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Comparing Jewish labor in Poland, 1942–1945, and Armenian labor in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1918

Introduction

This chapter points to similarities between labor relations involving Jews hiding in German-occupied Poland, 1942–1945, and Armenians hiding in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1918.¹ Many of these people took up informal employment with non-Jews and non-Armenians, respectively, to obtain sustenance at a time when their group was under a deadly threat. This was for people who were not wealthy enough to afford years of paying for food, hosts and bribes, or who had lost their wealth. Several hundred thousand Armenians and tens of thousands of Jews in Poland survived this way.² Examining these labor relations helps elucidate the social position of members of these two groups under persecution. The background of this interest is my contention that violence, persecution but also support for persecuted people are constituted by social interaction, which means that it is not enough to look at official policies. It was not only officials that persecuted Armenians and Jews; many civilians also killed, mistreated, denounced, and pillaged them. At the same time, I argue that Jews and Armenians underwent proletarianization in low-qualification jobs in those years, at least temporarily.

It is no coincidence that the political scholarship – whether, by tendency, accusatory or denialist – has paid little attention to this phenomenon, which tends to be at odds with their narratives. But a number of – mostly female – scholars in these two fields have pointed to the existence of this kind of labor. Often the topic has been raised in studies about women or children. Joanna Michlic noted that Jewish children hiding in Poland served non-Jews, mostly farmers, as “cheap labor” without the “right to the most basic human care,” Debórah Dwork emphasized that the work that Jewish children had to do was often hard and that the phenomenon also occurred inside Germany, and Nahum Bogner added valu-

¹ This chapter is based on my work in the project “Sounds of anti-Jewish persecution,” supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF-Projekt 100011_172597/1).

² For Ottoman Armenians, see Nazan Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children and Youth During World War I* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019), 115–116.

able observations and insights.³ Hilmar Kaiser mentioned that Armenians under persecution worked for others, as did Nazan Maksudyan, emphasizing children's industriousness and agency, and Victoria Rowe, who added that Armenian women continued to seek wage labor in the first years after liberation, although this was not customary before their deportation.⁴ Katharine Derderian called such work done by Armenian women "forced labor" and "slave labor," with women being extremely vulnerable to their employers/new families.⁵ However, I know of no in-depth study of the phenomenon on either side⁶ – except for Hilmar Kaiser's chapter in this volume – and, in comparative terms, there is a brief summary remark by Derderian that Armenian and Jewish women both had to do slave labor,⁷ but no in-depth comparison of labor relations of people in hiding in the two cases.

These are the questions guiding my brief analysis, each time asked in comparative fashion: What kind of work were the persecuted doing, and was it more in rural or urban environments? What about labor conditions, the workload, payment and treatment? To what extent did Jews and Armenians become part of

³ See Joanna Michlic, *Jewish Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland: Survival and Polish-Jewish Relations During the Holocaust as Reflected in Early Postwar Recollections* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 40 and 70; Debórah Dwork, *Children With A Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 92–95; Nahum Bogner, *At the Mercy of Strangers: The Rescue of Jewish Children with Assumed Identities in Poland* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009).

⁴ Hilmar Kaiser, "'A Scene from the Inferno': The Armenians of Erzerum and the Genocide, 1915–1916," *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, eds. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik Schaller (Zurich: Chronos, 2002), 177–178 note 55; Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 127–128; Victoria Rowe, "Armenian Women Refugees at the End of Empire: Strategies of Survival," *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Panikos Panyi and Pippa Virdee (Basingstoke and New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2011), 158–159, 167. See also Jinks, "'Marks'", 114, 123.

⁵ Katharine Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1917," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, 1 (2005): 3, 11–12, 14–15. See also Ceyda Karamursel, "The Uncertainties of Freedom: The Second Constitutional Era and the End of Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Women's History* 28, 3 (2016): 155. Calling Armenians living with Muslim families slaves was common among Christian activists in the 1910s and 1920s: Jinks, "'Marks'", 104–106.

