

ARTICLE

# Refugees as Resources: A Post-War Experiment in European Refugee Relief

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This article explores the Homeless European Land Program, an experiment in resettling foreign refugees in post-Second World War Sardinia undertaken by two idealistic Americans with the support of the Brethren Service Committee and the fledgling UNHCR. Focusing on individuals rejected for immigration, the initiative aimed to integrate these ‘hard core’ refugees by rendering them agents of development of a ‘backwards’ region of the Italian South and to overcome Italian reluctance to serve as a country of permanent resettlement for the displaced. The history of this project reveals the contradictory impulses of early Cold War refugee relief and humanitarianism: the competition between intergovernmental and voluntary agencies, of secular and spiritual enterprises, and of images of refugees as dependent and difficult to settle and yet capable of self-sufficiency. Many of the ideas piloted in Sardinia, notably the linking of self-sufficiency and development, later became prominent in the UNHCR’s work in the Global South.

In 1958, Ernest Schlatter travelled in his capacity as head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Rome to a remote outpost on the island of Sardinia to participate in the inauguration of the Homeless European Land Program (HELP), alternatively known as the Don Murray Project and later the Sardinia Resettlement Project. Schlatter’s presence signalled the keen interest of the UNHCR in this experiment in refugee resettlement and the hope it could serve as a model for other ‘permanent solutions’ for refugee integration.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the HELP project unfolded in the context of a broader drive for camp clearance within Europe, aiming to resolve the protracted problem of the so-called ‘hard core’ or ‘difficult-to-settle’ refugees rejected repeatedly for emigration abroad. While successfully settling a small number of refugees (around fifteen or so), HELP failed to serve as the template for a wider campaign of refugee integration and settlement that its organisers had envisioned. Nonetheless, the HELP project and its intense focus on fostering self-sufficiency offers an important early experiment in what scholars of refugees now deem ‘self-reliance’, as well as related questions of national development and refugee entrepreneurship that are often viewed as much more recent priorities of the refugee regime centred on the UNHCR and in the context of the Global South.

Much of the scholarship on refugee self-reliance has displayed the broader presentist bias common to refugee and forced migration studies. As Claudena Skran and Evan Easton-Calabria note, ‘Self-reliance discourse is commonly presented ahistorically, oriented on refugees’ future independence rather than drawing on the experience humanitarian agencies have gained over a century of

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Dr. Ernest Schlatter, Sardinia, 18 July 1958, ‘Inauguration of first refugee home, 1958’, Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2, Sardinia Refugee Project, Oberlin Special Collections.

assisting refugees’.<sup>2</sup> Work on refugee self-reliance thus tends to locate it in more recent phenomena, such as neoliberalism, while ignoring the very lively interwar experiments in fostering refugee economic initiatives promoted by the League of Nations and the Greek Refugee Resettlement Commission (detailed by Easton-Calabria),<sup>3</sup> among others. In her provocative re-reading of the history of the international refugee regime, Laura Robson offers a notable exception. She locates the origins of refugee ‘assistance’ in the exploitation of displacees as labourers, tracing schemes to employ refugees as workers back to the late Ottoman empire. These imperial logics converged with Zionist and other territorial resettlement schemes, consolidating in the League of Nations’ ‘core principle: that refugees, deployed as workers, could serve as a crucial resource for their new host states’.<sup>4</sup>

The interwar cases discussed by Skran, Easton-Calabria, and Robson provide important precedents for the HELP project, though many of the pre-1945 self-reliance schemes focused on ‘national refugees’ displaced to their putative ethnic homelands. HELP instead sought to resettle and integrate foreign refugees in Italy, making them key agents of national development and reconstruction as an earlier generation of national refugees had in places like mainland Greece and Macedonia. Nonetheless, these pre and post-Second World War European projects shared an emphasis on agriculture, rather than industry, a focus that characterised UNHCR models of ‘integrated rural development’ and ‘zonal development’ tried in places like Burundi in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> And despite Robson’s depiction of the refugee regime as one based on exploitation, HELP’s casting of foreign refugees – and ‘difficult-to-settle’ ones, at that – represented an important redefinition of the displaced. As Gatrell notes, the hard core label, along with that of ‘residuum’, stigmatised ‘individuals who could not be resettled in third countries on grounds of old age, prolonged ill health (such as tuberculosis or mental illness) or “social handicap”, as well as “people over 35 in a professional or intellectual class”’.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, HELP recognised its hard core refugees as valuable workers imbued with their full, rather than bare, humanity. Realising such potential and attaining self-sufficiency, however, required extensive work (indeed, *help*) on behalf of the displaced, just one of many contradictions that inhered in this experiment in fostering self-reliance and integration.

HELP thus embodied many of the contradictions and competing impulses of refugee relief in Europe and beyond during the early UNHCR period. Organised with spiritual and rehabilitative aims to help (mostly) anti-communist Cold War refugees, HELP nonetheless remained an outwardly secular project.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, some Italian Catholics proved suspicious of the Protestant organisations and their personnel, who explicitly understood their role as a mission and whose developmentalist visions rested upon long-standing understandings of the Italian South as a site of ‘backwardness’. Furthermore, the voluntary and intergovernmental agencies involved – religious ones among them

<sup>2</sup> Claudena Skran and Evan Easton-Calabria, ‘Old Concepts Making New History: Refugee Self-Reliance, Livelihoods and the “Refugee Entrepreneur”’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 1 (2020): 1–21, 6. This piece served as the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* focused on self-reliance.

<sup>3</sup> Evan Easton-Calabria, *Refugees, Self-Reliance, Development: A Critical History* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022). For an intriguing post-Partition case of framing national (in this case Bengali) refugees as settlers, refer to Udit Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Laura Robson, *Human Capital: A History of Putting Refugees to Work* (London: Verso, 2024), 35. Frederick Walter Lorenz’s analysis of Ottoman resettlement of Cretan Muslim refugees in Cyrenaica suggests the political utility of such refugees as well; in addition to their value as agricultural workers, these Cretan displacees helped the Ottomans weaken the power of the Sanusi brotherhood. Frederick Walter Lorenz, ‘The “Second Egypt”: Cretan Refugees, Agricultural Development, and Frontier Expansion in Ottoman Cyrenaica, 1897–1904’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 89–105.

<sup>5</sup> T. F. Betts, ‘Evolution and Promotion of the Integrated Rural Development Approach to Refugee Policy in Africa’, *Africa Today* 31, no. 4 (1st quarter, 1984): 7–24.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World’s Refugees, 1956–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16–17.

<sup>7</sup> As Barnett points out, while humanitarianism became increasingly secularised after the Second World War, it retains strong elements of the transcendental that marked its emergence in the nineteenth century. Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 20.

– tussled over jurisdictional and administrative questions. From another direction, HELP joined together early celebrity humanitarianism with academic interest in the refugee problem,<sup>8</sup> raising pointed questions at the time about the kinds of narratives best suited to promote such projects. This held not just for donors and the general public, whose compassion was elicited, but also the refugees themselves, who often had to be persuaded to leave the security of camp life for a risky proposition in Sardinia. Finally, both the staff on the project and the refugees who joined oscillated between advocating models of charity and more business-oriented or entrepreneurial ones. This underscored the dilemmas of promoting self-reliance for the most rejected of the refugees.

Although many of these tensions were negotiated on the ground in Sardinia, they hindered the translation of HELP into a larger model. What its founders and supporters intended as a pilot project remained, in the end, a singular initiative in the history of European refugees, albeit one that testifies to a throughline of entangled efforts at self-sufficiency and international development from the interwar period on. When viewed from Italy, site of Europe's first 'Southern Problem', these entanglements put into question rigid demarcations (temporal and geographic) between refugee histories in the Global North and South.<sup>9</sup>

In recuperating this history, this article draws primarily upon the rich collection of papers held at Oberlin College donated by Belden and Lisa Paulson, one of the two American couples (together with Don Murray and Hope Lange) that founded HELP. The papers of John Alexander-Sinclair, part of the UN Career Project available at Oxford's Bodleian Library, also proved useful. In addition, I conducted interviews in Simaxis, Sardinia, with widows and descendants of HELP refugees in June 2015. Finally, I spent a long afternoon interviewing the Paulsons at their Vermont home in August of 2015. While these personal papers and oral histories offer both a view from above and from below, they privilege the voices of those promoting self-reliance for displaced persons, rather than the refugees' own understandings of such initiatives.

### HELP: Genesis of a Project

HELP coalesced in response to the condition of displaced persons in Italy in the early postwar period. Into the 1950s and early 1960s, Italy hosted sizable populations of both foreign displaced persons and its own 'national' refugees from the former colonies and possessions lost with fascism's defeat. The latter became the responsibility of the Italian state, who provided subsidies that included housing. Many of the former instead were deemed international refugees eligible for assistance from the UN agencies: first the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), in operation between 1947 and 1952, and subsequently the UNHCR. The Italian state also maintained in camps those foreign displacees who did not come under the IRO's mandate; in addition, the Italian authorities took over responsibility for many foreign refugees once the IRO ceased operation. In part owing to extensive wartime devastation, in part owing to Italy's long history of overpopulation and outmigration, both Italian and UN officials concurred on Italy's low absorptive capacity for refugees. This meant that Italy would serve only as a country of transit for non-Italian displaced persons, whether they were eligible for UN help or not.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> As with the literature on self-reliance, work on celebrity humanitarianism often ignores earlier precedents, locating it squarely within the logics of global late capitalism. Ilan Kapoor offers a typical assessment of it as a 'new phenomenon' that 'legitimizes, and indeed promotes, neoliberal capitalism and global inequality'. Ilan Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1. Dan Brockington has instead located the height of celebrity humanitarianism in the Victorian era. Dan Brockington, *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development* (London: Routledge, 2014), 56.

