound Reception House intake registers, the 345th of what would become almost 1700 stories of escape and rescue by the end of 1927, when the League ceased its financial support.[[3]](#footnote-3) The narrative of her deportation, capture, and multiple escapes makes no mention of her tattoos, however, and in fact the marks are hardly visible in her identification photograph pasted to the page’s top-right corner. In one of Jeppe’s personal photograph albums, another photograph (Fig.1)**<FIG. 1 NEAR HERE>** shows her standing alone in Reception House, thick hair plaited back, gaze steadily holding the camera, tattoos plainly visible.[[4]](#footnote-4) A third picture of Zumroot, in “traditional” ornamental clothing, appeared on the front cover of a 1927 issue of *Orient im Bild* (Fig.2), **<FIG. 2 NEAR HERE>** the fundraising newsletter of the Deutsche Orient Mission, for whom Jeppe had once worked and who now partly funded her reconstruction projects.[[5]](#footnote-5) The portrait is captioned “An Armenian woman tattooed by Moslems,” but Zumroot is not mentioned in any of the articles—one a piece by Jeppe about refugees in Aleppo.[[6]](#footnote-6) The disjunctures between image and text here are more than coincidental. The *absence* of Zumroot’s story alongside her striking visual presence in *Orient im Bild*, the elision of her tattoos in the image and text of the intake register, and the more relaxed, self-assured composition of the album photograph, all bespeak a particular moment in interwar humanitarianism—when the visual rhetoric conventionally used in humanitarian campaigns, of disfigured, suffering bodies, began to jar with the emerging humanitarian agendas of national reconstruction. This ambivalent portrayal, and the exclusion of the tattooed women by most other relief workers, resonates with a longer history of the troubled relationship between humanitarianism, and those it finds less salvageable.

 The tensions over who was deemed recuperable and representable in these national reconstruction projects after World War I are highlighted by a focus on the worldviews and practices of the relief organizations and workers involved in the rescue of Armenian women who, like Zumroot, were recovered from Muslim households after being tattooed.[[7]](#footnote-7) The reclamation of these women and girls was part of a broader, almost unprecedented relief effort following the genocide of the Armenians by the Young Turks. At first emergency relief was given, where possible, to those who survived the deportation marches into the desert. One of the most important providers was the specially-formed American charity Near East Relief (NER), which deployed missionaries and other skilled and semi-skilled volunteers throughout the crumbling Ottoman Empire.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, following the Armistice in 1919, NER began to shift its efforts away from emergency relief towards the reconstruction of the Armenian community, as a religious, cultural, and distinct national entity. The League of Nations, too, joined in this project when it created the Commission in 1921.

These two organizations, and their different constituencies of relief workers, held varied views on how national reconstruction could best be achieved; but none, except Karen Jeppe and her backers, could countenance the tattooed women as “fit” to be part of this national rejuvenation. For most missionaries working for NER, the women’s tattoos constituted a barrier to their re-inclusion. Unlike the children, who were more easily re-absorbed, these women bore on their skin visible, permanent reminders of their “defilement” by non-Christian men. NER policymakers, too, focused on the orphans, as the more moldable and morally untainted “future of the race” (and a staple of philanthropic giving). Other NER workers—usually young, college-educated men and women who signed up for overseas relief in order to see the world, as well as do good in it—brought their own worldviews to the situation, tending to see the more educated, cultured Armenians, including rescued women, as the basis for national regeneration—although they still baulked at the tattoos. Jeppe, on the other hand, felt the surest basis for national reconstruction was to concentrate on those whose Armenian identity was strongest—and did not differentiate between those with tattoos and those without. Since her operations were fulfilling the goals of the Commission and were wholeheartedly supported by the Armenophile activists otherwise barraging the League for action, the League administrators acquiesced.

These different responses were emblematic of the shifts in humanitarianism in the immediate aftermath of World War I, and here particularly of the national reconstructionist projects launched in its wake. To date, scholarly work on the humanitarian efforts to recover Armenian women and children has been silent on the tattoos—including Keith David Watenpaugh’s 2010 article in this journal, despite his focus on the rescue efforts of the League and Karen Jeppe.[[9]](#footnote-9) Since this historiographical elision is unlikely to have arisen from the same discomfiture that affected contemporary witnesses, it seems that the tattoos have thus far been deemed a “marginal” phenomenon, unlikely to yield significant meaning about Armenian national reconstruction and the “new” humanitarian moment. However, examining the responses of relief workers to the tattooed women—and, crucially, to the question of their *recuperability*, not their *rescue*—reveals the unacknowledged but very real, un-breachable constraints within which a self-proclaimedly modern and “omnipotent” new humanitarianism was operating. As an emerging historiographical consensus on interwar humanitarianism argues, this period saw a transition from the (predominantly missionary-led) “civilizing mission” of the nineteenth century to a humanitarianism which, Keith Watenpaugh posits, was “envisioned by its participants and protagonists as a permanent, transnational, institutional, neutral, and secular regime for understanding and addressing the root causes of human suffering.”[[10]](#footnote-10) But it is also becoming clear that this transition was not as neat as Watenpaugh’s work implies; other scholars are depicting, more forcefully, a time of “overlapping” and “contested” change, replete with “conjunctures” and “contingencies,” and have, for example, questioned his claim of “professionalization.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Therefore, by expanding the analytical frame to include a wider range of humanitarian organizations and actors who were responding to the same “challenge”—not only the League, but also NER, and their respective constituencies of relief workers, both “old hands” and new—we can demonstrate more fully how, in this transitionary moment, the policies and practices which evolved and coexisted were often contradictory, and contested on the ground. None of this was neat, of course: for in this moment of change, as in any, old attitudes endured, or re-emerged, reconfigured and embedded in the new; and here it is precisely the tattoos which allow us to understand how the different constituencies of relief workers, as well as their employers and donors, negotiated the changes for themselves.

 Watenpaugh labels the “regime” which emerged from this transition (and from precisely this case of Armenian relief) as “modern” humanitarianism, a rather loosely-conceptualized term he seems to use without any sense of the freight “modern” carries, or its contestedness.[[12]](#footnote-12) There is a more illuminating, deeper relationship with modernity to consider here, if by “modern” we mean the utopian biopolitical projects of the twentieth century and beyond, which claim for themselves the ability and power to reshape, transform, and administer populations in the name of group “progress” and “purity.”[[13]](#footnote-13) In this vein, interwar humanitarian organizations like NER and the League claimed the power to fix, transform, and “save” those affected by the world’s ills, regardless of markers like religion, nationality, or troublesome past.[[14]](#footnote-14) But as humanitarian projects of national reconstruction, these were also fear and anxiety-driven processes of inclusion and exclusion in the name of nation-building—very recognizably modern, if in a way not implied by Watenpaugh. The tensions and disjunctures here—themselves very modern—tended to be resolved on the ground: the relief workers proved themselves reluctant to see the Armenian refugees in “humanitarian” terms, as all equally recuperable. The variety of responses to the women’s tattoos shows that the relief workers were hardly “neutral” in the administrative “processing” of all those who came, and instead categorized and divided them along a line of moral, cultural, or national “value” and “purity.” Thus, a more revealing understanding of the humanitarian projects of Armenian rescue and reclamation can be achieved by seeing it as a fully modern nation-building exercise, characterized by redemptive and transformational visions, gendered practices of inclusion and exclusion, and the manufacture of a visual aesthetic of a “pure” and “healthy” community. And while the ideological frameworks through which humanitarians categorize refugees and displaced persons have since evolved, more recent studies of humanitarian practice on the ground suggest that humanitarians continue to divide and ostracize those they categorize as “troublesome” or “incorrigible.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

The contradictions inherent in these modern claims to *be able to* remedy (logistically, legally and socially, and transformationally) these individual and collective ills, without regard for category markers, are made clearer here through a bottom-up history of relief workers in the field, rather than a purely organizational history.[[16]](#footnote-16) Here, looking afresh at well-trodden missionary archives and League papers, exploring previously unused archives of NER workers, and paying close attention to the composition of photograph albums and individual images in these collections, offers suggestive results. For in the case of the tattooed women, it is the writings and photograph collections of the relief workers which open up these contradictory histories of rescue, rejection, and sometimes inclusion, in a way that the sensationalist but otherwise reticent fundraising campaigns and official histories do not. Historians of humanitarianism have rarely integrated the analysis of visual sources into their research thus far (Watenpaugh, for example, uses images largely illustratively).[[17]](#footnote-17) And yet the visual record is key here—not only because of the “visual” nature of the tattoos, or because photographs are useful additional sources for a fragmentary source base, but because the representation of the tattooed women and of Armenian national reconstruction in these images and albums powerfully communicates the tensions and contradictions within the humanitarian project of rescue and reclamation.

Photography had been central to these humanitarian fundraising campaigns since the late nineteenth century, as Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno have recently noted, providing campaigners with an evidentiary basis for their claims and helping to generate sympathy (whether through sensationalism or more sober images).[[18]](#footnote-18) Here, it became intrinsic to the construction of who, and under what circumstances, was “recuperable.” The young historiography on humanitarian photography has thus far focused on humanitarian campaigners’ use of photographs to bolster their verbal rhetoric; a staple strategy was the use of raw images of disfigured, suffering bodies (famine-stricken victims of British policies in colonial India, the mutilated limbs of rubber-plantation slaves in the Belgian Congo), as visual evidence which worked in tandem with their verbal indictments of imperial authorities’ treatment of colonial subjects.[[19]](#footnote-19) In the postwar period, such raw images of suffering continued to be a viable visual strategy for those humanitarian programmes aiming at *systemic* change—combatting the global social ills of slavery, disease, trafficking, or improving the rights of minorities, refugees, and children. But such images of immutable violation became deeply problematic for the new strand of national reconstructionist humanitarianism, whose programmes aimed at transforming (indeed creating) *a people*: their aim was not just to reassemble surviving Armenians, but to mold a healthy, vigorous, and racially and culturally “pure” nation. Women, as child-bearers and custodians of domesticity, had to epitomize Armenianness. So while the old visual rhetoric—stark images of tattooed women—was still very effective in garnering attention, it locked the women in a permanent state of violation and ambiguous identity, in a way which disavowed the transformative promise of the new national reconstruction projects. This led to a shift in the visual strategies of humanitarian photography, with organizations like NER favouring images of “the recuperable”—female and child survivors and, later, stirring images of young orphans at work building the Armenian future, which echoed the visual imagery of interwar nation-building elsewhere.[[20]](#footnote-20) There is no traumatic “history” in these photographs, nothing to disturb the reconstructive agenda; as in Liisa H. Malkki’s resonant phrase, “history tended to get leached out of the figure of the refugee.”[[21]](#footnote-21) But this was impossible for the tattooed women, whose troublesome history was indelibly written on their faces—which for most humanitarian organizations and workers anchored them elsewhere, outside the Armenian nation, as racial and cultural pariahs.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The issue of these women’s recuperability, as well as their representability, reverberates in other gendered histories of facial marking and disfigurement—for example, the American “captivity narratives” of white girls taken into Native American tribes and tattooed; the French gueules cassées (soldiers whose faces had been disfigured during World War One); the women whose bodies were mutilated and tattooed with religious and nationalist slogans during India’s Partition.[[23]](#footnote-23) In each of these cases, ethnic and national identity were made uncertain, with all of the attendant communal anxieties about reincorporation.[[24]](#footnote-24) But it is the treatment of the tattooed women by relief workers in the Near East which most powerfully signals the disconnect between modernity’s discursively proclaimed capacity to salvage human life, irrespective of categories, and the real and continued practice of humanitarians to recognize only certain bodies, and certain “histories,” as recuperable.