⁶ This also appears to apply to the recent collection of critical local case studies *Dalej jest noc: Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, eds. Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, 2 volumes (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2018), where the topic pops up occasionally. The same goes for Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 135–170. What comes closest to a systematic treatment I found in Gunnar Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), esp. 131–136.

⁷ Derderian, "Common Fate," 14–15.

employers' families? How long did this informal employment last, and how steady was it? How did one get this kind of job? Who was employed in regard to sex and age? And who were the employers in terms of social status, sex and ethnicity?

All of this is about Jews and Armenians working while living illegally in the most intense years of persecution. This paper is not about Jews doing work who lived in German-controlled ghettos and camps, nor about Armenians working in military forced labor battallions,⁸ in the officially sponsored labor schemes in Aleppo, in orphanages and in the cities of Constantinople and Smyrna, where Armenians lived legally throughout the First World War.

The main material with which I work – and with which others have worked who made observations about this topic – are survivor accounts. This material has a number of limitations. Often, employment is only mentioned in passing without much qualification. And survivors, especially in the Jewish case, arguably represent atypical, relatively successful cases of employment, because they did not fall victim to persecution like most other members of their group hiding in Poland⁹ (this argument applies to Armenians only to a certain extent). But these Jews and Armenians never became, as some others did (especially Armenians), fully socially integrated, which is why they later left the employers or households where they had worked; these departures allow us to learn from their experiences, because their accounts are only available for that reason, whereas those who stayed with the new families did not leave accounts. Also, it has to be kept in mind that many of these survivors were minors at the time, with the effect that children's work is in the center of their accounts, whereas they mention labor done by older relatives of theirs only occasionally.

Labor relations compared

Where did people work who lived clandestinely? For context, it should be said that both persecutions took place during a major war in which there was a lack of labor due to many men having been drafted to the military, and in German-

⁸ See, for example, Erik Jan Zürcher, "Ottoman Labour Battalions in World War I," in Kieser and Schaller, *The Armenian Genocide*, 187–196; Raymond Kévorkian, "Ahmed Djémal pacha et le sort des déportés arméniens de Syrie-Palestine," in Kieser and Schaller, *The Armenian Genocide*, 197–212; Raymond Kévorkian, *Le génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006), 846–849.

⁹ See Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 413–420; Grabowski, *Hunt*, 138.

occupied Poland also for forced labor in Germany. The demand for labor was especially high in the countryside, where state control tended to be less tight.¹⁰

According to the accounts from Poland, Jews in hiding – children and adults, male and female – worked primarily as farmhands for individuals, rarely for cooperatives.¹¹ For many, the primary work in the villages was tending to animals.¹² Some female refugees were spinning and knitting for a living.¹³ Women and girls also worked as household maids, urban or rural.¹⁴ In villages, some went as taylorers or beggars, and Jan Grabowski mentions artisans such as shoemakers and carpenters.¹⁵ In cities and towns, there were more independent activities in petty trade – inside and/or outside ghettos, often in groups or pairs, sometimes also together with non-Jews – and smuggling, especially by boys.¹⁶ Other urban jobs – for girls and women – included sewing, mending socks, weaving, toymaking, stuffing cigarettes (most of this done as cottage work), baking and service jobs, including as street singers (on the non-Jewish side) and as porters at railway stations.¹⁷ Some Polish Jews also tried their luck with letting themselves be deported (or even crossed the border themselves) to Germany to find employment as alleg-

10 For labor demand in the city of Warsaw, see Paulsson, *Secret City*, 132.

11 See Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 82; Michlic, *Jewish Children*, 34; accounts by Emanuel Elbinger, Jerzy Frydman, Henoch Rafael Lisak, Karolina Heuman in: *The Last Eyewitnesses: Children of the Holocaust Speak*, ed. Wiktoria Śliwowska (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 33, 50, 102, 188; accounts by Mendel Rosenkranz, Józef Leichter, Jozek Mansdorf, Maria Kopel, Izak Klajman and Jan Kulbinger in: *The Children Accuse*, eds. Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Noe Grüss (London and Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 39, 70–71, 109, 122, 130, 225–226.

