
The Dangers of ‘Going Native’: George Montandon in Siberia and the International Committee of the Red Cross, 1919–1922

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Abstract

This article focuses on humanitarians by studying the interactions between the International Committee of the Red Cross and one of his delegates, George Montandon, between 1919 and 1922. Montandon was charged with a fact-finding mission in Siberia that set the basis for larger repatriation plans on behalf of prisoners of war from the Central Powers. This article explores the nature and circulation of expertise – formal and informal – in connection with Montandon’s private and professional life before the mission, during the mission itself and once the mission was over. Being a delegate for the ICRC was not a profession but rather a break from established professions as doctors, military officers and scholars in Switzerland. However, experts associated with the work of the Geneva organisation at the headquarters and at the ground level brought a vast set of skills to international humanitarianism. Through a spectrum of transnational connections and networks, at the end of the First World War the ICRC experienced processes of specialisation and standardisation of tasks which had already started in wartime. This article argues that the impulse towards an increasing professionalisation of humanitarianism ‘clashed’

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with the ambiguities of the ICRC's mandate, on the one hand, and the tensions between the agency of individual relief workers and the institutions they represented, on the other.

In the winter of 1920–1921 George Montandon (1879–1944) travelled across Siberia westwards by train during the turmoil of the Russian Civil War. The beginning of the trip marked the end of a long humanitarian mission that had been organised to meet the needs of prisoners of war and that Montandon had undertaken for the International Committee Red Cross (ICRC). When Montandon reached Moscow in April 1921, the Cheka, the Soviet security organisation, detained him for two weeks. He was accused of breaking the rules regarding the distribution of humanitarian relief and of being a spy.¹ Eventually, in the summer of 1921, the former Red Cross delegate made his way to Geneva, Switzerland through Riga and Berlin. Once in Geneva, it was the turn of the ICRC to investigate Montandon's work. While reporting to the ICRC, Montandon was asked to respond to a series of allegations that called into question his 'professional' behaviour during and after the mission.²

Montandon was a Swiss medical doctor. It was common practice for the ICRC to have medical doctors as its delegates in addition to military personnel and people with knowledge of the language or country where the mission took place. Montandon was an adventurer, a peculiar and complex character, highly educated and a polyglot. He was born into a wealthy Protestant family in the French-speaking canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in 1879. He studied medicine at the University of Geneva and then moved to the University of Zurich, where he was trained in surgery.³ While in Zurich, Montandon took classes taught by Rudolf Martin, a leading scholar in physical anthropology. He received further training in tropical medicine in Hamburg and in topography at the Society of Geography in London.⁴ During the First World War, Montandon worked as a surgeon in France. In 1919, when he was recruited by the ICRC, in addition to his professional activities as doctor Montandon also carried out voluntary work for the *Musée d'Ethnographie* in Geneva.⁵ On his way to Siberia, he completed a long article on the genealogy of musical instruments and cycles of civilisation.⁶

Montandon was chosen as the head of the ICRC mission to Siberia in March 1919, due to his expertise as 'traveller and doctor'.⁷ The ICRC set up an information

¹ George Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques pour la Croix-Rouge de Genève (1919–1921)* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1923), 281–92.

² Letter by Montandon to Paul de Gouttes, Lausanne, Oct. 1921 (I cannot read the exact date on the document), Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (AICRC), B MSB/OM.4.

³ 'Famille Montandon', <http://www.genealogiesuisse.com/montandon> (last visited 24 Jan. 2016).

⁴ Serge Reubi, *Gentlemen, Proletaires et Primitifs: Institutionnalisation, Pratiques de Collection et Choix Muséographiques dans l'Ethnographie Suisse, 1880–1950* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2011), 254–5.

⁵ Montandon to Pittard, 8 Mar. 1919, Bibliothèque de Genève, Ms. fr. 8232/48.

⁶ George Montandon, 'La Généalogie des Instruments de Musique et les Cycles de Civilisation', *Archives Suisses d'Anthropologie Générale Publiées par l'Institut Suisse d'Anthropologie Générale*, Tome III (Geneva: Albert Kuding Editeur, 1919), 1–120.

⁷ Letter to Montandon, Geneva, 3 Mar. 1919, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

gathering mission to Siberia upon the express request of the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross and the Ottoman Red Crescent Societies.⁸ This mission was asked to visit the camps where nearly 30–40,000 Austrian, Hungarian, and Ottoman prisoners of war were being held in order to check their numbers and living conditions.⁹ Three other delegates were also appointed: Jules Jacob-Guillarmod, Anthony Eigenmann and Weiner Steiner.¹⁰ When the information gathering mission ended in September 1919 only Montandon was asked to extend his mission and received full powers from the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross Societies in the spring of 1920. The number of Ottoman prisoners of war was too small for the Ottoman Red Crescent Society to partake in the second half of the mission. Montandon was then put in charge of transferring the prisoners of war that were located throughout Siberia and organising their travel from Vladivostok towards their homes in Europe.

With this purpose in mind, Montandon came up with the idea of preparing a train, also thanks to a fundraising campaign organised in the United States. Crossing Siberia during the Russian Civil War, the train first provided relief and then evacuated prisoners of war towards Vladivostok. It was composed of thirty-eight wagons, where Russian and other personnel, chosen by Montandon himself, worked. Among the fifty members of the staff there were transport experts, cooks, secretaries, doctors, nurses and engineers. Repatriation operations commenced in September 1920 and officially ended in the summer of 1922.¹¹

In this article, I am interested in understanding who the ‘humanitarians’ were, which informal or formal knowledge they possessed and how their ‘expertise’ circulated from the headquarters of the ICRC in Geneva to the ground level and the other way around.¹² I will do so through a case study on the illuminating figure of Montandon, who was both representative of his epoch and exceptional, in doing so shedding light on the private and professional reasons that pushed him towards the ICRC.¹³ Technical scientific expertise was one of the ways in which the ICRC tried to foster its institutional ambitions in the post-war period. While

⁸ For a complete list of the tasks of the ICRC mission to Siberia see *Mission en Sibérie*, Feb.–Mar. 1919, projet définitif, AICRC, B MSB/OM.1.

⁹ While they were technically *former* prisoners of war, as by the beginning of the ICRC mission to Siberia the First World War was over, ICRC documents refer to them as prisoners of war. Thus, for the sake of consistency this article will also refer to them as such.

¹⁰ Rapport du Dr. Montandon sur la marche intérieure de la mission, AICRC, B MSB/OM.6.

¹¹ Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 150. Letter by de Watteville to Chenevière, Geneva, 11 Nov. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

¹² Pierre-Yves Saunier, ‘Circulations, Connexions et Espaces Transnationaux,’ *Genèses* n° 57, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 110–26. Pierre-Yves Saunier, ‘Les Régimes Circulatoires du Domaine Social 1800–1940: Projets et Ingénierie de la Convergence et de la Différence,’ *Genèses* n° 71, no. 2 (2008): 4–25. Sandrine Kott, ‘Une «communauté épistémique» du social?’, *Genèses* n° 71, no. 2 (2008): 26–46.

¹³ I read Liisa Malkki’s latest book after writing this article. It was interesting to realise how chapter one of Malkki’s book – ‘Professionals Abroad’, reflects some of the professional and personal experiences of Montandon. In the first part of the book, Malkki conducts ethnography of Finnish aid workers who went abroad on a mission organised mainly by the ICRC. The book is a compelling read for anybody interested in humanitarianism. Liisa H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015).

the ICRC relied on delegates who had received formal training in Swiss institutions and universities, formal standards in humanitarian aid were ill-defined and subject to diverging interpretations. The lack of clearly defined criteria of 'professional' humanitarianism contributed to creating many 'conflicts of interest' and 'windows of opportunity', which developed at the intersection of some of the fundamental principles of the ICRC, such as impartiality, neutrality and universalism.¹⁴ These ambiguities and tensions had consequences for the development of the mission to Siberia as well as on Montandon's personal life and professional career.