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The Armenians were deported as part of a brutal state-building project by the Young Turks in 1915-16.[[25]](#footnote-25) The foreign missionaries stationed in the Ottoman Empire were largely unable to intervene, but sent home horrific reports of the killing of military-age males, and the starvation, massacre, robbery, and extreme sexual violence the women and children were subjected to during their deportation towards the Syrian desert.[[26]](#footnote-26) Along the way, thousands of women and children were abducted, sold, or rescued from the deportation columns, and “absorbed” into Turkish, Kurdish, and Bedouin communities as wives, concubines, servants, and slaves.[[27]](#footnote-27) Isolated, dependent on their captors or hosts for food and protection, many were also told that there were no Armenians left, and gave up hope. Little could be done during the war years to recover these absorbed Armenians.[[28]](#footnote-28) Most American missionaries left Turkey in 1917, when America entered the war, but many Scandinavian and German missionaries remained as members of neutral or allied nations.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Real opportunities for rescue came in 1918-19 at the war’s end, when the terms of the Armistice mandated the release of Armenians in Muslim households. NER enlarged its operations, and on 16 February 1919, the *SS Leviathan* sailed from New York for Constantinople with 250 relief workers on board. Some were missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), who had left Turkey two years before; the rest were volunteers—some with particular skills (in medicine or engineering, for example), some members of organizations like the YWCA. NER thus represented “a wedding of missionary and philanthropic interests”; its Executive Committee was composed of notable philanthropists and religious leaders, and its head, James L. Barton, was the ABCFM’s Foreign Secretary, and a former missionary in Turkey himself.[[30]](#footnote-30) This marriage was reflected in NER’s official brief; despite the secular tone, this reconstruction would, inevitably given the tenor of contemporary American society, proceed with a Christian ethic at its core:

To provide relief, and to assist in the repatriation, rehabilitation, and re-establishment of Armenians, Syrians, Greeks, Jews, and other needy peoples of the Near East: to provide for the care of orphans and widows, and to conduct any schools, industrial enterprises or operations of a philanthropic character … to promote the social, economic and industrial welfare of those who through no fault of their own have been rendered destitute or dependent directly, or indirectly, by the vicissitudes of war.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The rescue of women and children was thus integral to NER’s operations, and its workers quickly reported floods of Armenians coming forth from Muslim households. Rescue Homes were organized for the women—there were 16 homes by January 1920—while younger children joined the orphanages.[[32]](#footnote-32) Bible and Armenian classes were given, and industrial schools established to teach the girls sewing and the boys carpentry or other trades, to make them self-supporting. **<FIG. 3 NEAR HERE>**

The ABCFM missionaries were indispensable to NER’s relief operations, because of their familiarity with the country, languages, and culture. Many had witnessed the genocide before they left; they returned to find a destroyed and dispersed Armenian population, the intellectual and religious leaders murdered, the remnant generally destitute and to some degree “Islamized.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The missionaries prioritized the reconstruction of the Armenian community in Turkey as a religious and national group, understanding Armenian identity as deriving not only from religion, but also from cultural and indeed a form of “racial” belonging, in keeping with the general assumptions of the times. Most missionaries focused on the orphans, but some in charge of Rescue Homes, such as Caroline Holmes in Urfa and Elizabeth Webb in Adana, threw themselves into the rehabilitation of the older girls and women. In a letter to Barton in October 1918, Webb wrote of her “strong desire to help in this matter… The girls who need a refuge will go wherever they can find one. I would like to be there among the first, to continue under more favourable circumstances the work I left a year ago.”[[34]](#footnote-34) When she returned to Adana in March 1919, Webb quickly established a home for rescued girls.[[35]](#footnote-35) “No work I ever did has so gripped my heart,” she reported, with buoyant descriptions of the transformations in her charges—among them a tattooed girl, Horepsime.[[36]](#footnote-36) But Webb and Holmes were exceptions: most recoiled from the moral and sexual impurity they perceived in these women, preferring to expend their efforts on the more moldable, more “recuperable” orphans.

Other relief workers were also involved in the Rescue Homes. Most were taking advantage of the horizon of opportunity the Great War had opened to them to travel and to make their own mark on the world. For those who had wanted but been unable to see active service during the war, this *was* their war. The girls of the Smith College Relief Unit posted to Turkey as NER workers wrote letters home full of enthusiasm and discovery, and were keen to help in the education and rehabilitation of rescued girls.[[37]](#footnote-37) In Aleppo, John Dunaway and Stanley Kerr were actively rescuing Armenians from the surrounding villages and towns.[[38]](#footnote-38) Kerr, a young chemist (whose profession had kept him on the home front), was in charge of the NER lab and dispensary in Aleppo, but joined Dunaway on weekend rescue trips into the desert. His letters, self-confident and bursting with adventure, tell of sweeping the area around the town of Al-Bab in their truck, well-armed in case of trouble (since “we aren’t very popular ourselves in Bab”), outwitting men who lied, hid the girls, and disappeared when they heard the truck: “The next time [Dunaway is] going to send the Arab interpreter by horse and follow with a machine. Well it certainly is good sport anyhow.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Within a few months, they had covered “practically every village within a radius of 50 miles of Aleppo so that now over 450 girls have been rescued,” some of whom were tattooed—such that Jeppe herself later noted that this area was not important in the rescuing of Armenians, since “the work of liberation [was] largely done.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

But the Rescue Homes in fact wound down relatively quickly in 1920-21 as NER, taking stock of diminishing donations after over five long years of campaigning, focused its efforts squarely on the orphanages and grand educational and agricultural projects in the Caucasus and Mediterranean. At roughly the same time, 1921, the League of Nations was responding to a battery of demands from Armenian and Armenophile activists to help release the women and children still imprisoned in Muslim households.[[41]](#footnote-41) The First Assembly voted funds to establish the Commission, with branches in Constantinople (headed by Emma Cushman, an ABCFM missionary, and William A. Kennedy, a British doctor) and Aleppo, where Jeppe was already working. The Commission began active work in 1922, but the political tensions and constraints in Constantinople, as the Turkish War of Independence was concluded and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) superseded the Treaty of Sèvres (1919), meant that active rescue was largely impossible there.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Jeppe pursued very different rescue methods to Kerr and Dunaway. “I could obtain far better results in numbers if I rushed around in an automobile with soldiers and pulled out the Armenians from the houses,” she wrote in 1922, but rescue by force during the current situation—with Syria under an unpopular French mandate, factional fighting, and limited resources—would risk opening up an “Armenian question” in Syria.[[43]](#footnote-43) Instead, she employed agents to spread the word quietly that a place of safety existed in Aleppo, and aid escapees to reach Reception House. This was also the soundest basis for the task of national reconstruction, Jeppe felt: by reclaiming only those who *wanted* to come, only “the far best and most vigorous elements” would be rescued, those who answered “the call” “because their own world has the strongest hold in them [*sic*].”[[44]](#footnote-44) Jeppe, too, instituted language and trade classes, taking particular pride in her revival of the art of Armenian embroidery, and managed to trace the families of many who came; others, like Zumroot, went to live in the agricultural colonies she established. Between 1921 and 1927, Jeppe rescued 1,484 Armenians, and helped over 200 more to escape directly to their families. A third were women and girls, many of whom bore tattoos upon their faces, but unlike most NER workers, Jeppe treated these women no differently.[[45]](#footnote-45) Although the League ceased to financially support Reception House in 1927, Jeppe continued her work with funding from other organizations until her death in 1935.

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Women who had been tattooed were therefore not unknown to the relief workers and organizations in the Near East. The cultural practice of tattooing was well established amongst the Bedouin and Kurdish tribes in what is today eastern Turkey, Iraq, and the desert regions of northern Syria—the area most Armenians were deported through and to, and now a focus of relief efforts.[[46]](#footnote-46) Workers there were more likely to encounter women with tattoos—indeed Holmes, in south-eastern Turkey, mentioned that tattooing was “the case with *most of the girls*.”[[47]](#footnote-47) But a measure of the unease the vast majority of relief workers felt about the tattoos is discernible not least from how infrequently they are mentioned. For something so striking and taboo, there is very little comment scattered across the correspondence, reports, and diaries in the archives.[[48]](#footnote-48) The same is true of the photographic record: these women appear only infrequently in organizational fundraising materials, and then usually in stark, sensationalist portraits like that of Zumroot in *Orient im Bild*, with little or no editorial comment.[[49]](#footnote-49) They are also absent from the missionaries’ and most other relief workers’ photograph collections; Kerr, for example, was a keen photographer, but none of the tattooed girls he rescued appear in his photographs.[[50]](#footnote-50) Only in Jeppe’s collections do they appear with any frequency.

Of the minority of workers who *did* write about tattoos, most merely described “the sighting” of a girl, like volunteer Florence Billings near Constantinople, who wrote home: “We visited one of the Relief Orphanages—160 girls, Armenian, some very young to 14-15. … One girl about 12 came from an Arab’s tent, had had two husbands and had been tattooed on the chin.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Alice Keep Clark, a missionary in Hadjin, noted one day that: “there have been so many pitiful cases today—one was a girl frightfully disfigured by tattoo marks on her face, put on when she was held by the Arabs.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Notably, these brief mentions tend to pause or break off afterwards, the authors seemingly unwilling to discuss the issue further: Billings begins a new paragraph with “Later—All the school has just been vaccinated…”, while Clark follows her entry with “I must go to the kitchen now…”.

This absence or glossing over has something to do with the contemporary cultural unease in western society regarding tattoos. In the social and semiotic world of the middling, bourgeois families most of the relief workers came from, the tattoo was the sign of primitive, backward, savage “civilizations,” or else the mark of a convict. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europe and its colonies often tattooed or branded their convicts, usually on the face, as a permanent punitive mark—as Jane Caplan argues, a vicious re-appropriation of the primitive in order to mark the European outsider, also deliberately reminiscent of slave-branding.[[53]](#footnote-53) Tattoos were also found on the bodies of sailors, soldiers, and, in the case of women, prostitutes—those already on society’s margins, whose tattoos served to further mark their difference. During the nineteenth century, as Caplan shows, tattoos were increasingly pathologized within European society via the efforts of criminologists, such that by the century’s end tattoos were interpreted almost everywhere as the mark of the deviant and degenerate.[[54]](#footnote-54) In America, tattoos were further associated with the atavism of the internal “other,” Native American tribes, and recalled the horror of their own “captivity narratives” of young white girls taken into tribes and tattooed—which had raised similar questions over how far these girls were racially, culturally and visually recuperable.[[55]](#footnote-55) The facial tattooing of these Armenian girls was thus, for Americans and Europeans, an extreme social transgression. Unable to countenance the ambiguities, most rescuers shrank from the women—suspicious also that the tattoos indicated an individual’s transculturation, and thus divided national loyalties. This unease was reflected in their explanations of what the tattoos meant: they were commonly interpreted as devices for preventing the girls from running away, either because they would be too ashamed to return, or “with the intention of marking them as slaves of their owners and making it impossible for them, thus marked, to escape the vigilance of their captors.”[[56]](#footnote-56) All of these suspicions and explanations placed the women in a semiotic space outside both Armenian and Bedouin society.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Bedouin tattooing practices, like all tattooing practices linked with tribal identity, beautification, and gender, were obviously more complex than this. Research is sparse, especially in this geographic region, much of it dated and orientalist, and tattooing is now far less common.[[58]](#footnote-58) However, anthropologists noted that tattooing occurred only in nomadic (not urban) populations, and while both sexes engaged in medicinal tattooing, only women were “adorned” in this way (as one historian has drily observed, in male-dominated societies, “female tattooing is not likely to be simply decorative”).[[59]](#footnote-59) Tattooing happened mostly around the time of puberty or marriage, or other rites of passage—birth, pregnancy, childbirth, death.[[60]](#footnote-60) As Hanne Schönig more recently argued, these tattoos thus “mark the stages of life that accompany the transition from one social group to another, from one state to another, from one occupation to another,” stages which place women in a modified relation to the male world.[[61]](#footnote-61) The tattooing of these Armenian girls literally marked the moment of their inclusion, integration and absorption into the Bedouin community, simultaneously defining their status and belonging.