12 Accounts by Józef Leichter, Anzelm Landesman, Regina Rück, Henryk Piechotka, Tamara Cygler, Leon Majblum, Jozek Mansdorf and Izak Klajman in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 70, 76, 84–85, 86, 90, 91–92, 109, 130; accounts by Maria Kamińska and Helena Choynowska (Alter), in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 84, 168.

13 Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 64.

14 See Paulsson, *Secret City*, 108, 134; Michlic, *Jewish Children*, 34; accounts by Barbara Góra and Helena Choynowska (Alter) in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 73, 168 (both in Warsaw); accounts by Marlena Wolisch and Eugenia Welner in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 96, 124.

15 Account by Hanka Grynberg in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 182–183; account by Józef Leichter in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 70; Grabowski, *Hunt*, 148 and, for begging, the account by Cyla Braw in: Grabowski, *Hunt*, 221.

16 Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 99–113; Paulsson, *Secret City*, 125, 134–135; accounts by Henryk Meller, Szlama Kutnowski, Jozek Mansdorf and Jan Kulbinger, Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 65–66, 80, 105, 108, 222; account by Barbara Góra in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 73.

17 Paulsson, *Secret City*, 133; accounts by Joanna Kaltman, Hanna Mesz and Maria Teresa Zielńska, in: Śliwowska *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 80, 123, 149–150; Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 103, 108, 110.

edly non-Jewish Polish workers¹⁸ or, disguised as non-Jews, with Germans in occupied Poland, in jobs as maids, assistants and workers for military units, e.g.¹⁹

Armenian women and girls lived as housemaids or in forced marriages with Muslims, probably doing work similar to a maid, apparently in rural and urban environments. For women living with bedouins, this included weaving and spinning.²⁰ Especially those who were married also had to be ready for sex, which could, depending on one's perspective, also be regarded as kind of work; it has been called sex slavery.²¹ Some Armenian girls also found work as maids in German and other European families, who sometimes bought them.²² There were few male adult survivors of massacres and marches. Armenian adults and youth worked as "shoemakers, [. . .], seamstresses, tailors, blacksmiths, or carpenters, and [. . .] doctors" in times when qualified labor was scarce.²³ Some started to look for work and economic opportunity even during the deportation marches.²⁴ Boys worked as farmhands, shepherds, servants, or cleaning stables or doing gardening.²⁵ Kerop Bedoukian reported about a village in southeastern Anatolia in 1915, probably with some exaggeration, that all of the local "wives, maids, housekeepers, goatherds, milkers, cheese-makers" were Armenians.²⁶ There were other jobs in urban environments. One boy worked as an assistant of a physician and then

18 See Paulsson, *Secret City*, 135; account by Krystyna Chudy in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 26–28; account by Szlama Kutnowski in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 81.

19 See Anna Zapalec, "Powiat Złoczowski," in Engelking and Grabowski, *Dalej jest noc*, vol. I, 736–739; accounts by Robert Kulka and Eugenia Magdziarz in Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 89, 107; accounts by Jusek Mansdorf and Jan Kulbinger in Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 109, 226.

20 Kaiser, "A Scene," 177 note 55; Donald Miller and Lourn Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 114; *Verlust und Vermächtnis: Überlebende des Genozids an den Armeniern erinnern sich*, eds. Mihran Dabag and Kristin Platt (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015), 109, 186, 239–242 (Schuschanig Gambarian, Yüghaper Eftian and Zepure Medsbakian); Mae Derderian, *Vergeen: A Survivor of the Armenian Genocide: Based on a memoir by Virginia Meghrouni* (Los Angeles: Atmus, 1996), 93, 122 (this book must be used with caution).