Neither the ICRC's personnel in Geneva nor its delegates on the ground referred to themselves as 'professional humanitarians'. Humanitarianism did not become a profession for the members of the Committee in Geneva or for its delegates. After the various post-war humanitarian emergencies faded away in the mid-1920s, members of the ICRC Committee continued to act on a voluntary basis, while delegates resumed their pre-mission professions. In other words, while doctors, nurses or university professors were needed in any society at all time, humanitarians were not, at least in the interwar period. When humanitarian emergencies were over, there was no need for professional relief workers.¹⁵ However, the aspirations and ambitions of the ICRC and its agents tended to agree on criteria of humanitarian aid that were grounded in processes of rationalisation, specialisation, bureaucratisation, accountability and communication. These criteria speak the language and the practice of professionalisation.¹⁶

During their humanitarian missions for the ICRC, delegates were not asked to perform the exact same tasks they performed in their professional lives back home. Those who were doctors neither visited patients nor practiced surgery; the 'neutral' Swiss military was not involved in operations aiming at public security (it should be remembered that the Swiss army mobilised during the First World War); the social scientists did not engage in any scholarly activity. The unspoken duty of the delegates was to use some of their formal training and skills for the benefit of the unpredictable and malleable humanitarian contexts in which they happened to work,

¹⁴ 'The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement', <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p4046.htm> (last visited 24 Jan. 2016).

¹⁵ This article complicates Watenpaugh's argument about the professionalisation of humanitarian aid after the end of the First World War. Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). I have tackled the role of the ICRC delegates and their professional skills in one of my previous publications: Francesca Piana, 'Photography, Cinema, and the Quest for Influence: the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First World War', Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, eds., *Humanitarian Photography: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 140–64.

¹⁶ By way of comparison with the professionalism of social work, see Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880–1930* (New York: Atheneum, 1969). Disaster relief contributed to transforming social work into a profession. See Elizabeth Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003). More generally, I also found it useful to read literature on the professionalisation of social movements: John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 6 (1977), 1212–41; Suzanne Staggenborg, 'The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization in the Pro-Choice Movement', *American Sociological Review*, 53, 4 (1988), 585–605.

while respecting Red Cross principles. For instance, delegates were asked to establish semi-diplomatic relations with local, national and international institutions. The writing of reports became integrated in the daily tasks of the delegates: they observed and reported according to the mandates that they had received or according to the development of the situation. They implemented humanitarian operations, such as the provision of relief, the inspection of camps, the repatriation of prisoners of war or the resettlement of refugees.

All was not hazardous, however. Delegates learned through experience, passed information and know-how to each other and, with their reports and communications, contributed to the transformation and specialisation of the organisation. For instance, although reports varied according to the writer, one can recognise standards of writing, as well as standards regarding the expected content. The ICRC tried to pay attention to the preservation and filing of its own documents. Reports were also partially published in the Review of the ICRC or in pamphlets in order to give evidence of the work accomplished by the organisation.

In the case of Montandon, the humanitarian mission for the ICRC was a great opportunity. Contrary to the mandate he received from the ICRC, Montandon immediately went 'native', meaning he engaged closely with the people and countries in which he travelled and lived. The ICRC delegate, who in addition to his official medical profession was also an amateur anthropologist, conducted ethnographic research during the mission and collected various objects that he brought back to Geneva.¹⁷ Once the mission was over, Montandon organised various activities on the basis of the objects collected and ethnographic observations he had done. He also became vocal in supporting Bolshevism in Switzerland.¹⁸ This raised issues within the ICRC, which was concerned about the way in which its neutrality, impartiality and reputation were perceived.

Montandon brought to humanitarianism his experience in travelling and intermittent, mostly autodidactic, expertise in anthropology and ethnography.¹⁹ At that time there was no formal training to become an anthropologist in Switzerland. For instance, a national society of anthropology was only created in the 1920s, whereas the institutionalisation of anthropology in other European countries had already begun during the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Moreover, Swiss ethnographic institutions had limited financial resources to support research in the field. Ethnographers based in Basel had more funds than those based in Geneva and Neuchâtel, for instance, with the exception of Montandon.²¹ Ten years before the mission for the ICRC, in 1909, thanks family's financial resources, Montandon had

¹⁷ Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 299–301.

¹⁹ Pierre Centlivres and Isabelle Girod, 'Montandon et le Grand Singe Américain. L'Invention de l'Ameranthropoïdes Loysi', *Gradhiva*, 24 (1998), 33–43.

²⁰ Carole Raynod-Paligot, 'Eugène Pittard et l'Anthropologie. De la Préhistoire à l'Eugénisme', *MEG Tôtém, Journal du Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève*, Oct. 2013, 4.

²¹ This is something that Serge Reubi develops in his research. He also points out the differences in terms of ethnographic research and their financial background within Switzerland itself. Reubi, *Gentlemen, Prolétaires et Primitifs*, 381–92. On the institutionalisation of anthropology in Geneva, see

travelled throughout southwest Ethiopia. Montandon's family did not only provide him with concrete means but also with the seeds of his interests. His great uncle, Frédéric du Bois de Montpéreux, had been an explorer of the Caucasus in the second half of the nineteenth century.²² Upon his return from East Africa Montandon presented his work to geography societies in England, France, Italy and Switzerland.²³

Little historical work has been done on the mission of the ICRC in Siberia so far.²⁴ The history of international organisations and the history of humanitarianism have barely looked at the individual paths of 'minor' actors, such as a delegate of the ICRC.²⁵ As far as Montandon's personal and professional motivations for his work in Siberia are concerned, they have also received scant attention.²⁶ Historians of anti-Semitism and racism have been interested in Montandon due to the fact that, in the words of Marc Knobel, he became an 'ethnologist adrift'.²⁷ During the late 1930s

Taline Garibian, *Théories, Terrains et Institutionnalisation de l'Anthropologie Genevoise (1863-1917)* (Genève: Université de Genève, 2011).

²² The study 'L'Ologenèse Humaine' was dedicated to the memory of Du Bois de Montpéreux. George Montandon, *L'Ologenèse Humaine (ologénisme)* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1928), 1.

²³ <http://www.genealogiesuisse.com/montandon> (last visited 24 Jan. 2016); George Montandon, *Au Pays Ghimirra; Récit de Mon Voyage a Travers le Massif Ethiopien (1909-1911) ...* (Paris, A. Challamel; [etc.], [1913]); Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 92. Later on, Montandon would also engage in anti-slavery writing based on his experiences in Ethiopia: George Montandon and Ligue Suisse pour la Défense des Indigènes, *L'Esclavage en Abyssinie: Rapport Rédigé a la Demande de la Ligue Suisse pour la Défense des Indigènes* (Genève: Georg, 1923).

²⁴ An exception is Hofmann, who provides a multifaceted yet slightly fragmented history of the work of the ICRC delegate and of the organisation in Siberia: Blaise Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, Droit Humanitaire, Dollar et Paix des Vainqueurs: L'Organisation du Rapatriement des Prisonniers de Guerre Centraux Détenus en Sibérie après la Première Guerre Mondiale, par la Mission Montandon du CICR (1919-1921), les Croix-Rouges Nationales et la Société des Nations* (Lausanne, Université de Lausanne: 2001). Some other references to Montandon have to be found in the following studies: André Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1978), 108–23. Caroline Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 283. Francesca Piana, *Towards the International Refugee Regime. Humanitarianism in the Wake of the First World War* (Geneva: Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, 2013), 86–9. For a general study on the ICRC, see François Bugnion, *The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Protection of War Victims* (Geneva, International Committee of the Red Cross: Macmillan Education, 2003).

²⁵ The literature on humanitarianism is large and growing. For a review article on the history of international humanitarian aid, see Johannes Paulmann, 'Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4, 2 (2013), 215–38. For a review article on the anthropology of humanitarianism, see Miriam Ticktin, 'Transnational Humanitarianism', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 43, 1 (21 Oct. 2014), 273–89. This article is particularly pertinent as it provides a survey of the anthropology of humanitarianism since the 1980s. For a broad study on the history of humanitarianism in the nineteenth and twentieth century, written by a political scientist, see Michael N. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). Barnett sees the professionalisation of humanitarianism as a phenomenon that developed in the two last decades. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 217–8.

²⁶ Serge Reubi, *Gentlemen, Prolétaires et Primitifs*, 393, quoting Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, Droit Humanitaire, Dollar et Paix des Vainqueurs*, 31.