It was, according to Jeppe, physically quite a painful procedure.[[62]](#footnote-62) The skin was pierced by a small bunch of needles, then rubbed with pigment, usually lamp black or indigo. A scab would form, and when it healed, a bluish coloring was set underneath the skin.[[63]](#footnote-63) “As for the designs employed,” wrote anthropologist Winifred Smeaton in 1930, “a great deal could be written on the subject”:

The designs are geometrical or stylized. Generally they consist of combinations of dots and lines, especially zigzag and cross-hatched lines, circles, crescents, chevrons, triangles, stars, and crosses … most women have some tattooing on the face, especially on the chin, and dots between the eyes and above the upper lip.[[64]](#footnote-64)

 Only a few of the relief workers’ descriptions of tattoos acknowledge them as “supposed to beautify.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Instead, responding to their sense of transgression, relief workers and the European and American press described them as “disfiguring,” as scars, or as the “marks” or “brands” of slavery. This latter showed principled outrage at the Muslim ownership of Christian women, suggestive also of sexual slavery (especially when the orientalist and eroticized spectre of “the harem” was conjured)—and the singeing word “brand” hammered home the horror of what the English newsletter *The Slave Market News* called “this crowning atrocity.”[[66]](#footnote-66)*The Slave Market News* first appeared in 1924, campaigning against white slavery, and regularly published rather hysterical stories about the captivity and rescue of Armenian girls, accompanied by stark studio portraits (Fig. 4). **<FIG. 4 NEAR HERE>** In December 1924, for example, a piece entitled “Brand of Slavery” claimed “to comment as calmly as possible”:

It is foul inhumanity to enslave the helpless but it is the torture of hell to brand with tattoo marks the fair and innocent faces of white girls with their Moslem owner’s mark. Cattle are branded in England lest they should stray and escape but in Asia Minor they brand white flesh and blood for the same reason. … WE CONSIDER THE FACT THAT WHITE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE BRANDED, TORTURED, OUTRAGED, ENSLAVED, BOUGHT AND SOLD IN THE LANDS WHERE CHRISTIANITY FIRST TOOK ROOT TO BE THE SCANDAL OF THE CENTURY AND A CRIME AGAINST THE CIVILISATION OF THE AGE.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The emphasis in fundraising materials on the women’s “whiteness” was designed to forge racial solidarity amongst potential donors, and allay any fears over transculturation—an insistence upon their recuperability.[[68]](#footnote-68) But for the rescuers, particularly the missionaries, the women’s time in captivity raised questions about the lasting moral and racial effects of this “degrading slavery.”[[69]](#footnote-69) For them, the image of sexual subjection evoked by the tattoos was intolerable, and also a symbol that the women’s innocence, and purity, had been corrupted. It is telling, too, that the relief workers responded to their own unease by defining the tattoos as “marks of shame.” And as Jeppe observed, “the poor girls have a feeling of carrying a stigma for life on their faces, and in fact it often prevents them from coming home; they simply dare not expose themselves to the eyes of their compatriots.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

The responses of other Armenians were in fact mixed, and here too, the issue of their “recuperability” revolved around the female body as the repository of the nation. Vahé Tachjian argues that rescued women were taboo amongst the remaining Middle East Armenian elite, whose main goal was national regeneration—and who thus wanted a pure community, “cleansed” of the last vestiges of “turkification” and, indeed, of “blemishes.”[[71]](#footnote-71) Other refugees also shunned the rescued women, and many were forced to become prostitutes to survive—compounding the stigma.[[72]](#footnote-72) On the other hand, as Lerna Ekmekcioğlu has shown, other members of the Turkish Armenian elite actively reincorporated these women because, whatever their experiences, as women they were vital resources for national rebirth.[[73]](#footnote-73) Reception House’s records also show many cases where, like Zumroot, the girls were soon married to Armenian men—who, one relief worker reported, regarded the tattoos merely as “battle scars.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Although neither Tachjian nor Ekmekcioğlu examine tattooed women specifically, as Ekmekcioğlu rightly says, rescued women certainly *anticipated* stigmatization: we can presume doubly so for those with tattoos.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Thus, while some relief workers were sympathetic, their characterizations of the tattoos—disfigurement, scars, slavery, shame, stigma—delineated the women as an outcast group. The tattoos were visible reminders of their “degradation,” but more unsettlingly, they also threw their identities into doubt: as “captives,” held in “slavery” by these marks, they were not fully part of Bedouin society—but neither could they fully re-join the Armenian community.[[76]](#footnote-76) Hence the dismay at the permanence of the marks, frequently expressed and reported by the relief workers. As Jeppe’s doctor put it, “they are all tattooed to their great despair… because it is the ineffaceable sign of their time with the Arabs.”[[77]](#footnote-77) The tattoos are described as ineffaceable, indelible, permanent—“Blue-ing was inserted under her lip, and blue it will be to the end of her days,” wrote Holmes—suggestive of how, after rescue, the tattoos were treated as the girls’ primary mark of identification, and barrier to their reclamation.[[78]](#footnote-78) The other side of this particular coin was an obsession with surgical removal: NER’s only article on tattooing in its newsletter *New Near East*, entitled “Marks Hard to Erase,” suggested that “The main object of many of the girls in coming to the Rescue Home is to get rid of the mark of her slavehood.”[[79]](#footnote-79) In Adana, Webb and several other workers wrote of another girl, who “feels this ‘brand’ so keenly that she tries in vain to comb the coarse black hair down far enough to cover it and even asked the American doctor by sign language if he could remove it.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

Various doctors wrote to medical journals asking for advice on tattoo removal, and the *New Near East* noted that one medical missionary was succeeding in removing some tattoos by operations.[[81]](#footnote-81) “Occasionally a girl would disappear for a few days,” reported *The Slave Market News*, “and then would re-appear with a smile partly of pleasure and partly of embarrassment whilst a few healing wounds showed where the doctor’s knife had removed the record of her past life, and restored her so far as possible to self-respect and to her place among her friends.”[[82]](#footnote-82) A full-page illustrated article in one American newspaper, the *Ogden Standard Examiner*, shouted the triumph of western scientific knowledge over the “unknown Oriental inks” in gruesome detail through the story of Nargig Abakiam, who was taken to tattoo experts in New York. A series of drawings (Fig.5)**<FIG. 5 NEAR HERE>** illustrated the poultice treatment which would draw out the “secret inks,” leaving Nargig “as beautiful as ever—more beautiful, perhaps, for the little lines and wrinkles that had gathered also as the natural marks of her sufferings will have disappeared and the fresh bloom of her youth will have been restored.”[[83]](#footnote-83) A YWCA newsletter printed “before and after” photographs, one showing a raggedly-dressed girl “with patches on her face covering freshly made tattoos,” the second showing her “after she had been in the emergency home a few weeks,” posed in a white western-style dress, tattoos almost invisible (Fig.6).[[84]](#footnote-84) **<FIG. 6 NEAR HERE>** The emphasis in each success-story was that the girl, now able to show her face, could return to the Armenian community: in a reversal process which mirrored the original tattooing, the doctor’s knife would replace the marks of captivity with the scars of removal, or would draw out the inks under white bandages, culminating in a chrysalis-like restoration. This un-marking was thus a condition for reclamation, and for the woman to be reassigned an unambiguous Armenian, Christian, white identity—as if the success of her moral and national rescue was contingent upon her visual rescue. As with the contemporary case of the French gueules cassées—whose troubling appearances were “cured” via reconstructive surgery or sculpted masks—modern medical intervention was able to “solve” the “problem” of their recuperability.[[85]](#footnote-85) Crucially, then, when fundraisers *did* write of tattooed women, it was to assure donors that they could “become Armenian” again: “history” could, indeed, be “leached out.”

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In the field, though, far from the fundraising rhetorics, “history” was not so easily disregarded, and the very modern transformative claims of this humanitarianism remained unrealized. Instead, those engaged in humanitarian projects of national reconstruction continued to exclude those they deemed threatening to their vision of national renewal. Once the issue progressed from the women’s *rescue* to the question of their *rehabilitation*, then their “history”—as signified by their tattoos—determined how the different humanitarian organizations and workers judged their ultimate viability as components of the new nation.[[86]](#footnote-86)

As already noted, from 1920, NER shifted decisively away from emergency relief, launching large agricultural, medical, and educational projects for the orphans under its care.[[87]](#footnote-87) NER executives made a policy decision to emphasize “the child” over “the orphan,” likely because this suggested moldable “raw material” rather than the baggage “orphan” carried.[[88]](#footnote-88) From then on, fundraising letters and articles in *New Near East* referred to the children as “The Hope for the Future.”[[89]](#footnote-89) An April 1922 center-spread, entitled “The Resurrection of a Race,” declared that “Armenia’s hope is in her children. Through them, and them only, can she hope to rise again.” As NER shifted its policies, so too it shifted its visual strategies. Increasingly, the photographs in *New Near East* were ofneat, healthy orphans busy in NER’s workshops, fields, and schools (Fig.7);**<FIG. 7 NEAR HERE>** there are never any tattooed girls to disturb the visual coherence of national renewal. By 1922, only seven of the sixteen Rescue Homes were still operating, and support for the rescued women petered out with little comment.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Given their invisibility in NER’s campaigns, only the writings of missionary and other relief workers running the rescue homes open a window onto the treatment of the women. As Henry Riggs in Harpoot noted, the missionaries were faced with the task of rebuilding the last century’s work amongst the Armenians from the “shivering remnant” who returned from exile or had survived in Muslim homes, which, Riggs admitted, was a picture “far from reassuring.”[[91]](#footnote-91) The missionaries, too, focused on the orphans, who predominate and are consistently prioritized in the swathes of correspondence and reports, and are imbued with hope for the future: “The work for orphans is in many ways the most important of all,” wrote Emma Cushman in October 1916.[[92]](#footnote-92) Few actually *contested* the drive to rescue the women coming from Turkish houses—indeed, some devoted themselves to it, like Webb and Holmes, while others were wholly supportive, like William Chambers or Henry Riggs (who told stories of defending Armenian women from disgruntled former husbands with great relish).[[93]](#footnote-93) But the general response amongst missionaries was grudging and reluctant. In Aintab, the rescued women were placed seventh on the list of eleven reconstruction tasks (below “publications”); in Harpoot, Mary Riggs wrote, rather grumpily, that “They turn up at all times of day and every day of the week and claim they have just run away and have no place to spend the coming night and are in danger of being caught. So I have to take them in. One day last week I took in 46.”[[94]](#footnote-94)

The running of the rescue homes was left to female missionaries and relief workers, and here, too, the sparseness and tone of their comments indicates both disinterest and growing reservations about the project of rescue. For the missionaries, it was impossible that these women—who had “chosen” to “sacrifice” their moral, religious, and sexual purity by living amongst the Muslims for four years or more—could participate in the spiritual rebirth of the Armenian nation.[[95]](#footnote-95) They represented the failure not just of the missions’ work over the past eighty years, but also specifically of female missionaries’ efforts in the realm of “woman’s work for woman.” This focused on championing women’s education and trying to replace “primitive” housekeeping and medicine with “modern” methods, in the hope that women would then exercise a “civilizing influence” within the domestic sphere.[[96]](#footnote-96) In the missionaries’ eyes, the rescued women had “proven” themselves unfit for the responsibility of bringing up new families—their key gendered role in national reconstruction.

