A Bag of Seeds, a Mule, and an Empty Timber Frame: Building Indebted Lives in Southern Macedonia

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View of the wheat monocrop surrounding the village of Mikrokambos, overlooking Lake Pikrolimni. Photograph by the author, 2023.

Rising from the lush slopes of Mount Vistra in North Macedonia, the Vardar River flows eastward to dissect the city of Skopje. From there, it turns south, coursing through the central Balkan watershed until it meets the militarized EU border with Greece. To cross the barbed wire, concrete walls, and Frontex patrols—deployed since the 2015 humanitarian crisis—it must change its name: from Vardar to Axios. Eventually, the river empties into the Aegean Sea, threading through a wide, fertile valley shaped by millennia of sediment and retreating shorelines. Some six thousand years ago, this delta was a limnic basin—swampy, shell-strewn, and rich with clay and silt—gradually infilling the edge of the Thermaic Gulf, west of Thessaloniki. A century of monoculture farming, damming, and extractive land practices has drained its flow. What was once a landscape of swamps and tributaries has hardened into cracked earth, its surface fractured by drought. Below-average precipitation since 2021, coupled with rising temperatures and soil depletion, have precipitated a profound ecological breakdown. The villages that line the plain are depopulating, the wheat monocultures failing, and nationalist fervor intensifying.

This essay tends to this valley in southern Macedonia, a *place*, a borderland that has been the site of violent displacements of peoples and ecologies.[1] It traces one such moment of rupture: the agrarian refugee settlement project implemented in the aftermath of the 1923 Lausanne Convention on the Exchange of Populations between Turkey and Greece. It focuses on the work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC), an extraterritorial humanitarian agency established by the League of Na-

1 Throughout this essay, I refer to the region as "southern Macedonia" to acknowledge its historical and geographical continuity across contemporary borders. While this territory lies within the boundaries of the modern Greek state, I avoid the designation "Greek Macedonia" in order to foreground the region's geopolitical volatility and its multiethnic histories—many of which have been actively suppressed within national narratives. The term also reflects the presence of the neighboring state of North Macedonia, whose name was formalized in the 2018 Prespa Agreement, and highlights the contested nature of regional identities shaped by both regional and international interventions. When quoting original documents, I retain their historical locutions.

tions to permanently resettle over one million displaced people in Greece. Through an ambitious agrarian program of land redistribution and mass shelter provision, the RSC sought to transform this historically multiethnic and geopolitically volatile region into a monoculture landscape. Here, monoculture refers not only to the agricultural practice of dedicating arable land to the production of a single crop, but also to the state's attempt to construct a homogenous cultural, religious, and linguistic identity out of a historically heterogeneous territory. These two meanings of monoculture—ecological and ethnopolitical—are inseparable. In this agrarian program national consolidation, economic development, and territorial transformation violently converged. At the center of this apparatus was the smallholding: both the principal productive asset and the tool for converting displaced populations into cultivators, landowners, and debtors. Borrowing from colonial administrative systems, the RSC applied a logic of subdivision and standardization—parsing territory and classifying people according to productivity, kinship, and origin. Together with the rural shelter, the smallholding was one of the two spatial instruments that tethered displaced bodies to property, property to debt, debt to labor, and labor to the construction of the ethnostate.

ETHNOSTATES ESTABLISHED

The Lausanne Convention on the Exchange of Population between Turkey and Greece, signed on January 30th, 1923, was one of the first cases of systematic and compulsory "population exchange"—a misnomer for forced population displacement—between countries in the aftermath of a military conflict supervised by the international community.[2] It introduced a new instrument of international law so controversial and ethically fraught that even its original framers refused to take credit for its authorship. Delegates from Turkey and Greece, representatives of the Great Powers, and humanitarian actors alike disavowed responsibility, questioning the morality of the Convention's obligatory nature. Many found it repugnant, nonetheless signed it into law and heralded it as the only viable and long-lasting solution.[3] At the stroke of a pen, 1.22 million Christian Orthodox subjects were displaced to Greece, while 350,000 Muslim subjects were expelled to Turkey, where they were declared re-naturalized citizens of their—unknown and unfamiliar—homelands.[4]

In hindsight, the forced exchange represented the apex—if not the inevitable conclusion—of the principles that guided the reassembly of a new world order following World War I. Couched in the language of the liberal theory of international relations, it expressed a commitment to "self-determination and conciliation between victor and vanquished."[5] In Realpolitik, this principle of self-determination served as the driving force for the establishment of nation-states with ethnically homogenous populations. In today's terms, the *ethnostate*—a sovereign state consolidated along majoritarian ethnic lines—emerged as the only formula devised for the partition of three collapsing empires, the Ottoman, the Habsburg, and the

2 Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol, Greece-Turkey, (Lausanne: January 30, 1923).

3 Harry J. Psomiades, *Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Crisis 1922–1924: A Study on the Politics of International Humanitarian Intervention and the Greek-Turkish Obligatory Population Exchange Agreement* (Bloomingdale, Illinois: Pella Pub Co, 2011), 98–99.

4 Accurate figures, as Hirschon explains, are impossible to ascertain. The estimation comes from contemporary accounts of the mixed Committee overseeing the transfer, as well as later demographic data. See Renée Hirschon, "'Unmixing Peoples' in the Aegean Region," in *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, ed. Renée Hirschon (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2003), 14.

5 Hirschon, "'Unmixing Peoples' in the Aegean Region," 6. On the ideological foundations of Woodrow Wilson and his articulation of a liberal democratic theory of international relations, see Patricia O'Toole, *The Moralist: Woodrow Wilson and the World He Made* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2018). Wilson's principle of self-determination reverberated outside Europe igniting political upheavals and anticolonial struggles. However, the rapid disintegration of his promise, affirmed by the US retrenchment and Congress's refusal to ratify the Versailles Treaty, brought a new wave disillusionment and conflict. See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Russian.[6] The second objective, negotiated behind closed doors, was the maximization of territorial gains and spheres of influence of the Allies. New borders were drawn, territories reapportioned, states consolidated, and peoples displayed to ensure that the colonial holdings and geopolitical advantages of the victors remained unscathed.

Of the 85 million people affected by the territorial reapportionment of the three empires, two-thirds were classified as citizens of one of the twenty-eight "old enlarged, or newly created" nation-states.[7] The management of this crisis was delegated to armed forces, which assumed the policing of borders and population movements, and to nascent international organizations, such as the League of Nations, established in 1920. This delegation was not only rooted in the inability of single states to act but also in the fundamental notions regulating the inscription of the native in the juridical order of the nation-state.[8] "The whole system [was] based on a scheme of national states, with populations which fit into the scheme of nationalities," John Hope Simpson, a British Liberal politician who also served as League of Nations expert on refugees and second director of the RSC, explained. And he added, "[T]he person without nationality [did] not fit into that system"[9]

And yet, the Covenant of the League did not include any specific mention of refugees—let alone a provision for their protection.[10] Any intervention or advocacy led by the organization on refugees' behalf had to be instigated by a special appeal, then negotiated at the General Council which in turn decided the type and extent of responsibility its agencies would assume. Nor did the League define itself as a humanitarian actor. It explicitly entrusted this task to philanthropic organizations such as Red Cross societies (as outlined in Article 25 of the Covenant). In other words, the League did not intend to develop infrastructural capacities or allocate funding for humanitarian operations but rather to coordinate with relief organizations within national jurisdictions. If the League created a tentative humanitarian apparatus, it developed empirically through Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian Arctic explorer and diplomat, who almost single-handedly led the League's High Commission for Refugees with minimum resources.

As many legal scholars have noted, the humanitarian actors concerned with the displaced attempted to convince nation-states that refugees were not a category in need of special protections but rather impoverished economic migrants in need of employment.[11] It was a tactical maneuver and a pragmatic consideration on the part of Nansen, since what we understand today as the right to asylum or the freedom of movement were not enshrined in the post-war system of international peace. In place of rights-based arguments, the League's response to displacement blurred the line between refugees and migrants. Nansen and his High Commission did not appeal to rights, nor did they attempt to mobilize compassion for the plight of the displaced.[12] If post-war economic recovery and development depended on the expansion of labor markets, he wagered, then states might ultimately accommodate refugees—not as a special category, but as workers, debtors, and cultivators of national territory. These dynamics converged, with particular clarity, in the Greek case.

6 For a comparative analysis between the three empires and their dissolution, see, for instance, Mark von Hagen and Karen Barkley, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies And Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

7 Joseph B. Schechtman, *European Population Transfers, 1939–1945* (New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1971), 4.

8 Giorgio Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 92.

9 Sir John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem: Report of a Survey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1939), 230.

10 On the shifting definitions in international law and the League of Nations's attempt to provide legal protections, see Claudena M. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995). Relevant chapters in the same volume include "The Emergence of a New Regime," 77–100, and "The Quest of Legal Protection," 101–145.

11 This argument is more clearly articulated in the work of Katy Long: Katy Long, "When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection," *Migration Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 4–26. For a similar argument see Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe,* 103–105.

12 John Hope Simpson, "The Refugee Problem," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931–1939)* 17, no. 5 (1938): 620.

HUMANITARIAN CONFINEMENT

The months between the Greek military defeat and the signing of the Lausanne Treaty marked the first phase of displacement, during which Christian Orthodox subjects fled the Turkish coastline under emergency conditions. The second phase, following the Treaty and overseen by the international community, formalized the compulsory exchange of populations: Muslim subjects were expelled from Greece—primarily from southern Macedonia—while the remaining Christian Orthodox were removed from Turkey. In response to the initial crisis, a multitude of humanitarian organizations arrived in Greece after the League extended Nansen's mandate to include the country.[13] The American Red Cross (ARC) and American Near East Relief (NER) quickly came to dominate relief operations, replicating the spatial technologies and governance structures they had developed during World War I. Drawing upon their military and colonial administrative experience, U.S. humanitarians sought to make camps self-sufficient and keep them away from established communities. Whenever possible, camps were pushed to exurban and remote locations where "able bodied grown-up individuals ha[d] to work" to receive relief.[14] Brochures and camp bulletin boards issued warnings: "You have to obey the orders of the chiefs of your camp, you have to follow the rules they will give for the work in the camps. Those who do not work do not deserve any relief and relief will, therefore, be refused [sic] them."[15]

This cadre of U.S. humanitarian experts also shaped how the crisis was perceived internationally. When the first ARC reports reached Washington and Geneva, they described 300,000 refugees confined in southern Macedonia and West Thrace, 200,000 in Central Greece (including Athens), and another 300,000 in transit across the Aegean islands.[16] Their reports were rather bleak: "The refugees as almost as a whole are making very little if any progress toward recovering from their misfortunes," wrote the ARC field manager in Patras.[17] In his opinion, post-war mass unemployment was the root cause— not only hindering refugees' ability to become self-reliant but also undermining their peaceful coexistence with established communities.. "So acute has this problem become that the labor unions have taken action to prevent refugees from procuring work in their respective lines of work. […] There seems to be no chance of their being absorbed into the population of Greece and I believe that this situation will have to be faced by all concerned." [18] The ARC colonel in West Thrace shifted the blame onto the refugees themselves, blatantly defending the camps' disciplinary labor structure and claiming that unconditional support created "utterly worthless citizens, truculent, arbitrary and firmly convinced of their divine right to receive food for nothing and flatly refusing to accept work offered."[19] This construction of aid recipients as unproductive—and therefore undeserving—was not peripheral but central to how relief was distributed and withheld under the welfare imperatives of the Western empires from metropoles to colonies.

Backed by the U.S. State Department, ARC officials relayed their findings to the League's Coordination Committee and made their intentions clear: they wanted out. According to Colonel Haskell, who led the ARC mission in Greece, the only viable path forward was for the Greek government to "permanently settle the refugees"—a task it was infrastructurally,

13 Department of Medical Division in Greece, "Central Coordination Committee for Refugee Relief Work in Greece: Minutes of the 1st Meeting" (Athens, November 1922), Reel 127: Balkan States, Greece, ANRCR.