<sup>9</sup> On the 'myth of difference' between refugees from the Global North and 'economic' migrants from the Global South, see Lucy Mayblin, *Asylum after Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking* (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> For details on the complex process by which the distinctions between international and national refugees were worked out in post-1945 Italy, see Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar*

In light of restrictive immigration policies and labour schemes such as Great Britain's 'Westward Ho!', the 'French Metropolitan Scheme', and Belgium's 'Operation Black Diamond' that privileged strong and healthy young people ready to tackle difficult industrial work,<sup>11</sup> during the early Cold War there remained in Italy, Austria and Germany a large 'residue' of DPs with few prospects for resettlement abroad. The elderly, infirm, handicapped, and those suffering from illness numbered amongst these so-called 'hard core' refugees. Race and religion also factored into the 'hierarchy of desirability' exercised by refugee selection commissions, with Aryan-looking Balts favoured over Jews in places like France and the United States.<sup>12</sup> The presence of hard core refugees in camps on the Italian peninsula thus put into sharp relief the dilemmas posed by such DPs throughout Europe. What would become of these individuals who had few prospects of emigrating but simultaneously no chance of integration into an Italian state that had made clear it would not serve as a country of permanent refuge and whose citizenship policies (rooted in *jus sanguinis*) made naturalisation difficult and rare?

This question became even more acute as the IRO's mission wound down. In 1951, the IRO had worked frantically to settle as many refugees as it could in advance of its cessation, managing to assist some 20,000 to emigrate from Italy but leaving at least as many still in limbo in the country.<sup>13</sup> Faith-based groups like the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Italian Service Mission – which had collaborated closely with the IRO on facilitating emigration from the camps of Italy and other European countries – saw the IRO's end as creating 'an urgent challenge . . . to fill the vacuum of responsibility'.<sup>14</sup> The prominent role played by such groups reminds us that scholars have likely overstated the 'increased secularization of relief work' among DPs in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> Gatrell pointedly warns against overstating the distinctions between faith-based and secular organisations, distinctions stressed often for 'convenience of exposition rather than because the differences between them are clear-cut'.<sup>16</sup>

The assistance to Jews provided by groups like the American Joint Distribution Committee often figures as an exception to this humanitarian secularisation thesis that nonetheless proves the rule. Yet this likely reflects a bias in the scholarship and archives, with easier access to UN documents having led scholars to underplay the role of the Vatican and various Protestant organisations. The 2020 opening of the Secret Vatican Archives for documents dating from the reign of Pius XII (1939–58), for example, has begun to fill in the details of the large-scale relief efforts undertaken by the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza ai Profughi/Commissione di Assistenza, subsequently known as the Pontificia Opera di Assistenza. Underscoring the similarly important role played by voluntary religious groups, one World Council of Churches (WCC) publication claimed:

*Without the help of Christian Churches and other humanitarian voluntary agencies, the International Refugee Organization would have found it extremely difficult to resettle even a*

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Italy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020). Tellingly, Italy was one of the states that, in signing on to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, retained the geographic reservation limiting the refugees it would assist to those from Europe. For details: Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*, 5; Silvia Salvatici, 'Missing the Global Turn: Italy, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the Belated Removal of the Geographical Limitation', *European History Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2023): 357–78. On the categories of displaced person and refugee, see also Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 29–55.

<sup>11</sup> G. Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 104–8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, 115. For further details on the hard core refugees, turn to Gatrell, *Free World*, 16–18, 49–57.

<sup>13</sup> Belden Paulson, 'The Refugee in Italy ... 1952', 3; 'Unpublished writings related to mission work in Naples, 1951–1954', Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, Oberlin Special Collections [hereafter OSC].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1; see also 'Our Refugee Report', 1 June 1952, 'Italian Service Mission publications and publicity, 1951–1954', in the same location (Box 12).

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Gatrell, *Free World?*, 122.

*tenth of the 879,000 DP's who had been aided to begin new lives by the end of 1950! To illustrate, nine out of every ten DP's who are now living and working in the United States, would not be there except for help received from a religious group!*<sup>17</sup>

In Italy, the WCC paid particular attention to non-Catholic displaced persons, including Muslims and Orthodox Christians.<sup>18</sup> In 1955, the WCC had proposed a project to settle some eighty refugees near Paestum but failed to win approval from the Italian Ministries of the Interior, Agriculture and Finance.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in 1953 John Alexander-Sinclair at the UNHCR's Rome office had begun to formulate what, four years later, would take shape as the 'Sardinia Plan'. Formally presented at the 'International Conference on Refugee Problems Today and Tomorrow',<sup>20</sup> the plan called for the resettlement of 20,000 refugee families, both foreign and Italian or national displacees. Another version of the plan provided for the settlement and integration of 50,000 individuals.<sup>21</sup> Like the Paestum project, this Sardinia plan to integrate foreign refugees with little hope of emigration ultimately failed to materialise. It did, however, elicit the interest of several parties, notably the Council of Europe, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and Aide Suisse. It also revealed a growing focus on the underdeveloped Italian South as a potential site in which foreign refugees might serve as agents of development.

This was the broader context in which another Sardinian plan, that of HELP, came to fruition. The direct and immediate origins of HELP lie in the Casa Mia project, 'a school, a vocational center, a relief center, [and] a medical clinic'<sup>22</sup> for impoverished Neapolitans. Casa Mia developed from the work of the Italian Mission of the Congregational Christian Service Committee (CCSC), established in 1946 under the direction of Dr. Teofilo Santi. (In 1905, Santi's father, a Methodist minister, had opened a children's home, Casa Materna.) The Italian Mission, in concert with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and Italian officials, created four housing settlements for Neapolitans inhabiting a series of caves and subsequently built Casa Mia in 1952 to serve the inhabitants of the bombed-out ruins known as the Granili. A young American Oberlin College graduate, Belden Paulson, who had worked with the settlements and then directed Casa Mia, overlapped at the project with another American volunteer, the actor Don Murray. Raised in the Congregationalist Church, Paulson came from a family of missionaries and social workers. As a conscientious objector and member of the Brethren Church, Murray came to Casa Mia after a stint in German DP camps, service experiences that substituted for military duty. Murray devoted much of

<sup>17</sup> *The Plight of Refugees* (1951), 'World Council of Churches materials, 1951–1955', 11–12 (emphasis in original), Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC.

<sup>18</sup> The WCC, for instance, proposed a single camp in which to consolidate the non-Catholic displaced persons in Italy, arguing it had both logistical and spiritual advantages. 'Best Alternative: A Camp for Non-Catholic DPs in Italy,' 1951, 'World Council of Churches materials, 1951–1955', Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC.

<sup>19</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Position of Italian Government on Community Integration Projects', 28 Dec. 1959. 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files (Rome), OSC.

<sup>20</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, UN Career Project, Papers of Alexander-Sinclair, Ms.Eng.C 4659, Alexander-Sinclair to Benvenuti, Folios 1–190, 15 Apr. 1958.

<sup>21</sup> Bodleian, UN Career Project, Papers of Alexander-Sinclair, Ms.Eng.C 4659, Folios 1–190; Council for Europe Consultative Assembly, 'Motion for a Resolution presented by M. de la Vallée Poussin and a number of his colleagues,' 28 Apr. 1958. See also Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*, 191–201.

<sup>22</sup> Belden Paulson, Teofilo Santi, et al., *The Italian Service Mission* (Spring 1953), 'Italian Service Mission Publications and Publicity, 1951–1954, n.d.', Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC. See also the 'REPORT ON THE RESETTLEMENT OF AGED, T.B. AND OTHER DIFFICULT-TO-RESETTLE REFUGEES IN 1955', contained in File 425.3.309 'Service to Refugees General du 1952 au 1956', World Council of Churches Archive, Geneva.



his time in Naples to helping refugees in the city, in particular teaching them English with the aim of improving their chances for emigration.<sup>23</sup>

Murray and Paulson reconnected in 1956 in Chicago, where Paulson was doing graduate work and Murray enjoying newfound stardom with the release of the film *Bus Stop*. After a late-night brainstorming session over how to help foreign refugees they had encountered languishing in camps in and around Naples, the two men hatched a scheme to settle such 'hard core' refugees *within* Italy. Murray, in particular, was haunted by a promise he had made to a Yugoslav refugee, Mario. When leaving Naples, Murray had assured an angry Mario that he would one day leave the camps and live a free life.<sup>24</sup> With the goal of creating a 'free' refugee community, Paulson and Murray approached the CCSC and the Brethren Service Commission (BSC), among other potential partners. BSC Executive Secretary Harold Row signed on as Administrative Secretary of the HELP committee, co-chaired by Don Murray and his actress wife Hope Lange.<sup>25</sup> The UNHCR also expressed interest, as did the United States Escapee Program (USEP) and the World Council of Churches.