21 See for example Derderian, "Common Fate;" Vahakn Dadrian, "Children as victims of genocide: The Armenian Case," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, 3, (2003): 425, 427–428.

22 Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, 112; Martin Niepage, *The Horrors of Aleppo* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.y. [1917]), 13; see also account by Yüghaper Eftian in Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 187.

23 Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 128.

24 Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 127–128.

25 Kaiser, "A Scene," 177–178 note 55; accounts by Khoren Margossian by Aram Güreghian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 59, 61, 142, 144; Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, 110, 114, 117.

26 Kerop Bedoukian, *Some of Us Survived* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 54–55.

of a shopkeeper, eventually becoming his accountant.²⁷ In the town of Marash, some Armenians worked as sewers, in Birecik as weavers; in Harput Armenian women became knitters, and in Diyarbekir, Armenian boys became waiters.²⁸ In an urban environment, prostitution by Armenian women and girls was frequent, in some cases because they were shunned by other Armenians after having been raped, and for the same reason some worked as prostitutes also after liberation.²⁹ Activities of self-employment included petty trade (mostly for boys), begging, and some boys lived as thieves, especially in urban environments.³⁰ A 1980s oral history-based study included female informants who worked as “beggars, street peddlers, street cleaners, water carriers, maids, seamstresses, helpmates in hospitals, nurse’s aides, nurses, and teachers.”³¹ As Nazan Maksudyan stresses, many Armenian children – and other Ottoman children during World War I – were not just passive victims, but exerted agency in various ways, including work.³²

Importantly, the Armenian women and children initially often lacked experience and qualifications in the jobs they were given or took up. The sort of jobs that persecuted refugees could even hope for put them in a low social position. Except for the clothing sector, the same was also often true for Polish Jews. Overall, the kind of jobs the refugees obtained were amazingly similar in the two cases – farming and animal raising, trade, and weaving and cloth-making.

The accounts given by Armenians and Jews say little about the conditions of work. This includes the workload, which could be heavy or light, but was often not specified.³³ Given that payment usually goes unmentioned (one survivor noted that there was one), I assume that most Armenians worked for room and board.³⁴ The same went for Polish Jews; only some of them mentioned that they did piece-

²⁷ Account by Aram Güreghian in Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 73–75 (Pazare).

²⁸ Bedoukian, *Some*, 81–84, 86, 90, 126; account by Zepure Medsbakian in Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 242; Uğur Üngör, “Orphans, Converts and Prostitutes: Social Consequences of War and Persecution in the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1923,” *War in History* 19, 2 (2012): 177.

²⁹ Üngör, “Orphans,” 187–188; Tachjian, “Gender,” 66, 68, 71; for the context, see also Jinks, “Marks,” 111–112.

³⁰ Bedoukian, *Some*, 63; Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, 106, 114; Üngör, “Orphans,” 177; Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 128–129, 132.

³¹ Eliz Sanasarian, “Gender Distinction in the Genocidal Process: A Preliminary Study of the Armenian Case,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4, 4 (1989): 451.

³² Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 105–136, esp. 106, 140.

³³ See Kaiser, “A Scene,” 177–178 note 55; account by Aram Güreghian in Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 61; account by Szlama Kutnowski in Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 79.

³⁴ Zepure Medsbakian (in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 242) mentions that there was no pay. In the desert around Der es-Zor, the authorities prohibited Armenians from earning a salary; see Yair Auran, *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2002), 378.

