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Discussion: Humanitarianism

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This is the first in what it is hoped will become a series of discussion forums hosted by *1914-1918-online*. In this discussion forum, General Editor Peter Gatrell invited contributions that illuminate key interpretive debates around humanitarian relief efforts in wartime and its immediate aftermath. The three authors assess the state of the field in relation to humanitarianism in the era of the First World War and suggest an agenda for future research.

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General Editor's introduction: Peter Gatrell

It is fitting that humanitarianism should be the topic that launches this initiative. The history of humanitarianism is a growing field of scholarly activity, as is indicated by a number of landmark publications, new scholarly networks, and a raft of academic conferences.[1] Among the many initiatives and publications prompted by the anniversary of the First World War, we can include studies devoted to humanitarianism in wartime, including a book by Bruno Cabanes, for whom the

war represented a turning point in the provision of relief, and even a foundational moment in terms of human rights.[2]

What does this flurry of activity signify? How has it altered our grasp of the First World War? What are the most promising lines of enquiry for future scholars? The answers to these questions require intellectual clarity as to a sometimes amorphous concept or construct. In the following remarks, I have kept things simple by concentrating on practices designed to alleviate suffering in wartime, particularly civilian suffering.

In relation to the First World War, we could take into account initiatives, whether directed primarily by governments or by non-governmental organisations (including faith-based organisations, such as the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or JDC), as well as by private individuals, to alleviate suffering. A range of activities fall squarely into the form of humanitarian relief efforts in wartime that are associated with the formation and institutional development of the International Committee of the Red Cross and its national offshoots, whose focus was primarily on the relief of wounded soldiers and prisoners of war, whose suffering did not come to an end in 1918 and whose needs were not adequately met by the state on whose behalf they had fought.[3] In this respect, Elisabeth Piller reminds us that histories of humanitarianism should incorporate conceptions of a/the "greater war".

Given the scale of combat and its ramifications for civilians exposed directly or indirectly to its effects, humanitarian relief efforts also encompassed non-combatant refugees who fled or were removed from the combat zone, and who sometimes crossed international borders. But, as Rebecca Gill points out, the focus on the aftermath of war should not obscure the significance of pre-war ideas and practices whose various manifestations (at least in Britain) provide a corrective to ideas of a sudden rupture in 1914. Her reference to the South African War and how it led to the reconstitution of the British Red Cross might usefully be extended to take account of developments among the belligerent parties during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), a subject that awaits a full-scale treatment in terms of the Russian Red Cross and the *zemstvo* organisations that were revived in 1914.[4]

The First World War also brought into sharp relief a series of key issues in relation to humanitarianism action, such as by whom would it be conducted? In terms of activity, Gill rightly acknowledges the significance of local activism, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the embeddedness of local and national actors in transnational networks. In this respect, Branden Little cautions against too single-minded a focus on leading figures (important though they were, symbolically and otherwise) at the expense of studying the humanitarian foot-soldiers who "breathed life" into wartime relief agencies and whose motives and behaviour do not always figure in studies of humanitarian action.

As each author points out, the field of humanitarian intervention expanded not just during, but also in the aftermath of war. This expansion reflected in part the need to repatriate prisoners of war and refugees and to address the consequences of genocide in the Ottoman Empire. But it also owed a

great deal to ideas of post-war reconstruction and "rehabilitation", in which new humanitarian actors carved out a space for themselves. Key players included Near East Relief and Save the Children. Some leading figures in the new NGOs envisaged something other than short-term relief, more akin to what would later be called "development". Certainly this became apparent in the Balkans and in Armenia. It's important here to take account of the ways in which suffering and humanitarianism acquired a gendered dimension – and, indeed, how female relief workers represented themselves or were portrayed as suffering in the cause of humanitarianism, a subject likely to emerge in new work being undertaken by Francesca Piana and others.