Murray arranged for a movie publicity trip to pay passage for himself and Paulson to Rome the following year, where they began to meet with Italian officials in various agencies and ministries, as well as refugees. After they struck out in Calabria, the director of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (an Italian entity dedicated to development in Southern Italy) suggested the underpopulated island of Sardinia as an ideal site for such a settlement project. Both the Americans and the officials at La Cassa viewed this project as an instrument of development, of rehabilitation not only of displaced persons but also the supposedly economically and culturally 'backwards' region of Sardinia and, by extension, Italy's South. For Italians, the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno represented the latest iteration in state-sponsored campaigns designed to 'reform' both the southern landscape and its inhabitants that dated back to Italian statehood and the simultaneous construction of the South as a problem and pathology. The year after the Cassa's creation, the Italian parliament launched an extensive inquiry into poverty in Italy, highlighting the concentration of poverty in the South and on Italian islands. More broadly, the Southern Question refracted broader tropes associated with Orientalism.<sup>26</sup>

As Paulson put it in one of his many writings on HELP, he saw refugee resettlement in Southern Italy as a means to combat two forms of poverty: those of refugees and of Southerners. 'Apart from integration of these particular refugees', argued Paulson, 'the project would set an example as a pilot

<sup>23</sup> Belden Paulson, *Odyssey of a Practical Visionary: Eco-Communities, Sustainable Futures, Refugee Resettlement, Poverty and Racism, Dysfunctional Schools* (Plymouth, WI: Thistlefield Books, 2009), 88–90. Listen also to the 2017 interview with Donald Murray conducted by Jane Collings for the UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research: <https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/catalog/21198-zz002kcwc9>.

<sup>24</sup> Both men brought a long-standing dedication to the question grounded in first-hand experience. Murray had previously worked with DPs in Germany and Italy. Paulson's introduction to social work in Italy instead came through involvement in an Agape work camp in the Waldensian Valleys, Protestant strongholds in the Western Alps. In 1953, Paulson and some colleagues hatched the Falerna Project, intended to resettle refugees in Calabria, and Paulson toured other possible locations for resettlement in Lucania. The WCC took up the Falerna idea but it was never realised. Paulson, *Odyssey*, 25–31, 94. Paulson and Murray belonged to the generation that had missed combat in the Second World War and they saw their form of service as the peaceful rebuilding of the world after the war's destruction. On Murray's vow to help Mario and refugees like him, tune in to <https://or.alhistory.library.ucla.edu/catalog/21198-zz002kcwc9>.

<sup>25</sup> See the documents from the notary public in Dublin of 23 Oct. 1958, attesting to the Murrays' role as co-chairs, 'Legal Documents, 1958'. Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2, Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.

<sup>26</sup> For an introduction to the vast literature on Italy's 'southern question', turn to Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1921–1926)*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978); John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860–1900* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); and Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For more recent takes, see Lucy Riall, 'Which Road to the South? Revisionists Revisit the Mezzogiorno', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2010): 89–100. On the parliamentary commission on poverty, go to Ludovico Montini, 'The Parliamentary Inquiry into Destitution in Italy', *International Labour Review* 71, no. 1 (1955): 60–78. Regarding tropes of Orientalism in Southern Europe, refer to Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

project: show that such refugees still could work and support themselves, develop an understanding of the “refugee psychology” and means for refugee rehabilitation ... [and] bring refugee integration into the service of local development and vice versa’.<sup>27</sup> These explicitly developmental aims counter scholarly assessments, like those of Jeffrey Crisp, that ‘In the early years of UNHCR, when the majority of the world’s refugees were to be found in the industrialized countries, refugees and development were perceived as two distinct issues, with relatively little bearing upon each other’.<sup>28</sup>

On a scouting visit to Sardinia, Paulson and another BSC colleague, Ken Kreider, found a suitable tract of land in Simaxis, near the town of Oristano. Eventually purchasing 130 acres of agricultural land and establishing a cooperative – the *Cooperativa Agricola a Responsabilità Limitata Don Murray* – whose activities included agriculture, the manufacture of bricks, and a poultry operation, the project aimed to offer an alternative to communism through involvement of the Italian Federation of Cooperatives. As HELP’s prospectus claimed, this latter organisation had been ‘founded with the support of American cooperatives to compete with the growing communist cooperative movement’.<sup>29</sup> Livio Malfettani, head of the Italian cooperative movement, had provided Paulson and Murray early and meaningful support. In practical terms, the cooperative structure also gave the project a firm legal standing (with Murray and Lange registering the project in October 1958 with a notary in Ireland), permitted the project to receive funding from the Italian government, and facilitated permissions for refugees to leave the camps and work in Italy.<sup>30</sup>

Paulson, in particular, sought to provide an alternative to communism in Italy’s underdeveloped regions. Indeed, he received several draft deferments from the US military on the grounds of his work ‘fighting communism’. While working on HELP and the wider Italian refugee question, Paulson researched and wrote his political science dissertation at the University of Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Herman Finer. Paulson explored the growing strength of communist politics in Southern Italy, with Simaxis and Oristano among his research field sites.<sup>31</sup> He did so at a moment of intense academic and political interest in the Italian South and its peasant culture, to which would be attributed ideas such as ‘amoral familism’ and the ‘limited good’ as ways to explain their supposedly

<sup>27</sup> Belden Paulson, ‘Brief history of the project up to summer 1959’, 1, ‘Background and history of H.E.L.P., 1958–1959, n.d.’, Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC. See also, B. Paulson, ‘Sardinia Project’, 24 May 1961, 2, ‘Memos, 1961, n.d.’, Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Crisp, ‘Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process’, *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 168–91, 168. Surprisingly, even Easton-Calabria replicates such ideas when she describes post-Second World War help to refugees in European camps as focused on ‘care and maintenance’, noting a ‘humanitarian-development gap’ that only received attention beginning in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa. Evan Easton-Calabria, “Following the Refugees”: The World Bank, International Loans, and a Brief History of Refugees and Development’, *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 37, no. 2 (2017): 3–13, 4. Such views rely upon a temporally and geographically restrictive view of development as a phenomenon that arose only in the 1960s in the Global South. This ignores the deep histories of imperial development and how, in places like Italy, external colonisation and internal colonisation (particularly of Italy’s South) were bound up together. This also replicates a false periodisation that Europe’s displaced persons crisis followed the Second World War and was largely resolved, just as the refugee problem became globalised elsewhere.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Prospectus for pilot project to resettle the 50,000 hard-core refugee cases in Europe’, 2, ‘Background and history of H.E.L.P., 1958–1959, n.d.’, Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC. On the work projects, see Belden Paulson, ‘The present situation of the Sardinian program HELP’, 16 Dec. 1959, ‘Memos, 1959–1960’, Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>30</sup> See Paulson, *Odyssey*, 147–8; also refer to Murray’s comments in <https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/catalog/21198-zz002kcwc9>.

<sup>31</sup> For the broader context of how notions of freedom shaped Western understandings of Cold War refugees, refer to Gatrell, *Free World?*, 29–42; Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 217–91.

limited cohesion and solidarity and propensity towards patronage and clientelism.<sup>32</sup> Paulson, however, proved much more interested in understanding the perspectives of those who embraced communism at the grassroots and even included Simaxis' communist mayor on HELP's cooperative board.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, HELP served as both incubator and testing ground for several of Paulson's ideas about the power of spiritual renewal in heading off the communist threat, as well as the potential for rehabilitating hard core refugees through development. Indeed, both Paulson and Murray conceived of HELP in vaguely spiritual terms, even as they stressed the project's secular nature. In an unpublished document written sometime in the first half of the 1950s, Paulson located the question of Protestantism in Italy in the context of debates over religious liberty, noting that several prominent Protestants (including a follower of Billy Graham) had been asked to leave Naples. Paulson suggested that Protestantism needed to help 'guide [the] Catholic power into ways most in line with [the] Christian values'.<sup>34</sup> On the ground in Sardinia, however, Paulson and his HELP collaborators tread carefully, seeking to cultivate positive relationships with the local clergy in Simaxis and Oristano. Nonetheless, when a local woman married an Orthodox refugee and converted, this prompted an angry reaction on the part of both the local priest and the archbishop. Paulson countered, 'We have explained our position to the religious authorities: that we are a humanitarian refugee agency and not a religious agency; that we encourage each refugee toward religion and worship and we help him to make contact with Protestant, Orthodox or Catholic pastor, whatever the distance.'<sup>35</sup>

Given that many of the refugees had little apparent inclination towards religiosity, Paulson's comments about 'encouraging' them toward faith implied that HELP's rehabilitative mode – one that resonated with the UN's postwar focus on 'Helping People to Help Themselves' (the famous motto of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) – rested upon a foundation of spiritual rehabilitation underwriting self-sufficiency. In a 1957 diary entry, Paulson admitted as much, 'The refugees as well as we Americans are beginning to see that this project above all is based on faith – and *they* are going to pull it through.' He added, 'Perhaps this is a religious project: of organizing the inner resources and mobilization of one's total self so he can sayd[sic], "I have this in me, I can do this."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958); George M. Foster, 'Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good', *American Anthropologist* N.S. 67, no. 2 (1965): 293–315. Italian anthropologists like Ernesto De Martino were also studying Southern understandings of magic as forms of sub-altern culture at the same moment. While Banfield formulated his notion of amoral familism while teaching at the University of Chicago, Paulson did not study with him (Belden Paulson, personal communication). Instead, he worked under Herman Finer (who had written a book on Mussolini) and took classes with faculty members that included Hans Morgenthau and Kermit Eby, a Brethren Service minister who shared with Paulson an interest in religion and social work.