meal work in the textile sector.³⁵ Armenian survivors often described how they were treated by their employers by telling about the quality and amount of food they received. This could vary between being well provided, eating what the family ate and living off scrap.³⁶ Some complained about being bossed around by rural men or women, sometimes including beatings.³⁷ The account of Aram Güreghian is probably not atypical: he had to fend off a sexual assault by his first employer (a doctor) and was treated with dignity by the second, an Afghan businessman.³⁸ Even within a family, a girl could be treated well by one person, the new ‘father,’ and badly, like a maid, by another, his wife, for example.³⁹ The “treatment of the captured youngsters ranged from cruelty to love,” as Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill wrote, who added that older Armenian boys tended to be treated “as slave labor.”⁴⁰ The range of treatment of Polish Jews by their employers was almost equally wide.⁴¹ There was also mixed behavior. One survivor said that the farmers who took her in had rough manners but dealt with their own children the same way.⁴² A boy wrote that his farmer made him work hard but treated and fed him well.⁴³

Despite some reports about fairly good treatment, there is just one account of a Jewish girl in my sample who said she was dealt with like a family member.⁴⁴ This was more often the case with very small Jewish children, who did not work. Other Jews just worked for their hosts. By contrast, a great number of Armenian children were adopted by Muslim families and many women were accepted as (first) wives.⁴⁵

35 See accounts by Joanna Kaltman and Maria Teresa Zielińska in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 80, 150. For a lowly paid cow herder, see the account by Jan Kulbinger in in Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 226.

36 Rather positive: Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, 114; Derderian, “Common Fate,” 126; account by Schuschanig Gambarian in Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 109. Negative account by Khoren Margossian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 144.

37 Derderian, “Common Fate,” 93, 95; Kaiser, “A Scene,” 178 note 55.

38 See Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 74–75 (urban); similar account by Khoren Margossian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 142–144 (rural).

39 Üngör, “Orphans,” 178.

40 Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “The Armenian Genocide and the Survival of Children,” in *Anatomy of Genocide: State-Sponsored Mass Killings in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Alexandre Kimenyi and Otis Scott (Lewiston: Mellen, 2001), 232.

41 See accounts by Tamara Cygler, Maria Kopel and Eugenia Welner in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 90, 122, 124; account by Michał Pinkas in: Grabowski, *Hunt*, 187. Similar conclusion in Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 89–90, 94.

42 Account by Barbara Góra in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 73.

43 Account by Szlama Kutnowskii in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 79.

44 Account by Hanka Grynberg in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 184.

45 See Derderian, “Common Fate,” despite her quite different interpretation; Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, 106, 110; Rowe, “Armenian women refugees,” 158–159.

Many were tattooed, marking the “transition from one social group to another.”⁴⁶ Survivors identifying as Armenian sometimes wrote memoirs or were interviewed (after they had left their Muslim families), but those who stayed in those families are hardly represented in such sources. The fact that strong persuasion was necessary to ‘rescue’ some of them from Muslim families after 1918 and that many did not leave testifies to their social inclusion.⁴⁷ Many women who stayed in their new Muslim environs did so because fellow Armenians rejected their children who had been fathered by Turks, Arabs or Kurds. Others even returned to their Muslim families after having been ‘rescued’ out of their midst by Christians.⁴⁸ Many others were not adopted, but the full integration of Armenians into the family seems to be a major distinction between Armenians and Jews in Poland (except for an unknown number of young Jewish children⁴⁹), even though one has to keep in mind that neither the thousands of Jews nor the Armenians who stayed with their new families even after the German or Ottoman regime collapsed ever told their story.

For people in hiding, it was best if they could stay in one place and thus also one position of employment during the persecution. Although there is evidence for many Armenians having stayed in one job for years,⁵⁰ there were few who had only one employer, and others reported having changed frequently (some by running away), sometimes in combination with switching from one activity to another as well.⁵¹ Unsteady employment can also be taken as a sign that working conditions were bad and people were not integrated into families. Accordingly, Polish Jews seem to have stayed on average much shorter in one job than Armenians. Many Armenians disguised their identities like Jews did, but unlike non-Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, non-Jewish Poles were threatened with death by German ‘laws’ not to help Jews, which made many (but not all) send them away if they found out that their employees were Jews or if their neighbors found out; Jews themselves often left if they considered the risk of being betrayed too big due to the threats,

⁴⁶ Jinks, “‘Marks,’” 103, quoting Hanne Schönig.