14 Department of Medical Division in Greece to Unknown, "Propaganda Sheet (Camp Rules): Refugees!," 1922, Reel 127: Balkan States, Greece, ANRCR.

15 Ibid.

16 Central Committee for the Coordination of Relief Work, "Bulletin of Information" (Athens, November 1922), IX, Reel 127: Balkan States, Greece, ANRCR.

17 Henry Wolf (Manager of Patras) to the ARC Deputy Commissioner, "Patras No.24," March 1923, Reel 127: Balkan States, Greece, ANRCR, 1–2.

18 Ibid., 3.

19 Archives of the League of Nations, R1762, Report by Colonel Treloar to Colonel Johnson, 12 Apr. 1923, 48.28816.24912.

technically, and financially unequipped to handle. Any deeper involvement would entangle the ARC in a long-term, high-cost commitment. But with the United States retrenching from post-war Europe, neither the ARC's donors nor President Harding's administration were willing to extend their philanthropic hand. On June 30, 1923, the U.S. humanitarians officially announced their withdrawal from Greece five short months after the signing of the Lausanne Treaty.

EXTRATERRITORIALITY AND THE REFUGEE COMMISSION

With the Americans withdrawing from the region as the humanitarian crisis deepened, the League of Nations moved to intervene. The magnitude and violence of the displacement rendered the crisis a matter of international security in a region where Great Power rivalries, border disputes, and competing claims of sovereignty had simmered for decades. Within three months of protracted negotiations, the League approved a proposal for the creation of the Refugee Settlement Commission (RSC), an international humanitarian-via-development agency responsible for the permanent settlement of the displaced population in Greece. In tandem, Nansen laid the groundwork for an international loan to finance the RSC's operations, urging Eleftherios Venizelos, prime minister of Greece, to "make the world understand that the rapid and successful solution of the refugee problem is one on which the whole future of the country depends."[20] In doing so, the League maintained its refusal to act as a direct humanitarian provider or to recognize refugees as a distinct legal category, opting instead to manage displacement through financial and technocratic instruments.

The League not only served as guarantor of the international loan but also supervised this novel Commission directly, making it a extraterritorial agency *par excellence*. It prohibited the RSC from spending money for "temporary charitable purposes," stipulating that the agency's only goal was to permanently "establish refugees in productive work by means of land assigned to it, the funds placed at its disposal and its own income."[21] Put differently, the RSC, forbidden from providing food, clothing, or temporary shelter, could only address the immediate needs of the displaced through long-lasting spatial and economic mechanisms. To enable this, the Greek government amended domestic law to grant the RSC legal and territorial privileges. More than a million acres were allocated to the agency, which was allowed to use those lands for settlement purposes without being the *de jure* owner and was exempted from all taxation.[22] Taxes paid by refugees were redirected to the Commission itself, while the Greek state was forbidden from using any RSC-generated revenue as collateral for further loans without League approval. In effect, the RSC was a foreign agency with full legal capacity, independent of any Greek executive authority; according to Elizabeth Kontogiorgi's astute observation, "the Greek government had no right whatsoever to either supervise or intervene in the operations of the RSC even in cases where the former may have regarded the RSC's activities as inappropriate" or in direct conflict with state laws.[23]

20 Nansen (Istanbul) to Venizelos (London) cited from: Harry J. Psomiades, Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Crisis 1922–1924, 298.
21 C.524.M.187.1924.II: The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for International Loan (Geneva: League of Nations, October 30, 1924).
22 Elisabeth Kontogiorgi, Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 83.
23 Ibid., 89.

FROM RELIEF TO ENCLOSURE

As soon as the RSC administrators set foot in Greece, the basic parameters and ambitions of the humanitarianism-via-development program were put in place: the Commission would prioritize the rural settlement of refugees in the hinterlands of southern Macedonia, a geopolitical volatile region in the north, annexed to Greece after the Balkan Wars in 1913. The RSC board put it succinctly when it wrote that the scheme would be based on providing a small piece of "land for the refugees to settle upon and to cultivate for the purpose of becoming self-supporting citizens of Greece."[24] Thus, the coveted assimilation of refugees was linked to the acquisition of property and the capacity of the displaced to produce.[25] In this agrarian vision for the country's northern territory, the smallholding-based land redistribution program was understood as the fundamental productive asset as well as the vehicle for converting the displaced population into a large class of landowners and cultivators. As we will see, the Commission drew on colonial models of agrarian sedentarization and territorial management, subdividing land and sorting subjects through typologies of productivity, kinship, and origin—standardizing both plots and populations as part of a broader project of rural containment.

Although the displaced were not forced to move to the countryside, the RSC minimized support for urban refugees. The disparity in expenditures between rural and urban relief was rather staggering; more than £8 million was advanced for settlements laid out for rural refugees, whereas £1.2 million was allocated for the urban population, who represented 54 percent of refugees in Greece.[26] Wealthy merchants, entrepreneurs, and petit-bourgeois refugees from Anatolia, who had some means and informal support networks, stayed in major metropolitan areas, while poorer constituencies faced the impossible dilemma of either staying in the urban centers with minimum support or following along in the Macedonian hinterlands.[27] Standing on this thin line between inducement and humanitarian coercion, more than 350,000 subjects entered a scheme of land reform and long-term indebtedness—an arrangement that tethered relief to property and property to obligation.

Before turning to the material conditions of this agrarian settlement, it's worth parsing the calculus and imperatives that drove it. Antagonism between established communities and refugees surfaced at every level of economic, social, and political activity. In particular, the presence of refugees in cities led to fierce competition in the labor market, often manifesting as outright violence.[28] Dispersing the displaced to rural hinterlands emerged not only as a spatial strategy, but as a political priority. The rural operations also allowed the RSC to bypass the stipulation of providing sustenance to the displaced, while being prohibited from spending any money on charity—included the distribution of food. The RSC experts believed they could scale up the technology of the subsistence garden, in which recipients of aid were expected to cultivate food crops in allotments

24 C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, August 25, 1930), 4.

25 C.524.M.187.1924.II: The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for International Loan; and C.91.M.30.1924.II: Report on the Operations of the RSC for the First Three Months, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, March 6, 1924).

26 Charles B. Eddy, *Greece and the Greek Refugees* (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 34; and Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia*, 97.

27 Although a great number did follow—145,758 refugee families or approximately 600,000 individuals—remained in informal settlements in the periphery of Athens. As previously mentioned, the most captivating account of this story is recorded by Leontidou. Lila Leontidou, *Poleis tis siopis: Ergatikos epoikismos tis Athinas kai tou Peiraia, 1909–1940 [Cities of Silence: Worker's Settlement in Athens and Piraeus, 1909–1940]* (Athens: Ekdoseis Themelio, 1989). By 1925, the RSC would turn some of its resources to the urban settlements. The justification read as follows: "The establishment of an agricultural population in a given district increases the capacity of absorption of a town in that district. Accordingly, the role of the Department of Urban Colonization will henceforth be to reinforce, if possible, in this proportion, the urban population of centers in the districts where agricultural refugees are being settled." C.112.M.53.1925.II: Fifth Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, March 4, 1925).

28 Georgios Yiannakopoulos, *Refugee Greece: Photographs from the Archive of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies* (Athens: A. G. Leventis Foundation, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1992), 36.

within or adjacent to the sites of relief. If rural refugees were provided with rudimentary equipment, seeds, and a smallholding, the argument went, they could become food-independent before the next planting and harvesting cycle.

Extant DHTG shelters in the villages of Mikrokambos, Kastanies, and Gallikos.
Photograph by the author, 2023.
Bottom right: DHTG houses under construction in Western Thrace, c.1925.
Photograph by H.C. Jaquith. CAMS.

Beyond this immediate goal, the scheme rested on a longer-term premise: that refugees, once the acute crisis subsided, would transition from subsistence to commercial farming. Greek political parties, international agencies, and foreign lenders alike shared the conviction that "Greece should remain, as it had always been, a primarily agricultural economy."[29] Since its founding, the modern Greek state had relied on agriculture and related industries.[30] In the words of the last RSC Chairman, "events have obliged Greece to place agriculture in the front rank of her cares, and hence force to see in it the chief source of wealth of the country and the

29 Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia*, 103.

30 Many Greek scholars and economic historians have traced the centrality of agricultural production in the country's economy. The historiography of capitalist development of Greek agriculture focuses on the interpretation of the role of the state with respect to agrarian reforms and the 'agrarian question' in general, with landmarks including the creation of the independent Greek state, the agrarian reform led by RSC, and post-WWII reconstruction. A fierce debate among scholars emerged in the 1970s, when the nascent field of development economics entered the discourse. On the one side of the debate, Vergopoulos argued that agriculture operated as a sector perfectly complementary to the urban industrial sector. In contrast, Mouzelis argued that "disarticulation" between the two was what characterized Greek capitalist reproduction. In any case, both agreed that the smallholding and the intensified production based on family labor formed the primary unit of agriculture. Similarly, there has been a systematic negative transfer of resources between the family unit to Greece's economy. Vergopoulos's argument, that this type of agricultural enterprise continued into the capitalist system without being a "remnant of the past," is particularly pertinent for this essay. The state, through price control and taxation of agricultural products, and the need for market adjustment, pressured the farm family to intensify its production process by mobilizing all its resources. The family farm, for Vergopoulos, has survived despite these mechanisms and not due to them, comprising a capitalist venture without some kind of ideological or conscious transition. This argument reminds us Polanyi's theorization of mixed economy, where capitalist structures coexist with other forms of organization that predated them. See: Nicos P. Mouzelis, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment* (London, UK: Springer, 1979); Samir Amin and Kostas Vergopoulos, *La Question Paysanne et le Capitalisme* (Paris: NENA, 1974); Kostas Vergopoulos, *To Agrotiko Provlima stin Ellada [The Agrarian Question in Greece]* (Athens: Exadas, 1975); and Charalambos Kasimis and Apostolos G. Papadopoulos, "Family Farming and Capitalist Development in Greek Agriculture: A Critical Review of the Literature," *Sociologia Ruralis* 37, no. 2 (1997): 209–27.

essential element of its future economic development."[31] In the short term, the Commission's emphasis on subsistence cultivation relieved pressure on the state to import cereals and other foodstuffs—a crucial concern for a population that had expanded by one quarter in less than two years due to the forced exchange. In the long term, the projected conversion of refugees into a self-sustained class of smallholders promised an increase in agricultural output that could potentially balance the trade deficit. In this vision, the refugees constituted the labor force of the development apparatus; the smallholding—a "small piece of land for refugees to settle upon"—its infrastructure; and the RSC, its administrative engine. This agrarian strategy forged modernization through the countryside, anchored not in industrialization, but in refugee labor and the intensification of small-scale agricultural production. The refugee family farm was not a premodern remnant, but the means—the smallest functional unit—to force the establishment of capitalist integration into a countryside deemed underdeveloped and geopolitically precarious.