<sup>33</sup> See the book that resulted from Paulson's dissertation: Belden Paulson with Athos Ricci, *The Searchers: Conflict and Communism in an Italian Town* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966).

<sup>34</sup> Belden Paulson, n.d., 3, 'Unpublished writings related to mission work in Naples, 1951–1954', Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC. During the fascist period, the Vatican had waged a sustained campaign against Protestant proselytising in Italy. Kevin Madigan, *The Popes against the Protestants: The Vatican and Evangelical Christianity in Fascist Italy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021). As the war was drawing to a close, Pius XII had fretted about Protestant missionaries fanning out into the Italian peninsula, warning Churchill of the deleterious effects such activities would have on the populace. David Kertzer, *The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler* (New York: Random House, 2022), 435.

<sup>35</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Questioning from Sardinia', n.d., 4, 'Unpublished writings related to H.E.L.P. and Sardinia, c. 1958–1959', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC. In his earlier days at Casa Mia in Naples, Paulson had been asked if he and his colleagues were engaged in evangelisation. He replied that rather than preach the Gospel of Christ, 'I emphasized that we practice a Gospel of Spiritual Action, trying to embody a spirit of caring in everything we did as we helped people on the margins of life': Paulson, *Odyssey*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Diary Report of Sardinia Refugee Project, 23 Sept. through 20 Oct. 1957', 3, 'Diary Report on Sardinia refugee project, 1957', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.



In keeping with the tone expressed in his private musings, Paulson's meetings with the refugees often opened with prayer. In his agenda and notes for a 1957 meeting with HELP's refugees, Paulson likewise ended on a note of religious uplift, citing the '*Expression of faith of Don and me: Economic opportunity great – and spiritual satisfaction*'. He concluded that the ultimate challenge for the project was neither logistical nor political but spiritual.<sup>37</sup> Writing to Murray after one of the actor's numerous visits to Sardinia, Paulson again highlighted their envisioned role as spiritual guides for the refugees: 'Your trips over here are very important to the project . . . the refugees increasingly are giving little interest to your financial initiative to the project, or to your movie celebrity, but are recognizing your humanity and your spiritual force.'<sup>38</sup> One of the refugees even read aloud Murray's 'good letter as a kind of invocation',<sup>39</sup> suggesting how such encounters with the refugees often assumed a proselytising air. In this instance, though, refugees were not being converted to any particular faith but to the very notion of faith itself, including faith in themselves.

The tensions created by these different registers of ethical and spiritual care in service to a secular humanitarian project were not unique to HELP, of course, but rather characterised the many faith-based voluntary agencies that worked closely with the UN in providing early Cold War relief. Similar dilemmas had challenged the Quaker volunteers, for example, who initially administered assistance to Palestinian refugees in Gaza (work subsequently taken over by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency). One American Friends Service Committee leader described the organisation's mission as something greater than 'mere humanitarianism; it is not merely mopping up, cleaning up the world after a war'. Echoing the widespread hopes for a regenerative model of care, he added, 'It is a means of rehabilitation and is aimed at helping the spirit and giving hope that there can be a peaceful world.'<sup>40</sup> Rejecting militarism and violence as a 'Peace Church', the Brethren Service Church shared many similarities with the Quakers, embracing service as a key means of serving God. Murray, Lange, and Paulson registered the project with the American Council of Voluntary Activities through the BSC, which allotted \$4,000 a year to cover two American volunteers (agricultural specialists Ken Kreider and Harold Armstrong) to the project.

Yet it should be noted that Paulson, Murray and their collaborators stressed their humanitarian aims over their religious ones, in contrast to the Quaker leader quoted above who saw the AFSC's remit in Gaza as exceeding the limits of humanitarianism. While grounding HELP in their own religious commitments and networks, Paulson and Murray cast their net wide. Although the BSC provided the foundation for the project, in the United States Paulson and Murray also sought funds from president of Twentieth Century Fox Spyros Skouras and fundraised with the broader public. In addition, they made contacts with Senator Hubert Humphrey and Vice President Richard Nixon.<sup>41</sup> CARE and the Heifer Project provided materiel, including foodstuffs and 'resettlers' kits',<sup>42</sup> as the project gained steam. In keeping with its general reluctance to encourage foreign refugee

<sup>37</sup> Meeting of 14 Nov. 1957, 1, 'Meeting agendas, 1957–1959', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.

<sup>38</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 14 May 1958, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 1 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>39</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 8 June 1958, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 2 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>40</sup> Abrams cited in Ilana Feldman, 'The Quaker Way: Ethical Labor and Humanitarian Relief', *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 4 (2007): 689–705, 690.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the letter from Allard Lowenstein, Foreign Policy Assistant to Humphrey, noting the senator's interest in HELP and its possible application to other refugee questions, like that of Arab refugees. Allard Lowenstein to Belden Paulson, n.d. 'Proposal to resettle Arab refugees, 1958–1959', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.

<sup>42</sup> 'In each CARE food package is sugar, lard, jam preserves, bacon, beef, chicken, cocoa, semi-sweet chocolate, laundry soap, toilet soap, chicken noodle soup packages, and condensed milk . . . In each "resettlers" kit is an ax, a shovel, a spade, a saw with three blades, a pick, a garden hoe with three different attachments, a pair of pincers, and a hammer.' Ken Kreider, July 21–27, 1957, 2, 'Reports, 1957, 1959–1960', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC. A CARE representative made a brief visit to the Sardinia project

settlement, the Italian government offered cautious support, waiting for results before committing firmly. That said, the project did receive local and regional support from the Consorzio Bonifica at Oristano and the Sardinian entity for land reclamation known as EFTAS.

Joined by his wife, Lisa (who he met when she volunteered at Casa Mia), Paulson became HELP's first director. After identifying potentially suitable refugees on the Italian mainland, Murray and Paulson invited the heads of families to Sardinia for a trial period, with the men returning to the camp at the Christmas holidays before deciding whether to return definitively.<sup>43</sup> These early participants included two Czechs, Roubal and Nyc. Murray and Paulson had known several of the refugees, like Yugoslav Mario, for a number of years. The primary criteria for selection was their hard core status together with their capacity for difficult labour despite physical limitations (Mario had lost a lung to tuberculosis, for instance). In addition, Roubal, Nyc and Mario had been considered informal leaders in the camps.<sup>44</sup>

All potential participants in the Sardinia scheme had to be approved by a committee composed of representatives from UNREF and the Italian Amministrazione per le Attività Assistenziali Italiane ed Internazionali (AAI).<sup>45</sup> Elena Buonacuore, the UNHCR's representative in the Italian camps, also played a critical role here. The initial refugees were joined by a Spaniard and several Yugoslavs; ultimately, (anti-communist) Yugoslavs constituted the largest group of refugees on the project. A number of individuals, including two Albanian men, quickly changed their minds and returned to camp life. And some of those refugees who decided to give it a go in Sardinia nonetheless continued with their requests to emigrate abroad, with one man later leaving for the Netherlands and another for Australia.<sup>46</sup>

As refugees settled into life in Simaxis and Paulson and Murray found themselves pulled in multiple directions, the two men increasingly yielded the reins of the project to the BSC and the UN. In 1959, the BSC sponsored a summer work camp programme in Simaxis, following up on a Quaker work camp there a year before. Twenty-three volunteers worked alongside the refugees on tasks such as harvesting the sugar beet crop, planting artichokes, and cleaning out irrigation canals.<sup>47</sup> In September, shortly after the work camp wrapped up, the UN contracted John Barwick – an ordained minister who had worked in Palestine and Lebanon, as well as with Italian POWs – to replace Paulson as HELP director. Paulson joined the staff of the UNHCR/UNREF branch in Rome, a move engineered in part by Murray's discussions with UNHCR High Commissioner August Lindt.<sup>48</sup>

Paulson's UN contract, initially for one year and subsequently extended into 1961, sketched out his role. Paulson was to:

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in Feb. 1960. Belden Paulson to Paul Moore and Cliff Clemens, 9 Feb. 1960, 'Correspondence – Moore, Paul (and Cliff Clemens), 1959–1963, n.d.', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7. Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>43</sup> Agreement with refugee for 'trial period' with Don Murray Project in Sardinia, 'Misc. materials, 1958–1960, n.d.', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC. See also 'Certificate to be presented to refugees' in the same file.

<sup>44</sup> Paulson, *Odyssey*, 123. Refer also to Murray's comments: <https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/catalog/21198-zz002kcwc9>.

<sup>45</sup> On the collaboration of the IRO and AAI in assisting refugees in Italy, Maria Eleonora Guasconi, 'I rapporti dell'AAI con l'IRO e l'assistenza ai profughi in Italia (1947–1956)', in *L'Amministrazione per gli Aiuti Internazionali*, ed. Andrea Ciampani (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002), 155–66.

<sup>46</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 16 July 1958, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 2 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Moore, 'Work Phase of the Sardinia Camp', 'International Work Camp in Sardinia, 1959', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.