²⁷ Marc Knobel, 'L'Ethnologue à la Dérive: George Montandon et l'Ethnoracisme', *Ethnologie Française*, nouvelle série, 18, 2 (1988), 107–13. My own translation from the French.

and the Second World War, the former ICRC delegate worked as an ethnologist at the Ecole d'Anthropologie in Paris and strongly supported 'scientific' racism and anti-Semitism. Historian Alice Conklin writes that Montandon's interest in ideas of 'scientific' racism already dated to the years before his mission for the ICRC.²⁸ In France Montandon actively collaborated with the *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives* during the Vichy regime.²⁹ As a result of his extreme positions, French partisans executed Montandon and his wife in Paris in 1944.³⁰

For this article, I have drawn on documents held at the archives of the ICRC, books and articles published by Montandon and private correspondence exchanged between Montandon and Eugène Pittard, the famous Swiss anthropologist.³¹ My goal is not to recount the history of the ICRC mission in Siberia. Doing so would require combining ICRC sources with those from the League of Nations, as well as with additional material from the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross Societies and the Ottoman Red Crescent Society; it would also require Russian and local sources which I do not have.³² Nor do I aim to write a biographical sketch of Montandon, for which I would need his private papers, which do not seem to exist.³³ Instead, in the first part

²⁸ Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 92–94.

²⁹ More work has been written on Montandon. See Marc Knobel, 'George Montandon et l'Ethnoracisme', in Pierre-André Taguieff, Grégoire Kauffmann and Michaël Lenoire, *L'Antisémitisme de Plume: 1940-1944: Études et Documents* (Paris: Berg, 1999), 277–93; Carole Reynaud Paligot, *La République Raciale: Paradigme Racial et Idéologie Républicaine (1860-1930)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), 313. Carole Reynaud Paligot, *Races, Racisme et Antiracisme dans les Années 1930* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), 51–9; Carole Reynaud Paligot, 'L'Emergence de l'Antisémitisme Scientifique chez les Anthropologues Français,' *Archives Juives* Vol. 43, no. 1 (June 28, 2010): 66–76. See in particular the fine study by Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 91–9, 308–26.

³⁰ Montandon is not unknown to the Swiss 'grand public': on the career and life of Montandon, see Valérie de Graffenried, 'L'Ethnologue Devenu Antisémitiste', *Le Temps*, http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/477d6fa4-8f7a-11e4-9ac8-723e124a5af7/Lethnologue_devenu_antis%C3%A9mite (last visited 29 Apr. 2015); on the relationship between Montandon and the French writer Céline, see Alain Campiotti, 'George et Louis-Ferdinand', *Le Temps*, http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/ecd72b78-190b-11e0-9375-71d46e7e7adc/George_et_Louis-Ferdinand (last visited 29 Apr. 2015); Eric Mazet, 'Céline et Montandon', <http://louisferdinandceline.free.fr/indexthe/antisem/montandon.htm> (last visited 29 Apr. 2015).

³¹ Review of the ICRC, files of the Mission to Siberia, files of the Commission of Missions and of the Committee. The correspondence between Montandon and Pittard is not to be found in the private papers of Pittard, but in the private papers of his son, Jean-Jacques Pittard, who most likely kept some of the letters addressed to his parents, Eugène Pittard (1867–1962) and Noëlle Roger (1874–1953), both of them important personalities in Geneva at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century.

³² This is something Hofmann also highlights: Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, Droit Humanitaire, Dollar et Paix des Vainqueurs*, 6–7.

³³ Federal Archives in Bern contain documents on the Red Cross mission in Siberia that are also available at the ICRC archives in Geneva. The *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris has seven boxes containing documents written or held by Montandon. These documents are the closest we can find to private papers, although the bulk of the material dates back to the late 1930s and up to 1944. It seems that this collection preserves just a minor part of Montandon's archives, which might have been lost after the end of the Second World War. Joseph Billig, 'George Montandon et Ses Archives', in *L'Institut d'Etude des Questions Juives, Officine Française des Autorités Nazies en France: Inventaire Commenté de la Collection de Documents Provenant des Archives de l'Institut Conservés Au C.D.J.C.*, Inventaires Des Archives Du Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (Paris: C.D.J.C., 1974), 186–205.

of the article, I investigate the spaces, institutions and networks where expertise was produced, how and why it circulated and how it was transformed by international humanitarianism.³⁴ In the second part, I argue for the informative relationship of humanitarianism and the development of social sciences in the interwar period. Bringing humanitarian aid to destitute people in foreign countries was a chance for travelling and adventure. To make this argument, I build on more developed research about the connection between colonialism and anthropology.³⁵

The Mission to Siberia

An article published in the review of the ICRC retrospectively referred to the mission to Siberia as ‘the longest and the most important’ of the several missions that the organisation undertook after the First World War. However, the documents tell a different story.³⁶ The minutes of the ICRC Committee – the central decision-making body of the organisation – suggest that Geneva headquarters paid limited attention to the work of Montandon during the information gathering part of the mission that extended from March to the autumn 1919. The efforts of the organisation were instead directed to negotiating and organising the repatriation of prisoners of war in other parts of Europe. The fact that a larger number of delegates were located in Central and Eastern Europe speaks to how marginal the work of Montandon and his personnel was for the ICRC. Putting forward the outcomes of the mission to Siberia was a much needed communication strategy, which responded to the ICRC’s lack of financial resources and the increasing competition in international humanitarianism, both outside and within the Red Cross movement.³⁷

The work of the ICRC on behalf of prisoners of war reflected, on one hand, to the extension of its mandate after the First World War and, on the other hand, to the needs of former ex-combatants.³⁸ As for the ICRC, founded in 1863 after the life

³⁴ For an example of individual transnational trajectories, see Madeleine Herren-Oesch and Isabella Löhr, *Lives Beyond Borders: a Social History, 1880 - 1950* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2014).

³⁵ For studies that connect the complex relationship between social sciences and colonialism, see Emmanuelle Sibeud, ‘Les Sciences Sociales à l’Epreuve de la Situation Coloniale’, *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 10, 1 (2004), 3–7; Emmanuelle Sibeud, ‘Un Ethnographe Face à la Colonisation: Arnold Van Gennep en Algérie (1911–1912)’, *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 10, 1 (2004), 79–103. Regarding a later period, which saw social scientists (re)thinking their role and the impact of their knowledge on the decolonising process in Africa, see the work of Frederick Cooper, ‘Development, Modernization, and the Social Sciences in the Era of Decolonization: the Examples of British and French Africa’, *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 10, 1 (2004), 9–38. Interestingly, Cooper also looks backward to the role of anthropologists in French and British Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, pointing out the ambivalence of anthropology towards colonialism.

³⁶ George Montandon, ‘Mission en Sibérie: 22 mars 1919 – 17 juin 1921’ RICRC, no. 36, Dec. 1921, 1197.

³⁷ John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996). Irène Herrmann, ‘Décrypter la Concurrence Humanitaire: le Conflit entre Croix-Rouge(s) après 1918’, *Relations Internationales*, 151, 3 (2012), 91–102.