A HELLENIZING MAP AND THE COLONIZATION OF MACEDONIA

It is for this reason that the vast majority of rural settlements were established in southern Macedonia, the proverbial "New Lands" of the Greek state Here, the land tenure regime still bore the imprint of the late Ottoman Empire—particularly the çiftlik system, in which large estates were worked by sharecroppers under quasi-feudal arrangements.[32] In some regions, these estates produced cash crops like tobacco for regional or external markets, though subsistence farming was not absent. To be precise, 1,388 out of 2,089 rural settlements were founded in these borderlands, representing 60 percent of all rural refugees.[33] However, the more decisive factor in prioritizing the "Colonization of Macedonia" was the state's ambition to consolidate its national territory. "Hellenizing the New Lands," securing borders, and assimilating a heterogeneous population appealed not only to Greek authorities but also to the League's governing bodies. To the Great Powers, such a project was essential to the geopolitical stability of the Balkans, which had been embroiled in territorial conflicts over Macedonia for the past two decades.[34]

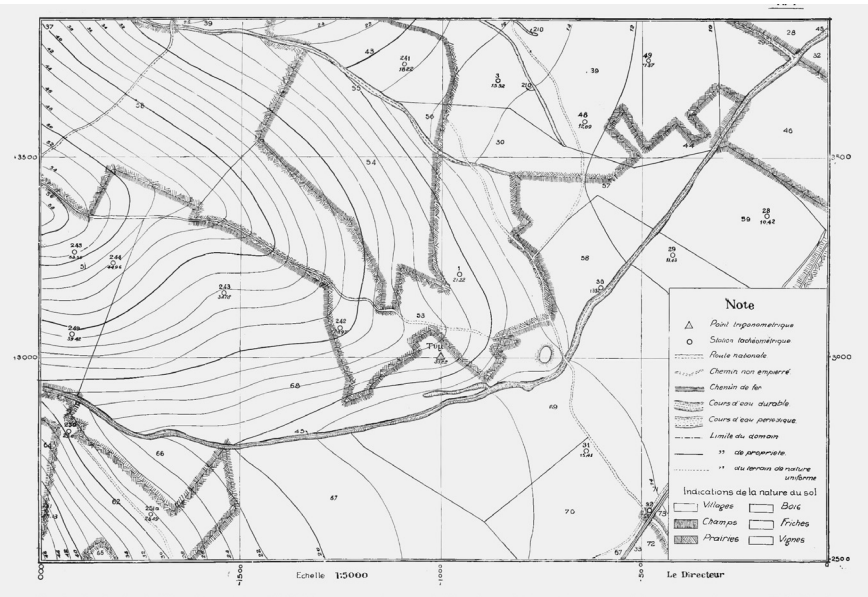
If the modern state of the post-war years rested on the ideal of a homogeneous ethnic identity, any definition of ethnicity in the Balkans, particularly in Macedonia, was both disjunctive and unstable. Or rather, if the architects of the modern ethnostate assumed that ethnicity could be deduced from the intersection of language, religion, race, or class, these determinants manifested in the region in all possible combinations: from Pontic Greeks and Romani to Grecophone Muslims, Slavic-speaking Christians, and Vlach populations, among many others. What these communities shared was a regional affiliation with southern Macedonia and vernacular and pastoral modes of inhabiting the land, which had been under Ottoman rule for four centuries. Focusing here on the Vardar basin as a paradigmatic zone of transformation: in between water and land, the swamps and the valley, communities remained rooted while ecological

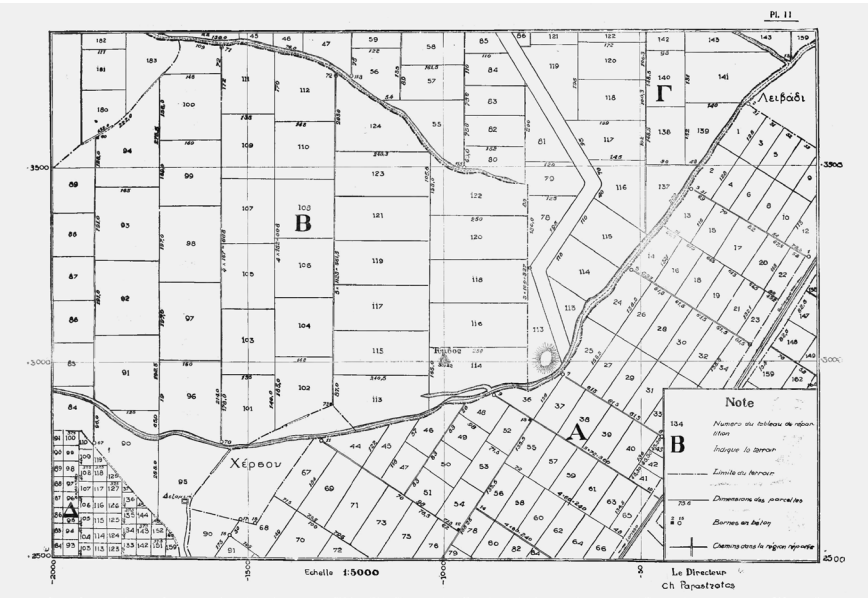
31 C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, 17.

32 Vergopoulos, *To Agrotiko Provlima stin Ellada [The Agrarian Question in Greece]*, Part I.

33 Experts believed that the expropriation of çiftliks would cause the least amount of resistance from the established communities. Suffice to say that this was an optimistic prediction: as historian Penztopoulos has shown, Greece's largest landowners, who hoped to benefit from the expulsion of the Ottoman owners, vehemently protested the rural refugee. In addition, landless sharecroppers squatted in abandoned estates in between the expulsion of Muslims owners and the arrival of refugees. Dimitri Pentzopoulos and Michael Llewellyn Smith, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact on Greece* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1962).

34 Mazower explains that ethnic cleansing, whether in the Balkans in 1912–13, or in Anatolia in 1921–1922, "was not a spontaneous eruption of primeval hatreds but the deliberate use of organized violence against civilians by paramilitary squads and army units; it represents the extreme force required by nationalists to break apart a society which was otherwise capable of ignoring the mundane fractures of class and ethnicity." Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2007), 129.





Topographic maps before and after land redistribution.
Plate I and Plate II in C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, League of Nations, August 25, 1930.

Pl. II

Cadastral Survey

Estate of Korynos. Fac-similié of distribution by plots.

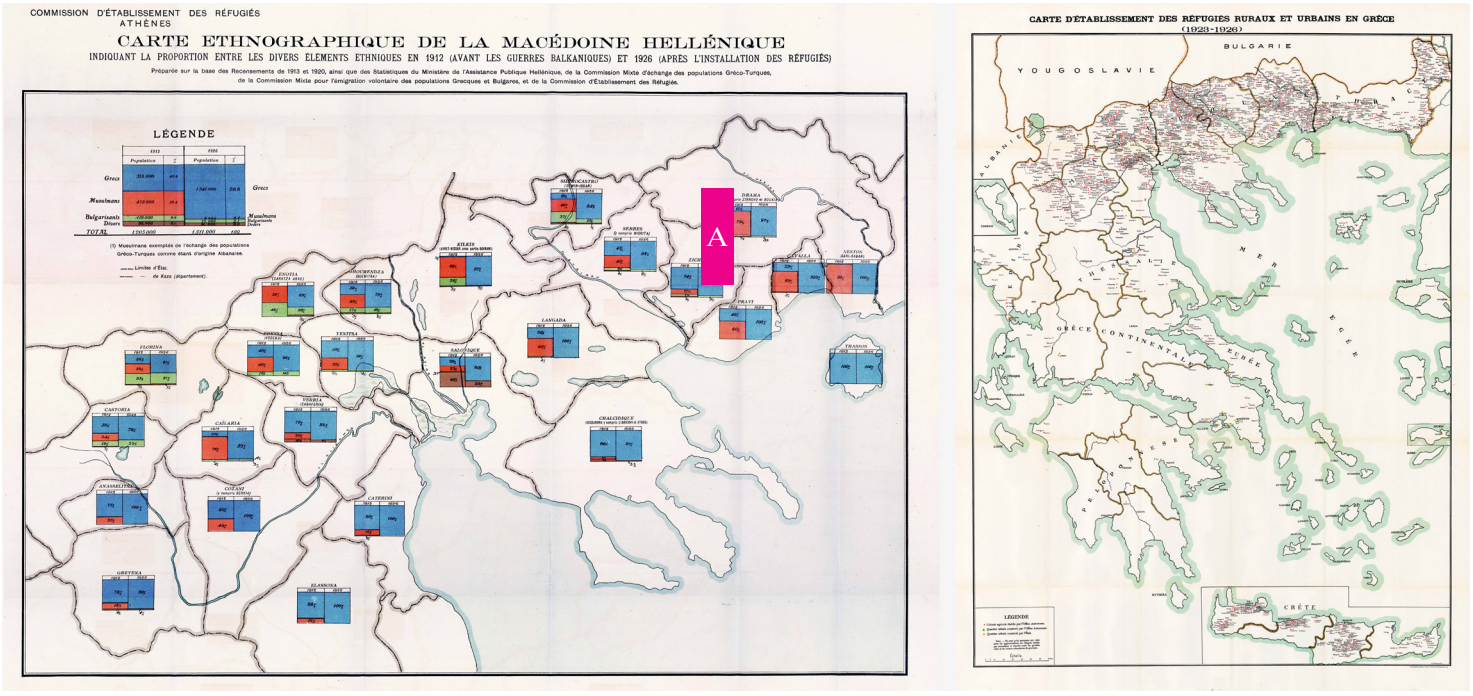
Translation of the corresponding sheet of the Survey:

Number	Colonist: Name	Christian name	Father's Christian name	Holding: Description of Colonist	Proportion of holding	Quality of Land: A — No of plot	Area Str	Area m²	Quality of Land: B — No of plot	Area Str	Area m²	Quality of Land: Γ — No of plot	Area Str	Area m²	Quality of Land: Δ — No of plot	Area Str	Area m²	Total Str	Total m²	Observations
101	Hadi-Parass	Athanasse		Cultivator	1 1/4	101	8	125	101	22	500	101	14	375	30	1	500	46	500	
102	Mitningas	Nicolas		»	1 1/4	102	8	125	102	22	500	102	14	375	103	1	500	46	500	
103	Bouclas	Efstratios		»	1 1/4	103	8	125	103	22	500	103	14	375	67	1	500	46	500	
104	Kalacos	Demetre		»	1 1/4	104	8	125	104	22	500	104	14	375	140	1	500	46	500	
105	Kozanitou	Mertzano		»	1 1/4	105	8	125	105	22	500	105	14	375	29	1	500	46	500	
106	Dallis	Georges		»	1 1/4	106	8	125	106	22	500	106	14	375	61	1	500	46	500	
107	Veves	Saranti		»	1 1/4	107	8	125	107	22	500	107	14	375	84	1	500	46	500	
108	Vassilicou	Fotios		»	1 1/4	108	8	125	108	22	500	108	14	375	33	1	500	46	500	
109	Ghavlaridou	Marie		»	1 1/4	109	8	125	109	22	500	109	14	375	23	1	500	46	500	
110	Léondaris	Constantin		»	1 1/4	110	8	125	110	22	500	110	14	375	19	1	500	46	500	
111	Raptopoulos	Jordan		»	1 1/4	111	8	125	111	22	500	111	14	375	150	1	500	46	500	
112	Horinos	Athanasse		»	1 1/4	112	8	125	112	22	500	112	14	375	157	1	500	46	500	
113	Héliopoulos	Nicolas		»	1 1/3	113	9	750	113	27	000	113	17	250	91	1	500	55	500	
114	Vayvaos	Anastasse		»	1 1/3	114	9	750	114	27	000	114	17	250	87	1	500	55	500	
115	Kavilias	Constantin		»	1 1/3	115	9	750	115	27	000	115	17	250	68	1	500	55	500	
116	Arabadjanis	Nicolas		»	1 1/3	116	9	750	116	27	000	116	17	250	22	1	500	55	500	
117	Miliatès	Nicolas		»	1 1/3	117	9	750	117	27	000	117	17	250	53	1	500	55	500	
118	Guanitès	Nicolas	Prodromo	»	1 1/3	118	9	750	118	27	000	118	17	250	173	1	500	55	500	
119	Arabadjidès	Constantin		»	1 1/3	119	9	750	119	27	000	119	17	250	10	1	500	55	500	
120	Hadji-Papa	Fori	Demetre	»	1 1/3	120	9	750	120	27	000	120	17	250	16	1	500	55	500	
121	Tsakires	Jean		»	1 1/3	121	9	750	121	27	000	121	17	250	38	1	500	55	500	
122	Zissoglou	Thrasaivoulos		»	1 1/3	122	9	750	122	27	000	122	17	250	36	1	500	55	500	
123	Mavridès	Demetre		»	1 1/3	123	9	750	123	27	000	123	17	250	99	1	500	55	500	
124	Papadopoulos	Haralambe		»	1 1/3	124	9	750	124	27	000	124	17	250	89	1	500	55	500	

Cadastral survey image.
C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, League of Nations, August 25, 1930.

zones shifted across landscapes and seasons. The basin was defined not by fixed borders but by seasonal inundations, reed beds, and mosquito-heavy marshlands—environments that defied clear cadastral inscription. As the mosaic of populations resisted legibility and classification within the modern ethnostate, so did Vardar's alluvium—muddy, saturated, and liminal.