<sup>48</sup> Harold Row to Belden Paulson, 8 June 1959, 'Correspondence – Row, Harold, 1958–1960', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.); Belden Paulson to Paul Moore, 5 Sept. 1959, 'Correspondence – Moore, Paul (and Cliff Clemens), 1959–1963, n.d.', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7. Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC. On Murray's role in Paulson's UNHCR position, see Paulson, *Odyssey*, 150–52.

advise the Projects Officer on camp clearance problems in Italy; Assist the Projects Officer in counselling and selecting beneficiaries for camp clearance projects; Advise the Projects Officer on problems related to the project CC/ITA/P.1/59 with a view to ensuring the final integration of the beneficiaries on the project H.E.L.P. in Sardinia.<sup>49</sup>

Both Paulson and the UNHCR thus saw his job primarily as translating the localised experience of HELP into a broader plan for refugee integration. As Paulson wrote of Simaxis in 1960:

This is the pilot project of Italy to solve the refugee problem. The Italian Government, as well as the UN, looks to it for instruction. This does not mean that this project itself is expected to settle all of Italy's difficult refugees. Rather, it is a test as to whether these refugees who have been in camps this long can be recuperated to become self sufficient.<sup>50</sup>

By 1961, Barwick had requested to leave the HELP project early, and was replaced by Ellis Shank.<sup>51</sup> As Paulson wrapped up his work with the UNHCR in advance of returning to a university post in the United States, he admitted that the Italian government had become increasingly uninterested in either HELP or refugee integration more generally. The ambitious pilot plan intended to launch a wave of refugee settlement schemes had instead become 'a touch and go survival for the 15 or less families now in Sardinia'. Don Murray 'now realizes that he and I left too soon', added Paulson.<sup>52</sup> The project remained under BSC guidance until 1966. Yet, as I learned when I visited Simaxis in 2015 to meet with several widows of the former refugees and their children, traces of the Don Murray cooperative live on today in the form of a commemorative marker, the houses of the descendants of the former refugees, and the poultry and agriculture businesses.

### HELP, Celebrity Humanitarianism and Media Narratives

The HELP experiment remains little known today, despite its high media profile in the United States and Italy at the time and its extensive documentation by its founders, particularly Paulson. From its inception, HELP derived much of its cachet from the actors Don Murray and Hope Lange. Unlike a good deal of present-day celebrity humanitarianism, which involves merely lending one's name to a project or a funding initiative, Murray was one of the driving forces behind HELP's conceptualisation and creation. Journalists covering the project made much of the fact that Murray and Lange used a significant portion of their film salaries to seed the project, foregoing necessities such as furniture and a new car to make the Sardinian plan a reality.<sup>53</sup> Whereas the UN World Refugee Year (WRY) launched at the end of the 1950s often played upon the contrast between the difficult lives of refugees and the affluent lives of celebrities – what Gatrell deems the 'antinomy of possession and

<sup>49</sup> Special Service Agreement/Memorandum of Agreement between UNHCR and Belden Paulson, 31 Dec. 1959, 'Agreements, 1959–1961', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>50</sup> Memorandum for Messers Moore and Clemens, 14 June 1960, 1, 'Correspondence – Moore, Paul, 1959–1963 (and Cliff Clemens), n.d.', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>51</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Visit of Mr. Barwick', 13 Mar. 1961, 'Memos, 1961, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. Barwick had a 2.5 year contract, in contrast to most of the short-term contracts of other staff members. See Belden Paulson, 'The present situation of the Sardinian program HELP', 16 Dec. 1959, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>52</sup> Belden Paulson to Paul Moore, 3 June 1961, 'Correspondence – Moore, Paul, (and Cliff Clemens), 1959–1963, n.d.', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Gehman, 'Movieland Marriage with a Mission', *Coronet* (May 1959): 38–42, 'Clippings and publicity (in English), n.d.', Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC.

dispossession'<sup>54</sup> – in HELP's case the sacrifices made by its young stars reinforced its sense of mission. In this sense, perhaps, Murray, Lange and Paulson proved closer to the many unsung volunteers turned activists who devised a range of creative initiatives to raise both money and awareness of refugees during the course of WRY than to the movie stars and royalty who made brief appearances at film premieres and galas connected to the campaign.<sup>55</sup>

Yet HELP's modest success in settling some fifteen refugees and their families against considerable odds owed much to the celebrity status of Murray and Lange. Murray's most adroit publicity move came when he conspired with Lisa Paulson to bring Belden back from Sardinia to California on a fundraising pretext. Told he was to participate in a 'youth and religion' broadcast, HELP's director was escorted to a TV studio where he watched dumbfounded as his wife (who he believed was back in Sardinia) and other friends and relatives took the stage and narrated events from his life. Jim Read, Deputy UN High Commissioner for Refugees, rounded out the evening expressing the agency's commitment of support to the project. As I watched this episode of Ralph Edwards' show, 'This is Your Life', fifty-seven years later on an old VHS tape with the Paulsons at their Vermont home, Belden laughed at his own incomprehension. Unfamiliar with the show and its format (which usually featured older celebrities given a retrospective of their life), he didn't understand what was happening at first and had to be nudged to look at the camera. Featuring Belden Paulson as a young hero of refugee relief, the show concluded with an appeal to viewers to donate to HELP. Contributions poured in, eventually totalling around \$86,000. Some people sent letters of appreciation but admitted they couldn't remember Paulson's name (in contrast to the famous Murray), addressing him as 'Dear Mr. This is your life'.<sup>56</sup> The show also proved useful in Italy, being screened for representatives from the UNHCR, the USEP, and the ICEM (Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration), among others.<sup>57</sup>

The 'This is Your Life' program succeeded where an earlier fundraising effort by Murray and Lange had not. In 1957, Murray wrote and, together with Hope Lange, acted in an episode of *Playhouse 90* that aimed to bring the refugee question to public attention. Titled 'For I Loved Strangers', the drama centred on an American serviceman in Europe who falls in love with a Czech refugee. In a letter to Paulson, Murray confided his disappointment that he had been blocked in his plan to turn the programme into a fundraising appeal. 'After I had at the producer's insistence changed the ending of the drama to lead into an appeal [for HELP] – [the network] would *not allow an appeal to be made*.' The consequence '*was a difference of 100,000 to 200,000 dollars to the project*'. Murray reassured Paulson not to worry, however, as he had signed on to a film he might not have otherwise accepted in order to hit their fundraising target of \$34,000 by March of that year.<sup>58</sup>

The 'This is Your Life' episode garnered HELP widespread coverage in the Hollywood press. Gossip columnist Hedda Hopper wrote an error-filled column, for example, that Paulson deemed a 'disaster'. Paulson fretted to Murray, 'For Hopper to say such things as "HELP has become world-wide in its scope" when we don't even own a piece of land and have official permission to begin, can make us sound downright irresponsible'. Paulson worried about the effect on potential partners, stating, 'When voluntary agencies read this sort of thing, after ten years of working in refugee camps with almost no publicity, we can imagine their sentiments'.<sup>59</sup> Murray urged calm, counselling Paulson that this was the way of Hollywood.

<sup>54</sup> Gatrell, *Free World?*, 142.

<sup>55</sup> See the extensive discussion of such efforts in Gatrell, *Free World?*, 145–68.

<sup>56</sup> Wm. Leikam, 5 Mar. 1958, "'This is your life" television appearance, 1958–1959', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC. On the funds raised, see Ralph Edwards to Belden Paulson, 27 Mar. 1958, in the same folder. Many letter writers to Paulson, including Edwards, noted that while Murray had played a critical role in the success of the episode, Belden was the real 'star' of the piece.

<sup>57</sup> Paulson, *Odyssey*, 137.

<sup>58</sup> Don Murray to Belden Paulson, 30 Dec. 1957, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 1 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>59</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 12 Aug. 1957, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 1 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

For Murray the Hopper column instead raised a much more fundamental, even philosophical, issue about the double-edged sword of celebrity humanitarianism. He asked Paulson frankly, 'Do we want the support of the entertainment field and its vast public outreaches or are we to be content with working only with the support of the church groups?' Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given the success of the 'This is Your Life' appeal, Murray confessed he was more than happy to remain focused on the church groups. 'As it is, by attempting to bring the entertainment world into a consciousness of the problem and enthusiasm to support a solution to the problem I am putting myself in a position that not only disturbs my peace of mind but is actually detrimental to my artistic endeavors'. Becoming pigeon-holed as a do-gooder, Murray exclaimed, 'I am getting fed up with being misquoted, misinterpreted, being called a "former trappist monk"'.