³⁸ During WWI, the ICRC mainly was involved in missions to inspect the camps housing prisoners of war and interned civilians. After the end of the conflict, because of the extension of the ICRC’s

changing experience of Henry Dunant on the battlefield of Solferino, it was initially meant to provide neutral and impartial assistance to the wounded during wartime. It was only during and after the First World War that the mandate of the organisation was extended to prisoners of war and civilians. A large number of prisoners of war from the Central Powers had been kept captive in Siberia and Turkestan since 1915 and 1916. It was only in March of 1920 that the victorious powers agreed to the liberation and repatriation of prisoners of war of all nationalities who were still detained in Siberia.³⁹

The ICRC Committee approved the appointment of Montandon and the three other delegates in March 1919. Of the thirteen members of the Committee in January 1919, all worked on a voluntary basis for the ICRC and were chosen through co-optation among Genevan financial, political and academic elites.⁴⁰ Gustave Ador, the president of the Swiss Confederation, was also the president of the ICRC. The other members primarily hailed from the established professions, namely medical doctors, law professors from the University of Geneva, former and current Swiss diplomats, members of the Swiss army and men from the business world.⁴¹ The international humanitarianism of the members of the ICRC Committee was rooted in Western bourgeois liberalism, Protestantism, a racialised representation of the world through civilised categories and the specific Genevan environment where they were born and acted professionally, socially and culturally. The ICRC was a conservative institution. For instance, in keeping with the marginal position of women in Swiss society, there was only one woman on the Committee. This was Marguerite Cramer (then Frick-Cramer due to her marriage to Eduard Frick, general-delegate of the ICRC).⁴² While the members of the Committee were professional in the sense that they brought their own professional skills to the ICRC and had accumulated deep knowledge of

mandate to other categories of war victims, the missions that the organisation carried out changed in their nature and scope. Fact-finding became central to the work of the ICRC. Here is the list of missions undertaken by the ICRC in peacetime, as in the unpublished dissertation by Hazuki Tate: 'étude du rapatriement, mission permanente installée, inspection des camps des prisonniers en Allemagne et surveillance des camps de passage, chargé de la surveillance pour le transport, mission de Sibérie, mission diplomatique, inspection des missions, liquidation du rapatriement'. See Hazuki Tate, *Rapatrier Les Prisonniers de Guerre: La Politique des Alliés et l'Action Humanitaire du Comité International de la Croix Rouge (1918-1929)* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2015), 326, 327–46.

³⁹ Marguerite Cramer-Frick, 'Le Rapatriement des Prisonniers du Front Oriental après la Guerre de 1914–1918 (1919–1922)', *RICRC*, 504, Aug. 1944, 706. More generally, for some references to studies on prisoners of war during and in the aftermath of WWI, see Peter Gatrell, 'Prisoners of War on the Eastern Front during World War I', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 6, 3 (2005), 557–66. See also Peter Pastor and Graydon A. Tunstall, *Essays on World War I* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2012); Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford: Berg, 2002). Matthew Stibbe, *Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration in Europe during the First World War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009). On the Western Front, see Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France and Germany, 1914–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴⁰ A full list of the members of the ICRC Committee is to be found at the beginning of each issue of the *Review of the ICRC*.

⁴¹ Edouard Naville, Adolphe d'Espine, Frédéric Ferrière, Alfred Gautier, Adolphe Moynier, Paul des Gouttes, Edouard Odier, Edmond Boissier, Horace Micheli, Frédéric Barbey-Ador, William Rappard, and Marguerite Cramer.

⁴² Herrmann, 'Décrypter la Concurrence Humanitaire', 99–100.

humanitarian questions during the First World War, the volunteer and unpaid character of their involvement suggests a less clear cut distinction between a nineteenth century charity model and a twentieth century professional model of humanitarianism.

Montandon and the three other delegates who accompanied him were recruited in haste and by co-optation. It was Montandon who suggested the names of his collaborators. Jacob Guillaumod was a doctor from Neuchâtel and an expert alpinist, who had undertaken expeditions to the Himalayas and had a passion for travelling.⁴³ He was appointed as the deputy of the mission. Eigenmann, from Berne, who was chosen as the secretary of the mission, had lived in Siberia and spoke Russian. Steiner was from Winterthur and had spent three years in Petrograd during the beginning of the Bolshevik regime as one of the guards of the Swiss Legation in the city.⁴⁴ The hastiness of setting up and sending the mission was also the result of the many long months that the ICRC had been waiting to send it. When the financial resources and the Allied and local authorisations finally came, no time that could be crucial to saving the lives of prisoners of war was to be wasted. Before leaving for the mission, the four delegates and the members of the Committee met in Geneva with the representatives of the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross Societies. The four ICRC delegates acquired more information from the reports of the American Red Cross that they consulted in Washington on their way to Vladivostok.⁴⁵

ICRC's delegates did not receive a formal salary, as one would expect.⁴⁶ Their travel, accommodation and living expenses were fully covered, and they also received an indemnity, which varied according to their status as head of the mission or a 'simple' delegate.⁴⁷ The delegates' involvement in the decision-making process depended on a number of factors, including the ICRC's interest in the specific country/region and context where the delegate worked, the personality of the delegate and the financial,

⁴³ 'Résumé de la vie du Docteur Jules Jacot-Guillaumod, médecin à Lignières, alpiniste, et grand voyageur', Par le Docteur ORL Georges Terrier, professeur honoraire de l'Université de Lausanne, au Crêt-du-Loche. Fondation de l'Hôtel du Commune de Lignières. Available at <http://fondation.lignieres.org/page/archives.htm> (last visited 27 Mar. 2015).

⁴⁴ Rapport de George Montandon sur sa mission en Sibérie -1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁴⁵ Montandon, 'Mission en Sibérie': 1198.

⁴⁶ For a review of the ICRC delegates in history, see Brigitte Troyon and Daniel Palmieri, 'The ICRC Delegate: an Exceptional Humanitarian Player?', *The International Review of the Red Cross*, 89, 865 (2007), 97–111, in particular 98.

⁴⁷ Conditions d'engagement des délégués du Comité International de la Croix Rouge envoyés en Sibérie, Geneva, 20 Mar. 1919, AICRC, B MSB/OM. In the case of the mission of the ICRC in Siberia, Montandon received 2,500 CHF, whereas the other delegates received 1,000 CHF monthly. I summarise here the main points of the contract: travel, accommodation and personal expenses were covered by the ICRC; on top of this delegates received a complementary monthly indemnity; contracts were to last at least six months and could be terminated by either party at any time after this period with a one month notice; general health, accident and death insurance were paid for by the ICRC, which would not cover any other expenses; delegates would have to respect neutrality in their declarations and actions and no political activity was to be excluded; delegates were forbidden from engaging in any press or public communication during and after the mission; even in private communications delegates should not disclose any information that could damage the future actions of the ICRC; and the chief of the mission was the only one who was responsible to the ICRC and was encouraged to solve any disputes in the most peaceful terms.

political, and logistical circumstances. Again, ICRC delegates were not ‘professional humanitarians’. Only a few had already carried out humanitarian work during the First World War and even fewer continued a humanitarian career after their work for the ICRC by moving to other humanitarian organisations. To my knowledge, only Georges Burnier, delegate of the ICRC in Istanbul in 1921, continued working for the International Nansen Office in Syria until 1938.

What complicated the work of the ICRC delegates in Siberia was the on-going Russian Civil War. The Bolshevik government had an easier task controlling the Russian European territory after the October Revolution. This was not the case for Siberia, from Vladivostok along the Trans-Siberian railroad. There the civil war lasted until 1922. In brief, the Russian Civil War on the Far Eastern Front saw a coalition made of anti-Bolshevik White forces, Allied forces and a small Chinese contingent fighting against the Bolsheviks. Against this unsettled backdrop, Japan added more instability, sending troops to Siberia. Prisoners of war from the Czech legions also attacked Bolsheviks trying to find their way home.⁴⁸

Sending a mission to Siberia during the Russian Civil War was not an easy task. The Geneva Committee maintained relationships with both the ‘Reds’ and the ‘Whites’. It is worth recalling the importance of the mission implemented by ICRC delegate Woldermar Wehrin in Moscow, as well as the role of the ICRC in the relief mission in the famine-stricken Volga region.⁴⁹ Moreover, the ICRC largely collaborated with Russian organisations in exile, both in the countries where Russian refugees were dislocated and in international post-war negotiations that took place mainly in Paris and Geneva. As far as the Soviet Red Cross is concerned, the ICRC recognised the new organisation on 15 October 1921, four years after the beginning of the October Revolution.⁵⁰

While Montandon turned out to be an independent head delegate, it is also true that the ICRC gave him a ‘free hand’.⁵¹ Montandon had a great deal of autonomy in the mission in Siberia. The flexibility of the ICRC towards the mandates of its delegates was not peculiar to Montandon’s mission only. It was, in fact, a common feature of the relationship which connected the organisation to its delegates. Quality

⁴⁸ Hofmann, *Bolchevisme, droit humanitaire, dollar et paix des vainqueurs*, 8–9. For general references on the Russian Civil War, see Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), esp. ch. 4, 8, 10, 11, 16; Edward Acton, V. IU Cherniaev and William G. Rosenberg, *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914–1921* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Jean-François Fayet, ‘En l’Absence de Relations Diplomatiques et de Puissance Protectrice: la Protection des Intérêts Soviétiques durant la Période Dite de Transition’, *Relations internationales*, 143, 3 (2011), 75–88. Kimberly A. Lowe, ‘Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty: Red Cross Intervention on Behalf of Political Prisoners in Soviet Russia, 1921–3’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, 4 (2014), 652–74. The role of the ICRC and other European relief organisations fighting famine was minor in comparison to the massive operations conducted by the American ones. Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ Jean-François Fayet et Peter Huber, ‘Mission Wehrin du CICR en Union Soviétique (1920–1938)’, 89(849), Mar. 2003, *RICRC*, 98, 101–2.