Relief, like development, was of course not a politics-free zone. Piller rightly reminds us that humanitarianism could be a form of soft power, evident, for example, in post-war US diplomacy, with its insistence on "American methods" of delivering relief and on advertising American generosity. During the war, public organisations in Russia did not disguise their political purpose as they challenged the competence of the tsarist state in addressing the needs of soldiers (and their families) and refugees. Peter Holquist aptly characterises them as "parastatal" organisations whose leaders regarded themselves as a government-in-waiting.[5] The defeat of the Provisional Government in October 1917 finally put paid to their homes of political supremacy, but the leadership continued to provide charitable and other assistance to Russian exiles in the 1920s and beyond, and to insist on the illegitimacy of the Bolshevik regime.[6] Likewise, relief efforts during the terrible Russian famine in 1921 might be couched as purely humanitarian, but the main agency involved, the American Relief Administration, found itself assailed on both sides of the political divide, as giving succour to the Soviet state and as representing a potential capitalist bridgehead on Russian soil. Politics also intruded directly into post-war relief efforts in early Weimar Germany.[7] Political radicalism found expression in the pacifist stance adopted by members of the Society of Friends (Quakers), who mixed aid work with a critique of militarism, but it also underpinned key figures in SCF, who articulated a distinct mandate in relation to children.[8] Finally, as Gill suggests (taking a cue from Alan Lester), we need to broaden the notion of politics to encompass humanitarian governmentality, as practised, for example, by the ICRC in its powerful systems for gathering information and delivering relief.

The following contributions shed light on these and other issues, and take the agenda a stage further. Gill makes an important point about the connections between military personnel and civilian activists in sites of conflict and displacement such as Serbia, and this kind of "entangled humanitarianism" clearly did not end in 1918. Branden Little invites us to pay closer attention to what happens inside the black box of humanitarian agencies. One might take this as a clarion call for a business history of humanitarian NGOs, of the kind provided for a later era by Heike Wieters in her study of CARE.[9] This would also enable us to gain a better understanding of the financial as well as the human resources available to humanitarian actors. In terms of future research, we might also consider the education and training of future aid workers – to what extent and how did the generation of humanitarians who reached maturity in the middle years of the 20th century draw upon the

experience of aid workers transmitted either directly via formal training programmes or indirectly? How far was training construed as instilling purely technical expertise, or as something more than specialist knowledge of technology?

Lastly, we know far too little about accountability. This is a hot topic in contemporary studies of humanitarianism, and one that deserves greater consideration by historians.[10] In wartime, accountability towards the state looms particularly large, but aid organisations may also entertain ideas of accountability towards private donors, and some, such as the Quakers, envisage more radical ideas of responsibility towards humanity at large, in terms of seeking a world without war. Piller makes the important point about the recipients of relief – how they presented themselves, as well as how they were represented in the forum of humanitarian aid organisations. In mentioning power relations in humanitarianism, scholars might also, as she suggests, devote more attention to the emotions and psychology of the recipients of relief – and to those who provided donations and supplied aid.

We invite readers of *1914-1918-online* to offer their own responses to the following valuable contributions.

Rebecca Gill

Interestingly, recent publications in the history of humanitarianism reveal little agreement on the significance of the Great War. Fabian Klose, looking at state-led humanitarian intervention, largely ignores the years 1914-1918 ("the first half of the twentieth century seemed to experience a complete halt in the further development of the concept of humanitarian intervention"), while Branden Little argues the opposite – that "humanitarianism conditioned the USA's decision for war"; moreover, "it was through humanitarian interventions […] that Americans most assiduously reconstructed elements of European society" in the aftermath, and created the blueprint for American interventionism during its rise as a global power in the 20th century.[11] For Little, this "explosion of new endeavours" in relief, activism, and public policy "catalysed the creation of new forms of international interaction" out of a long-standing American impulse for "redemptive interventionism".[12] For Johannes Paulmann, meanwhile, interested mostly in the historical periods and related dilemmas through which a "multilevel, polycentric" humanitarian field dating in origin to the 1880s was established, the Great War stands out less as a catalyst than as part of a broader "conjucture" encompassing the Second World War and the late colonial period.[13] Back with America, and back with a more trenchant claim for the significance of the Great War, Keith Watenpaugh argues that the specific knowledge and practices (which changed from ameliorating suffering to addressing root causes) that arose in American interventions in the Middle East following the Armenian genocide was *the* (or *an* – there is some ambivalence on this point) origin of modern humanitarianism.[14] This was an era which, as for Paulmann, ended with the reckoning of the Second World War, though they attribute different reasons for this. The latest work by Bruno Cabanes largely supports the idea that

modern humanitarianism arose in the Great War and its aftermaths of population displacement and famine, though he also surveys European responses, and makes the very different and very specific claim that these humanitarian encounters resulted in a new human rights movement.[15]

So, how we arrive at this subject matter or locate this field of action is not straightforward at all, and is linked to how we approach the question of definition, periodisation, and origins. It also depends upon the vantage point of which country we recount this international history.