Over this shifting terrain, a carpet of uniform subdivisions began to unfold. Demographic data was collected and tabulated. Cadastral maps were drawn. Smallholding was measured, graded, and assigned. Stored in the League's archives is the settlement program's supporting document: a 7,200-page survey listing each "colonist's" Christian name, occupation, assigned plot, soil quality, shelter type, and debt owed to the RSC. To borrow from the discursive framework of James Scott, the RSC attempted to render legible the instruments of national modernization. As he writes in *Seeing Like a State*, "the premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity. It lacked anything like a detailed 'map' of its terrain and its people. It lacked, for the most part, a measure, a metric, that would allow it to 'translate' what it knew into a common standard necessary for a synoptic view."[35] For Scott, rendering a society legible by arranging the population in ways that simplified modern state functions—taxation, conscription, and appeasement—was the central issue in modern statecraft. Arranged through property, the RSC's extra-statecraft ordered bodies and conscripted the most vulnerable population into the transformation of an ungovernable and multiethnic Macedonia into a modern Greek province. The maps—the census data, the nomenclature of classification, the visualization itself—did not merely represent this process. They made it feasible and conceivable.



Left: Map of demographic shifts in Macedonia between the 1912 and 1926 censuses, showing settlements produced by the RSC. K. Barbaritis (cartographer), Carte ethnographique de la Macédoine Hellénique (Paris: IMP. Berger, 1926).
Right: Map showing refugee settlements constructed by the RSC. Red triangles: agricultural colonies by the Autonomous Office; green squares: urban quarters by the Autonomous Office; orange squares: urban quarters by the State. K. Barbaritis (cartographer), Carte d'établissement de réfugiés ruraux et urbains en Grèce (1923–1926) (Paris: IMP. Berger, 1926).

35 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

A series of maps produced in 1926, midway into the settlement campaign, make this transformation visible. Using state-of-the-art chromolithography and the techniques of military cartography, two massive accordion-fold maps condensed the territorial logic of the RSC's operation into visual form. The first map focused on Macedonia and compared census data from 1912—before the Balkan Wars—to that of 1926, three years after the forced exchange. Stacked bar charts imprinted atop each administrative division of the RSC's Directorate General of Macedonia, registering the violent population shifts. In Kilkis, "Greeks" rose from 2 percent to 97 percent; "Muslims" dropped from 66 percent to near erasure. In Sidirokastro, "Greeks" increased from 19 percent to 84 percent. The second map captured the program's territorial footprint. Brown lines outlined the RSC's "Directorates of Colonization." Thick orange lines traced Greece's northern borders with Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria; the contested border with Turkey was conspicuously absent. Also, absent were the informal refugee encampments of Athens and Thessaloniki—or, as the cartographer put it, "the agglomerations established by the refugees themselves [were] not marked on the map." Instead, red triangles marked agricultural colonies established by the RSC. The mostly white surface of the "Old Lands" showed few symbols. But as the map moved northward, Macedonia thickened with red triangles, their density forming a red hue that saturated the borderlands—a monotone.

In a paradoxical reversal, refugees from Anatolia, who were the victims of Greek nationalism, became the unwitting participants of its legitimation. When they resided in the country's urban centers, they were considered a security concern; but pushed to the swamps of Macedonia, they were used to securitize the national borders, dwarf the presence of this mosaic of minorities, and mute their territorial claims.[36] Charles Howland, the second Chairman of the RSC, put it rather bluntly: "It is not risky to prophesy that in the course of time the effect of Hellenizing Macedonia will be to destroy brigandage and pillage which have thriven on disturbed economic and political conditions, to eliminate civil and guerilla war among villages and comitadji, and to reduce appreciably the chances of war between Greece and her neighbors who so often have had created an excuse for intervening on behalf of non-Greeks in the table-lands and valley-pockets of Macedonia and Western Thrace."[37] If the Lausanne Convention of the Exchange of Population advanced the "unmixing of peoples" via instruments of international law, the rural resentment in Macedonia was its spatial corollary.[38]

BAUHAUS IN THE HINTERLANDS

If land redistribution reorganized the territory, it was the small house—a prefabricated, debt-financed, and mass-produced shelter—that anchored the body to the plot, and the plot to the state. To house some 300,000 people, the RSC had to invent a parallel system of shelter provision. At this juncture, it turned to the international networks of technical experts and contractors, issuing an international call for tenders. The language of the call described "homes to be erected in Macedonia and Thrace for the agricultural refugees, consist[ed] of two living rooms, a stable, and a

36 Anastasia N. Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870–1990*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997), 147–50.

37 Charles Howland, "Greece and Her Refugees," *Foreign Affairs* 4, no. 4 (July 1926): 612–23.

38 I am borrowing the locution from Hirschon, "'Unmixing Peoples' in the Aegean Region."

granary."[39] In addition to this basic dwelling, the invitation asked for a variation of housing types tailored to family size and kinds of occupation. For instance, shelters for tobacco cultivators were to include a covered veranda for drying tobacco leaves, while those for fishers should substitute stable and granary with outdoor sheds. Finally, the average cost of each unit—excluding overhead charges and transport of materials—was not to exceed the 12,000 drachmae, the equivalent to an annual wage of a farmer in Greece.

Extant DHTG house, Type B, in the village of Gallikos. Photograph by the author, 2023.

By July of 1924, the RSC awarded Adolf Sommerfeld, a German developer and Bauhaus benefactor, the contract for the construction of 8,000 houses with a stipulation that if the collaboration proved successful the order could extend to an additional 2,000 homes.[40] Having accumulated capital and expertise during World War I by developing wide-span timber hangars and depots for the German military, Sommerfeld gained access to influential networks within Germany's Ministry of War.[41] As the country transitioned to a peacetime economy, he anticipated that mass housing would become central to reconstruction and redirected his expertise toward residential construction. In 1919, he founded FEA GmbH, a timber supply company, and acquired majority shares in real estate firms such as Allgemeine Häuserbau-Actien-Gesellschaft (AHAG).[42] At the same time, he joined industrial lobbying efforts to position the German construction sector within international reparations initiatives. As a delegate

39 The first time Sommerfeld appeared in the RSC's reports was in October 1924. However, the DHTG company is misspelled and anthropomorphized into Mr. Dehategе. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the story of the German subsidiary in Greece has slipped through the cracks. C.524.M.187.1924.II: The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for International Loan; The precise language of the call and the required deliverables are mentioned in: C.438.M.167.1924.II: Third Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC, 3. For more recent scholarship on the endeavor see Theodossios Issaias, "Architectures of the Humanitarian Front, 1915-1930 The American Red Cross and the Refugee Settlement Commission of the League of Nations," *Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dissertations*, October 1, 2021; Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis and Christina Pallini, "Colonizing the 'New Lands,'" in *Promised Lands, Internal Colonisation In 20th Century Mediterranean History*, ed. Axel Fisher (Rome: European Science Foundation, 2013). Celina Kress, *Adolf Sommerfeld /Andrew Sommerfield: Bauen für Berlin 1910-1970* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag für Kunst- und Geistesgeschichte, 2011).

40 C.438.M.167.1924.II: Third Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC, 3.

41 Celina Kress, *Adolf Sommerfeld /Andrew Sommerfield: Bauen für Berlin 1910–1970* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag für Kunst- und Geistesgeschichte, 2011), 80–83.

42 Kress, 85–93.

to the Study Commission for Reparations, he advocated for in-kind contributions—including building materials—as a way to revive domestic industry while fulfilling Germany's obligations under the Versailles Treaty of 1919.[43] It was in this context that he first encountered Walter Gropius, whose vision for a new architecture aligned with Sommerfeld's ambition to merge design with industrial production. Their collaboration soon materialized in the Sommerfeld House in Berlin, the first demonstration house for the Bauhaus—a building that both enthused and perplexed contemporary and future critics alike. It was through this convergence of industrial capacity, political access, and architectural visibility that Sommerfeld emerged as a logical partner for the RSC's unprecedented housing campaign in Macedonia.

To oversee the housing mission, Sommerfeld established *Danziger Hoch- und Tiefbaugesellschaft GmbH* (DHTG), a Belgrade-based subsidiary of AHAG, and invited architect and Bauhaus teacher Fred Forbát to join its ranks. Between late 1924 and the autumn of 1925, Forbát operated within a sprawling jurisdiction that encompassed unincorporated suburbs, homesteads, and new settlements across the region's hinterlands. His responsibilities included: administering the DHTG, refining and standardizing housing types, organizing a workforce of 800 laborers, supervising site progress, and—as he later wrote in his diary—"learning how to play this highly complicated political instrument."[44] In just eight months, he oversaw the production of 9,673 single-family homes, organized into some two hundred new settlements and extensions of existing villages, with a great number established in the Vardar Valley between Thessaloniki and Kilkis.[45]

A TIMBER FRAME, A SMALLHOLDING, AND A LOAN

At the heart of DHTG's work was an aided self-help housing program that structured every phase of rural rehabilitation. In coordination with the RSC's technical department, Forbát formalized a construction protocol that included access to loans, the distribution of building materials, and on-site support by DHTG supervisors. In simple terms, DHTG provided the blueprints and built the foundations and timber structural frames of prefabricated houses. Once the frames were erected, refugees—the future homeowners—completed the walls and finishes using local materials such as earth bricks and pisé walls.[46] Even then, most could not afford the cost of the frame. To address this, the protocol secured access to favorable

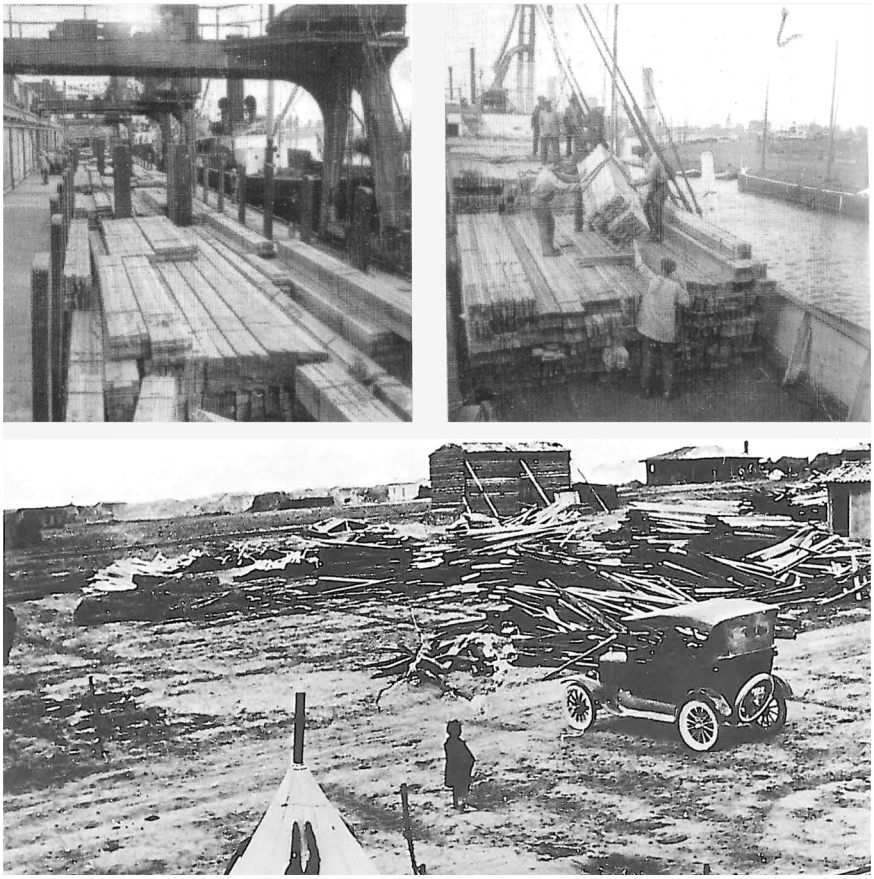
43 The literature on reparations is vast and diverse, reflecting the different national perspectives and political leanings of the observers. For the purposes of this research, the recent survey by historian Leonard Gomes has served as my primary guide: Leonard Gomes, *German Reparations, 1919–1932: A Historical Survey* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010). On reparations in kind and the German Industry, and on the perception of humiliations nationally and internationally, see Leonard Gomes, *German Reparations, 1919–1932: A Historical Survey* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 57–67 and 33–36 respectively.