⁵¹ Procès-verbal de la Commission des Missions, 3 May 1920, AICRC.

standards would be introduced much later – not until the 1970s.⁵² This lack of clarity in defining the extent to which the mandate of the ICRC could be stretched and, consequently, what was acceptable professionally, led to conflicts of interest as well as windows of opportunity. During an information gathering mission, delegates' reports contained information on their visits to the various camps and the connections that they established with local and international authorities.⁵³ As a consequence of the dire conditions of the prisoners of war, Montandon transformed the fact-finding mission into a relief mission and organised the distribution of clothing, medication, food and money. It seems that Montandon did so on his own initiative and without asking authorisation for it or, at least, communicating it to the headquarters in Geneva.⁵⁴ From his side, in the final report Montandon made reference to the fact that relieving prisoners of war was part of the task that he had received from the national societies. While the Swiss doctor challenged and stretched the – vague – humanitarian mandate that he had received from the ICRC, this is an example of the difficulty of determining who was right and who was wrong concerning the nature of Montandon's mandate, especially in light of the free rein granted to him by the ICRC.⁵⁵

In the summer of 1919, the Austrian and Hungarian governments through their Red Cross Societies transformed the fact-finding mission into a repatriation mission. They also asked Montandon to continue his work: he was asked to prepare the ground for the repatriation plans that the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross Societies would undertake once their delegates arrived in Siberia, their arrival being a consequence of the signing of the peace treaties, Russian authorisation and the Allied green light to proceed with the repatriation of prisoners of war of all nationalities.⁵⁶ Also German prisoners of war were repatriated from Vladivostok by sea. When the mandate of the ICRC in Siberia was extended from a fact-finding mission to an operational one, it was debated whether to replace Montandon with a more docile delegate or to send another delegate to Siberia who would compensate for the qualities that Montandon lacked. However, neither of these options was pursued. The ICRC could not formulate a formal complaint against Montandon, as he was the one with the best knowledge of what was going on, and the arrangements for the mission to Siberia were made orally and little trace remains in written documents. Not only was the ICRC unable to check the activities undertaken by its delegate but it was also unable to find the document containing the instructions that were given to Montandon in the first place.⁵⁷ This indicates that the organisation placed greater emphasis on being operational than precisely filing its documents. It also shows that

⁵² Troyon, Palmieri, 'The ICRC Delegate': 101.

⁵³ 'La situation des prisonniers de guerre en Sibirie' rapport de M.A. Eigenmann, secrétaire de la mission du CICR, June–Sept. 1919, AICRC, B MSB/OM.1; Rapport sur les prisonniers de guerre austro-hongrois & turcs en Sibirie, pendant l'été 1919, AICRC, B MSB/OM.1.

⁵⁴ This information is contained in a later letter that summarises the working relationship between the ICRC and Montandon: Letter from de Watteville to Chenevière, Geneva, 11 Nov. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁵⁵ Rapport de George Montandon sur sa mission en Sibirie –1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Letter from de Watteville to Chenevière, Geneva, 11 Nov. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

the organisation was going through many changes and was learning by doing – all of which challenged and shaped its professionalisation.

The financial resources given to Montandon during the second part of the mission for the repatriation of prisoners of war also seemed to be scarce. When it was time to organise the transportation by sea of prisoners of war from Vladivostok, the sum that Montandon asked the ICRC for far exceeded the money that the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross Societies had already provided to the organisation. Both the ICRC and Montandon seemed to lack the professional skills to evaluate the gravity and complexity of the situation correctly. They also lacked the communication skills that were necessary to effectively share information with the national Red Cross Societies. While Montandon's personality played a crucial role in the development of the mission to Siberia, it should not be forgotten that different forces and principles were at stake. Montandon represented the ICRC, which had been mandated by national societies that represented their respective governments and prioritised national interests over the ICRC's principle of humanity and universalism.⁵⁸

To give an example of the problems that Montandon's mission provoked, in the summer of 1920 the Hungarian government wanted to keep track of the decisions made by Montandon for the repatriation of its men, both in terms of logistics and financing.⁵⁹ Indeed, Montandon had organised the repatriation of prisoners of war on the boat *Shunko-Maru*.⁶⁰ Out of nearly 1,100 men, half were Hungarians. As Blaise Hofmann writes, financial resources came from the *Commission Centrale Economique Tchecoslovaque* and from individual financial contributions made by prisoners of war. Montandon promised prisoners of war that money would be reimbursed.⁶¹ This provoked the late opposition of the Hungarian government, which did not agree to pay for those prisoners of war who became Hungarian due to the territorial settlement established after the First World War.⁶² Montandon's decision revealed the contrast between the universalism of the ICRC's principles and the nationalism of the Red Cross Societies. Upon the insistence of the ICRC and after a formal trial, the Hungarian government paid its share.⁶³ From his end, Montandon reiterated that his main preoccupation was how to better help prisoners of war, regardless of their nationality (there were Austrians, Czechoslovakians, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Rumanians, Poles, Turks and Yugoslavians) and ideological position (some of them had been exposed to and won over by Bolshevik propaganda) in accordance with Red Cross principles.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, Droit Humanitaire, Dollar et Paix des Vainqueurs*, 141.

⁵⁹ Rapport de George Montandon sur sa mission en Sibérie –1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁶⁰ Garantie du Dr. Montandon donnée aux prisonniers contre le prêt de leur argent personnel pour leur transport à bord du 'Shunko-Maru', AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁶¹ Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, Droit Humanitaire, Dollar et Paix des Vainqueurs*, 95.

⁶² *Ibid.* 95–8.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 95–8.

⁶⁴ 'Nous n'avions pas à nous préoccuper des sentiments pro- ou antibolcheviques que pouvaient avoir les uns ou les autres des prisonniers. Nous avions à nous demander, d'un point de vue 'croixrougien', quelle était la solution préférable dans l'intérêt matériel des prisonniers et dans celui de leur futur rapatriement'. Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 32.

Even though the Hungarian Red Cross agreed to contribute to the scheme financially, it had already started to question Montandon's decision to repatriate prisoners of war eastwards. The Hungarian position coincided with the internationalisation of the question of prisoners of war through the arena of the League of Nations and with the appointment of Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen as the high commissioner for prisoners of war. While Nansen pushed for stopping the movement of prisoners of war eastwards and worked for the implementation of a naval bridge from Estonia to Germany, the Austrian Red Cross continued to endorse the repatriation through Vladivostok, as had been decided, and for which financial resources had already been provided.⁶⁵

Tense discussions at the ICRC headquarters about these topics suggest the political significance of the mission to Siberia and the struggle for prestige and resources that the organisation was undergoing after the First World War. Even if opinions were divided within the ICRC Committee in Geneva, eventually the ICRC supported Montandon and his eastward repatriation plan. In the end, the organisation lacked the information to seriously undermine the activities of its delegate and wanted to avoid a public scandal. However, under pressure from the national Red Cross Societies, in December 1920 the ICRC decided to recall Montandon and appoint another delegate, who this time was given more precise instructions.⁶⁶ Montandon was asked to go to Vladivostok and then make his way to Geneva as soon as possible in order to report on the achievements of his mission and respond to the national societies' allegations. At that point, it was weeks since the ICRC had heard from Montandon. Either disregarding the instructions or never receiving them due to the bad status of communications, Montandon proceeded towards Moscow instead, proud to be the only delegate to have crossed the 'whole Soviet territory'.⁶⁷

During his mission, Montandon took the initiative to organise a special train. What does the image of the train crossing Siberia during the Russian Civil War tell us about the process of the professionalisation of the ICRC and its staff after the First World War? On the one hand, the ICRC headquarters in Geneva did not have a say in the organisation and implementation of the repatriation process through the special train. Members of the Committee and of the Commission of Missions did not possess the elements to fully understand and, consequently, assess the situation. They had to rely on the judgement of Montandon, his knowledge of the situation in the region and the information that the delegate sent them. On the other hand, in setting up the train, Montandon took full responsibility for it, particularly since there was neither a governmental representative on the train nor a special delegate from the railways. Such a train – and such a creative initiative during the Russian Civil War – would not have been possible if Montandon had not been able to rely on the connections with both the Bolsheviks and the White armies that he had established

⁶⁵ Procès-verbal de la Commission des Missions, 22 Oct. 1920, présents: Frick-Cramer, Ador, Boissier, Chenevière, Frick, Colonel Stoll, AICRC.