From the perspective of *British* history in this period, with which I am personally the most familiar, I would tend not to be as categorical as either Klose (whose notion of a "pure" concept of state military/diplomatic humanitarian intervention does not hold in the face of interconnections between the British humanitarian diplomacy of activists and consular staff on the ground in places such as Serbia, and the relief efforts of those such as the Serbian Relief Fund) or Watenpaugh (for in the British case, there was no "turn" from early humanitarianism to a new "modern humanitarianism" in the First World War; for such a "polycentric" field, this periodisation is too stark). Nor would I follow Cabanes in identifying the post-First World War period with a new human rights regime and concomitant change in humanitarians' "psychic landscape".

For the British case, the Great War and the period immediately following 1918 saw an expansion of humanitarian activity. However, I'd argue that, rather than detect, *pace* Cabanes and Watenpaugh, the start of a new humanitarian regime, this activity actually faded quite rapidly after about 1924, once the deluge of donations during the Russian famine had dried up. This is not to say that British humanitarian activity ceased, but rather, if we take the example of the British Save the Children Fund (SCF), we see that by 1924 – the year, in fact, and I think this is no coincidence, of its sponsoring of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child – its work is extremely small in scale and done on a shoe-string. But more than a question simply of scale, Cabanes and Watenpaugh's notion that the Great War caused a rupture in the "humanitarian imagination" does not fit the British case.

There seems merit in viewing the Great War as a catalyst for certain elements of humanitarian endeavour. For American humanitarianism, this is demonstrated by Julia Irwin (in her work on the American Red Cross) and in Branden Little's publications and contribution to this discussion[16] (and actually, I think Watenpaugh's argument is at its strongest when it is more restricted to traditions of American humanitarianism in the Middle East, rather than pushed to serve more universal claims). For Britain too, when it came to practical assistance, tradition and innovation sat side-by-side, in terms of who was aided, and why, and how this helped define notions of "civilian" and "combatant". What is so fascinating is the extent to which the meaning of these interventions was coloured by domestic concerns and contexts, even where British and Americans were involved in similar ventures regarding, say, Armenians or Belgians. Here I'd make the claim for the British "humanitarian imagination" that we need to not only widen our lens to take in the years immediately following 1918, but also to consider the legacy of the South African War (1899-1902), concluded only twelve years previous to the outbreak of the Great War, and the influence of the "Eastern Question" (i.e., the governmental and non-governmental response to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the

persecution of Christian minorities in the region), particularly in British liberal political and activist circles.

Locating humanitarianism as a field of action – and identifying humanitarian actors – is as much about being attentive to local history, and national political and social history, as it is about international mechanisms or institutions and the intended beneficiaries of these ventures. By 1914, Britain had an active Red Cross Society, providing first aid and transportation for wounded combatants. It saw its role as supplementary – and, in the event of a British war, in exclusive service to the British army (wounded from opposing armies would receive treatment as POWs); indeed, following a British-sponsored revision to the Geneva Convention in 1906, following dissatisfaction with the operation of the Geneva Convention in the South African War, Red Cross workers were technically no longer to be deemed neutral, but rather "respected and protected" on the same terms as the regular army medical services (though, of course, this doesn't mean that this translated into how Red Cross workers were viewed in practice, with images of neutral "angels of mercy" perennially popular). The failures in organisation which, in the South African War, had led to a criticism of the army medical services and the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) had resulted in the reconstitution of the BRCS as a responsive, trained, and drilled adjunct to the new territorial army and the development of a form of triage by which the most severely wounded were transported from casualty clearing stations to base hospitals. During the course of the Great War, thousands of civilians volunteered – the majority of them women – as temporary staff (predominantly nurses known as Voluntary Aid Detachments or VADs). While there were qualms from within the Red Cross itself that the nature of the organisation had changed from being simply responsive to calls for assistance to being a crucial cog in medico-military provision, in many ways the system established by the reformed BRCS in the years preceding the war was successful in providing an efficient reserve of voluntary medical resources funded through, and largely staffed by, civilian donations and (often unpaid) labour throughout 1914-1918. The BRCS also assisted Belgian refugees – a first step towards a more diffuse sense of national service, which continued in their decision (not unanimous) to expand their remit to cover peacetime domestic welfare work and join the new American-led League of Red Cross Societies (founded 1919) in overseas public health programmes. The Great War also saw the participation of Red Cross Societies in the colonies, such as India and South Africa, where they had been established as branches of the BRCS.