⁴⁷ For the high numbers of those who stayed, see Jinks, “‘Marks,’” 116. Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 117–120, 125 argues that staying was often a matter of choice. Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors: Children’s Lives After the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 69 writes that ‘rescue’ teams sometimes used force to take Jewish children out of their non-Jewish families after 1945. See also Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 257–295.

⁴⁸ Jinks, “‘Marks,’” 123; Tachjian, “Gender,” 73, 75.

⁴⁹ Clifford, *Survivors*, 66–67 argues that these numbers were low (but only on the basis of children placed with non-Jews with the help of rescue organizations); see also Bogner, *At the Mercy*, 75, 290–292.

⁵⁰ See especially the examples in Kaiser 2002, “‘A Scene,’” 177–178 note 55.

⁵¹ See Bedoukian, *Some*, 63, 81–90, 126; accounts by Aram Güreghian and Zepure Medsbakian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 59, 61, 241; Maksudyan, *Ottoman Children*, 124–125.

blackmail or rumors. Therefore there are many reports by Jews recording very short employment periods⁵² and comparatively few reporting stays of over one year.⁵³

This lack of steadiness raised the question of how to get a new job under conditions that meant that searching for employment could easily lead to one's being denounced and killed. But the need was so great that many Jews report that they or their relatives asked Christians whether they needed any workers.⁵⁴ Even if not explicitly stating that they were Jews, many locals might, and did, guess as much. In some cases, non-Jews who no longer wanted to house a Jew transported him to an acquaintance for new employment.⁵⁵ It was often different with Armenians, who were for the most part actually picked up by Muslim locals, whether abducted or literally bought by them. There are many reports about so-called slave markets, whether improvised or of a steadier character.⁵⁶ Other Armenians seem to have searched for jobs on their own, as indicated by their frequent change of employers.

According to the reports from Poland, men, women and children all found employment with Polish non-Jews. In contrast, those Armenians who were employed were mainly women and children, girls and boys.⁵⁷ Armenian men had relatively little chance to get a job, were running a much higher risk of getting murdered, and most survivors were women and children.⁵⁸

If Armenians worked in firms, institutions or shops, their employers were mostly men. If they worked within rural families, those were also usually headed by a man, although it was often women who assigned the work, especially to girls and women. Those who picked up or bought Armenians were for the most part men, but women were also reported to do this in some places.⁵⁹ It was about

52 Accounts by Mendel Rosenkranz, Józef Leichter, Regina Rück (about her mother) and Leon Majblum in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 39, 70, 84, 92; account by Jerzy Frydman in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 50.

53 Account by Józef Leichter in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 70; accounts by Henoch Rafael Lisak and Maria Teresa Zieliński in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 102, 149.

54 Accounts by Józef Leichter, Anzelm Landesman and Leon Majblum in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 70, 76, 91–92.

55 Account by Henoch Rafael Lisak in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 102.

56 See Auran, *Banality*, 379–380; Miller and Touryan Miller, *Survivors*, 101, 110; Derderian, “Common Fate,” 12; Dirouhi Kouymijan Highgas, *Refugee Girl* (Watertown: Baikar, 1985), 74; Leon Surmelian, *I Ask You, Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1945), 108, 111–112; accounts by Aram Güreghian and Yüghaper Eftian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 61, 186.

57 This accentuation differs somewhat from Derderian, “Common Fate.”

58 For the latter point, see Kaprielian-Churchill, “The Armenian Genocide,” 223.

59 For the latter, see Abraham Hartunian, *Neither to Laught nor to Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 102–103 (near Aintab) and Sanasarian, “Gender Distinction,” 453.

the same for the Polish non-Jews who employed Jews (except for the purchasing aspect), but women had a slightly greater role there.