Murray recognised the financial necessity of keeping the entertainment world onboard, however, even as he acknowledged the costs of such a strategy. Referring to the travelling slide shows that had mobilised support against slavery and against the atrocities of Leopold's Congo in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Murray urged Paulson, 'If you and all our supporters and advisors want to continue to seek the support and interest of the "Magic Lantern" world you must be prepared . . . to take great care to exactly explain, precisely examine all your public presentations and then have them completely misunderstood'. Murray concluded that the problem wasn't the Hedda Hoppers of the world but the readers themselves, who cared little about refugees but instead enjoyed the spectacle of humanitarianism as entertainment. These readers 'care about one thing . . . Magic Lanterns'. Murray added that help from the entertainment sector necessarily meant inaccuracies.<sup>60</sup> Among the inaccuracies was a tendency to accentuate the positive. Murray, more clear-eyed on the realities of publicity than the academically-minded Paulson, reminded his project partner, '*You don't get money from these people by accentuating the negative* ... Therefore, the things said about the project over here will always come out in print as seeming easier, surer than they are'.<sup>61</sup>

The realities of publicity also meant that journalists and project participants alike tended to privilege Murray's contributions over those of Paulson.<sup>62</sup> One reporter sheepishly apologised to Paulson: 'I'm sure I have overplayed Murray's role and underplayed yours; perhaps you can suggest a way of overcoming that – tho [sic] a publisher's interest is naturally enhanced by Murray's presence.' He also urged Paulson to accept the lack of nuance in such pieces: 'Try not to worry too much about details of omission or the fact that subtleties are lost in condensing a large story into 1500 words. Can't be helped.' Writing in 1959, the same author admitted the market for refugee stories had waned. As a result, '1500 words is probably about as long as it can go and be marketable. Refugees, unfortunately, aren't as good "copy" as they were a couple years ago after Hungary'.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Don Murray to Belden Paulson, 16 Aug. 1957, 'Correspondence – other individuals (incoming), 1957–1958', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC. Paulson told Rev. Oliver Powell of the First Congregational Church of Oak Park, 'Don Murray says he has to make a great effort in Hollywood not to be stereotyped as the "cause man," so everyone does not prejudge that friendship with him means supporting his cause.' Belden Paulson to Oliver Powell, 28 Jan. 1958, 'Correspondence – Powell, Oliver, 1958–1962', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>61</sup> Don Murray to Belden Paulson, 30 Dec. 1957, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 1 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC. The ambitions of the project also quickly inflated as various PR types got involved. As Paulson put it, 'By this time these PR folks were no longer discussing a small pilot project for fifteen families but closing the refugee camps in Europe with their 40,000 inmates, and serving as an example for resettling Arab refugees in the Middle East (an idea I'd been discussing in Geneva). Not much interest in accuracy, only the big splash.' Paulson, *Odyssey*, 110.

<sup>62</sup> In 2013, when Murray returned to Simaxis and received an honorary citizenship, he requested that the *Cooperativa Agricola a Responsabilità Limitata Don Murray* be renamed *Cooperativa Agricola a Responsabilità Limitata Don Murray e Belden Paulson* in recognition of Paulson's signal contribution to the project.

<sup>63</sup> Dave (?) to Belden Paulson, Letter of 1 Feb. (1959?), 'Background and history of H.E.L.P., 1958–1959, n.d.', Box n. 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC.



The wide-ranging activities around the UN-sponsored World Refugee Year (1959–60) admittedly revived interest in Europe's hard core refugees. For WRY, Murray made a film about the Simaxis project that Paulson then screened in Rome.<sup>64</sup> Paulson also proposed organising a WRY International Conference in Sardinia, though it did not materialise.<sup>65</sup> One unfortunate effect of WRY, however, was the impression that this had finally 'solved' Europe's lingering refugee issue. In 1961, Paulson spoke on two local Chicago television shows about refugees and came face to face with growing indifference to refugees. After this, Paulson wrote to John Barwick, HELP's director, despairing: 'Money raising for refugees now is going to be almost impossible, in America at least.' The problems were not just financial: 'Right now, in fact, we are facing the problem that [of] refugees in our camps who have been accepted for emigration to the U.S. under the new law, many may not be able to go because the churches, etc., in the U.S. are not finding affidavits for them.' Paulson concluded gloomily that raising money for the Simaxis experiment would become ever more difficult.<sup>66</sup>

In a 1962 letter to Paulson, his former UNHCR colleague Victor Beerman – who had inherited the Rome office from Schlatter – admitted that WRY had extinguished the will of any country to again advocate for refugees on such a large national scale. In Europe, the challenge was exacerbated by the post-war economic recovery. 'Putting it in a nutshell', wrote Beerman, 'how to raise funds for "booming Europe" (*you* know that many individuals in Europe are *not* "booming") whilst at the same time there are people starving in underdeveloped countries?'<sup>67</sup> Paulson responded that it came down, in part, to narrative construction. In the United States, he wrote, there 'must be the air of crisis and finality, in order to stimulate people'.<sup>68</sup> Yet the sense of crisis proved hard to maintain, as compassion fatigue set in and priorities shifted.

In recognition of the fact that crisis was a difficult trope to maintain over the long term, HELP employed multiple narratives and media frames during its existence. The rehabilitative frame, as we have seen, had featured prominently. Photos showcased refugees at work, contrasting their new-found industriousness and sense of purpose to idle lives in the camps. Paulson and others depicted these refugees as pioneers, a move that restored agency to the displaced. In one paper, Paulson wrote:

On the island of Sardinia in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, a new community is rising from almost virgin ground. The unique aspect of this little group of pioneers is that they are refugees who have been in camps for years and who were assumed to be incapable of work, not to mention of pioneering.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> 'Tiber Topics', *Daily American* (6–7 Mar. 1960); 'Clippings and publicity (in English), 1957–1958', Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Italian Service Mission, OSC. The Italian newsreel company INCOM also filmed the project. It is not clear if the INCOM newsreel survived, as it does not appear on the LUCE website.

<sup>65</sup> 'Proposal for International Conference in Sardinia (in June 1959)', 'Proposals, 1959–1960, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>66</sup> Belden Paulson to John Barwick, 3 Apr. 1961, 'Correspondence – Barwick, John, 1959–1961, n.d.', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>67</sup> Vic Beerman to Belden Paulson, 15 Mar. 1962, 'Correspondence – Beerman, Victor, 1960–1963, 1967, 1978, 1982', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>68</sup> Belden Paulson to Vic Beerman, 26 Apr. 1962, 'Correspondence – Beerman, Victor, 1960–1963, 1967, 1978, 1982', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. In a subsequent letter of 19 June 1962, Paulson noted that Billy Graham had successfully raised over \$600,000 for his 'religious crusade' and suggested that Americans were hungering for something beyond materialistic or 'Cold War' questions. Yet Paulson confessed that friends and family urged him to put out a big refugee book with a trade press drawing on his experiences before the interest raised by WRY waned. Paulson, *Odyssey*, 161–2.

<sup>69</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Questioning from Sardinia', n.d., 1, 'Unpublished writings related to H.E.L.P. and Sardinia, c. 1958–1959', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2, Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC. Paulson, *Odyssey*, 99–100, 169.

Lisa Paulson declared Sardinia ‘a brand new territory with the pioneering element’, likening twentieth century Sardinia to 1800s America.<sup>70</sup>

Such framings had multiple historical resonances. For American audiences, of course, they tapped into the myth of the frontier. In keeping with this masculinised trope, it was perhaps not coincidental that the refugees were largely male and that the project’s male founders received more publicity than did their spouses.<sup>71</sup> In the Italian context, this language of pioneering instead echoed notions of the *coloni* sent during fascism to undertake land reclamation in Sardinia, mainland Italy, and the Italian colonies. Italian publications like *Nuova Sardegna* and *Così* covered the project and donations and offers to sell HELP land came in from Italian readers.<sup>72</sup>

In his dual roles at HELP and the UNHCR, Paulson also produced a series of papers intended for policy makers and academics. Paulson saw real potential in the HELP model for Palestinians displaced by the creation of Israel, for instance, a theme he developed through discussions with UNHCR colleagues and other refugee specialists. Paulson’s presentations at refugee seminars in Europe kept interest in HELP alive at the level of the intergovernmental and voluntary agencies, though he worried sometimes that these same supporters might be asking HELP to do too much and bear the burden of too many hopes.<sup>73</sup>

In the early 1950s, Paulson had already dreamed of projects that would revive the United States’ image abroad, ‘done by Americans who have the humility and vision to reach Europeans on the European level through a method of appeal that will convince the populations of these countries’.<sup>74</sup> As we have seen, the methods of appeal employed by Paulson, Murray, and those publicising HELP were multiple. They literally succeeded in putting a tiny Sardinian hamlet on the map of religious humanitarians, as well as on the maps of those who read magazines about Hollywood celebrities. In addition, HELP landed on the radar of the camp refugees themselves who had previously considered emigration from Italy as their only hope. The attempt to appeal to many audiences reflected the multiple impulses that converged in the HELP project. Yet the diverse actors involved in HELP also created confusion and disagreement, ultimately contributing to its limited scope.

### Too Many Cooks?

The interest of multiple voluntary agencies in HELP and their different visions made possible the project even as it hampered its expansion. In the face of hesitation by the Italian government, HELP’s organisers had proceeded to get the project’s initial legal and financial footing in place. As Paulson put it, ‘After some months thus the Italian Government was faced with a *fait accompli*’.<sup>75</sup> Yet this did not resolve fundamental tensions between the project founders and the refugees themselves, on the one hand, and the founders and the BSC, on the other.

<sup>70</sup> Paulson, *Odyssey*, 105. See also “‘Sardinia’ by Lisa Paulson, n.d.,” Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC. Belden also conceived of HELP’s founders, not just its refugees, as trailblazers. As he encountered scepticism about the project in its early days, Paulson wondered, ‘Where are the pioneers? Who will tackle the unpopular controversial fields which offer only hard work and high casualties?’ At the prospect of HELP taking off, wife Lisa wrote, ‘It makes me so happy and excited to think I will be a “pioneer” again.’ Paulson, *Odyssey*, 99–100.

<sup>71</sup> This contrasts with the later focus on women’s involvement in refugee self-sufficiency schemes. See Betts, ‘Evolution and Promotion of the Integrated Rural Development Approach to Refugee Policy in Africa’, 7. Film and media scholar Sonya di Palma is currently studying Hope Lange’s contribution to HELP within the broader context of Lange’s career.