The Great War in Britain also saw the participation of a number of civilian relief ventures established by self-consciously progressive liberal activist and Quaker circles. These had a history of providing relief in situations which would both help alleviate and publicise acts of state tyranny. Traditionally, much of this concern had been directed at exposing persecution of Christian groups in the Ottoman Empire, where relief was coupled with a campaign for their greater international oversight and political autonomy. In the South African War, many within these circles accused the British government of similar tyranny over the internment of Boer civilians in concentration camps. In 1914, these groups fractured, failing to agree on the lessons of this earlier war. Some who had protested the British government's actions in the South African War felt that objection to "Prussian tyranny"

overruled objection to British entry into the war, and that early arbitration of the kind they had advocated in 1899-1902 was futile. The fate of "poor little Belgium" became their watchword, but also, crucially, that of the British government, and here, following Alan Lester,[17] I think we can detect a key moment in the emergence into mainstream foreign policy of a humanitarian governmentality, (which did not, of course, exclude the use of violence or unprecedented interventions such as the incarceration of civilian "enemy aliens"). This is a way of looking at the politics of humanitarianism, and its paradoxes, which goes beyond an analysis of the collaboration of lobby groups, or the tarnishing of "non-political" ideals through association with political imperatives, for as Lester notes, "humanitarian dispositions and rationalities extended to those exercising governance as well as those seeking to influence them".[18]

For others in pre-war "progressive" circles, the primary lesson of the South African War was that the brunt of war fell disproportionately on civilians (particularly women and children), thus it was imperative to stop the war immediately and quell the corrupting war spirit. In this context, relief work become an important way of enacting international friendship. Many activists of this stripe had by now shifted their political allegiance from the Liberal Party to the Independent Labour Party (ILP), Union of Democratic Control, and the Women's League for Peace and Freedom. Some within these circles undertook important work with civilians in allied Europe, such as the Quaker Hilda Clark (1881-1955), who helped establish a maternity hospital in France, or for interned "enemy aliens" in Britain, and Belgian refugees in the UK and Holland. But for many, the most significant statement of their beliefs came after the war in their work of reconciliation, feeding and clothing "enemy" civilians in the countries of the Central Powers; these included the founder of the SCF, Dorothy Buxton (1881-1963), and her sister, Eglantyne Jebb (1876-1928).

I think that this work by civilians and for civilians was significant, and not simply in terms of its extended scope and scale. Tammy Proctor argues that the Great War solidified the concepts of civilian and combatant in ways that would set the pattern for all future conflicts.[19] I would agree, and suggest that humanitarian ideologies, languages, and practices were key to this, and in this way the events of the Great War were not simply significant for their impact on modern humanitarianism, but also modern humanitarianism was important to how we conceptualise this first "total" war, and in particular the distinction created between "home fronts" and "fighting fronts". Before the First World War, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had overseen protocols for the explicit amelioration and protection of the wounded combatant, in doing so helping to construct the boundary between soldier and civilian. During the war, the ICRC advocated for civilian internees to be afforded the international protection of POWs. As Matthew Stibbe has shown, the ICRC began to accord itself a certain expertise in camp inspection (and turned itself into a trusted intermediary with privileged access to these camps, whilst also negotiating how and when to speak out against the very fact of civilian internment).[20] But there existed no similar framework for civilian protection and relief outside of the camps. Aid for these civilians (many of them refugees) and their classification in the humanitarian imagination as worthy subjects of relief was gendered in important ways. On the one hand, the protection of Allied civilians – particularly women and children – was portrayed as a