The religious and racial filters through which the missionaries viewed the fact of the women’s—often forced—relationships with Muslim men labelled them problematic, and diseased, in a metaphorical as well as sometimes literal sense. Ruth Parmelee, a medical doctor in Harpoot, found that only around 15% had some form of sexually transmitted disease; but the missionaries’ general suspicion was that most were untreatably “diseased,” and the idea of them being irremediably vitiated as an entire group, and thus “irrecuperable,” is clearly present.[[97]](#footnote-97) In a continuation of the disease metaphor, they were frequently described as “mentally unstable.” “One girl had become partially insane from her treatment in a harem,” wrote one missionary. “Her face was disfigured by four tattoo marks … She looked at us in a wild, frightened sort of way as she sat spinning and weaving.”[[98]](#footnote-98) This, it was acknowledged, was usually because their “worse-than-death experiences … had robbed [them] of reason,” and while some were undoubtedly traumatized by brutal experiences, there hovers over these descriptions a more general implication of the cultural “damage” done to the women as a group.[[99]](#footnote-99)

“Trouble” around the issue of active sexuality, or sexual impurity, also explains at least in part the missionaries’ division of rescued women and girls by age: girls under thirteen were usually absorbed into the orphanages, blending into the nurtured category of “the orphan.”[[100]](#footnote-100) “Rescue women,” by contrast, were regarded with suspicion—they were not given new clothes for a month, in case they ran back to their Turkish husbands—and they appear in missionary writings as slow-witted, somehow more intractable in nature, more difficult to redeem.[[101]](#footnote-101) “Some of them formerly had good homes and still show the result of that training, but for the most part they have had to learn the first essentials of how to live,” wrote one: “In some ways it has been harder to teach them because they are so large and have become so accustomed to their bad ways of doing things.”[[102]](#footnote-102) A YWCA worker in Harpoot concurred: “there seems to be more promise for the future in these [younger] girls than in the women of the Refuge Home, many of whom are mature women.”[[103]](#footnote-103) In Harpoot, Parmelee housed the mothers separately in a “nursery.” While this was partly a practical measure—the women could work during the day—it was also clearly driven by the sense of their needing “better supervision,” as Parmelee put it.[[104]](#footnote-104) This quarantining was also presumably connected to the unease many missionaries felt when confronted by children who were the product of this “sexual impurity” (or indeed a kind of “miscegenation”): Parmelee called them “Armeno-Turkish babies,” others called them “Turk babies.”[[105]](#footnote-105) None of these missionaries envisaged the women, sometimes rather cruelly labelled “Turkish Brides,” as being able to marry and have a “normal” life.[[106]](#footnote-106) In this, the missionaries’ conviction that the orphans represented the best hope for Armenian regeneration dovetailed with NER’s, albeit for slightly different reasons. For women with tattoos, their marks provided a definite indicator of what was otherwise only an invisible potential for impurity, transculturation and disease.

Yet there were individuals—both missionaries and other NER workers—who did not completely ostracize the women, bringing other perspectives to the question of how, and how far, rescued women could be rehabilitated. They invested time and emotion in their care, and running through their writings is a concern for their individual futures, and indeed present happiness. At the simplest level, this is evident from the way they refer to their charges by name, and as girls, not women. Helen Jones and Elsie Tanner, two YWCA workers stationed at Harpoot by NER, shared many of the missionaries’ misgivings about the rescued women. However, approaching them from within a YWCA framework of strengthening individual (and thus global) Christianity through recreation, they sought to “hold out to the freed captives some hope in life.”[[107]](#footnote-107) “Up to the present time they have been looked upon from the standpoint of self-support rather than self-development,” reported Tanner.[[108]](#footnote-108) As well as planning “more systematic and supervised industrial work,” they hoped to “reach” the women through supper groups, including the mothers, and took the head girl under their wing: “she has the most tragic look on her face and Elsie and I have resolved that we will try to help Vartanoosh forget.”[[109]](#footnote-109) The YWCA girls brought about a marked difference in the Rescue Home’s atmosphere, as the missionaries themselves reported with an air of surprise, and they were sad to leave some months later for work elsewhere: “It seems hardly possible to have become as interested as I have in many of the girls in so short a time and it is going to be a pull to leave it all.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

However, the two who invested most in the rescued girls were in fact missionaries, Caroline Holmes and Elizabeth Webb. Holmes’ memoir is full of tales of the Armenians she took in, of defending them against false “relatives” looking for servants, and of family reunions—including her cook, who recognized her young daughter amongst the arrivals one day, or Hirepsomy, a tattooed girl, who recognized her brother Hagop in the marketplace: “their joy was so great that the Turks turned away their faces from the sight to wipe away their tears.”[[111]](#footnote-111) The most dedicated, though, was Webb, a missionary of long standing whose successes were held in high regard by the other Adana missionaries.[[112]](#footnote-112) “The life of each one of these twenty-nine girls has its own tragedy,” she noted, describing some of the lengths they had gone to in order to escape, and the transformation in their personalities.[[113]](#footnote-113) “How shall I tell you of Rosa, our first child,” she wrote, “so bold and wilful! Sometimes I almost despaired of doing anything with her. But how can I ever make you see the change that has come over her in the past six weeks? Right mind, quick and capable, she is a born leader.” And their second girl, Horepsime:

After losing father and mother, she spent four years among the Arabs. Here she was obliged to milk 150 sheep every day, besides going to the mountains and cutting wood for fuel, carrying it home on her back. To keep from having her face tattooed, according to the custom of the Arabs, she threw herself into a shallow well. Finally, finding she would be left there to starve, she managed to climb out, and submitted. Her face is now disfigured with a pattern in black spots which will remain till death, except, as possible, they may be cut or burnt out.[[114]](#footnote-114)

As well as recording the forlorn girls’ first smiles, and organising day trips, she concentrated on teaching them to knit, embroider, and make rugs.[[115]](#footnote-115) Webb was circumspect about the fact that these girls would never be fully reintegrated into Armenian society, but resolved, with empathy, to give them the best chance in life:

We do not call our home an “orphanage” or a “refuge,” but a “Trade School,” as this is what we plan to make it. … Many of these girls can probably never have homes of their own. The right thing is to teach them trades that they may be independent and able to earn a living for themselves. They have been previously sinned against, and many will suffer through life for it.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Webb, Holmes, and the YWCA girls thus shared the dominant perspective amongst relief workers, that the rescued women were not “recuperable” for the nation—but were determined that they could be rehabilitated *as individuals*, and should be given the chance of a happy and fulfilling life: part of the Armenian community, but not part of national regeneration.

The five girls from Smith College, a liberal girls’ college in Massachusetts, projected a different set of cultural assumptions onto the problem of recuperation. Although they came, like many of the missionaries, from a broadly New England Protestant background, they did not see the girls’ experiences *per se* as a barrier to inclusion in this national project; rather, they based their ideas about regeneration and social progress on their own experience and belief in the transformative power of education. Each was enthusiastic about the rescue work; Esther Greene, in particular, included in her long, intense letters home many stories of taking in girls, mediating between them and their Turkish husbands through the home’s door, and accompanying Miss Graffam, a famous missionary, on a quest to retrieve a former pupil from a Kurdish chief’s house.[[117]](#footnote-117) But the Smith girls of course related to those Armenian girls most like themselves—those usually of higher social standing who had been educated in the missionary colleges, who spoke English and were “extremely attractive, ladylike and well bred.” These they saw as the “leaven in the lump”—“it is to them to whom the country looks for leaders,” wrote Greene.[[118]](#footnote-118) Justine Hill, stationed as Stanley Kerr’s lab assistant in Aleppo, argued that once political tensions had subsided, the best among the Armenians should take over reconstruction: “I firmly believe that if given a fair chance to exist, they would soon do their own scrambling, with an occasional hand.”[[119]](#footnote-119)

Mabel Elliott, a doctor seconded to NER by the American Women’s Hospitals organization, likewise warmed to this social class of girls. The beginning of her memoir recounts her first weeks treating girls in the Constantinople Rescue Home, “all from the best class of Armenian homes; carefully reared, well educated, charming girls, much like a group of young American college women.”[[120]](#footnote-120) Her tone here is compassionate and affectionate, in marked contrast to her description of a tattooed woman who came to an NER orphanage to claim her child: “There was nothing bright or gay about the stooped figure… her face was wrinkled and brown as leather, her teeth were decaying, and between the bright dark eyes wasthe blue tattoo mark of the Turkish-Armenian womanwho has known slavery to the Arabs… when the baby understood that she was to go away with this woman she clung to Miss MacKaye’s neck in silent desperation.”[[121]](#footnote-121) Elliott does not mention any tattooed girls at Constantinople, although other sources do, and neither do any of the Smith girls.[[122]](#footnote-122) It seems that for these relief workers, too, the girls’ tattoos were a visual barrier to them ever being able to be “like young American college women.”

Karen Jeppe’s approach to the question of who was “fit” to participate in national regeneration owed less to notions of purity or malleability than to currents of European thinking on national identity and belonging. As Matthias Bjørnlund argues, Jeppe saw herself not as a missionary but “as an aid worker and rescue worker, and, increasingly, as an activist working for national self-determination for the oppressed and dispelled Armenians.”[[123]](#footnote-123) Jeppe was deeply rooted in an influential Danish Lutheran movement named Grundtvigianism, which emphasized personal freedom, education, and human nature as inhering in one’s own ethnic and cultural nation—and thus saw her task as supporting and strengthening Armenian group coherence, not undermining it by attempting to convert Armenians to Protestantism.[[124]](#footnote-124) Her focus on restoring Armenian cultural heritage, crafts, and language, was in this vein. She sought to rescue and reclaim only those whose Armenian identity had remained strong, “whose yearning for their people is so strong that they brave everything and fly. Those are the ones we must get hold of.”[[125]](#footnote-125) This, as she intended, required a “special effort” on their part; “they had to decide for themselves whether they would leave the houses where they were detained or not, and they often ran a considerable risk in doing so.”[[126]](#footnote-126)

Seeking out and seizing Armenians in Muslim households thus, for Jeppe, risked not only a new “Armenian question” amidst the political tensions of French mandate Syria, but also risked bringing in the “wrong sort.” Early on, she made a very specific appraisal of who the most recuperable Armenians were—an appraisal in which her later agricultural settlement schemes were also prefigured. Unlike those living in villages, where the life was “moral and pure,” and work the “natural condition of life,” those living in the cities, both boys and girls, were “the victims of an unlimited licentiousness, and have mentally and physically been infected and spoiled”:

We have only too many corrupted Armenians, both men and women, and a great number are so turkified that they are no good. The Oriental woman sinks rapidly, and it is difficult to raise her again. A wholesale gathering in of them would bring too many of that kind; in the other way they would not come.

Those who would come are the Armenian young men who come with the definite purpose to remain Armenians. They have only one thought, to return to their people and to succeed.[[127]](#footnote-127)

Jeppe estimated that more than half the Armenian women in Muslim houses had resigned themselves to settling down and “trying to forget their own people,” and accepted that for many, “natural love” for the children born to them would “bind them firmly to the home.” These women were “lost” forever: “but on the other hand hundreds of women sigh for liberation. If they could find the means of flight and knew a place, where they would not be entirely abandoned, they would not tarry one moment.”[[128]](#footnote-128)

While Jeppe managed to trace family members of fully three-quarters of those she rescued—an impressive feat given the geographical spread and continual movement of the ravaged diaspora—others, like Zumroot, settled in her expanding agricultural colonies.[[129]](#footnote-129) She established the first, Tel Armen, in 1924, to provide a living for those more used to farming than the city, and also to help mitigate the expenses of Reception House.[[130]](#footnote-130) In her report to the League, Jeppe linked rescue with a reconstruction which would forge an “organic link between the Arab and the Armenian world”:

The colony would tend to make our refugees much more useful to the country in which they live...