<sup>72</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 8 June 1958, ‘Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 2 of 2)’, Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7. Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>73</sup> Paulson, *Odyssey*, 142–3, 146–7, 151.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Paulson to his uncle, 24 Feb. 1951, 2, ‘Unpublished writings related to mission work in Naples, 1951–1954’, Box 12, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Professional and Personal Papers of Belden and Lisa Paulson, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 1, Italian Service Mission, OSC.

<sup>75</sup> Belden Paulson, ‘Position of Italian Government on Community Integration Projects’, 28 Dec. 1959, ‘Memos, 1959–1960’, Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

In 1958, as refugees settled in, Paulson was already warning Murray that 'our relations are more like employer-worker than equals working cooperatively toward a common goal', with a brewing situation of conflict like that of 'management and labour'. This resulted from differing opinions about the role of the cooperative and refugee self-management (Paulson's vision), as opposed to the project itself assuming more of the risks and simply paying a wage to the refugees (the demands of some of the refugees). In this, the refugees themselves embraced the more reductive understanding of self-sufficiency in primarily financial terms that, ironically, has also characterised scholarly readings.<sup>76</sup> 'It was as though we were facing a labor union', lamented Paulson. He suggested widening the net for refugee selection and located some of the resistance to the HELP administration in the pre-existing networks between refugees who came from the same camp (that of Aversa).<sup>77</sup>

Paul Moore, an agricultural specialist who had served as work director of the BSC summer work camp at Simaxis in 1959 and then returned to the project in 1960, offered a different diagnosis. He argued that the establishment of the cooperative had hindered rather than facilitated rehabilitation. In 1960, Moore had recommended: 'To become an operative enterprise, I am convinced the project must provide employment for refugees as *employees* instead of as managers as a cooperative or as individual owners. The wage would be determined by local conditions and the nature of the job.' In this model, refugees might possibly work up to managerial positions. In Moore's mind, the refugees had been burdened with too much responsibility too soon. As he put it, 'the first step to rehabilitate these people is to employ them in a normal occupation in a manner which permits them to be as free as possible from mental decisions and problem solving situations'. Moore proved blunt in his conclusion: 'The HELP project operates contrary to this fact and advice'. Moore warned that even if HELP could be 'organized properly, it would still not be a going enterprise because of the lack of business method in operating it'.<sup>78</sup> Although a BSC volunteer, Moore conceived of HELP not in terms of charity or spiritual rehabilitation but through the more prosaic lens of economics. Hence his worry about unrealistic expectations of refugees becoming overnight entrepreneurs.

Moore came into conflict with Barwick, to whom Paulson had handed the directorship in 1959, over issues such as funding. The UNHCR became increasingly wary of the project, in part as the result of these tensions. In August 1960, Paulson accompanied a UNHCR official on a visit to Simaxis. The UNHCR delegate commented on the 'impressive' physical achievements of the project but highlighted the 'lack of competent direction'. At a 'tension' filled meeting, Barwick appeared 'on the defensive both with us [UNHCR] and with his staff, in particular Mr. Moore'.<sup>79</sup> Moore left the project soon after.

The UNHCR continued to express support but urged caution. In a follow-up memo to the report on the site visit, the author highlighted HELP's uniqueness: 'At present it is the only integration project in Italy providing the possibility of permanent and successful integration. Individual integrations have proven so difficult that, as you can see from our regular progress statistical reports, now very few projects are even presented for such integration.' Yet the same memo worried that a potential failure of the Sardinia project would hurt the UNHCR's reputation in Italy and possibly weigh negatively on a proposal to create a 'protected community' in Varese for hard core refugees needing permanent care.<sup>80</sup> As a still young agency, the UNHCR was particularly concerned about its reputation, as well as

<sup>76</sup> Easton-Calabria, *Refugees, Self-Reliance, Development*, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 30 Jan. 1958, 2, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don 1957–1960 (Folder 1 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>78</sup> Paul H. Moore, Report on the Sardinia Project, 1 Dec. 1960, 1–2, 6, 'Reports, 1957, 1959–1960', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.

<sup>79</sup> 'Visit to Sardinia Project', 31 Aug. 1960, 3, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>80</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Sardinia Project', 12 Sept. 1960, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

overstepping a statute expressly designed to limit its field activities.<sup>81</sup> The UNHCR was not yet permitted to engage in 'operational activities'<sup>82</sup> but risked crossing that line in Sardinia.

Paulson sought to address these various issues. He recognised that in addition to a lack of business acumen, HELP 'really has no personnel who could be considered qualified social workers'.<sup>83</sup> He embraced a proposed reorganisation of the project, which included the creation of a board to oversee it.<sup>84</sup> Elsewhere, in a suggestion that echoed Moore's critique, Paulson mulled over the possibility that HELP might be transformed into a kind of

'Man's Town' compared to Father Flanagan's 'Boy's Town' in Nebraska. That town does not promise any parcel of the property, or give any automatic guarantee of the world's wealth. In this 'Man's Town' the refugees would be induced to participate on the basis of an assured employment with earning, and a social environment approaching a normal way of life.<sup>85</sup>

Paulson thus appears to have come around to Moore's thinking on the 'burden' of expecting refugees to bear the risks of either a cooperative or land ownership too soon.

Ultimately, the BSC and the UNHCR could not agree on HELP. Within the UNHCR's Rome office there had always existed mixed opinions about HELP, with Schlatter well-disposed to it and legal head Lapenna adopting a more sceptical stance.<sup>86</sup> Shortly after the visit to Simaxis, in September 1960 the UNHCR began advocating that Barwick resign as director and the BSC cede its role as operating agency.<sup>87</sup> The implications of this demand were stark on the part of the UN agency:

Should BSC reject withdrawal from the project, BSC must be informed that UNHCR may no longer feel it can officially support the project, counsel new refugees for it, provide further financing, ask the continued cooperation of the Italian authorities, encourage outside funds (e.g. the UK WRY contribution). UNHCR takes this position because it is of the opinion that the project is unlikely to succeed with its present direction and organization.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>81</sup> On the principle of 'non-operationalism', see Betts, 'Evolution and Promotion of the Integrated Rural Development Approach to Refugee Policy in Africa', 9. On how the UN's organisational culture often privileges protecting its reputation and personnel over the refugees it is charged with assisting, see the critique by Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Displacement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 87–116.

<sup>82</sup> Belden Paulson, Personal Notes, 10 Feb. 1960, 'Notes and comments, 1960–1961, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. A year earlier, Paulson had reported on a surprising lack of funds for the UNHCR in New York, despite the WRY campaign. Belden Paulson, 'Memo for Geneva on Money Raising in USA for UNHCR', 1 Dec. 1959, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>83</sup> Belden Paulson, 'Visit to Sardinia', 2 Feb. 1960, 3, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Service in Europe Files, Subseries, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>84</sup> Notes for Discussion of the Sardinia Project with Mr. Naylor, 5 Jan. 1961, 6, 'Notes and comments, 1960–1961, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. See also the plan for HELP to be established as a foundation. Belden Paulson, 'Plan to bring to full development the existing 56 ha. Project integrating approximately 25 refugee units with basis for sound expansion', 'Proposals, 1959–1960, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>85</sup> Belden Paulson, 'A suggested plan to bring to full development the HELP project to rehabilitate refugees with a basis for sound expansion', 1 Dec. 1960, 2, 'Proposals, 1960, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>86</sup> Belden Paulson to John Barwick, 8 Apr. 1960, 'Correspondence – Barwick, John, 1959–1961, n.d.', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>87</sup> Belden Paulson to Mr. Pinegar, Confidential Letter, 8 Nov. 1960. 'Reports, 1957, 1959–1960', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project, OSC.

<sup>88</sup> 'Sardinia Project', 22 Sept. 1960, 4, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

BSC officials dug in their heels, even if they did not necessarily disagree with the UNHCR diagnosis of the project's deficiencies.<sup>89</sup> By this point, the BSC appeared to identify Paulson more in his role as a UNHCR employee than as HELP's founder, with Barwick requesting that Paulson not visit HELP for several months. The BSC's head in Geneva, Curtis Naylor, went so far as to liken 'HELP to a church pastorate, where a minister makes a grave error if he returns to visit his former church'. This pointed back to the tensions between an ostensibly secular form of humanitarianism grounded in religiosity. Paulson, however, rejected Naylor's analogy (even if previously he had also used such spiritual vocabulary), countering in a language more familiar to the social sciences and social work: 'The HELP project involves the total economic, social and domestic lives of many people, and in no way can be compared to a change of spiritual leaders. It is a pilot project calling for every bit of experience and know-how past and present.'<sup>90</sup> Writing to Paul Moore, Paulson underscored these incompatible visions of the project: 'BSC apparently looks at the project as a kind of witness, while our interest – and I believe yours – is exclusively to get the refugees settled as well and as quickly as possible.'<sup>91</sup>

The BSC refused to give up its leadership.<sup>92</sup> In its stubbornness, the BSC did not prove unique. Gatrell notes how World Refugee Year accentuated such rivalries amongst relief agencies and organisations. 'All NGOs wanted to stake a claim to be taken more seriously by governments or by the UN and where necessary to establish a higher profile vis-à-vis one another.' At times, this even 'contributed to "institutional isolation"',<sup>93</sup> a fitting diagnosis for the BSC's insistence on going it alone.