⁶⁶ Procès-verbal de la Commission des Missions, 20 Oct. 1920, présents: Ador, Ferrière, Boissier, Chenevière, Ehrenhold, AICRC.

⁶⁷ Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 9.

since the beginning of the mission.⁶⁸ ‘Going native’ turned out to be useful for the implementation of such a bold solution. The uncertain definition of ‘professional’ humanitarianism and the circumstances in which such a mission took place explain the difficulty of determining whether the decision to repatriate prisoners of war eastwards was justified and of ascertaining the exact number of prisoners of war repatriated.⁶⁹

After the end of Montandon’s mission, in the summer of 1921, many discussions took place at the Commission of Missions on the way in which the former delegate carried out his duties.⁷⁰ While the financial records of the mission in Siberia were being checked, it was also debated within the ICRC whether to take formal legal action against Montandon.⁷¹ Opinions were divergent with the ICRC. However, the sloppy state of the financial records, the impossibility of assessing the economic conditions in Russia and dramatic changes in the currency exchange made it difficult for the ICRC’s Financial Commission to assess the financing of the mission.⁷²

After weeks of discussion and investigation, the ICRC ended the inquiry into Montandon’s behaviour. The final financial report stated that despite all of the problems with the mission’s finances, the accounts were fine overall – after the Austrian and Hungarian governments paid the balance – and only a financial expert would have been able to keep track of all of the expenses in an accurate way. Information collected from collaborators and witnesses also seemed to confirm that Montandon’s behaviour had in general been correct.⁷³ However, when Montandon asked whether the ICRC would hire him for another mission to Austria or Hungary,

⁶⁸ ‘On ne peut cependant partir, la serviette sous le bras, pour organiser une évacuation de plusieurs mille hommes, dans un pays où les moyens techniques et les approvisionnements sont à peine suffisants! Il nous fallait un train complet, muni de vivres pour quelques dizaines de mille hommes, de médicaments, et de tout ce que nécessitait l’entretien d’un personnel de près de cinquante personnes pendant plusieurs mois’. Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 89–90.

⁶⁹ Blaise Hofmann calls for caution in estimating the total number of prisoners of war repatriated eastwards. His total estimate counts that nearly 18,000–20,000 of them were repatriated through Vladivostok. See Hofmann, *Bolchévisme, droit humanitaire, dollar et paix des vainqueurs*, 105.

⁷⁰ Procès-verbal de la séance de la Commission des Missions, Mon. 29 Aug. 1921, présent: Sautter, Chenevière, Boissier, Reverdin, Frick-Cramer, Brunel, Moroy, AICRC.

⁷¹ Procès-verbal de la Commission des Missions, Fri. 7 Oct. 1921, présent: Sautter, Chenevière, Boissier, Cramer, Brunel, Schlemmer, Sutter, et Moroy, AICRC.

⁷² For the budget of the mission see Rapport de la Trésorerie sur les comptes de la mission du CICR en Sibérie, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁷³ From Geneva, the ICRC mobilised formal and informal networks and connections to collect information on Montandon’s mission in Siberia. De Reding-Biberegg, ICRC’s delegate in Budapest, reported what was written in the Hungarian press about the mission and stated that the allegations against Montandon did not seem to be justified. Letter by de Reding-Biberegg to the ICRC, Budapest, 29 Sept. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4. Charles L.E. Lardy, Swiss consul in Tokyo, met with M. Fischer, charged with the transportation of Montandon’s mission, who confirmed that without the mediation of Montandon, especially with the Soviet authorities, ‘nothing would have been done’. Letter by Charles L.E. Lardy to Ador, Tokyo, 9 Feb. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4. My translation from French. M. Pribil, Austrian, and second secretary of Montandon, defended the head of the mission and explained the circumstances against which money sent by the families did not reach prisoners of war. Note concernant la mission de Sibérie, lettre adressée au Dr. Ferrière, unsigned and undated, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

the organisation politely declined.⁷⁴ This happened at the beginning of 1922, when the ICRC became aware of some of the other unexpected consequences of the work that Montandon had carried out in Siberia.

Montandon's Instrumentalisation of the ICRC Mission

During his humanitarian mission, Montandon collected objects, crafts and various skulls and made ethnographic observations. In a letter that Montandon addressed to Eugène Pittard before leaving for Siberia he mentioned that the humanitarian work would leave little time for 'ethnographic and anthropologic observations'. He would try to collect 'something' without mentioning it to Edouard Naville, the acting president of the ICRC and former president of the International Agency for Prisoners of War, as he did not want him to think that these actions would impact his humanitarian work negatively.⁷⁵ While it is difficult to say how much of his spare time Montandon dedicated to conducting ethnographic research, the letter by Montandon to Pittard suggests that the delegate was aware of what was at stake for the outcome of the mission.

This dedication to conducting research highlights the relationship between humanitarianism and social sciences in the interwar period and in the Swiss context. While Montandon's medical skills and his previous experiences in Ethiopia played a decisive role in his appointment as an ICRC delegate, his experience in Siberia marked a turning point in his professional career. When he had some free time – as he was keen to highlight – Montandon delegated command of the mission and travelled to areas in which he engaged in ethnographical explorations.⁷⁶ On his way to Siberia from Geneva across North America, Montandon conducted ethnographic observations among the Native American Havasupai tribe in the United States, the Ainu of the Sakhalin Island of Japan as well as among the Japanese themselves, the Buryats in Transbaikalia and the Kyrgyz people in the surroundings of Omsk in the southwest of Siberia.⁷⁷ During a public conference once back in Switzerland, Montandon stressed that he conducted his humanitarian and ethnographic work separately. Moreover, in order to highlight the amateurish – and unthreatening – character of these ethnographic activities, the ICRC delegate compared them to the amusement of a delegate that would play a musical instrument in his spare time.⁷⁸ However, thanks to the material that he collected during the mission and to the publications that resulted from them, a couple of years after the end of his humanitarian activities for the ICRC, Montandon stopped working as a medical

⁷⁴ Letter from a member of the Committee to Montandon, 28 Jan. 1922, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁷⁵ Montandon to Pittard, 8 Mar. 1919, Bibliothèque de Genève, Ms. fr. 8232/48.

⁷⁶ Untitled document, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁷⁷ 'Une visite aux Aïnou, c'est pour un ethnologue, un morceau de choix.' Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 58 and footnote 1.