No element could ever be more suited to colonisation in this country than these young Armenians with all the energy of their race tingling in their veins…

The colony would attract them in thousands and enable them to become Armenians again.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Accordingly, Jeppe’s criteria for who was “recuperable” diverged significantly from those of the NER workers, missionary or other, in that she judged “purity” and therefore suitability not by morality or “disease,” but on strength of national feeling, as evidenced by their “risking all” to escape. She was therefore little interested in the tattoos marking the faces of some women who came to Reception House; it was their inner identity which concerned her, not their outward appearance. In the intake registers, tattoos are visible on at least 47 of the girls’ faces (Fig.8), but only three of the personal stories mention tattoos, each time in a case where the extent of the tattooing resulted in medical or psychological difficulties and clearly horrified the staff.[[132]](#footnote-132) **<FIG. 8 NEAR HERE>** In general, these photographs do not accentuate the tattoos. Indeed, they bear little resemblance to the mug shots increasingly being used across Europe and America, but instead are in the style of classic late nineteenth-century portrait photography, using the Victorian technique of an oval frame, thought to flatter and accentuate the shape of the face: these portraits were an act of recuperation in themselves.[[133]](#footnote-133)

It is the photographs in Jeppe’s six personal albums which are most revealing of her attitudes to the tattooed girls, and their inclusion in her vision of national reconstruction (e.g. Figs.1, 9, 10). Scattered amongst the everyday scenes of life at Reception House, the trade workshops, and the expanding desert villages, are several photographs of tattooed women, including the image of Zumroot standing in Reception House. One woman stands alone, in the doorway to her house in the compound; a group of four girls, just rescued, stand in front of Reception House, formal in one photograph, relaxing into smiles in a second.[[134]](#footnote-134) In Reception House’s workshop, Mariam is shown refining embroidery designs with two workers (Fig.9). **<FIG. 9 NEAR HERE>** Another girl, Jeghsa, stands between two newly-built houses in the compound, the whitewash fresh and the trees still young, her quiet, direct gaze holding the camera (Fig.10). **<FIG. 10 NEAR HERE, OR ANYWHERE BEFORE THE END OF THE ARTICLE>** None of these photographs sensationalize the girls, or reduce them to the “problem” of their tattoos. Rather, they depict the girls as Jeppe saw them: getting on with their new lives, *as Armenians*—both recuperable and representable, if only within the confines of her own albums.

Jeppe did make strategic use of the tattooed women in her fundraising drives, thus including those not conventionally considered “recuperable” in her visualization of her reconstruction work. She commissioned a set of portraits, including Zumroot’s *Orient im Bild* frontispiece, which accentuated and exhibited their marks. *The Slave Market News* was the most avid publisher of these images, alongside sensationalist stories, also offering postcard reproductions for sale.[[135]](#footnote-135) Its campaign style, while more lurid than most, utilized the well-established humanitarian convention of depicting human suffering in order to argue for the abolition of the system which produced it—here, white slavery. But those fundraising for national reconstruction—*Orient im Bild* and *Armeniervennen* (the newsletter of the Danish Friends of Armenia, Jeppe’s closest supporters)—were more guarded in their use of these photographs and accompanying captions, perhaps not trusting that their subscribers would also believe the tattooed women were “recuperable.”[[136]](#footnote-136) More often, they published long articles from Jeppe detailing her successes, and progress in the construction of the new colonies—accompanied by images which, cumulatively, chart the transformations in the “recuperated” and the land. Here, as in *New Near East*, the new agendas of national reconstruction demanded a new visual aesthetic—not the orderly, sanitized aura which suffused pre-war missionary photographs, but a more vigorous, organic aesthetic of struggle and rejuvenation which chimed with the dreams of the interwar period.

Jeppe found support for her activities from a number of Armenophile societies and private individuals across the globe.[[137]](#footnote-137) In their overriding concern to re-establish the Armenian nation as a cultural and ethno-religious entity, Jeppe and her funders saw the task of rescue and rehabilitation slightly differently to the League. In the Near East, the League aimed to construct social peace through a combination of minority protection laws, French and British mandates (an evolution of the “civilizing project”), and social justice and social reform projects.[[138]](#footnote-138) Back in Geneva, the focus was on *rescue*—conceived as the “saving” of Armenian women and children from slavery and forced concubinage, and the reversal of the wartime process which saw national minorities mixed and absorbed into others.[[139]](#footnote-139) But for Jeppe, rescue had to be accompanied by rehabilitation, if the nation was to be “saved.”[[140]](#footnote-140) Jeppe thus had a deeper and more emotional investment in rebuilding the Armenian nation than the League, but her *modus operandi* for rescue and rehabilitation fitted their agendas well; even her agricultural settlement project, which in some ways went beyond her original brief, was perfectly in tune with the League’s ideals, in its logic of the economically productive social integration of a national minority into the surrounding majority. As she argued, settling them in her colonies in fact “utilis[ed] that which seemed their greatest obstacle, their ‘arabisation,’ to build up a strong and thriving peasantry fit to understand and to be understood by the native population.”[[141]](#footnote-141) Following Jeppe’s lead, her heterogeneous mix of funders became advocates of the reabsorption of the tattooed women into the Armenian community; the League, pleased with Jeppe’s work (and to have the activists among them appeased), raised no objections.

**<\*\*\*\*PLEASE INSERT SECTION BREAK\*\*\*\*>**

The seductive new visualizations of national reconstruction within fundraising materials provided a distraction which helped organizations and donors overlook the problems of “history,” even when marked so very visibly on the women’s faces. But for most relief workers on the ground, the women’s tattoos were too significant to be overlooked, and rendered them too problematic to be included in the new nation. Jeppe, too, divided and categorized the surviving Armenian population—not along lines of “history,” but on strength of national feeling. Thus, the treatment of the tattooed women lays bare the contradictions between this “new” humanitarianism’s claims to be able to remedy and transform, and its enduring reluctance to treat all as equally “recuperable.” What makes this interwar humanitarianism truly “modern” is not its (uneven, and contested) transition from “old” to “new” personnel and practices: it is these sweeping projects for the remolding of societies and peoples, the attendant gendered biopolitics of inclusion and exclusion, and the construction of a visual aesthetic which would mobilize audiences and donors through uplifting depictions of transformed, recuperated bodies. By putting under the same lens the intricacies of these different visions of national reconstruction, and particularly as they related to the tattooed women, we bring into clearer focus both the complex processes of change in humanitarian practices during the interwar period, and also their insuperable limits. Crucially, these are best captured by exploring the thoughts and initiatives of ordinary relief workers on the ground, since they themselves frequently embodied, and were agents of, these changes, and directly imposed the limits. And crucially, too, it is in the writings and photograph albums of these relief workers that we find the otherwise hidden stories of the tattooed girls, and their fates.

Zumroot, as the intake registers note, moved to Jeppe’s second agricultural colony, and married an Armenian farmer. The four other girls on *The Slave Market News*’ frontispiece and postcard also found homes: Mariam (standing, right, and Fig.9) became self-supporting as an embroiderer; Eliza (seated, right) supported herself as a servant, living with relatives; Victoria (standing, left, and Fig.8) went to Beirut to live with her brother; and Haiganoosh (seated, left) found work as an embroiderer, living with her brother and father.[[142]](#footnote-142) Jeghsa’s story appeared in *Armeniervennen* in 1930; there are four photographs of her in total, suggesting she remained at Reception House a while.[[143]](#footnote-143) As Caroline Holmes reported from Urfa, Hirepsomy and Hagob were reunited as brother and sister in a chance meeting in the marketplace. And while the ending of Elizabeth Webb’s story in Adana would suggest that Rosa and Horepsime, her first two girls, would have gone on to lead independent and relatively happy lives, we cannot know. Adana was the scene of fighting between French and Turkish troops at the end of 1921, as the Kemalists expelled the French from Cilicia—events that many Armenians did not survive. Webb arrived in Beirut in 1921: her personnel card simply reads “among refugees.”[[144]](#footnote-144) Many of the rescued girls were swept up in the Turkish military campaigns in the southeastern provinces of Turkey between 1921 and 1923, and many—as Jeppe found—decided to return to Muslim households. Once again, they joined the thousands who became permanently absorbed into the Turkish national community, as Turkish wives, mothers, and grandmothers—whose fate as “hidden Armenians” is only now being recognized in contemporary Turkey, as thousands of Turks hunt through their family histories to see if they, too, have an “Armenian grandmother.”[[145]](#footnote-145)