justification for war and a spur to enlistment and voluntary endeavour. On the other, for those in the early decades of the 20th century who put forward a humanitarian critique of militarism through a pioneering documentation of domestic suffering and the gendered effects of state violence, the civilian (more particularly the woman and child, and the "*enemy*" woman and child) was rendered the emblematic innocent of war in both the South African War and First World Wars. But as Tammy Proctor shows, this was also, in many ways, a distinction that was perpetually blurred: civilians, of course, aided war-making, and, as Alan Kramer has argued, in the First World War, the "enemy civilian" increasingly became "targets of war policy" and even "legitimate objects of violence".[21] It is interesting to speculate about whether it was women's greater participation in the First World War, often in fact as aid workers (for example, those German Red Cross nurses accused in British propaganda posters of denying water to British wounded) which led to the category of "innocent civilian" becoming more firmly tied to the child in the publicity of organisations such as SCF after the war.

Here, in this expansive work for civilians and especially "enemy" civilians – very deliberately differentiated from combatants – and in the tightening of an association between relief for civilians and pacifism – was something which I think distinguished humanitarianism in the Great War. For some in "progressive" circles, the objection was now not simply political oppression, but war itself, which required welfare, education, open diplomacy, and co-operation at every level if it was to be thwarted. For Quakers, this humanitarian pacifist mission became a central part of their corporate identity following the war, and was arguably constitutive of, as much as borne of, their theological transformations in this period. For organisations such as SCF (with its strong links to the British Quakers), this was also an important part of its identity and growing international remit.

It was in this context of post-war institutional ambition and internationalisation, but falling donations following the end of intervention in Russia, that the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was proposed, providing the international SCF movement with a new *raison d'être*. This was sponsored by the MacDonald government (the first Labour government), significant when one thinks of the Buxtons' links to the ILP and of Ramsay MacDonald's (1866-1937) own activism following the South African War and his anti-war stance during the Great War. It is significant, too, perhaps, for how these "rights" were framed in the form of a child's social contract, reminiscent of the visions of childhood first put forward in the early years of the ILP by Margaret Macmillan (1860-1931) and other activists, some of whom would go on to be trenchant supporters of the SCF. But rather than follow Cabanes and see these as an early manifestation of human rights drawn from the practices of Great War-era humanitarianism, I think that the Declaration of the Rights of the Child ought to be viewed as the iteration of a *right to intervention* by an organisation seeking its own mandate in an era when the very possibility of humanitarian action was shrinking in proportion to its funds (in this I differ from Little and Piller here, and agree with Watenpaugh in arguing for a distinction between paternalistic evocations of a brotherhood of humanity in this era, and a later generation's assertion of individuated rights, starting in the late 1930s).

It is also instructive to recall the role of colonial nationalists such as Jan Smuts (1870-1950) in the early work of the SCF (and others such as Mrs Steyn, wife of the former president of the Orange Free State, who contributed monies to school feedings schemes in Germany after the war), for here, once again, networks from the days of the South African War were revitalised. Smuts at this time was also taking a prominent role in drafting the covenant of the League of Nations and articulating the new mandated territories as "sacred trusts". If, as Kevin Grant argues, Britain was never "decisively prominent" nor even particularly adept at mastering internationalism,[22] we need to pay attention to the nimbleness with which South Africa (and other emergent nations) were able to model this new international order of mandates, International Labour Office protocols, and "child rights" in the image of their own, racially-bound notion of white political supremacy, grounded on the presumed universality of social and scientific thought. The transnational and imperial networks through which international activism and humanitarian campaigns were pursued have been examined by Daniel Laqua and Frank Trentmann and are certainly ripe for future research.[23] Those studies by Joëlle Droux, Jasmien Van Daele, and Amalia Ribi, which elucidate the relationship between cosmopolitan humanitarian activists, nongovernmental organisations, and the foundation of the League of Nations and the International Labour Office suggest a particularly pertinent approach: their recent work has focused on the compromises, debates, and mechanics of influence that occurred "upsteam" of the issuing of new international laws and covenants, often involving networks and pressure groups which pre-dated the new international regime in Geneva.[24]