The social position of those who employed Armenians differed widely. In the urban sphere, they tended to be of a bourgeois background: dignitaries, businessmen and foreigners. Those who had Armenians work for them in the countryside were farmers or pastoralists, who could be wealthy but often they lived modestly or were poor. They were from various ethnicities: Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Europeans and even Afghans.⁶⁰ By contrast, most employers in Poland were ethnic Poles and some were Germans, but there is only one report about a Ukrainian.⁶¹ In terms of class, there are relatively many descriptions of poor non-Jewish Polish farmers who employed Jewish workers, knowingly or not.⁶² If Jews found work with Germans, they were usually not poor.

Conclusion

In the late Ottoman Empire and in German-occupied Poland during World War II, many people were ready to accept individuals from persecuted minorities in hiding as workers. In both cases, this happened more in rural than in urban areas because there was a war-related lack of labor in the countryside. Most people – children and adults – worked as farmhands, maids or servants. In cities and towns, some of the activities (especially in trade) involved self-employment. The jobs tended to be manual, low-skilled, the employment informal and unsteady. Apparently there was little pay; without doubt, persecuted people were taken advantage of in situations where they were deeply vulnerable and in most cases alone. They were exploited, but not all of the work was terribly hard, even for children. Those who exploited those under persecution came from all walks of life, but often they were lower-class people who were just getting by themselves and who did not draw huge benefits from the employment.

In this chapter, such employment has neither been interpreted as part of the persecution nor as rescue activity, as has been done in the political liter-

⁶⁰ See Derderian “Common Fate,” 13, 19 note 26; for Arabs: Derderian, *Vergeen*, 93 and the account by Schuschanig Gambarian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 109; for Turks: account by Zepure Medsbakian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 242; for Kurds and an Afghan see the account by Aram Güreghian in: Dabag and Platt, *Verlust*, 59, 74 and by Zepure Medsbakian, 239.

⁶¹ Account by Anzelm Landesman in: Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, *The Children Accuse*, 76.

⁶² For example, accounts by Emanuel Elbinger and Barbara Góra in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 33, 73 and as a contrary example account by Henoeh Rafael Lisak, in: Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, 102.

ature. In terms of work, both Muslims in Anatolia and Syria and Christians in Poland accepted persecuted people as a subordinate part of their society. Not everybody treated Armenians and Jews as outcasts. Despite the fact that, apparently, little cash was involved and they were paid in kind, I argue that those taking up work in the ways described in this paper underwent proletarianization and, if they came from bourgeois or petty-bourgeois backgrounds, social decline, whence many ascended after the persecution with the help of those who remained of their families. Even if those employed could be killed by their employers with impunity, they can be seen as proletarians, not slaves, because of the loose ties between employer and employee. It is true that in the Ottoman case, many started a new life in a new family during the war and stayed there after 1918. The situation in Poland, where capitalism was more advanced than in the Ottoman countryside and the family as an economic unit perhaps already less dominant, was usually less paternalistic, less personal and more business-like.⁶³ But also in the Ottoman Empire, even if many Armenians were bought or captured by their employers, the term ‘slavery’ does not appear to describe labor relations sufficiently, at least in many cases, given refugees’ integration into families.

The Armenians’ fates resembled late Ottoman slavery in that the primary demand was for females, most of whom were domestic servants,⁶⁴ labor was hard without pay, sexual abuse frequent and many Armenians, as well as slaves, fled.⁶⁵ Around World War I, Ottoman slavery was dying down but was still a known practice.⁶⁶ However, while many poorer households kept Armenians, to own slaves was for the most part an upper class affair⁶⁷ (a tradition upon which Talaat Pasha seemed to build with his 10 July 1915 order to give Armenian children as adoptees

⁶³ However, the literature cited in footnote 47 indicates signs of affection by many hosts for young Jewish children.