⁷⁸ Untitled document, presumably sent from Montandon to the ICRC for information on the content of one of his public lectures, Nov. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

doctor and started a new professional career as an anthropologist first in Switzerland and then in France.⁷⁹

The ICRC seemed not to be particularly concerned about the ethnographic work conducted by Montandon, though it only became aware of it once Montandon began organising exhibits in Switzerland with the objects he had collected while on the humanitarian mission.⁸⁰ Rather, in light of the exhibits organised by Montandon, the ICRC expressed concerns about the acquisition of objects. It wanted to be sure that financial resources – already a contentious issue – were not diverted from humanitarian aid.⁸¹ That would have been a serious problem because the cost of repatriating the prisoners of war ended up being much higher than expected and provoked dissatisfaction among the national societies that had called upon the ICRC for help and had paid it for its work.⁸²

Montandon was not the only delegate to take advantage of his humanitarian work for his personal interests – all of which reinforces the idea of the malleability of professional humanitarianism at the end of the First World War. Pittard also acted as an ICRC delegate for the relief of Albania in 1924 and contributed to founding the Albanian Red Cross. By the time of his humanitarian engagement with the ICRC, Pittard had already been to Albania for his ethnographic work. It is easy to understand that Pittard continued to have an anthropological ‘eye’ even when he was on a humanitarian mission. For instance, some of the pictures that Pittard took in Albania for the ICRC seem to speak more to an audience interested in ethnography than in humanitarianism. Other ICRC delegates were also involved in unclear activities. This was the case for Eduard Frick, who was accused by the Soviet authorities of taking advantage of his humanitarian mission for his personal commercial interests.

Once he returned to Switzerland, Montandon tried to make the most of his work for the ICRC. In the autumn of 1921 Montandon organised an exhibit in Neuchâtel for the *Société des Amis des Arts*. The former ICRC delegate also organised conferences where he presented his ethnographic investigations.⁸³ At the same time as he organised this exhibit, Montandon also put together another one at the *Mutuelle Artistique* in Geneva. However, due to the fact that he was late with the writing of the final report for the ICRC, he volunteered to cancel the exhibit in Geneva. It would be necessary to have a closer look at the exhibition documents, in cases where they still exist, to understand which objects were displayed and how, and whether the ethnographic exhibit organised by Montandon aligned

⁷⁹ ‘Famille Montandon’, <http://www.genealogiesuisse.com/montandon> (last visited 24 Jan. 2016).

⁸⁰ In December 1922, a Swiss business based in Japan also wrote a letter to the Swiss Red Cross asking where to send the objects that Montandon had provisionally left behind. Letter by Siber Hegner & Co. to the direction of the Swiss Red Cross, Zurich, 11 Dec. 1922, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁸¹ Letter by Montandon to Paul de Gouttes, Lausanne, Oct. 1921 (I cannot read the exact date of the document), AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁸² Procès-verbal de la séance de la Commission des Missions, 15 Mar. 1920, présents Mlle Cramer, Sautter, Boissier, Chenèvière, AICRC. See also Note de la Trésorerie au Comité concernant le déficit de la mission du Dr. Montandon, fiche, 27 Oct. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁸³ Montandon au président du CICR, Lausanne, 29 Sept. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

with Genevan/Swiss ethnographic traditions. It is also unclear what happened to the objects that Montandon collected in Siberia. Some of the pictures of the exploration of Ethiopia are now held at the *Musée du Quai Branly* in Paris. They were moved there from the *Musée de l'Homme*, which first hosted them.⁸⁴ It is likely that when Montandon left Lausanne in 1925 he brought his own personal collections to France.

In addition to the organisation of exhibits, Montandon turned out to be an extremely prolific writer. In the course of the mission, Montandon submitted all kinds of written texts to the ICRC, including cables, letters, provisional reports and responses to specific questions that the organisation submitted to him. Montandon possessed a modern Corona type machine – small and easy to transport.⁸⁵ It is not difficult to imagine that Montandon wrote these texts from the many places where he happened to be throughout Siberia. Montandon's writing allows for a reflection on the places, contents, and intended audiences of the 'humanitarian' and 'ethnographic' texts that resulted from the mission.

As with any other delegate of the ICRC, Montandon was expected to write a report at the end of his contract, which was supposed to be an internal document.⁸⁶ David Forsythe writes that, at the beginning of the First World War, some reports by ICRC delegates had also been published. This practice would soon stop.⁸⁷ Montandon compiled the final report in Lausanne, where he and his Russian bride, Maria Konstantinovna Zviaghina, whom he had met during the Red Cross mission, settled upon their return from Russia. The report was most likely based on the notes that Montandon took during the mission as well as on his memories. Montandon wrote an impressively long and detailed report of more than 300 pages: the document is a mix of humanitarian, political, technical and ethnographic data and considerations. The former ICRC delegate submitted half of the report to the ICRC in the summer of 1921. Afterwards, he asked the ICRC for a special writing indemnity in order to complete the report, which the ICRC decided to allow. As the ICRC Committee highlighted in a letter to Montandon, it was the first time that one of its delegates had asked for such an indemnity.⁸⁸ As was common practice, the report, after being largely reduced, was published in the *Review of the ICRC* in October 1921.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ [http://www.quaibrany.fr/fr/explorer-les-collections/?tx_mqbcollection_explorer\[action\]=list&tx_mqbcollection_explorer\[controller\]=Work](http://www.quaibrany.fr/fr/explorer-les-collections/?tx_mqbcollection_explorer[action]=list&tx_mqbcollection_explorer[controller]=Work) (last visited 24 Jan. 2016).

⁸⁵ Untitled document, list of medicaments brought to Siberia by Montandon, as well as his personal clothing, the camp equipment, dated Mar. 1919, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁸⁶ During the mission, Montandon published two other articles under his name in the *Review of the ICRC*: George Montandon, *Memorandum du 15 Novembre 1919 pour la Non-Evacuation des PG devant les Rouges*, 14, Feb. 1920, RICRC, 198–205; George Montandon, *Le Typhus Exanthématique en Sibirie de 1919 a 1921*, 33, Sept. 1921, RICRC, 919–21.

⁸⁷ David P. Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 31.

⁸⁸ Discussions took place at the Commission of Missions. Procès-verbal de la Commission des Missions, Wed. 21 Dec. 1921, présent: Ador, Boissier, Frick-Cramer, Cramer, Brunel, Schlemmer, Sutter, AICRC. Letter by a member of the Committee to Montandon, Lausanne, 28 Jan. 1922, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁸⁹ Montandon, 'Mission en Sibirie', RICRC, 1197–232.

Unwittingly, with this lump sum the ICRC financed both the completion of the overdue report and the preparation of the book that Montandon published the following year, which was centred on the work that he carried out for the ICRC in Siberia. *Two years with Koltchak and with the Bolsheviks. For the Red Cross of Geneva, 1919–1921* (*Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques. Pour la Croix-Rouge de Genève, 1919–1921*) is similar to the report that Montandon submitted to the ICRC in terms of general content. The two main differences are that the organisation of the content differed somewhat and the ethnographic pages are not included in the published book. Indeed, Montandon was artful enough to develop and publish them as separate texts. This is one of the many ways in which the humanitarian work done for the ICRC had consequences for the life and career of Montandon. For example, the six skulls that Montandon acquired from the ethnographic museum of Vladivostok constitutes the core of one of his later publications on Paleosiberian phrenology.⁹⁰

To complicate things further, on several occasions Montandon expressed a pro-Bolshevik position.⁹¹ Not only did Montandon publish the report without asking the ICRC for permission, he also published pages in which he clearly expressed his pro-Bolshevik feelings.⁹² Consequently, the ICRC worried that these declarations would compromise the reputation of the organisation and felt obliged to distance itself from them with official communications.⁹³ In addition to avoiding public communication about the Red Cross mission, being politically neutral was a prerequisite for the efforts towards the professionalisation of the organisation. The contract signed between any delegate and the ICRC says that the former ‘would respect the strictest neutrality in his talks and actions. Any political demonstration will have to be completely excluded’.⁹⁴ The importance of neutrality was connected to the reputation, moral status and professional image of the ICRC. In the end, the financial existence of the ICRC depended on governmental and private contributions. It still does. Being suspected of Bolshevik allegiances could irremediably compromise the image and future work of the organisation, which was already going through a delicate time.⁹⁵ While the ICRC’s concern was legitimate, it also hid another major problem, namely

⁹⁰ George Montandon, ‘Craniologie Paléosibérienne: Néolithique, Mongoloïdes, Tchouktschi, Eskimo, Aléoutes, Kamtchadales, Aïnou, Ghiliak, Négroïdes du Nord’, *L’anthropologie* (1926), 209.