44 Fred Forbát, "Aufbauarbeit in Den Dörfern" (Diary entry included in *Erinnerungen eines Architekten aus vier Ländern*, Thessaloniki, 1924), 86, DBAB, Band 5 hg. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

45 The DHTG's rural operations became a testing ground for the techniques Forbát later deployed as part of Ernst May's brigades in the Soviet Union during the early 1930s. Forbát, "Aufbauarbeit in Den Dörfern," 89. Although Forbát rarely theorized his work, his most extensive article was written for *Technica Chronica*, the official magazine of the Technical Chamber of Greece, which published the proceedings of the CIAM 4 Conference. In many ways, it is a realignment of the principles of the Athens Charter where he counterposes his study of the City of Karakanda, USSR. Although he adhered to the strict functionalist division of the city, he also advanced a peculiar mixture of dis-urbanization, in which the entirety of a territory is punctured by decentralized residential areas and satellite cities, organized in isotropic grid systems in a strict separation from the productive industries and landscapes. It is hard not to notice that the Macedonian scheme, though not mentioned in the article, and the USSR schemes share principles. Fred Forbát, "Die Funktionelle Stadt," *Annales Techniques: Organe Officiel de La Chambre Technique de Grèce*, Le IV Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Nouvelle, 2, no. 28 (1933): 740–42; On Disurbanism as a dominant conceptual apparatus in the USSR, see Hashim Sarkis, Roi Salgueiro Barrio, and Gabriel Kozlowski, *The World as an Architectural Project* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020), 110–19.

46 The method of construction and loan are described in detail in the protocol signed between a refugee head-of-household and an RSC representative; Directorate of Colonization of Macedonia, Protokollo: Parathosis Kai Paralavis Oikiskon Dehatege [Protocol: Delivery and Acceptance of DTHG House] (Kilkis, April 30, 1927); C.438.M.167.1924.II: Third Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC. Similarly, by the conclusion of the RSC's operations, the final report described the DHTG protocol and published a series of plans of the houses: C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC."

mortgages issued by the RSC, with the structural frame as collateral. A stable interest, below market average and guaranteed by the RSC, was applied to the remaining balance.[47] Ownership was transferred to refugees upon completion of the amortization period.



Top: DHTG workers loading lumber onto the Attika steamer in Szczecin.
Photograph by Paul Sommerfeld, London.
Below: Wood supplies being delivered to the hinterlands; tents in the foreground replaced by houses. DHTG forepersons' Ford Model T Touring (20mp), c.1924.
L'établissement des réfugiés en Grèce, League of Nations, Geneva, 1926. CAMS 63.

The distribution of timber frames and housing loans followed the same protocol as the allocation of smallholdings and agricultural equipment. To be eligible for rural settlement, refugees had to declare farming as their primary occupation. Upon arrival in Greece, they were required to form legally constituted entities—"agricultural cooperatives"—which some technical experts romanticized as the "hiving" instinct of Greek village life: "instinctively each village group from Asia Minor tried to reconstitute itself as the same village group in Greece."[48] In practice, however, these cooperatives were rarely grassroots initiatives. They were more often imposed by state and humanitarian officials, who preferred to divide refugees according to place of origin and assign them to collectively managed administrative units.[49]

Unlike the Greek land redistribution of 1917 or the U.S. Homestead Acts of the late nineteenth century, land was not given freely. Once enrolled in a cooperative, each household became eligible for separate loans

47 Directorate of Colonization of Macedonia, Protokollo: Parathosis Kai Paralavis Oikiskon Dehategе [Protocol: Delivery and Acceptance of DHTG House].
48 Henry Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens* (Garden City, NY: Doran & Co, 1929), 265.
49 C.110.M.51.1926.II: Ninth Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, March 1, 1926), 5.

covering a smallholding, a prefabricated house, agricultural tools, livestock, and seeds. The scheme did not operate on collective ownership or stewardship of common assets but relied on individual debt, administered through the cooperative. Heads of households in each group appointed a council of representatives, who were authorized to negotiate with the RSC and manage debt repayments. The same group was held responsible for collecting installment payments and transferring them to the RSC. In short, the RSC considered the cooperative as its primary administrative unit—both a means of governance and a mechanism for discipline. Such a structure, experts hoped, could assist in managing the program, especially during the early stages of the transition from relief to resettlement.

As soon as refugee cooperatives were assigned locations, teams of RSC agronomists, topographers, and engineers surveyed the land and assessed its viability. Each household was provisionally allotted a small parcel for subsistence gardening, along with livestock, tools, and seeds. If the assigned site was an abandoned village previously inhabited by expelled Muslim residents, RSC workers undertook repair operations on existing structures. If not, architects and forepersons from the DHTG arrived to design and construct entirely new settlements. Of the roughly 130,000 households resettled in Macedonia and Thrace, fewer than forty percent occupied existing buildings.[50] The remainder were settled in newly built structures grouped into purpose-built villages—beginning with the first 200, which included 10,000 houses constructed between 1924 and 1925 under the supervision of Forbát and the DHTG.

FROM CAMPS TO VILLAGES

The dispersal of these camp-construction sites across Macedonia served the program's immediate goal: to divert and isolate the displaced population from existing urban and rural communities. Yet the management strategy was cloaked in a hybrid rhetoric—oscillating between the language of modern efficiency and a romantic return to the land, between hygienic planning and vernacular settlement patterns. As Henry Morgenthau—former U.S. ambassador to Istanbul, executive of the American Red Cross, and first chairman of the RSC—explained, an "agricultural community" in Greece was not a dispersed American-style farmstead, but a village where families lived side by side. The farmlands, he wrote, "lie all about this village. These lands are marked by boundaries and are the private possessions of the various families."[51] He emphasized that:

> If it had been necessary to provide every farm family with a dwelling isolated on a separate farm, the problem of erecting such dwellings would have been almost impossible of solution. This organization made things infinitely easier to do, since the necessary building materials and machinery could be concentrated and carried on as one job in each large community.[52]

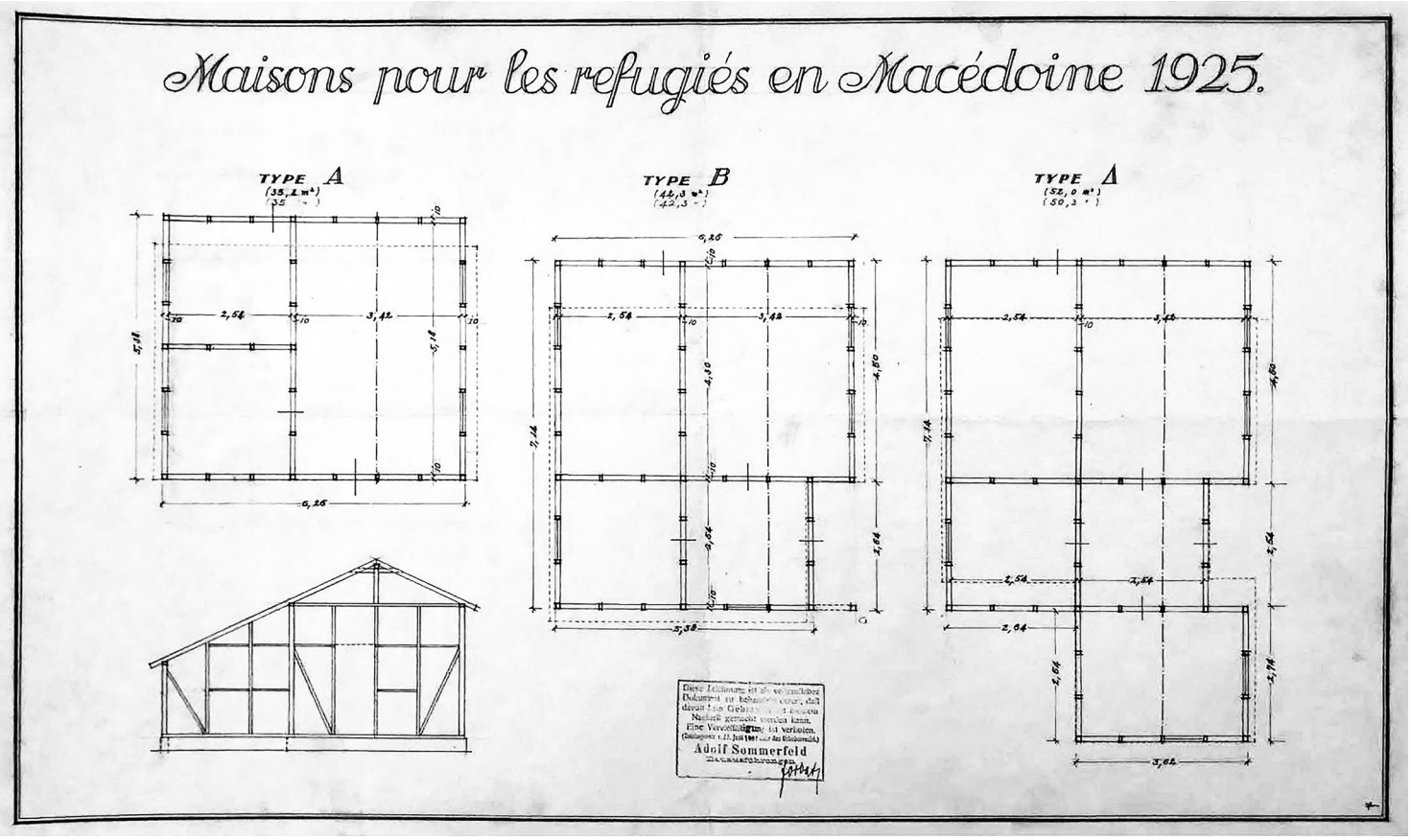
And this was, indeed, how the process unfolded. Once a tract of land was flattened and a camp was established, DHTG experts arrived to map the subdivisions and begin construction of the houses. Initial infrastructure included compacted soil roads, latrines, and hand-dug wells—temporary works that both served the camp and laid out the skeleton of the future village. Soon after, five-ton trucks—purchased by the DHTG from the U.S.

50 The breakdown of total number of different housing types, repairs and new contraction, is reported on the segment "Agricultural Housing" of the last RSC report, C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, 10.

51 Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens*, 125.

52 Ibid., 266.

Army—delivered the precut timber kits to site.[53] Forepersons and refugees slept in tents for the duration of the work, while a rotating team of DHTG supervisors drove between 30 to 40 villages in five Ford Model T cars.



The three typologies of DHTG houses, with plans and timber-frame elevation.
Stamped by Adolf Sommerfeld, c.1924. DBAB.