This work for civilians generated new forms of humanitarian knowledge and technologies of humanitarian relief work, to which I might point to "humanitarianism for the under-5s", starting with midwifery in emergency and war situations (such as the maternity hospital run by Hilda Clark in France), and the greater understanding of paediatric care in war and famine, for instance the application of new scientific knowledge in nutrition by the Hoover relief administration and the SCF (for example, their adoption of the feeding schemes devised by Professor Clemens von Pirquet (1874-1929) for malnourished children in Vienna). I'd also highlight the specialist knowledge that derived from internment camps, including the ICRC's regime of inspection and expertise, and the recognition of psychiatric disorders labelled as "barbed wire disease" and "refugee apathy". In response, we also see the utilisation of occupational therapy, particularly crafts, and with it the development of a certain homespun humanitarian aesthetic of "indigenous" handiwork (still sold in Oxfam shops!), but which also became part-therapeutic and educational projects designed to preserve national identity (particularly where the very question of statehood was in question – see Watenpaugh on the relief of Armenians in the Middle East on this point).

Attempting to uncover some of these humanitarian relationships, and considering what a "history of humanitarianism" from below might look like, seems like a fruitful next step. Indeed, there are a growing number of fascinating microhistories of specific sites and interventions that are enriching our understanding of humanitarianism in the era of the Great War – the authors conscious of historians' problematising of institutional histories and grand narratives, and aware of the dangers of replicating the power dynamics inherent in humanitarianism by privileging donors and their moral dilemmas

over the reception, meaning, and legacy of aid for those who received it. Yet the history of humanitarianism, unlike, say, the history of the Great War itself, is a relatively new field, and we so far lack large-scale transnational histories (we lack even a history of the ICRC during the war years, as Francesca Piana notes). We are, then, in the process of mapping new fields, with tools that we constantly question, and archives which are largely uncharted (and these, of course, an institutional record only). The challenge is to locate the field of action without recourse to categorical turning points, or a simplistic quest for origins, to reflect upon the role of history in humanitarian practice and authority, to acknowledge the relevance of a multi-levelled history of the local, national, imperial, and international, and to think about the interaction of politics and humanitarianism, not simply in terms of lobbying by external activists, or the corruption of an ideal, but in terms also of "humanitarian governance". Tracing some of these connections and practices and placing them into the context of wider networks and concerns involves the sort of transnational history that can also help us reappraise our knowledge and conceptualisation of the First World War – particularly the divide between home fronts and fighting fronts, civilians and combatants, and the increasingly important place of the "enemy civilian" in the humanitarian imagination – a history which, as Jay Winter has observed, has until recently remained stubbornly national in its focus.[25]

Branden Little

Humanitarian Leaders and their Supporting Structures

It is fair to say that historians know more about a select band of leading personalities associated with humanitarian relief in the First World War than they do about the underlying systems and structures that animated the endeavours these leaders directed. Biographies of humanitarian "celebrities" often anthropomorphise leaders *as their organisations or the movements they inspired*. Thus, Henri Dunant (1828-1910) is widely credited as the singular inspiration for the Red Cross movement in the mid-19th century, and Edmund D. Morel (1873-1924) is lionised for saving the Congolese from further cruelties during the *fin de siècle*. In the First World War, Herbert C. Hoover (1874-1964), as the chairman of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, remains the *sine qua non* figure for saving Belgians from starvation. Likewise, through his association with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Gustave Ador (1845-1928) is praised for constructing the International Prisoners of War Agency, which helped millions of soldiers survive captivity. At war's end, Save the Children and its ongoing efforts to enhance child welfare are acknowledged as the brainchild of Eglantyne Jebb. And Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1922 for pioneering the mass resettlement of persons displaced by the war. Unusually strong personalities and unlikely paths to becoming "humanitarians" are common features of their collective biography.

No humanitarian leader functioned without a base of support. A densely interconnected web of professional and social associations constituted the indispensable superstructure that elevated figureheads such as Hoover and Nansen to positions of prominence. Fervently loyal deputies often served as a secretariat that managed an army of volunteers. The deputies eschewed personal glory

and intentionally cultivated the image of their leader as a heroic life-saver amid the world's greatest cataclysm. Following their direction, international networks of supporters performed essential services which breathed life into large-scale relief operations. Many volunteers laboured without compensation because the organisations they represented encouraged personal sacrifices and routinely lacked sufficient resources to hire permanent staff. Humanitarian societies relied on voluntarism (sometimes coercive) in lieu of conscription. A vast machinery coordinated their operations, which often stretched internationally and across militarised borders.