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 Zumroot, August 16, 1923, Reception House Registers, C1601-1603, Archives of the League of Nations, Geneva [hereafter ALON]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The terms used contemporaneously and in later scholarship to describe these processes are extremely loaded. Campaigners often used “kidnapped,” “abducted,” and “taken into slavery.” Historian Ara Sarafian’s “absorption” is more neutral: Sarafian, “The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide,” in Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack, eds., *In God’s Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2001), 209-21. “Rescue,” “recovery,” and (especially) “repatriation” all presuppose the “correctness” of these actions. None are sufficient to capture the range of the women’s experiences (see also n.27); I use these terms as necessary to convey the worldviews of those involved, but I am analyzing these as western projects of “reclamation,” “reconstruction,” and “recuperability.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The registers were called the “Protocols” by the Aleppo staff. Most of the surviving registers (three are missing) are in the League of Nations archives, which labels them “Reception House Registers.” Another is held in the Danish State Archives: De Danske Armeniervenners Arkiv, 10158, ‘1919-1949’, ‘Forhandlingsprotokol’, pakke 1. I call them “intake registers” since it is smoother idiomatic English. See Dicle Akar Bilgin, Matthias Bjørnlund, and Taner Akçam’s project to digitize the “Aleppo Protocols,” with their critical introduction: [http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/orphan-children.nsf!OpenDatabase](http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/orphan-children.nsf%21OpenDatabase). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There are six albums, held in the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute archives, Yerevan, numbered (by the archive) 56-61. The photographs within 56-60 were numbered consecutively by Jeppe. This photograph: album 57, no. 100. The photographs are uncaptioned: significant correlative work has been necessary to identify persons, places, and approximate dates. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Orient im Bild* no. 3 (1927). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Im Flüchtlingslager von Aleppo,” *Orient im Bild* no. 3 (1927): 20-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The women’s own perspectives are largely absent here. It is in the nature of their lives and experiences that few would have had the opportunity, or wish, to tell their stories in their own words at the time. In the sources I use, their words are always filtered by third parties, whether relief workers or journalists abroad. There are some oral testimonies, mostly dating from the 1960s and 1970s (see Gayane Adourian, Barouhi Chorekian, and Barouhi Silian’s brief testimonies of being tattooed in Verzhine Svazlian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eye-Witness Survivors* (Yerevan, 2011); Doris Melkonian is working on the UCLA collection; others are available via the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive). But the circumstances of giving this testimony (with the need to maintain and underline their re-assumed Armenian identity), and the filtering of their memories through their subsequent life experiences—which include starting families of their own, and therefore denotes acceptance/inclusion—makes them less reliable as testimonies of their feelings in the early 1920s. One published memoir discusses tattooing in some detail: *Vergeen: A Survivor of the Armenian Genocide* (Los Angeles, 1997). It confirms my analysis below, especially in its discussion of Vergeen’s “shame,” her desire for surgical removal, and fear of non-acceptance by the Armenian community—but is likewise filtered through her post-genocide family life in America; moreover, the text itself is written by Mae M. Derderian, the daughter of Vergeen’s closest friend, based on Vergeen’s unpublished manuscript. While I would have preferred my critical perspective to have been informed by the women’s, I have tried to retain a sense of their independent agency where possible (for example, the choices of Zumroot and others to stay or leave). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The charity went through various mergers and name-changes before becoming Near East Relief upon its incorporation by Act of Congress in 1919. For a brief, critical history, see Davide Rodogno, “Beyond Relief: A Sketch of Near East Relief’s Humanitarian Operations, 1918-1929,” *Monde(s)* 6, no. 2 (2014): 45-64. Armenian communities also mounted significant relief efforts, but these lie outside the scope of this article: Vahé Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15 (2009): 60-80; Raymond Kévorkian, Levon Nordiguian, and Vahé Tachjian, *Les Arméniens 1917-1939: la quête d’un refuge* (Paris, 2007); and Anna Aleksanyan’s forthcoming work on Neutral House in Constantinople, prefigured in her “The issue of identity of surviving Armenian women and children after WWI,” “Aid to Armenia”conference, London, June 3, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Keith David Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920-1927,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1315-39; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Near East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1919-19* (Oakland, Calif., 2015); MatthiasBjørnlund, “Karen Jeppe, Aage Meyer Benedictsen, and the Ottoman Armenians: National Survival in Imperial and Colonial Settings,” *Haigazian Armenological Review* 28 (2008): 9-43; Inger Marie Okkenhaug, “Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927-1934,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 432-454; Vahram L. Shemassian, “The League of Nations and the Reclamation of Armenian Genocide Survivors,” in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Looking Backwards, Moving Forwards* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2003), 81-112; Victoria Rowe, “Armenian Women Refugees at the End of Empire: Strategies of Survival” in Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee, eds., *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2011), 152-172. Two other historians who focus on Armenian debates over reclamation also largely elide the tattoos: Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion,” and Lerna Ekmekcioğlu, “A Climate for Abduction, a Climate For Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 3 (2013): 522-53. Suzanne Khardalian’s film about her own family, *Grandma’s Tattoos* (2011), is the only real treatment thus far, but remains a personal history. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Watenpaugh, “League of Nations’ Rescue,” 1319; Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Johannes Paulmann, “Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century,” *Humanity* 4, no. 2 (2013): 215-38 (“overlapping,” “conjunctures,” and “contingencies”); Rob Skinner and Alan Lester, “Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012): 729-47, here 737 (“subtle and contested realignment”). Others write of “moments of acceleration”: Kevin O’Sullivan, Matthew Hilton and Juliano Fiori, “Humanitarianisms in Context,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 23, nos. 1-2 (2016): 1-15. Other works exploring this transition include Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge, 2014); Eric D. Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled History of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilising Missions,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1313-43; special issue of *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014); special issue of *Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History* 40, no. 5 (2012); special issue of *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 23, nos. 1-2 (2016); Magaly Rodríguez García, Davide Rodogno, and Liat Kozma, eds., *The League of Nations’ Work on Social Issues: Visions, Endeavours and Experiments* (Geneva, 2016). Francesca Piana neatly problematizes “professionalization” in her “The Dangers of ‘Going Native’: George Montandon in Siberia and the International Committee of the Red Cross, 1919-1922,” *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 2 (2016): 253-274. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Watenpaugh, “League of Nations’ Rescue,” 1319-1322, and Watenpaugh, *Bread From Stones*, 4-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Seminal works linking modernity and exclusionary violence include Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989); Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, Calif., 2003); also Mark Mazower, “Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1158-1178, and Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System.” “Modernity” is of course still a highly contested sociological, intellectual, and historical concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Rodríguez Garcia, Rodogno, and Kozma, “Introduction,” in their *League of Nations’ Work*, 13-30, here 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Suggestive examples include Liisa H. Malkki’s discussion (in her seminal “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377-404) of relief workers’ discomfort towards Hutu refugees on the Tanzanian border who did not conform to normative humanitarian definitions and expectations of “the refugee.” The result, she argues, was a “depoliticization” of the refugee category—which also speaks to other cases where the political claims of refugees, or their unwillingness to accept certain sorts of aid, make them “troublesome” for humanitarian workers: for example, Nell Gabiam, “When ‘Humanitarianism’ Becomes ‘Development’: The Politics of International Aid in Syria’s Palestinian Refugee Camps,” *American Anthropologist* 114, no.1 (2012): 95-107; Ilana Feldman, “Difficult Distinctions: Refugee Law, Humanitarian Practice, and Political Identification in Gaza,” *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (2007): 129-169. In a different vein, and one which resonates interestingly with surgical efforts to remove the Armenian women’s tattoos (see below), Didier Fassin and Estelle D’Halluin, and Miriam Ticktin, have explored how the French state views immigration and asylum through a medical lens: the politics of care means that refugees with medical conditions like HIV, cancer, or particular experiences of sexual violence or torture are accepted, while the “merely” impoverished are not. Miriam I. Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011); Didier Fassin and Estelle D’Halluin, “The Truth from the Body: Medical Certificates as Ultimate Evidence for Asylum Seekers,” *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005): 597-608. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Piana, “Dangers of ‘Going Native,’” 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Significant exceptions include Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (Cambridge, 2015); Kevin Grant, “Anti-slavery, Refugee Relief, and the Missionary Origins of Humanitarian Photography ca.1900-1960,” *History Compass* 15, no. 5 (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, “Introduction,” in Fehrenbach and Rodogno, eds., *Humanitarian Photography*, 1-21, here 1.This is the first historical collection on this topic: as they note, the theoretical literature on “regarding the pain of others” is well-developed, but thus far not always grounded in empirical research. Certainly, many interwar humanitarian organizations made good use of the developing mass media technologies available—including film—and developed well-oiled publicity machines. See Peter Balakian, “Photography, Visual Culture, and the Armenian Genocide” in Fehrenbach and Rodogno, eds., *Humanitarian Photography*, 89-114; Kevin Rozario, “‘Delicious Horrors’: Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern Humanitarianism,” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2003): 417-455; Cabanes, *The Great War*, 248-299. NER and Jeppe used film as well as photography. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Christina Twomey, “Framing Atrocity: Photography and Humanitarianism,” *History of Photography* 36, no. 3 (2012): 255-64; Zahid R. Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (Minneapolis, 2012), 153-188. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. On NER’s use of images of women and children, see Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 83-4, and Balakian, “Photography,” 104-109. Laura Briggs’ discussion of NGOs’ use of “madonna and waif” images in the 1950s to “mobilize ideologies of ‘rescue’, while pointing away from addressing causes,” is pertinent here: Briggs, “Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption,” *Gender & History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 179-200. On images of nation-building/national rebirth, see Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif., 2004); Claudia Koonz, “‘More Masculine Men, More Feminine Women’: The Iconography of Nazi Racial Hatreds,” in Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden*, 102-134; Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (2000); Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, trans. Haim Watzman (Waltham, Mass., 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries,” 385. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This visibility raises the issue of how knowledge and concealment operate in the aftermath of mass sexual violence, and their role in the re-acceptance of raped women. Nayanika Mookherjee argues that memories of rape during the Bangladesh war of 1971 today operate as a “public secret,” where those who are known to have been raped may retain their “honour” as long as this fact remains, in practice, *concealed in public*:“‘Remembering to forget’: Public Secrecy and Memory of Sexual Violence in the Bangladesh War of 1971,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 2 (2006): 433-450. A similar situation seems to have been at play for at least some of those Armenian women re-absorbed into the Armenian community—but since this concealment depends on a lack of visible differentiation, such “public secrecy” was hardly possible for tattooed women. For other contexts where the idea of “public secrecy” resonates, see Urvashi Batalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, N.C., 2000); Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (Wisconsin, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On the American “captivity narrative” of the most famous of these, Olive Oatman: Margot Mifflin, *The Blue Tattoo: The Life of Olive Oatman* (London, 2009); Jennifer Putzi, *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens, Ga., 2006); Brian McGinty, *The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival* (Norman, Okla., 2004). On the gueules cassées: Julie M. Powell, “About-Face: Gender, Disfigurement and the Politics of French Reconstruction, 1918-24,” *Gender & History* 28, no. 3 (2016): 604-622, and Marjorie Gehrhardt, “Gueules Cassées: The Men Behind the Masks,” *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 6, no. 4 (2013): 267-281. On Partition, see Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1998), 31-64, and Sujala Singh, “Nationalism’s Brandings: Women’s Bodies and Narratives of the Partition,” in Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray, eds., *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations* (Basingstoke, 2000), 122-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Arjun Appadurai, “Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization,” *Public Culture* 10, no. 2 (1998): 225-247. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Seeing Like a Nation-State: Young Turk Social Engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913-50,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 1 (2008): 15-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916*, ed. and intro. Ara Sarafian (1916; Princeton, N.J., 2000). The most recent and detailed historical accounts are Raymond H. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London, 2011), and Ronald. G. Suny, *“They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else”: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, N.J., 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. On sexual violence, MatthiasBjørnlund, “‘A Fate Worse Than Dying’: Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide,” in Dagmar Herzog, ed., *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London, 2008), 16-58. Most contemporary accounts use “Bedouin” synonymously with “Arab”, but the Armenians I discuss here were largely absorbed into nomadic (Bedouin) rather than urban (Arab) households: thus I use “Arab” only when quoting the original. The motivations behind Turkish, Kurdish, and Bedouin people’s actions were always complex: all benefitted structurally and economically from those they took in (from their labour, whether domestic or sexual, and/or from not having to pay a dowry, a major expense in a family’s life-cycle), but altruism also played its role, and the situation as a whole cannot simply be reduced to one of violent and self-interested exploitation. See Sarafian, “Absorption,” and Richard G. Hovannisian, “Intervention and Shades of Altruism during the Armenian Genocide” in Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (Basingstoke, 1992), 173-207. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Missionaries in Turkey were reliant on their powers of persuasion and relationships with local officials to protect even the few Armenians they employed as staff. The Armenian community and some Protestant missionaries in Syria managed to organize help and rescue clandestinely: Arakel K. Tchakirian, “The Romance of Recovering Armenian Orphans from the Turks,” n.d., ALON 12/9640/4631; JohnMinassian, *Many Hills Yet to Climb* (Santa Barbara, 1986); Hilmar Kaiser, *At the Crossroads of Der Zor: Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915-1917* (Reading, 2002); Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Beatrice Rohner’s Work in the Death Camps of Armenians in 1916,” in Jacques Sémelin, ed., *Resisting Genocide: The Multiple Forms of Rescue* (Columbia, 2010), 367-382. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. On Scandinavian missionaries’ relief efforts, see, see Bjørnlund, “National Survival,” and Inger Marie Okkenhaug, “Scandinavian Missionaries, Gender and Armenian Refugees during World War I: Crisis and Reshaping of Vocation,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 23 (2010): 63-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Flora A. Keshgegian, “‘Starving Armenians’: The Politics and Ideology of Humanitarian Aid in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century,” in Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown, eds., *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge, 2009), 140-155, here 144. See Rodogno, “Beyond Relief,” 5-6, for further details on the committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. “American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief: Minutes,” 1915-1919, Box 1, Record Group 2, Accession 2010:002, Near East Foundation records (FA1305), Rockefeller Archive Center [hereafter RAC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *New Near East* 4, no. 7 (1920): 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A sanguine contemporary assessment is Henry H. Riggs, “The Period of Disaster,” *A.B.C.F.M. history 1910-1942: section on the Turkey missions* (unpub. Ms., 1944), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810-1961, Houghton Library [hereafter ABC] 88). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Elizabeth S. Webb to James L. Barton, 5 October 1918, ABC 16.9.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Personnel records for Elizabeth S. Webb,” American Board in Turkey records, Item #15784, Digital Library for International Research Archive, available at <http://www.dlir.org/archive/items/show/15784>. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Elizabeth S. Webb, “A ‘Trade School’ in Adana,” *Life and Light for Woman* 49, no. 12 (1919): 524-28, here 524. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Near East Relief Unit, 1918-1920, Boxes 30-32, War Service Collection, WWI, 1914-1918, Smith College Archives [hereafter SCRU]. On the SCRU, see my forthcoming “‘Making Good’ in the Near East: The Smith College Relief Unit, Near East Relief, and Visions of Armenian Reconstruction, 1919-1921,” in Jo Laycock and Francesca Piana, eds., *Aid to Armenia* (Manchester, forthcoming). KathleenSheldon’s account of a Red Cross nurse working for NER resonates with this idea of seizing opportunities: “‘No More Cookies or Cake Now, “C’est la guerre”’: An American Nurse in Turkey, 1919 to 1920,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 23 (2010): 94-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Kerr’s career trajectory is also exemplary of someone who seized the opportunities offered by the social shifts the Great War engendered: he returned to Lebanon as a lab chemist after his first NER stint, later becoming President of the American University of Beirut. On Kerr, see Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 91-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Stanley Kerr to family, July 18, 1919, Stanley E. Kerr Archives 94, Zoryan Institute [hereafter SKA]. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Kerr to Marion, September 28, 1919, SKA 99; Kerr to family, Aleppo, July 18, 1919, SKA 94; Karen Jeppe, “Rapport Annuel de la Commission de la Société des Nations, Pour La Protection des Femmes et des Enfants dans le Proche-Orient: Section d’Alep,” February 21, 1927 [draft]. ALON 12/16489/4631. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. E.g. ALON 12/4631/4631, 12/9640/4631, 12/10589/4631. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See the correspondence in ALON 12/24391/4631. The branch continued to operate, arbitrating disputes between the Armenian, Turkish, and Greek communities over the “national identity” of orphans, running a large orphanage, and helping refugees to trace their families and emigrate. On the minority provisions of Sèvres and Lausanne and the contemporary political climate relating to minorities, see Lerna Ekmekcioğlu, “Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey’s Step-Citizens,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 657-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Karen Jeppe, “Account of the Situation of the Armenians in Syria and of my work amongst them from the 1st of May until the 1st of September 1922,” August 24, 1922, ALON 12/30066/4631. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For statistics, see Karen Jeppe, “Report of the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East. Aleppo July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927,” July 28, 1927, ALON 12/6075/4631. The exact number or proportion is difficult to determine. Although I can discern tattoos on 47 of the 463 women and girls helped by Jeppe (from the surviving sixteen of nineteen registers), I strongly suspect there were more than the ten per cent this represents: in some cases a girl’s tattoos stand out strongly in one photograph, yet are invisible in a second (see n.132). This is most likely down to the film emulsion and developing techniques used at the time (my thanks to Piers Rawson for his help here). Relief workers commented that “most” of the girls were tattooed (n.47), or that they were tattooed “without exception,” as Jenny Jensen, Jeppe’s helper, wrote: “Brev fra Aleppo,” *Armeniervennen* 5-6 (1925): 18. While they were probably exaggerating for the purposes of advocacy, it seems certain that the proportion tattooed was far greater than ten per cent. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Jeppe recorded that there was no custom of tattooing amongst the Turks (“Annual Report of the League of Nations Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East,” January 31, 1926. ALON 12/16489/4631). Separate here is medicinal or pilgrimage tattooing (never facial), sometimes practised by the Armenian community. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Mary Caroline Holmes, *Between the Lines in Asia Minor* (New York, 1923), 47. Emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. These comments are based on work in NER (and associated) collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center, Houghton Library, Hoover Institution Archives, Burke Library, the ABCFM collection at ARIT-Istanbul, and the writings of a number of NER workers. It is very likely that tattooed girls would have sought refuge at other relief stations near Holmes in Urfa—Hadjin, Adana, Aintab, Tarsus, Mardin, Marash, Aleppo—but archival references to them are very slight: beyond Elizabeth Webb’s description of Horepsime at Adana (n.36)and Kerr’s single mention from Aleppo (n.40), only Alice Keep Clark at Hadjin briefly mentions one girl in her memoir *Letters from Cilicia* (Chicago, 1924), 47. Elsewhere, the records are even sparser: NER’s newsletter mentioned tattooed girls at Marsovan in the north (*New Near East* 6, no. 3 (1920): 29) but I found no discussion by the workers there; and despite the strong set of archival records for Harpoot (in the interior), the only mention found was on the reverse of a photograph in the collection of the station’s doctor, Ruth Parmelee, who wrote of one of the mothers depicted: “tattoo marks do not show – done by the Arabs during deportations.” Box 6, Folder 3, Ruth A. Parmelee Papers, Hoover Institute Archives [hereafter Parmelee Papers]. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Just one issue of NER’s newsletter—*New Near East* 6, no. 3 (1920)—included images of tattooed girls. A photograph on page 13, taken by the American archaeologist Francis W. Kelsey during his Near East trip in 1919-1920, shows five tattooed girls in Aleppo (probably rescued by Kerr and Dunaway). NER cropped out the background (focusing attention even more on the tattoos) and printed it as a space-filler, underneath completely unrelated articles, as “Girls Rescued from Harems—Thousands Are Still in Captivity.” The original is at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Accession No. 7.197. The second image, “Marks Hard to Erase,” was printed on the “News Notes” pages (29-30) with a short paragraph; I discuss this below. In *Orient im Bild*, besides the image of Zumroot, only two other photographs of tattooed women appear (no. 9 (1927): 65, and no. 5 (1929): 38), with very short comments or captions. Two other publications, *The Slave Market News* and *Armeniervennen* (“Friend of Armenia”) are discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Part of Kerr’s collection is held by the Zoryan Institute, and part by Joyce Chorbajian. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Florence Billings to friends, Brusa, December 8, 1919, Florence Billings Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 1.4, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Clark, *Letters from Cilicia*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Jane Caplan, “Introduction,” in Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Jane Caplan, “‘National Tattooing’: Traditions of Tattooing in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body*, 156-173; Caplan, “Educating the Eye: The Tattooed Prostitute,” in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires, 1890-1940* (Cambridge, 1998), 100-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Beyond the references cited in n.23, see, inter alia, June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993), and Alan Govenar, “The Changing Image of Tattooing in American culture, 1846-1966,” in Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body*, 212-33. Bruce Grant’s *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009) is a compelling reading of captivity narratives in a different imperial context. It is worth noting that at this time, tattoos—though never facial tattoos—were becoming fashionable amongst European and American upper classes. See Jordana Bailkin’s investigation of the interplay between fashionable and forcible colonial tattoos in “Making Faces: Tattooed Women and Colonial Regimes,” *History Workshop Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005): 33-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. William N. Chambers to Herbert E. Case, Adana, May 14, 1919. William N. Chambers Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, Record Group 30, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library [hereafter Chambers Papers]. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Again, it is difficult to determine how the women themselves saw this “transculturation.” Those who later rejoined the Armenian community often emphasize their unease and discomfort with the Bedouin way of life, their hatred of their tattoos, and their desire to escape, but again, the circumstances and constraints of telling filter their testimony (see n.7). It is suggestive that many were not “absorbed” alone, but alongside other Armenians, meaning that an earlier identity could be maintained to some extent. Fethiye Çetin, in her memoir of her Turkish-Armenian grandmother, recounts a childhood memory of her grandmother and certain other women of the (Turkish) village baking unfamiliar cakes in spring: they were celebrating Easter. Çetin, *My Grandmother: A Memoir*, trans. Maureen Freely (London, 2008), 101-2. It is reasonable to assume that when they moved communities, the women’s identities became to some degree liminal or bifurcated, but that in practical terms most adapted themselves to their new households’ way of life. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Winifred Smeaton, “Tattooing Among the Arabs of Iraq,” *American Anthropologist* 39, no. 1 (1939): 53-61; Henry Field, *Body Marking in Southwestern Asia* (Papers of the Peabody Museum 45, no. 1 (1958)); A.T. Sinclair, “Tattooing—Oriental and Gypsy,” *American Anthropologist* 10, no. 3 (1908): 361-386. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. C.P. Jones, “Stigma and Tattoo,” in Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body*, 1-16, here 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Smeaton, “Tattooing,” 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Hanne Schönig, “Le corps et les rites de passage chez les femmes du Yémen,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 113-114 (2006): 167-77, here 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Jeppe, “Rapport Annuel,” February 21, 1927. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Smeaton, “Tattooing,” 59; Schönig, “Le corps et les rites de passage,” 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Smeaton, “Tattooing,” 60-61. Importantly, then, the designs have nothing to do with Islam either (which in fact forbids tattooing, even as it continues in practice), contrary to the claims western newspapers sometimes made: e.g. *Ogden Standard Examiner*, September 5, 1920, 2. See Göran Larsson, “Islam and Tattooing: An Old Question, A New Research Topic,” *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 23 (2011): 237-56. As far as I can establish, the patterns marked on Armenian women’s bodies were not substantially different from those normally used, confirming my point that these tattoos signified *absorption*, not captivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *New Near East* 6, no. 3 (1920): 29; Karen Jeppe to A. Lancaster Smith (*Slave Market News* editor), May 22, 1925, as reported in Lancaster Smith’s letter to Sir Frederick Lugard, June 4, 1925, ALON 12/43565/4631. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *The Slave Market News* 1, no. 5 (1925): 3. On the harem, see Irvin Cemil Schick, “The Women of Turkey as Sexual Personae: Images from Western Literature,” in Zehra F. Arat, ed., *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Woman”* (New York, 1998), 101-123. Both Sinclair and Field’s research, and anecdotal evidence, suggest that it was in fact not men, but women (usually from outside the group) who performed the tattooing—so the slippage between tattooing and sex (see Fig.5) was also an orientalist fantasy. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *The Slave Market News* 1, no. 3 (1924): 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. At the time, American courts were “fretfully” accepting Armenians as legally white (as David Roediger puts it: *Working towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York, 2006), 96), but socially and culturally they were often labelled (and treated) as “Asiatics.” The fundraising literature therefore worked hard to “whiten” Armenians and demarcate them from other Near Eastern populations. See Janice Okoomian, “Becoming White: Contested History, Armenian American Woman, and Racialized Bodies,” *MELUS* 27, no. 1 (2002): 213-237; Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana, 2006); Daniel Gorman, “Empire, Internationalism, and the Campaign against Traffic in Women and Children in the 1920s,” *20th Century British History* 19, no. 2 (2008): 186-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Chambers to Case, May 14, 1919; “Statement with Regard to the Deportation of Women and Children in Turkey and the Neighbouring Countries. Mademoiselle Vacaresco, Romanian Delegate,” September 21, 1921, A.V/7, 1921; Mark Ward to US Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes, May 3, 1922, archived in Box 3, Folder 11, Parmelee Papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Jeppe, “Annual Report,” January 31, 1926. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion,” quotes on 66, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Uğur Ümit Üngör,“Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes: Social Consequences of War and Persecution in the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1923,” *War in History* 19, no. 2 (2012): 173-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Lerna Ekmekcioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford, Calif., 2015); Ekmekcioğlu, “Climate for Abduction.” Tachjian and Ekmekcioğlu disagree strongly on whether this was a politics of exclusion or a “climate of redemption”: Tachjian, “Mixed Marriage, Prostitution, Survival: Reintegrating Armenian Women into Post-Ottoman Cities,” in Nazan Maksudyan, ed., *Women and the City, Women in the City: A Gendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History* (London, 2016), 86-106, here 104n.20 and 105n.30, and Ekmekcioğlu, “Climate for Abduction,” 525n.6. In part this derives from their differing source bases and emphases, but the point here is that there was no single response amongst the varied Armenian communities and survivors, just as there was not amongst relief workers. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Alice Moore to Miss Lewis, May 25, 1919, Derindje. Box 30, SCRU. See also the testimonies of Karapet Tozlian, Nouritza Kyukdjian, and Suren Aram Alajajian in Svazlian, *Testimonies*; when Vergeen arrives in America, her husband asks her not to hide her tattoos, and calls them “symbols of your valor and honor.” Derderian, *Vergeen*, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ekmekcioğlu, “Climate for Abduction,” 525n.6. *Vergeen* bears out this point (pp. 142, 160, 249). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Caplan’s observation that “The tattoo occupies a kind of boundary status on the skin, and this is paralleled by its cultural use as a marker of difference, an index of inclusion and exclusion” resonates here. Caplan, “Introduction,” xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Vartan Katchperouni, “Rapport médical de la Maison de Réception de la Ligue des Nations a Alep, 1925-1926 [sic],” ALON 12/49505/4631. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Holmes, *Between the Lines*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. *New Near East* 6, no. 3 (1920): 29. The gueules cassées felt a similar overriding desire for surgical intervention: Powell, “About-Face,” 609-612. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Elsie Greene Dewey, manuscript, Adana, May 29, 1919. Albert Dewey Papers, Box 2, Folder 80, Record Group 161, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library [hereafter Dewey Papers]; Chambers to Case, May 14, 1919; Webb, “Trade School.” [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *New Near East* 6, no. 3 (1920): 29. Among those who wrote for advice were Dr. M. Hovneriar in Aleppo: *Journal of the American Medical Association* 74, no. 10 (1920): 691-2, and Dr. Wilfred M. Post, *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, December 19, 1919, 2. The two most commonly used techniques, it seems, were removal by surgical means or by chemical poultice: Marvin D. Shie, “A Study of Tattooing and Methods of its Removal,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 90, vol. 2 (1928): 94-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *The Slave Market News* 1, no. 3 (1924): 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. *Ogden Standard Examiner*, September 5, 1920, 2. “Nargig Abakiam” appears to be a misspelling of “Nargis Avakian.” [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Blue Triangle News*, January 16, 1920: 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Powell, “About-Face,” and Gehrhardt, “Gueules Cassées.” As Powell notes (610), the masks, which were inflexible and “evoked a quality of pastness…central to their appeal,” were part of a profoundly conservative attempt “to co-opt and embody a traditional, French masculinity.” In a period when France was coming to terms with modernity and the pace of change, the masks were comfortingly “out of step” with the “modernist spirit:” they “erased a vision of destructive change.” [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. The balance of power within an organization or individual relief station could be key: as I show, workers could sometimes take small initiatives to help the women, or forceful individuals could sway others, and thus shape practices at a local or organisational level. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Rodogno, “Beyond Relief.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Near East Relief: Minutes, 1919-1920, Box 1, Record Group 2, Accession 2010:002, Near East Foundation records (FA1305), RAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Executive Committee to Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, n.d. [1921]. Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund (FA061), Series 3, Box 9, Folder 104, RAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. “Report of the Near East Relief to Congress, December 31, 1921,” Box 134, Record Group 1, Accession 2009: 104, Near East Foundation records (FA406), RAC. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Riggs, “The period of disaster,” 9, 29. For the American missionaries, the years immediately following World War I were precarious. Since the mission’s beginning in the 1840s, they had concentrated on the empire’s Armenian population, partly because of the Muslim elite’s objections to their working amongst Muslims, partly because they hoped to inspire a Christian “revival” amongst the Armenians, which included drawing them away from their supposedly sloppy Orthodox practices into Protestantism. This revival was supposed to function as a lever for Ottoman society as a whole, encouraging the Muslim and Jewish populations to convert too. After the genocide it therefore “began to look as though the whole educational and medical work of the missions might be blotted out” (Ibid., 1). At the same time, the missionaries—their confidence bolstered by the hope of an American mandate or at least social reform—began to hope that the Muslim populations, their “old confidence” shaken by the tumult of war, might now be “open” to Christianity. The general feeling, as before, was that the Armenians were central. The missionaries’ goal was thus not an independent Armenian nation, but a reconstructed and integrated national religious group within Turkey: as Hans-Lukas Kieser notes, the missionaries variously supported federalism, the return of Armenian and Kurdish refugees, an American mandate, and the installation of a new liberal government. Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia, 2010): 34-47.It is not irrelevant that many missionaries stationed in Turkey were born there, in (if also apart from) a religiously and ethnically heterogeneous society. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Emma Cushman and Wilfred Post, “Armenian Relief Work in Konia,” October 1916, ABC 16.5 v1. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Chambers to Case, May 14, 1919; Henry H. Riggs to family, July 18, 1920, ABC 16.9.7 v.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. John Merrill to Mr. Bell, Aintab, February 22, 1919, ABC 16.9.5 v.25.v.5; Mary W. Riggs to family, August 10, 1919, ABC 16.9.8 v.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The missionaries repeatedly expressed a preference, during the deportations, that girls commit suicide rather than “turn” and renounce Christianity. See Bryce and Toynbee, *Treatment of Armenians*. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See Barbara Reeves-Ellington, *Domestic Frontiers: Gender, Reform, and American Interventions in the Ottoman Balkans and the Near East* (Amherst, Mass., 2013); Heleen Murre-van den Berg, “Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Middle-Eastern Women” in Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flaskerud, eds., *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East* (Oxford, 2005), 103-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Typed statistics archived in Box 1, Folder 1.2, Parmelee Papers. “*All* such were victims of disease,” wrote Caroline Holmes, “and not a few died as a result, in spite of care and nursing and up-to-date methods in the treatment of venereal diseases.” Holmes, *Between the Lines*, 29. See also Ward to Hughes, May 3, 1922. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Elsie M. Kimball to family, July 24, 1919. Elsie M. Kimball Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, Mount Holyoke College Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Mrs. Howard B. McAfee, “Sob-Stuff from Syria: A Story of the Near East,” n.d., Howard B. MacAfee Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institute Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Susan W. Orvis to Miss Lamson, Talas, January 3, 1920, ABC 16.9.4 v.7. Ruth Parmelee also made a cut-off at age 13 for mandatory examination for STDs: Box 1, Folder 1.2, Parmelee Papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. YWCA worker Helen Jones noted that the women “sometimes” ran away, later giving the figure of “one or two”: Helen Jones to Mary Lyon, October 1, 1919, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Box 708, Folder 6, Sophia Smith Collection [hereafter YWCA USA]. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Susan W. Orvis to Miss Lamson, Talas, January 3, 1920, ABC 16.9.4 v.7. Agnes Fenenga in Mardin concurred: “[They] need so much watching.” Fenenga to Women’s Board of Missions, October 19, 1919, ABC 16.9.8 v.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Helen Jones to Mary Lyon, 1 October 1919. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. “Relief work at Harpoot 1919-1922,” n.d., Box 1, Folder 1.2, Parmelee Papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Parmelee’s comment inscribed on the back of photograph,Box 6, Folder 6.2, Parmelee Papers. “Turk babies”: Elsie Tanner, “Report. October 1 to November 1, 1919,” Box 708, Folder 6, YWCA USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Helen Jones to Sarah Lyon, August 30, 1919, Box 708, Folder 6, YWCA USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Helen Hendricks, ed., *Report of the Overseas Committee of the War Work Council of the YWCA, 1917-1920* (New York, 1920), 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Elsie Tanner, “Report of E.K. Tanner to the War Work Council, 1 July-1 Sept 1919,” Box 708, Folder 6, YWCA USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., and Helen Jones to Sarah Lyon, October 1, 1919. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Tanner, “Report. October 1 to November 1, 1919.” Mary Riggs noted the different atmosphere in her letter to the Women’s Board of Missions, October 17, 1919, ABC 16.9.8 v.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Holmes, *Between the Lines*, 47-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. “After these months of slavery these girls are responding well to the care and attention which is being bestowed upon them to bring back an appreciation of what Christianity is.” Chambers to Case, May 14, 1919. Albert Dewey’s wife also took an active interest in their care (Dewey himself seems to have ignored them entirely): see Box 2, Folder 80, Dewey Papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Webb, “Trade School,” 526. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ibid., 525. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Elizabeth S. Webb, “Our Happiness Factory: A refuge for abused and helpless girls,” ABC 16.9.5 v.23.v3. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Webb, “Trade School,” 528. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. See Esther Greene’s letters to family, September 2, 1919, September 28, 1919, November 20, 1919, SCRU Box 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Esther Greene, July 12, 1919, SCRU Box 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Justine Hill, October 17, 1919, SCRU Box 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Mabel Elliott, *Beginning Again at Ararat* (New York, 1924), 20-35, here 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Ibid., 185-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Florence Billings, cited above, described tattooed girls in Constantinople. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Bjørnlund, “National Survival,” 1. See also Jonas Kauffeldt’s critical introduction to his translation of Karen Jeppe’s serialized “biography” of her adopted Armenian son, *Misak: An Armenian Life* (London, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Bjørnlund, “National Survival,” 17-18. Grundtvig (1783-1872) was a theologian, historian, and teacher, and had a deep influence on the course of Danish nationalism well into the twentieth century. Ove Korsgaard, *NFS Grundtvig—as a political thinker* (Copenhagen: Djöf Publishing, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Archived translation of a letter from Karen Jeppe, July 13, 1921, ALON S146, “Deported Women and Children in Turkey to June 30th 1924.” [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Karen Jeppe, “Report of the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East. Aleppo July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927,” July 28, 1927. Jeppe thus valued the *agency* of the refugees in a way which American missionaries typically did not (since it threatened to disrupt hierarchies of power and obedience). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Jeppe, “Account of the Situation of the Armenians in Syria.” [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Karen Jeppe to League of Nations Secretary-General, Aleppo, January 31, 1922, ALON 12/19111/4631. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Jeppe, “Report of the Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East. Aleppo July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927.” [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Jeppe to League of Nations Secretary-General, January 31, 1922. On Jeppe’s colonies, see my forthcoming article in *History*, “‘An organic link between the Arab and Armenian world’: Karen Jeppe’s agricultural colonisation scheme in northern Syria, 1920-1935.” [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. “Protection of women and children in the Near East. Extract from the minutes of the thirtieth session of the Council. September 1 1924.” ALON A.46.1924.IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Reception House Registers, Loucia, August 5, 1925; Maritza, September 26, 1925; Aghonie, October 8, 1925. Loucia’s records note, for example, that she was tattooed “in an awful manner, not [only] the whole face and chest, but also the hands and fingers. Those [*sic*] are almost paralysed from this treatment. We are doing our best to help her.” (Loucia’s right hand eventually had to be amputated, and she was still unwell at Reception House in 1931.) However, like Zumroot’s, Loucia’s tattoos are completely invisible in her intake photograph—confirming my point that the proportion of tattooed girls is much higher than the intake registers themselves will confirm. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Although some Armenians had been able to afford studio portraits before the war, it was still unusual. The returnees may well have felt a sense of self-worth, sitting for their portrait in an Armenian studio, having just re-joined the Armenian community. On local Armenian portraiture and its meanings, see David Low, “Photography and the Empty Landscape: Excavating the Ottoman Armenian Image World,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 6 (2015), 31-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Album 60, no. 495; album 57, nos. 209-212. The caption, “fire kvinder ankommet til redningshjemmet,” is from a copy of one image, found in Jeppe’s collections in Gylling Lokalhistorisk Arkiv [hereafter GLA]. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Fig.4; other examples in ALON 12/4365/4631. The Danish Friends of Armenia also produced postcards of Jeppe’s activities, some showing tattooed girls (examples in GLA). Ironically, *The* *Slave Market News* also occasionally *retouched* the photographs to make the tattoos even more visible, although rather heavy-handedly—prompting some, including a British Foreign Office official resisting appeals for the government to involve itself in the rescues, to doubt that the tattoos were real: FO 1490/228/44, National Archives. One retouched *Slave Market News* postcard is archived in ALON 12/43565/1631, also printed in *The Slave Market News* 1, no. 3 (1924): 4: the image is of a girl named Mariam (June 18, 1924, Reception House Registers), who clearly has tattoos in her intake photograph, although less visibly than in *The Slave Market News*’image. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. As noted above, *Orient im Bild* published a few such photographs, with very short comments and captions. Jeppe’s influence was more evident with *Armeniervennen*, which published these photographs to shock and attract attention, but also often “normalized” the women by printing their life stories alongside their photos, just as they did with other rescued Armenians. See, for example, Jeghsa’s story, *Armeniervennen* 10, no. 9-10 (1930): 36-7. But in both publications, images of national renewal far outnumber and outweigh the images of tattooed women. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Her annual reports to the League detail funders from America, Europe, New Zealand, and Australia, some of whom had originally lobbied the League to set up the Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. On the mandate system, Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, 2015); on social reform, Rodríguez Garcia, Rodogno, and Kozma, eds., *League of Nations’ Work*. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. See Watenpaugh, “League of Nations’ Rescue,” 1321. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Jeppe, “Account of the Situation of the Armenians in Syria.” [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Jeppe, “Report, July 1, 1926-June 30, 1927.” [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Mariam, June 6, 1924; Eliza, February 20, 1925, Victoria, February 16, 1925; Haiganoosh, July 22, 1924, Reception House Registers. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. *Armeniervennen* 10, no. 9-10 (1930): 36-7. Two photographs are in Jeppe’s private albums, one a glass slide held by GLA. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. “Personnel records for Elizabeth S. Webb.” [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Ayşe GülAltınay, and YektanTürkyılmaz, “Unravelling layers of gendered silencing: Converted Armenian survivors of the 1915 catastrophe,” in Amy Singer, Christoph K. Neumann and Selçuk Akşin Somel, eds., *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York, 2011); Çetin, *My Grandmother*. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)