The scale of these camp-villages ranged from a few dozen to two-hundred families, depending on the size of each cooperative. Despite variation in population, the formula remained fixed: an uncompromising grid laid out perpendicularly to the main access road. Each block contained six-to-eight subdivided parcels, each measuring 600 square meters (0.15 acres). Single-family houses were positioned along the perimeter, while communal latrines were placed at the block's center—rudimentary sanitary cores within a diagram of self-help. Because most settlements were located in underdeveloped hinterlands, they remained disconnected from municipal water, sewage, or electricity networks. Still, a promise of future infrastructure lingered—a deferred horizon that cast the grid as a placeholder for modernity. This basic arrangement did not stop officials from claiming that: "As these villages were built upon large tracts of open land, it was possible to layout the arrangement of streets and houses upon the most modern conception of convenience and healthful arrangements. Adequate light and air have been provided for every lodging. These new villages will doubtless have a permanent sanitary effect upon all Greek towns in the future by reason of their example." [54]

53 For the first months, the Directorate of Colonization was responsible for the delivery of the kit-of-parts to the construction sites by lorry or trains. According to Forbát, the materials often waited for days in remote train stations or was lost. Utilizing an emergency clause of the contract with the RSC, the DHTG assumed the material transports and bought a dozen five-ton trucks from the American army, which was still stationed in the region. Fritz Dörpfeld, the son of famous German archaeologist Wilhelm Dörpfeld, who grew up in Athens, led the logistical operations. See: Forbát, "Aufbauarbeit in Den Dörfern," 86–87.

54 C.112.M.53.1925.II: Fifth Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC, 10; Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens*, 239.

Forbát continued refining the housing types, reorganizing the logistics of self-help construction, and rationalizing the serial production and delivery of timber components. As he admitted, the system set up through the international tender "worked quite poorly."[55] Prefabricated timber frames were manufactured in Schneidemühl (now Piła, Poland), transported by train to Szczecin, then shipped to Thessaloniki by steamship, a journey that could last between twelve-to-twenty days. Once at the port, workers unloaded the kits, bundled them by site, and transferred them to a nearby warehouse. From there, five-ton U.S. trucks carried the kits inland across a network of rough roads stretching 50-to-100 kilometers. Forbát described in a letter to his wife Hedwig Rücker, "except for some strategic roads built by the allied army, the roads were in bad condition and there were no bridges at all; you simply [drove] your car through the shallow streams." [56] At the construction sites, refugee forepersons—some recently trained—were expected to check each shipment against a parts list and assemble the house from drawings and construction manuals. If parts were missing, the journey reversed itself. Recognizing the irrationality of this scheme, Forbát established makeshift carpentry workshops near the sites and redesigned the structural frame—reducing the number of prefabricated components and introducing a modular system of typological variants.

DHTG offered three revised single-family house types—of 35, 42, and 52 square meters—each based on a modular timber stud frame that allowed larger units or future expansions to build outward from a compact core. The smallest, a 35 square-meter shelter, followed an almost square plan and sat on a plinth two steps high. It featured an asymmetrical gable roof—commonly called a "saltbox roof"— which produced both a primary and secondary façade: the front oriented toward the street, the rear toward a kitchen garden. The main living space occupied the front portion of the plan under equal rafter lengths, while two auxiliary rooms—one a rudimentary kitchen with a workbench, the other a granary—were tucked beneath the lower rear roofline. The 42 square-meter house (Type B), the most widely surviving today, added a vestibule while retaining the same kitchen and granary configuration. A recess in the front façade created a covered porch supported by a freestanding corner post—offering both a sheltered entry and a veranda for drying tobacco leaves. A similar treatment appeared in the 52 square-meter type, where a third enclosed volume formed an off-center alcove at the front. Although refugees were responsible for arranging their interiors and finishing walls, Forbát proposed the placement of windows and standardized two timber-framed apertures with wooden blinds: a larger one for main rooms, and a smaller one for auxiliary spaces. To accelerate occupancy, he introduced a temporary cladding system: rabitz (wire-mesh) concrete panels fabricated on-site and fixed directly to the timber frame. These panels could later be replaced with sturdier materials or reused for interior insulation.

MUD BRICKS AND CIRCULATING SYMBOLS

The DHTG house oscillated between a modern, replicable home and the so-called traditional farmhouse found throughout the rural Balkans and beyond. It spoke both the language of serial production and a vernacular idiom intelligible to the Greeks, Germans, and Americans involved in its design and fabrication. The asymmetrical shed roof, repurposed by Forbát and the DHTG, was a form rooted in humid regions and derived from the incremental expansions of gabled wooden roofs—extensions built quickly and cheaply to accommodate changing household needs. In its formal ambivalence and dual mode of production—serial and self-help—the DHTG

55 Forbát, "Aufbauarbeit in Den Dörfern," 85.
56 Forbát to Rücker, "Brief an P., Saloniki," November 10, 1924, 83.

house reified the dualities of the refugee settlement program. It embodied the agrarian development strategy that sought to intensify rural productivity by transferring responsibility to displaced subjects while minimizing direct state intervention or investment. Agrarianism was framed not only as a cultural ideal or geopolitical strategy but also as a path toward modernization—a political claim that the nation's future could be built through a decentralized intensification of small-scale agricultural units.

Left: "Children making bricks at Rodosto. Immediately upon emerging from tent life, the transferred peoples began to utilize the local clay and build themselves houses." Photograph by C.D. Morris, c.1925, published in Carter Melville, "History's Greatest Trek," National Geographic Magazine 48, no. 5 (November 1925): 583.
Right: Brick wall of an extant DHTG shelter in Kastanies. Photograph by the author, 2023.

The house functioned as an aesthetic-political device, quickly becoming the visual emblem of the entire refugee settlement program. In November 1925, it appeared in a sixty-page pictorial essay in *National Geographic*, which narrated the aftermath of the population exchange for an international audience.[57] Titled "History's Greatest Trek," the piece relied on the conventions of humanitarian publicity. Photographs taken by an American Red Cross crew showed displaced families boarding ships and trains, setting up tents in front of the Temple of Hephaestus, and trudging through the mud with mules.[58] These images of precarity were followed by images of repair. One photo shows five men standing in a muddy worksite, surrounded by cement barrels and benches, applying plaster to the exterior of a large DHTG house. Another depicts children behind a spread of sun-drying mudbricks, gleefully holding them aloft. The caption reads: "Immediately emerging upon tent life, the transferred peoples began to utilize the local clay and build themselves houses." It continues: "Every Anatolian born knows to use the clay, and here was plenty of it. The old folks gathered chaff, the women mixed it with the clay and cut it into bricks, the children played hod-carrier, the walls were erected on the refugee principle of helping one another, and the baking sun did the rest."[59] That same mud, once part of Macedonia's swampy riverine edge, had been drained to make the land arable—and now, kneaded by displaced hands, reemerged as the walls of a new agrarian order.

57 Carter Melville, "History's Greatest Trek," ed. Gilbert Grosvenor, *The National Geographic Magazine* XLVIII, no. 5 (November 1925).
58 Melville, 537-538 558-566 572.
59 Melville, 583, 564.

The author offered no mention of the German subsidiary, the architect, or the location of the houses, but the narrative was revealing. He began by asserting that "the exchange was for [Greece] an economic necessity," noting that "the undeveloped territory contains only 15 people to the square mile, yet at last she has a national homogeneity to base her future."[60] In doing so, the editorial echoed the League of Nations's post-war vision of peace—one grounded in the belief that stability required the separation of ethnic groups and the creation of homogenous nation-states. This logic was directly tied to economic development: the influx of refugees, the author suggested, would redeem the region's underdevelopment. Recovery, in his view, depended on the assimilation of displaced people and their transformation into agricultural producers. "If the last traces of classic Ionia have vanished from Asia," he concluded, "the motherland, in receiving back descendants of her Pilgrim Fathers after three thousand years, acquires a sturdy, invigorating stock of grain producers and, moreover, of industry transplanters, who have brought with them crafts of silk-weaving, rug-making, ceramics."[61]

View of the entrance to the Thessaloniki International Fair, with DHTG pavilion at left. TIF Archives, Thessaloniki.

The same narrative was staged again in September 1926 at the Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF)—the first of its kind in Greece. Like many expositions before it, the fair was timed to coincide with a commemorative event: the celebration of Macedonia's incorporation into the Greek state following the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. It also marked what the organizers framed as the successful completion of the first two years of refugee settlement in the region.[62] Amid nationalist speeches, electric illuminations, fireworks, and the booths of 600 exhibitors, a full-scale prototype of a DHTG house greeted fairgoers at the entrance. Occupying the most prominent position—adjacent to the monumental gate and the only point of entry into the 7,000-square-meter fairgrounds—the house was visited by over 100,000 people. The RSC used Forbát's largest housing type, painted white and adorned with flowers, pumpkins, and watermelons, as both a promotional pavilion and an exhibition space for its rural settle-

60 Melville, 564–65.

61 Melville, 584. In 1930, when the RSC ceased its operations, *The National Geographic* published a new piece, entitled "New Greece," reiterating the same argument of rebirth. Maynard Owen Williams, "New Greece," *National Geographic* LVIII, no. 6 (December 1930).

62 Demetrios Santis, "I Hthesini Teleti Ton Egkainion Tis Diethnous Ekthesis [Yesterday's Opening Ceremony of TIF]," *I Makedonia*, October 3, 1926; Demetrios Santis, "I Ekthesis Tis Thessalonikis Kai Oi Valkanikoi Mas Geitones [The Thessaloniki Exhibition and Our Balkan Neighbors]," *I Makedonia*, October 3, 1926; Irene Douka, "The First TIF, 1926, a Beginning," *Macedonia*, Special Edition: Arts and Culture Edition (September 11, 2016), 34–45.

ment initiatives. A massive sign suspended between two electric poles read "ΑΓΟΡΑΖΕΤΕ," which translates to "BUY" in English, urging visitors to purchase refugee agricultural products and craftwork. Inside the house, maps of Macedonia—like those discussed earlier—outlined the scope of the settlement campaign, while kiosks sold tobacco and wheat, rugs, ceramics, and other goods produced by the refugee cooperatives.

A second prototype appeared soon after on the Quai Wilson in Geneva, just a block from the temporary headquarters of the League of Nations. There, international visitors—humanitarians, League bureaucrats, national delegates, and passersby—could encounter the dislocated house in a new register: not as a pavilion of national pride, but as evidence of humanitarian success. As they strolled along the lake's edge, visitors could step inside a full-scale model of the DHTG house, accompanied by photographs, maps, and explanatory texts chronicling the operations of the RSC in Greece. Inside, displays of tobacco, carpets, silks, and ceramic objects demonstrated the revival of refugee crafts and industries.[63] The goal, according to the RSC's 1927 quarterly report, was "to furnish a more concrete idea than can be formed from the administrative reports of the successful effort made by the majority of the refugees to resume both the farming activity and their handicrafts which, with the catastrophe of 1922, had appeared in danger of extinction."[64] The report declared the exhibition a success, stating that the house and its contents "excited the interest of numerous visitors, as did also the maps, photographs and statistics exhibited."[65] It was a striking paradox: while the dislocated house circulated freely across borders and institutions, the refugees it was meant to serve remained confined to the mud and debt of Macedonia's hinterlands.

BRIBES AND BLUEPRINTS

It would be hyperbolic—if not paternalistic—to assume that refugees embraced the house and protocol because Forbát's design offered them a decent home or the agency to shape it. Such an interpretation reflects the professional ideology and positionality of the architect, the ethnographer, and the development expert. Very few disciplines can look at—and celebrate—self-help labor and improvised and ad-hoc solutions, while overlooking the dispossession, scarcity, and indebtedness that structured the lives of agricultural refugees. Ingenious as it might have been, Forbát and Sommerfeld's house, at best, served as a rudimentary cottage: an emergency shelter offering marginally more protection from the natural elements than a typical military tent. At worst, scattered across the muddy plains of the Vardar Valley, the houses stood as skeletons in a state of perpetual construction. Or, as a rather disappointed Forbát confided in his diary, "storms took away the entire frames and roofs," and added that while he expected refugees to "fill them up with locally available sun dried clay bricks or, in places with no clay, burnt bricks […] most of them were ill

63 C.456.M.161.1927.II: Fifteenth Quarterly Report on the Work of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, September 3, 1927); C.574.M.204.1927.II: Sixteenth Quarterly Report on the Work of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Athens: League of Nations, November 15, 1927).