The mobilisation and management of a global humanitarian program necessitated the development of administrative systems to orchestrate diplomatic, financial, public, and other relations. National Red Cross societies, for instance, created elaborate structures with an executive headquarters, regional divisions, local committees, and expeditionary teams of surgeons, nurses, and other health and rehabilitation experts. Similarly, Belgian relief committees flourished across the Anglophone world and funnelled money, foodstuffs, and clothing to hundreds of thousands of Belgian refugees and soldiers, and to the millions of Belgians that endured Germany's occupation of their country. National and local committees followed the detailed guidelines established by the international commissions authorised to undertake work in the affected countries.

In many countries across the world – whether belligerent, neutral, or otherwise connected to peoples at war – relief societies energetically served to mitigate distress. They were often small and uncoordinated at war's beginning. Their leaders' names were inconsequential in the grand drama of war. But very quickly, centralisation occurred, where the largest and best-connected organisations that could arrange bulk purchases of food and coordinate their delivery in war zones, for example, received critical endorsement by governments and an attentive humanitarian public. It was mostly in these larger organisations that prominent figureheads emerged. Popularly and politically, Hoover and Nansen ascended the ranks of war leaders and were widely considered humanitarian statesmen. This trend toward mass humanitarian aid, moreover, mirrored the industrialisation of warfare. The density of relief committees and their global reach ensured that virtually no metropolis or minor village was disconnected from acts to alleviate suffering produced by war. Total war inspired extraordinary humanitarian countermeasures.

"Perfecting the machinery" became a popular industrial-age phrase for humanitarians of the First World War. Progressives in the North Atlantic world who esteemed efficiency and correlated sophistication with enhancing operational performance regularly used this phrase. It also represented an aspirational goal to achieve perfection in a man-made organisation. Their goals: counteract the destruction of war and discover remedies for humanity's depravity. Relief societies that embraced new managerial practices and administrative designs earned the esteem of governments, donors, and aid recipients. From Switzerland, the ICRC devised an elaborate information system for cataloguing prisoners of war, notifying governments and families of their status, and facilitating the transmission of correspondence and relief parcels for detainees. Further east in typhus-ravaged Serbia, the International Serbian Sanitary Commission demonstrated the urgent imperative to cultivate medical expertise in epidemiology. Relief agencies soon formulated stringent professional

standards for physicians and nurses; program administrators, international accountants, lawyers, nutritionists, agronomists, social workers, and child welfare specialists also established roles as humanitarian professionals. Relief societies that remained immersed in traditional expressions of sentimental care for the downtrodden and could not demonstrate their performance in press releases, motion-picture films, newsletters, pamphlets, and statistically rich and graphically illustrated annual reports lost the confidence of governments and societies alike. Just as the conflict inspired innovations in the art and science of warfare, humanitarianism underwent a seismic transformation in the scope and scale of its activities.

Humanitarian Campaigning to Remedy Problems of Total War

The ascension of certain individuals to humanitarian celebrity resulted from their addressing one or more of the major categories of suffering produced by war. Hoover, Jebb, Ador, and Nansen acquired a preeminent reputation by trailblazing into new fields of humanitarian endeavour.

Military conscription of agricultural workers, battlefield destruction, and naval blockade created food scarcity across Europe. These forces disrupted peacetime markets in which food, fodder, and fertiliser had flowed without difficulty across borders. In Belgium, the danger of famine was first felt in 1914. Hoover's successful campaign to feed Belgians trapped by German occupation forces brought him lasting acclaim. Subsequently, Jebb christened Save the Children, and thereby exposed the ongoing plight of peoples in blockaded lands even after the war ostensibly concluded in 1918.

Populations trapped by war inspired another major humanitarian initiative. The unanticipated explosion of mass imprisonment surprised combatants who were ill-prepared to meet the needs of injured prisoners or otherwise feed captives. Survival in prison camps, therefore, frequently depended on the external provision of goods by relief societies. Ador's notoriety resulted from pivoting the ICRC, which defended humanitarian principles, to championing the humane treatment of imprisoned soldiers. Among its many actions to attenuate the harshness of captivity, the ICRC encouraged the donation of goods to prisoners, coordinated their delivery, and discouraged pilferage by captors.