⁹¹ ‘Si, à l’âge de quarante ans, nous avons voyagé dans le cinq continents, si nous avons vu les plus grands spectacles de la nature, si nous avons assisté aux contrastes sociaux les plus divers, témoin, dans les nuits d’Abyssinie, du défilé des caravanes d’esclaves enchaînés, tandis qu’à l’autre bout du monde, frôlant la féodalité japonaise, nous avons bu du thé vert dans les jardins du Mikado, nous disons que nous n’avons rien vu moralement de plus impressionnant que cet écrasement de l’orgueil de la classe dans la Russie Sovyétique.’ Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 300–1.

⁹² ‘... L’état d’esprit, le sens moral qui ont présidé à la révolution et qui, à notre point de vue, sont les plus puissants des facteurs qui maintiennent au pouvoir le Gouvernement bolchevique.’ Montandon, *Deux Ans chez Koltchak et chez les Bolchéviques*, 9–10.

⁹³ Letter by Chenevière to Montandon, Geneva, 1 Mar. 1923, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁹⁴ Conditions d’engagement des délégués du Comité International de la Croix Rouge envoyés en Sibérie, Geneva, 20 Mar. 1919, AICRC, B MSB/OM. Translated from French by the author. The choice of ‘his’ is deliberate: there were no female delegates at the end of the First World War.

⁹⁵ Letter by W. H. Silling to Ador, Lausanne, 1 Oct. 1921, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

that the organisation lacked professionalism and neutrality by being intrinsically anti-Bolshevik, as was the case for Western circles at that point. Even if it is unclear at which point in the mission Montandon became pro-Bolshevik, the delegate's supposed lack of neutrality did not mean that he lacked impartiality or discriminated between prisoners of war.

This was a lot of undesirable publicity for the ICRC. The publication of Montandon's book raised what an ICRC document euphemistically referred to as 'some emotion'.⁹⁶ Attention came mainly from the French and Swiss communist and liberal press, attracting reviews from both sympathisers and detractors.⁹⁷ One of the most elaborate responses came from L.H. Grondijs, a Dutch historian, who had also travelled in Russia and who had published one of the few books at that time on the Russian Civil War.⁹⁸ Grondijs provides a counter-narrative of the mission of Montandon in Siberia for the ICRC, in particular criticising his complaisance with the Soviets and his decision to repatriate prisoners of war eastwards instead of westwards.⁹⁹ Even if it is understandable that the seeds of what would become his communist credo can be located in the years 1919 to 1921 and in his contact with the Bolshevik world, the verbalisation of Montandon's communism materialised only back to Siberia. The retrospective politicisation of his mission, through his public expression of pro-Bolshevik feelings, occurred once Montandon was back in Switzerland.

One of his former colleagues in France, the anthropologist Henri Victor Vallois, contended that Montandon's 'conversion' to communism happened during the mission when he met his wife, who was pro-Bolshevik.¹⁰⁰ In addition to expressing a real fascination with the new Bolshevik regime, one cannot exclude the possibility that Montandon's ideological positions were the result of opportunism. Once back from Siberia, Montandon joined the Communist Party in Lausanne and contributed articles to a communist newspaper called *Clarté*.¹⁰¹ It should be noted that Montandon's political affiliation did not only affect his relationship with the ICRC but also his later academic career. In 1921 Montandon was appointed as a professor of ethnography at the University of Neuchâtel, but the *Conseil d'Etat* subsequently invalidated his appointment, most likely due to his political position.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Letter by Chenevière to Montandon, Geneva, 1 Mar. 1923, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4. My translation from French.

⁹⁷ *L'illustré*, 30 Dec. 1922, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁹⁸ L. H. Grondijs, 'Bolchévisme et Croix Rouge en Sibérie', *Extrait du Mercure de France*, 15-VII-MCMXXII, 1–21, AICRC, B MSB/OM.4.

⁹⁹ Marc Jansen, 'L. H. Grondijs and Russia: The Acts and Opinions of a Dutch White Guard', *Revolutionary Russia*, 7, 1 (1994), 20–33. Jansen writes that Grondijs was a supporter of the White armies and even joined them.

¹⁰⁰ Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 94; 'Interview de Henri Victor Vallois (le 15 février 1981)', *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 8, 1 (1996), 99.

¹⁰¹ Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 94–5.

¹⁰² Pierre Centlivres, 'L'Ethnologie à l'Université de Neuchâtel: 1912–1964', 4.

In 1925 Montandon left Geneva for France, where he would dedicate his time to anthropology.¹⁰³

Conclusion

The ‘lived internationalism’ of Montandon shows how expertise was produced and circulated in different ways in the immediate post-First World War period, through the porosity and hybridity of personal, professional and institutional interactions. Expertise was formal and informal. The life of Montandon suggests that his expertise was acquired in formal settings, such as Swiss universities, as well as in institutionalised medical practice and in informal circumstances, which also shaped his personal interests as explorer and ethnographer. Expertise was local, national and transnational. Montandon acquired skills in Switzerland, Ethiopia, France and other European countries in which he travelled. He established transnational connections through his interest in travelling and anthropology, and also took part in local and national networks, as his roles in Genevan humanitarian and anthropological circles demonstrate. By taking part in his mission for the ICRC, Montandon had the chance to travel to Siberia in a period when it was not easy for foreigners to have access to the country, thanks to a Swiss diplomatic passport. During the mission, Montandon developed diplomatic, logistic and managerial skills. He collected a large set of ethnographic data and observations, met and married his wife and added a long list of anecdotes to his personal life narrative.

Through exploring the exchange of expertise between the ICRC and Montandon, this article demonstrates the extent to which the ICRC struggled to become a ‘professional’ organisation following the First World War. It seems clear that the process of professionalising humanitarian aid led to both conflicts of interest and opportunities. This is visible at different levels: in intra-agency interactions between the ICRC staff in Geneva and its delegates, in inter-agency exchanges between the ICRC and the organisations belonging to the Red Cross movement and in the individual development of Montandon’s private life and career.

The Siberian context and the Russian Civil War were complex backdrops against which the ICRC and Montandon happened to work. During the mission this complexity meant having to adapt to a quickly changing situation, which was determined by the fragmentation of the White, Allied and Red forces. At the international level, when the ICRC agreed to act on behalf of the Austrian and Hungarian Red Cross Societies and the Ottoman Red Crescent, the First World War had just ended, the peace negotiations were still ongoing and the peacemakers had started to realise that establishing and guaranteeing security would take much longer than expected. At the institutional level, pointing out the ambitions and pitfalls of humanitarian aid does not prevent us from reading a real interest for the lives of needy prisoners of war from the standpoint of the ICRC and its agents.

¹⁰³Knobel, ‘L’Ethnologue a la Dérive’, 107; Knobel, ‘George Montandon et l’Ethnoracisme’.

Looking at the exchange of expertise and the professionalisation of humanitarian aid through the lives and work of ICRC delegates other than Montandon would produce a slightly different narrative, because of the peculiarity of each personal path. The interest of this story lies in the fine balance between the uniqueness and representativeness of the interactions of the ICRC with Montandon. Both historical processes are there, the 'exceptional' and the 'normal'. What Montandon seemed to have enjoyed most was the thrill of adventure, which permeated much of his humanitarian and ethnographic writing. However, Montandon was as skilled as other ICRC delegates. He was probably keener than others to instrumentalise and circumvent rules for his own advantage – something that had an impact on his later professional career in anthropology. But one can also read in the same spirit of adaptation and creativity some of the successes of Montandon's humanitarian mission, namely in coming up with innovative solutions, such as the train, that would not have occurred to a more obedient delegate.

Montandon's ethnographic work offers an opportunity to start thinking about the connections between ethnography (or the social sciences more generally) and humanitarianism. While it is not possible to generalise about the ethnographic interests of other humanitarians, one can assume that a widespread interest in discovery and adventure was also a part of the complex reasons why people engaged in international humanitarianism, as Liisa Malkki shows in her book.¹⁰⁴ Montandon's 'side activities' embedded the fragmented and informal ways in which ethnography developed as a scientific discipline in Switzerland. In the end, this article brings to light the mixed motives of actors, both institutions and individuals, whose understanding and implementation of international liberal humanitarianism contributed to shape and influence the broader social and political history of twentieth-century Europe.

¹⁰⁴ Malkki, *The Need to Help*, 23–52.