64 C.456.M.161.1927.II: Fifteenth Quarterly Report on the Work of the RSC, 6.

65 C.574.M.204.1927.II: Sixteenth Quarterly Report on the Work of the RSC, 7. The crafts presented inside the refugee home continued their journey throughout Europe for one more year. To be precise, the curator of the exhibit, folklorist Angeliki Hatzimichali, was invited by art historian Henri Focillon to present Greece's popular arts and crafts at the Conference on Popular Arts, organized in Prague by the League of Nations and the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in 1928. The conference's conceptual framework was defined by Focillon and included both art historians, folklorists, and ethnographers, as well as the League's ILO delegates. The attention to traditional crafts revealed how important provincial and rural productivity was as a political, aesthetic, and economic medium in the national and international statecraft in the aftermath of the Great War; Henri Focillon, "Introduction," in *Art Populaire. Travaux Artistiques et Scientifiques Du 1er Congrès International Des Arts Populaires, 1928.*, vol. 1, 2 vols., Institut International de Cooperation Intellectuelle (Paris, Prague: Editions Ducharte, 1931); Annamaria Ducci, "The International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations," in *Europe in Crisis: Intellectuals and the European Idea, 1917–1957*, ed. Mark Hewitson and Matthew D'Auria (Berghahn Books, 2012); Theodossis Issaias, "Crafting Modernities: 'Popular Art', Henri Focillon and the League of Nations," in *Session: Globalized Regionalism and Modernist Aesthetics in the Built Environment* (College Art Association 105th Conference, New York, NY, 2017).

and weak and preferred to put up their tents within the frames and leave them like that."[66]

Yet, the DHTG house was more than this rudimentary amenity. It was a protocol—a mutual agreement that defined agricultural refugees' responsibilities and obligations towards the RSC and the State, and vice versa. This protocol outlined a bifurcating process: the first branch of this process defined a mode of production; the second offered a conditional path to homeownership through indebtedness. In the former, refugee cooperatives and their leaders accepted self-help labor, but fought to redefine it. For them, construction work was neither a cost-saving measure nor a nostalgic aesthetic category—"a village instinct"—nor was it an experimental building project of the Bauhaus. It was labor. And it deserved compensation. Cooperatives demanded full access to the RSC workforce, organizing around the principle that their contribution should be formally recognized and remunerated. This was a militant labor demand that the RSC could not easily discredit—especially given the large number of organized and frustrated refugees behind it.

One more anecdote from Forbát's diary paints an unmistakable picture of refugees' agitation tactics and their power:

> New troubles came, however, when some refugee leaders, after the worst misery was over, were not very content with us working while the work could be carried out by small Greek [refugee] enterprises. Just after a new supply contract was to be signed with the Commission, a newspaper editor contacted me and asked how much we were willing to pay to avert a poison attack against us and the Colonization office. The situation was too precarious to simply show him the door. One of our employees, who was there as a witness, asked the editor what guarantees we had that the attack would not take place [if we paid him].
> The editor shouted, enraged: *'Mais, monsieur, c'est une chose moralique.'*[67]

Whether DHTG paid the bribe, Forbát does not say. What is certain, however is that "repeated attacks during the spring [of 1925] intimidated the Greek members of the [RSC] in such a way that they did not dare to oppose the allocation of all Colonization orders to [Greek and refugee] companies," as Sir John Campbell, the Vice-Chairman of the RSC, confidentially admitted to Forbát.[68] In May 1925, just weeks after the poison threat, Forbát and Rücker packed their things and left Greece.

Nevertheless, the basic principles of Forbát's design survived the ousting of the German company. Once the importation of wood was not an option, his blueprints were reworked by the RSC technical department and the Directorate of Colonization of Macedonia and adapted for low-tech standardization systems based on local resources and labor. RSC experts introduced multiple construction systems, including cement blocks, load-bearing stone or bricks, or a combination of the two.[69] Yet the additional 31,997 houses built by the RSC between 1925 and 1930 adhered to the organization, dimensions, and formal gestures first introduced by the DHTG. The types retained Forbát's asymmetrical roofs and incremental extensions, as well as utilized the formal gesture of recessed facades to create verandas. For the remaining five years of the refugee settlement program, the vast majority of building contracts went to local building companies and, as an official report boosted, ninety percent of construction workforce positions were filled by refugees.[70]

66 Forbát, " Aufbauarbeit in Den Dörfern," 87.
67 Ibid., 88.
68 Ibid.
69 The evolution of the rural houses is presented in a comprehensive typological spread published in: Annex to C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, August 25, 1930).
70 Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens*; C.406.M.128.1928.II: Nineteenth Quarterly Report of the RSC, 14.

THE PROTOCOL AND AN ACT OF REFUSAL

If refugee organizing reshaped the production of houses and the construction industry, the struggle against indebtedness unfolded more slowly and unevenly. It began with the 1924 construction protocol and extended into the 1930s, linking the rudimentary house to the economic ambitions of rural resettlement—and to Greece's shifting position during the Great Depression. Accidentally, yet consequentially, the interplay between spatial policy and the RSC's financial instruments gave refugees unexpected leverage. This was not an organized peasant revolt, but a mass, tactical form of activism—spatial at its core. It centered on the house: its location within the contested terrain of Macedonia, and its function within the national economy.

Composite map from bottom to top: floodplains of the Vardar Valley; settlement footprints in Yannitsa; aerial photograph of Mikrokambos and saline shore of Lake Pikrolimni; photographs of DHTG houses and construction sites. c.1925. DBAB. Composite map by the author.

Let us consider the three financial instruments that defined the refugee settlement project. First, a £12.3 million international loan was issued in 1924 under the auspices of the League of Nations to support the RSC, with an interest rate that peaked at an exorbitant 8.71 percent.[71] Two similar loans followed in the coming years. By 1931, Greece's public debt had tripled, rising from 12,594 to 38,602 million drachmas—equivalent to 155 percent of GDP, with a per capita foreign debt higher than anywhere else in Eastern Europe.[72] Second, the Lausanne Convention promised refugee compensation. A Mixed Commission was to evaluate and liquidate the

71 Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia*, 81; Stephen Pericles Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 635.

72 Mark Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis* (Oxford, UK: New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 315.

movable and immovable property of the displaced population and provide each individual owner with a debt declaration that could be exercised against the destination country. However, this agreement was never implemented.[73] Years of failed negotiations culminated in the 1930 Ankara Treaty, colloquially known as "the treaty of friendship," which nullified the compensation mechanism. It simply stipulated that each government take into its possession the properties vacated by refugees.[74] The Greek government took over properties formerly owned by Muslim subjects and issued bonds for partial refugees. Lauded abroad as a last act of inspired diplomacy by Venizelos, the Liberal Greek Prime Minister who had regained power in 1928, the agreement left its displaced constituents with little to claim.

The third financial instrument was the refugee mortgage. The DHTG house was not just a frame awaiting completion—it was also a loan mechanism, a form of collateral that gave access to financial assistance administered by the RSC. While the terms of the loans were relatively favorable, refugees did not receive ownership titles until the loan was fully amortized. Even then, the protocol prohibited the sale or transfer of the house for years to come.[75] In short, it was imperative for the RSC and the government that each refugee household remain settled in the lands they had been assigned.[76] When refugees entered this protocol in 1924 and 1925, it was with the understanding that compensation for their vacated and liquidated properties in Turkey would offset against their debt. If the DHTG protocol assigned a price to their labor and financial obligations to the state, it also implied reciprocity. It was both a mortgage and a promissory note; refugees agreed to become cultivators and repay their loans, insofar as the state and the RSC kept their own part of the bargain.

For the first five years, the system appeared to be working as the RSC and the government had hoped; refugees paid their installments and cultivated their land. By 1928, most agriculturalists had transitioned from subsistence farming to cash crops, and similarly, the cultivated lands in Macedonia doubled in hectarage. This expansion was not due to capital improvements, irrigation, or state-led land reclamation: such measures were often promised but delayed for years or never materialized. Between 1928 and 1934, however, large-scale geoengineering projects began to terraform the region's landscape—most notably the drainage of the Yannitsa swamp, a vast wetland at the center of the Vardar valley, where many of Forbát's settlements had been established. These interventions aimed not only to expand arable land but also to mitigate the seasonal flooding that repeatedly destroyed both subsistence and cash crops, and to combat malaria, which was devastating refugee populations living in provisional camps across the plain. Under these dual imperatives—economic development and public health—U.S. capital and geoengineering firms gained a foothold in the region, ultimately completing the drainage works in 1932 and 1934.[77] Nonetheless, the earliest gains in agricultural output were not the result of these delayed infrastructural works. It was the personal effort of refugees who converted fallow, grazing, or swampy lands into a carpet of productive smallholdings, primarily devoted to monoculture of wheat. The results were striking: the production of wheat more than doubled from 210,226 tons in 1924 to 450,200 tons in 1928, leading to a steep decline in wheat imports.[78] The Vice Chairman of the RSC claimed that refugee food independence had been reached, or in his own words, cereal production was "more than sufficient for the consumption of the whole

73 Michael Barutciski, "Population Exchanges in International Law and Policy," in *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, ed. Renée Hirschon (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2003), 23–35.

74 Onur Yildirim, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922–1934* (Routledge, 2007), 117–18.

75 Office of Colonization of Macedonia, "Protokollo: Parathosis Kai Paralavis Oikiskon Dehatege [Protocol: Delivery and Acceptance of DTHG House]."

76 The same was true for the smallholding, with the key difference that the allotment was a productive asset that could be cultivated by other members of the refugee cooperative.

77 Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia*, 278–283.

78 Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia*, 308.

refugee population."[79] Optimism prevailed, even as foreign debt loomed over the broader economy.

The global economic crisis reached Greece by 1928–29, and the fragile edifice began to collapse. World wheat prices plummeted. Cereal farmers—who cultivated more than 70 percent of the land—saw their average income fall from 19,200 to 12,300 drachmas in a single year.[80] Conditions were even more dire for tobacco cultivators, who relied on exports to U.S. companies that manufactured Camels, Lucky Strikes, and Chesterfields, and thus, did not benefit from tariffs and other protectionist measures put in place by the Liberal government. Under pressure from disillusioned and starving refugee farmers, Venizelos Liberals and the RSC offered a round of concessions: interest rates on refugee mortgages from 8 percent to 3 percent, and relief was granted on certain types of debt, including those linked to seed and livestock.[81] It was a strategic attempt by the state to absorb some cost of the resettlement project and to buy some time for the Liberal party who was back in power.

The Ankara Treaty delivered the final blow to the fragile trust between rural refugees and the state. By annulling the elaborate mechanism of appraisal and liquidation of vacated properties, it also betrayed the government's promise of full compensations to the displaced population. The protocol and its implied mutual responsibility were severed. Refugees and their representatives felt liberated from their own responsibilities enshrined in the protocol, insisting that the Greek state should meet all the costs of the settlement. To compound matters for the Liberal government, the RSC—simultaneously with the Ankara Treaty—rounded up its operations, transferring all its functions to the Greek Ministry of Agriculture and the newly founded Agricultural Bank. Now refugee grievances could be aired not against the amorphous international agency but against their own elected officials or local clerks who worked at a bank branch at the nearby town.