⁶⁴ See Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 215. Thanks to Masha Cerovic for suggesting that I take a closer look at Ottoman slavery in general.

⁶⁵ Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800–1909* (Basingstoke: Macmillan and St. Martin’s, 1996), 160–173.

⁶⁶ Ehud Toledano, “Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery (1830s–1880s),” *Poetics Today* 14, 3 (1993): 485; Erdem, *Slavery*.

⁶⁷ Karamursel, “The Uncertainties,” 140; Michael Ferguson, “Clientship, Social Indebtedness and State-Controlled Emancipation of Africans in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds*, eds. Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 51. However, at the peak of some refugee waves in the 19th century, broader population groups acquired (Muslim) ‘Circassian’ slaves: Karamursel, “The Uncertainties,” 155.

preferably to village notables).⁶⁸ Other differences were that only some Armenian survivors said that they were bought, and very few that they were sold on,⁶⁹ that many Armenian children were factually adopted by Muslim families, and slaves usually were not.⁷⁰ The forms of Armenians' relationships to their 'host' households also differed from slavery.⁷¹

The fate of Armenian children resembled the usual treatment of Ottoman orphans and destitute children taken in by other families, as it resembled slavery. With slavery on the decline, such fostership was on the rise. As with the Armenians around 1915, foster children were mostly girls, were used as unpaid servants for doing hard work for room and board only, were exploited under the guise of charity and were often sexually abused, with no schooling permitted. But unlike among the Armenians, accepting foster children was mostly an upper class affair; the children were Muslim and typically did not become part of the family – virtually no “happy stories” are documented,⁷² whereas, remarkably, some Armenian survivors do report positive treatment by Muslim families. Perhaps the fact that rural poor families, too, adopted Armenians in great numbers had something to do with the fact that some were better treated than slaves and normal destitute children, although this may seem counterintuitive. In any case, the evidence suggests that some new social practices were emerging.

A generalizing comparison cannot stand on two legs. More cases are needed. The labor relations of Ottoman Armenians and Polish Jews can be compared to the fate of alleged or real Indonesian leftists persecuted in and after 1965. My study on their fate and on their accounts⁷³ concluded that many also experienced enforced proletarianization, after which some again climbed the social hierarchy. The situations are somewhat comparable since, unlike most in the communist movement, the majority in my Indonesian sample were well-educated and of an urban middle class background. They also tried to disguise their true identities. Many became workers (including in childcare) and some engaged in petty trade,

⁶⁸ Üngör, “Orphans,” 176.

⁶⁹ For the latter fact, Sanasarian, “Gender Distinction,” 454 mentions two cases. See, for example, also Jinks, “Marks,” 86.

⁷⁰ Zilfi, *Women*, 166–167; Erdem, *Slavery*, 152–153.

⁷¹ Erdem, *Slavery*, 152–160; Zilfi, *Women*, 127; Ferguson, “Clientship,” 51, 61.

⁷² See Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 52–53, 55–58, 61–62, 67–68, 77 (quote). Locals and parents considered going to orphanages a better option for a child than going to foster families: Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children*, 56.

⁷³ Christian Gerlach, “Indonesian narratives of survival in and after 1965 and their relation to societal persecution,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anti-Communist Persecutions in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Christian Gerlach and Clemens Six (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 441–458.

like those under persecution in Poland and the Ottoman Empire. One major difference is that only a few Indonesian leftists turned to farmwork, at least in my sample – surprising for an overwhelmingly rural society. Also, many leftists were ostracized by some of their own family members. Another marker of difference is that, in a social and partially also in a legal sense, the persecution of leftists in Indonesia is still ongoing decades later. In any case, the Indonesian story, too, is complex, but in many cases is again about the social displacement of middle class urbanites within a not fully industrialized society. These experiences are about people under persecution finding a place temporarily, their treatment in that situation and the degrees of their acceptance by others. More studies on labor in other contexts of mass violence would help shed further light on these dynamics.

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