By June of 1961, Paulson reported with disappointment that the UN had lost interest in HELP.<sup>94</sup> Elsewhere, Paulson complained of the UN's bureaucracy and its tendency to privilege good public relations over good policy,<sup>95</sup> a critique reminiscent of Michael Barnett's analysis four decades later of the UN's organisational culture that prioritised above all else the UN's reputation.<sup>96</sup> Paulson also noted that within the world of relief workers, there remained many in Italy with 'vested interests . . . people whose jobs depend on not solving the problem'.<sup>97</sup> In addition, he had experienced the usual office intrigue and rivalries and his close contacts with Geneva Headquarters sometimes created tensions with the staff in Rome.<sup>98</sup>

At the time and in retrospect, however, Paulson continued to emphasise the value of the HELP project in and of itself – and its transformative effect on the lives of a small number of refugees – even if it had failed to serve as the basis for an exportable model. The project also served as a painful but important reminder that even amongst the hard core there existed the 'hardest' core who required different solutions, that is, that the rehabilitative model and its related goal of self-sufficiency was not appropriate for all displaced persons, whether in Italy or beyond.

<sup>89</sup> Beerman, Paulson, 'Sardinia Project', 13 Apr. 1961, 'Memos, 1961, n.d.', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>90</sup> Belden Paulson to Paul Moore, 22 Jan. 1961, 'Correspondence – Moore, Paul (and Cliff Clemens), 1959–1963, n.d.', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Paulson to Kenneth Anthony, 23 Jan. 1961, 'Correspondence – Other individuals (outgoing), 1959–1962', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>93</sup> Gatrell, *Free World?*, 125.

<sup>94</sup> Belden Paulson to Paul Moore, 3 June 1961, 3, 'Correspondence – Moore, Paul (and Cliff Clemens), 1959–1963, n.d.', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>95</sup> Belden Paulson to John Barwick, 3 Apr. 1961, 2, 'Correspondence – Barwick, John, 1959–1963, n.d.', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Barnett, 'The UN Security Council, Indifference, and Genocide in Rwanda', *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 4 (1997): 551–78.

<sup>97</sup> Belden Paulson to Don Murray, 4 Apr. 1958, 4, 'Correspondence – Murray, Don, 1957–1960 (Folder 1 of 2)', Box 13, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 2. Sardinia Refugee Project (cont.), OSC.

<sup>98</sup> Paulson, *Odyssey*, 172.



## Conclusion: HELP and Its Legacies

Beginning as the dream of two idealistic Americans working in postwar Naples to provide a solution for hard core refugees, the HELP project drew upon a deep tradition of rehabilitative efforts directed towards refugees and other victims of violence, war, and catastrophe. In HELP's case, the notion of 'helping people to help themselves' was shot through with connotations of spiritual uplift that sometimes competed with prosaic issues. These more secular or worldly concerns included the question of how to put the project on a sound economic footing and what types of media outlets and strategies were best suited to promote the initiative.

HELP succeeded in its goal of integration and economic security for the small number of refugees it settled. In several instances, the refugees took local wives, signalling a relatively high degree of integration between the project and the local environment. The chicken and farming operations continue to the present day. The project never became the much-vaunted template that its founders and supporters had hoped for, though, despite its celebrity supporters and the surrounding publicity. In addition to its inherent contradictions, discussed in this article, the project suffered from two key weaknesses: its founders Murray and Paulson were soon stretched thin, pulled in other directions, and its institutional partners could not agree on their vision for the project going forward. Nor did HELP develop within a favourable national climate, as Italian officials worried that a successful project could lead the UNHCR to push for further permanent settlement of foreign refugees in an Italian state still grappling with large numbers of its own, national refugees from the territories it had lost with fascism's defeat.

In his work with the UNHCR, however, Paulson did contribute to the wider camp clearance programme even as he acknowledged the limits of self-sufficiency programs for some sub-categories of the hard core. During his time in Sardinia, Paulson had become all too aware of the reality that amongst the most difficult of refugees there existed a hierarchy of needs and possibilities. In 1959, for example, three handicapped refugees had arrived on the Simaxis project.<sup>99</sup> A year later, Paulson admitted that the project was only suitable for refugees 'capable of eventual full self sufficiency if adequately rehabilitated',<sup>100</sup> excluding those with disabilities that rendered hard physical work impossible. His broader vision for refugee resettlement nonetheless proved expansive, including amongst those capable of rehabilitation displaced persons with prison records and curable illnesses (either physical or mental).<sup>101</sup> Paulson also stressed the need to promote schemes for integration and self-reliance on a collective, rather than individual, basis. While based at the UNHCR Rome office, Paulson drew upon his Sardinia experience to advocate for the creation of 'protected communities' to provide permanent care to those hard core refugees incapable of self-sufficiency.

In light of ongoing debates today within the UNHCR about the significance of self-reliance schemes 'to prepare refugees for whatever durable solution may be realized',<sup>102</sup> the story of HELP and its impact on UNHCR thinking proves useful to revisit. Paulson and colleagues at the UNHCR proposed establishing in the Italian town of Varese a 'protected community' for the hardest of the hard core, though it did not come to fruition.<sup>103</sup> Paulson and Beerman also worked with colleagues

<sup>99</sup> Belden Paulson to John Barwick, 23 Dec. 1959, 3, 'Correspondence – Barwick, John, 1959–1961, n.d.', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>100</sup> Belden Paulson to Sheldon Mackey, 16 Feb. 1960, 'Correspondence – Other individuals (outgoing), 1959–1962', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>101</sup> Belden Paulson to John Barwick, 23 Feb. 1960, 'Correspondence – Barwick, John, 1959–1961, n.d.', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>102</sup> UNHCR cited in Skran and Easton-Calabria, 'Old Concepts Making New History', 2.

<sup>103</sup> Belden Paulson to Jean Heidler, 22 Mar. 1960, 4–7; also 3 June 1960, 'Correspondence – Heidler, Jean, 1959–1960', Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. See also the notes of F. Preziosi on the UNHCR visit to Varese and the neuropsychiatric hospital there. Preziosi, 'Trip to Varese and Garbagnata', 8 Apr. 1960, 'Memos, 1959–1960', Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. See also V. Beerman and B. Paulson, 'Finalizing Camp Clearance: The Protected Community and other solutions', 12 Mar. 1961, Box 15, 'Memos, 1961, n.d.', Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. For his proposal on a protected community in Sardinia, turn to Belden Paulson, 'Proposal for organization of the protected community',

at the AAI to find solutions for ‘chronic mental cases’ among the refugees.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, officials took account of how cultural and religious differences demanded distinct solutions, as with the proposed settlement of Muslim Albanian refugee families in Calabria. Here the existence of polygamous families made them difficult to settle in many parts of Italy, even if they adhered to a ‘rigid moral code’ and were ‘among the least likely among all our refugees to cause external trouble’.<sup>105</sup>

In this sense, the limitations of HELP served the wider cause of refugee settlement programmes by pointing out the need for tailored solutions within the sub-categories of hard core refugees. Paulson would consolidate his hard-gained knowledge in a survey he and Elena Buonacuore conducted of the Italian camps together with recommendations for camp clearance. Paulson later deemed this survey one of his most significant accomplishments during his UNHCR tenure in Rome.<sup>106</sup>

As Europe continues to confront pressing migration challenges, the story of the HELP project – big in ambition but modest in scope – highlights the value in historicising contemporary efforts to achieve durable solutions, particularly those focused on self-sufficiency that posit refugees as resources rather than as burdens. The vision of Sardinia as offering a permanent home for refugees continues to resonate in the contemporary moment. In November 2015, Italian journalist Beppe Severgnini published a *New York Times* editorial recommending that contemporary refugees be settled in Italy’s ‘empty spaces’, an argument that reworked long-standing ideas about Southern Italy as a critical site for development. Contending that the ancient Roman practice of providing land to veterans offered lessons for contemporary Italians, Severgnini singled out underpopulated Sardinia as a particularly appropriate site for such resettlement.<sup>107</sup>

As this article has demonstrated, however, Severgnini didn’t need to stretch back to antiquity for his precedents. The histories of post-1945 projects to resettle refugees in Southern Italy (and Southern Europe more generally) trouble genealogies of refugee history, as well as differentiations between Global North and South. Rather than developmentalist visions for refugees being exclusively associated with the latter, they were actually first worked out in Europe’s margins. Severgnini, as well as scholars, could look to a small hamlet in western Sardinia at the end of the 1950s for instructive lessons about both past and present.

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29 June 1960, ‘Proposals, 1959–1960’, Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3. UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>104</sup> Belden Paulson, ‘Discussion with AAI on Institutional Project for Mental Cases’, 17 Feb. 1961, ‘Memos, 1961, n.d.’, Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC. Paulson reported ‘consternation on the part of certain person in the camps as to the function of the mission of the psychiatrist, Dr. Strozka’. Belden Paulson, ‘Visit to camps in Naples area’, 23 Feb. 1960, ‘Memos, 1959–1960’, Box 15, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Series 7, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>105</sup> Paulson letter to Vin Van der Linden, 12 May 1960, ‘Correspondence – Other individuals (outgoing), 1959–1962’, Box 14, Belden and Lisa Paulson Papers, Service in Europe Files, Subseries 3, UNHCR Project Files, OSC.

<sup>106</sup> Paulson, *Odyssey*, 177.

<sup>107</sup> Beppe Severgnini, ‘Let Refugees Settle Italy’s Empty Spaces’, *New York Times* (4 Nov. 2015).