Faced with plummeting grain prices, some refugees abandoned their farms in the hinterlands to seek opportunities in the urban centers of Thessaloniki and Athens. Those who stayed behind stopped paying their debts—either because they could not, or because they refused to do so. In tandem, refugees who had previously voted *en bloc* for Venizelos's Liberal party now felt betrayed, shifting political allegiances towards the Left, the Agrarian, and the Communist parties.[82] As the historian Petropoulos writes, they developed a peasant class consciousness, "sublimating their alienation by struggling for an envisioned international order in which ethnic minorities would not constitute political problems."[83] Neither the Liberals nor the opposition parties were prepared to confront this surge of inter-war radicalism. They blamed unions and agricultural cooperatives for the crisis. In a failed attempt to gain back refugee support, Venizelos toured Macedonia, appealing to refugees' pity, insisting that paying their debts was not merely their moral duty, but a necessary sacrifice to help remaining unhoused refugee families. His tour to Macedonia was a disaster.[84]

79 John Hope Simpson, "The Work of the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission," Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs 8, no. 6 (1929): 583–604, https://doi.org/10.2307/3015675.

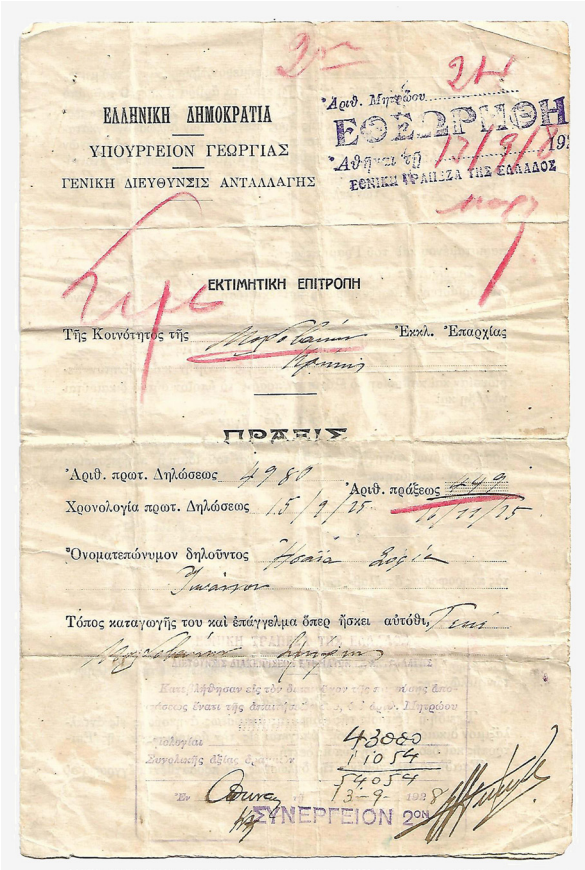
80 Mazower, Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis, 80–81.

81 C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC, 14.

82 Thanos Veremis, "1922: Political Continuations and Realignments in the Greek State," in Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey, ed. Renée Hirschon (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2003), 53–62; Spryridon Ploumidis, "Agrarian Politics in Interwar Greece: The Stillborn 'Peasant' Parties (1923–1936)," Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica, Historica, 2012, 57–87.

83 John A. Petropoulos, "The Compulsory Exchange of Populations: Greek-Turkish Peacemaking, 1922–1930," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1976): 158–59.

84 Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities*, 692–96.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Issaias Sophia registering as a refugee and entering the RSC housing relief program, 1925.

The government had staked the country's future on the success of the rural settlement program and the revitalization of the agricultural sector. But the exodus of refugees and their disobedience as cultivators threatened both the geopolitical hold on Macedonia and the economic ambitions of the project. Ioannis Karamanos, the former Director of the RSC's Directorate of Colonization in Macedonia—now serving as Director General in the Ministry of Agriculture—summed up the crisis:

> [Greece] had created a large class whose existence helps to maintain the social equilibrium of the country. In these circumstances, it must necessarily see with anxiety the force sale of many agricultural properties at low prices, to meet obligations assumed at a time when agricultural prices fetched high prices. The situation thus created may undo all the good value done by the Government at such heavy cost.[85]

Behind Karamanos's characteristically neutral and bureaucratic language, there was a paradox at play: lending institutions, first the RSC and later the Agricultural Bank, were seizing control of properties to force the sale of homes and smallholdings of delinquent borrowers.[86] Although the Great Depression had decimated the yearly salaries of farmers, the majority of the country's ordinary revenue still came from agriculture. In contrast, the land price and real estate value of the rural houses was close to nothing since demand was nonexistent. Evictions and forced sales, in-

85 Ioannis Karamanos, "The Agricultural Crisis" (Geneva: League of Nations, 1931), 188.

86 Evictions and forced sales had already started in 1926 but paled in comparison to those that followed. The last quarterly reports of 1926 reassured the lenders: "Naturally, our agents are confiscating the property left by refugees who have definitely abandoned the settlement, are claiming the repayment of debts contracted by them, and in general are taking all steps to safeguard the interests of the Commission." C.110.M.51.1926.II: Ninth Quarterly Report on the Operations of the RSC, 3.

stead of generating revenue for lenders, added to the national debt and accelerated the rural exodus. In short, the punitive measures and threats were self-defeating. The state had overplayed its hand.

To halt the rural exodus and radicalization of refugees, Venizelos appealed one last time to the League of Nations for a loan to consolidate the agricultural debt. His request coincided with the second round of banking panic in mid-1931 and was met with indignation.[87] At Karamanos's urging, he declared a five-year moratorium on agricultural debts owed by individuals, suspended the seizure of farms, and suspended the direct land tax levied on most crops. Soon after, Greece followed the UK and left off the Gold Exchange Standard in 1932—defaulting on its debt and devaluing its currency.[88] If post-war reconstruction internationally—and the refugee settlement in Greece in particular—had once meant capital flowing from powerful economic centers to multiple peripheries, by 1928 the direction had reversed: the dependent peripheries had begun repaying their debts to their lenders. The default abruptly halted those flows. The weak national currency incentivized producers to shift from exportable to import-substitution crops—primarily wheat. To reduce trade deficits, the government encouraged this transition with meager but critical infrastructural and assistance projects. Agricultural refugees, enjoying debt and eviction moratoria and levied taxes, now benefitted from protectionist measures as well as public projects that aimed at boosting the domestic economy.

FROM SECHOVO TO IDOMENI

Refugees converted uprootedness to possibility, alienation to opportunity, poverty to micro-entrepreneurialism. They were forced to do so. Or, to use the technical experts' preferred language, they became self-reliant; however, their path to this coveted self-reliance differed dramatically from what the RSC and the Greek government had envisioned. Through shrewd political organizing and by taking advantage of a series of unforeseen historical events—the Great Depression, Greece's debt moratorium, currency devaluation, among others—refugees managed to benefit from a system that was stacked against them. Let's not forget that with the stroke of a pen in 1923, the international community decided that Christian Orthodox subjects who resided in Minor Asia and Muslim subjects in Greece had to abandon their lives and livelihoods, neighbors and friends, properties and material possessions. Within a few months, the rural resettlement program in Greece transformed the displaced population from dispossessed to indebted; in the summer of 1924, refugees awaiting in camps for their rural rehabilitation *owned* nothing. By the fall of the same year, they *owned* close to nothing but *owed* money to an international agency. To be precise, they owned a few sacks of seeds—most probably Virginia tobacco or Canberra wheat seeds—and were in debt for a smallholding, a plough and an ox—or a mule, if they were lucky—and an empty timber frame.[89] Nothing could amend their anguish and torment, uprootedness, and refugeedom caused by the Lausanne Treaty; however, through social practices that blended political pressure, informal economic networks, and forms of spatial activism, refugees managed to turn around a system that was stacked against them.

The naturalization of this population passed through labor and property. The chromolithographic maps of 1926 and Forbát's timber skel-

87 Mazower, *Greece and the Inter-War Economic Crisis*, 133.

88 D. Berg-Schlosser and J. Mitchell, *Authoritarianism and Democracy in Europe, 1919–39: Comparative Analyses* (New York, NY: Springer, 2002), 218–30; Frank C. Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 243.

89 Particular varieties of seeds are analyzed at length in the following reports: C.444.M.202.1930.II: Twenty-Seventh Quarterly Report of the RSC; C.406.M.128.1928.II: Nineteenth Quarterly Report of the RSC; C.281.M.104.1927.II: Fourteenth Quarterly Report on the Work of the RSC, Quarterly Reports on the Work of the Refugee Settlement Commission (Geneva: League of Nations, June 1, 1927).

etons revealed those mechanisms. To borrow again from James Scott's discourse, the maps and drawings were state simplifications; they were abridged records.[90] They did not and could not represent the activity of the communities they depicted, nor were they intended to. They represented the instruments that interested the international observers; they showed taxable property, a secured border, loan collateral, and a census, joining forces with the nation-state's imperatives. Yet, such schematization always ignores fundamental features that sustain life. Scott illustrates this with the example of a work-to-rule strike. He writes, a work-to-rule strike "turns on the fact that any production process depends on a host of informal practices and improvisations that could never be codified. By merely following the rules meticulously, the workforce can virtually halt production. In the same fashion, the simplified rules animating plans for, say, a city, a village, or a collective farm were inadequate as a set of instructions for creating a functioning social order"—let alone a thriving social life, I would add. What is significant and perhaps instructive about the RSC's undertaking was not the simplified scheme—the tyranny of development and assimilation—but how it made allowances for the process and practices that the system failed to account for. By accident or omission, it created the infrastructure for its defeat: the agricultural *cooperative* was conceived to facilitate tax collection, yet it turned into the primary unit of dissent; the *protocol*, initially understood as a loan contract, transformed into a promissory note, a record of mutual responsibility that was severed; the reliance on *self-help* labor, introduced as a cost-reducing measure, gave collective power to the displaced. The program might have failed its original designers but afforded refugees with leverage.

In 2016, nearly a century later, the village of Idomeni—a train stop a few hundred meters south of the confluence of the Vardar River and its right-bank tributary, the Konska—became the flashpoint of a new refugee crisis, shaped by the war in Syria and ongoing conflicts in Kurdistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. As Europe closed its borders, 15,000 people fled official detention centers in the Greek interior and moved upstream, against the river's current, toward the Macedonian frontier—hoping proximity might grant them a place in the queue to cross into the Balkans, and from there to Germany. Riot police and helicopters were deployed to raid and dismantle the makeshift camp, while a new policy was negotiated with Turkey to stem the movement of refugees. In exchange for six billion euros, Turkey agreed to "receive back" migrants who entered Greece, while selectively allowing asylum seekers to cross its borders. In effect, Europe violated the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*—which prohibits states from transferring or removing individuals from their jurisdiction when there are substantial grounds to believe they would face persecution, torture, or other serious harm upon return. This principle, first upheld under the Nansen Mandate, was codified in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

The camp has been discussed extensively worldwide; often, it became a space where philanthropic initiatives overlapped with artistic practices and a planetary constellation of volunteers and facilitators. Most agreed that Idomeni was an "embarrassment to the values the continent holds so dear."[91] Yet no one mentioned that the depleted, monocultured soil beneath refugee tents, clinics, and cabins was once a redistributed refugee smallholding of the rural settlement program. In the massive chromolithographic maps of 1926, Idomeni appeared with its Slavic toponymic, Sechovo, as a small red triangle. The RSC and the humanitarian-via-development programs of the interwar years form a distinct chapter in the genealogy of humanitarianism. Fraught with their own contradictions and violence, assimilationist imperatives and manufactured scarcities, they nonetheless throw into sharp relief the different kind of violence that de-

90 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 6.

91 Helena Smith, "Migration Crisis: Idomeni, the Train Stop That Became 'an Insult to EU Values,'" *The Guardian,* sec. World News (March 17, 2016).

fines humanitarian governance of today, even though they share vocabularies, institutional frameworks, networks of NGOs, or forms of shelters. A century apart, the house and the tent indexed different eras of containment but often stood on the same ground. The instruments changed; the coordinates held.

AUTHOR

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