Whereas captivity defined the war experience for more than seven million Belgian civilians and nearly ten million soldiers, the war also forcibly uprooted an estimated fifteen million people from their homes. The need for enhanced security (to prevent espionage and sabotage) had inspired the adoption of passports, border controls, and surveillance systems. These institutionalised measures prevented many refugees who lacked either the documentation or adequate resources to undertake their journey home, or to find new homelands where acute persecution would cease. Displaced persons exposed the incapacity of individual nation states to resolve this ongoing dilemma of resettlement long after the war formally ended. Acting at the behest of the League of Nations, Nansen's mostly successful crusade to aid displaced persons thus reflected another herculean undertaking.

Collectively, these fields of humanitarian activity – feeding the hungry, caring for children and prisoners, and facilitating the resettlement of displaced peoples – arose from the vastness of a cataclysm that engulfed much of Europe, Soviet Russia, and the Middle East. The war further extended far beyond into parts of Africa and Asia. Millions of soldiers and civilians would have surely died without humanitarian intervention. In addition to emergency life-sustaining services rendered, enduring principles were also forged during this war by which future humanitarian organisations conceived their responsibilities and organised relief services. International relief increasingly fell under the direction of permanent, large agencies – international, governmental, and nongovernmental. In the era of the First World War, moreover, humanitarian leaders articulated a nascent human rights regime based on an individual's entitlements to food, humane treatment, and to dwell in a safe home. Nevertheless, even innovative and ably led relief societies struggled to counteract the vicious forces unleashed by industrialised killing.

Elisabeth Piller

The era of the Great War unleashed human suffering on a nearly unprecedented scale. Millions of combatants and civilians were killed, wounded, imprisoned, displaced, widowed, and orphaned. Across Europe and the Middle East, vast numbers of men, women, and children were cold, sick, hungry, and in despair. In response to total war's myriad forms of suffering, the humanitarian field of action broadened rapidly. Key humanitarian actors like the Red Cross societies greatly expanded their care for wounded combatants, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) addressed the new humanitarian challenges posed by hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war.[26] In addition, humanitarians began to focus increasingly on the civilian victims of war. Old and new, public and private, secular and religious organisations committed themselves to alleviating food shortages in occupied Belgium, mitigating the complex consequences of the Armenian genocide, and resettling a wave of refugees. The ever-more encompassing *forces of destruction,* as Michael Barnett has noted, evoked ever more encompassing *forces of humanitarianism.*[27]

When trying to locate the humanitarian field of action, it is important to remember the sheer scope of this field in the era of the Great War. Just like the crises it addressed, humanitarian responses transcended European battlefields, as well as the common military/political periodisation of 1914-1918.

For one, the scope of humanitarian action in the era of the Great War was truly global. From Boise, Idaho to Blumenau, Brazil to Balberra, Australia, people mobilised themselves to alleviate the war's innumerable forms of suffering. While a considerable part of relief work was organised through ethnic diasporas, a number of humanitarian causes – such as the relief of occupied Belgium – elicited worldwide compassion among groups of people who had no direct connection to this country and might, indeed, have struggled to locate it on a European map. This truly global reach of humanitarian action was owed in part to the professionalised publicity of humanitarian campaigns. Among the many practices and techniques of administrating relief which the war revolutionised, humanitarian

publicity was certainly not least. Representing the culmination of longer-standing trends, the era of the Great War witnessed the increasingly savvy, professional use of humanitarian imagery and story-telling in order to render the suffering of distant others urgent and actionable to audiences worldwide.[28] While Great War humanitarians certainly did not pioneer images of, say, innocent children suffering or the use of humanitarian photography, the war broadened the scope and skill of their public communication. Organisations like the Commission for the Relief in Belgium maintained press offices in several countries, while a number of fundraising campaigns even partnered with professional public relations companies to champion their cause as widely and effectively as possible. The introduction of "invisible guest" dinners and child sponsorship programmes went a long way toward making even large-scale humanitarian assistance personally meaningful to donors. In this way, the suffering of the Great War helped entrench iconographies, languages, and practices of humanitarian action which have remained with us ever since. No less importantly, humanitarian pursuits offered an attentive global audience a salient opportunity to partake in an otherwise distant war. Indeed, outside of actual military service, humanitarian action provided perhaps the most important way through which people around the world actively involved themselves in the Great War.

Importantly, too, this global humanitarian mobilisation did not end with the peace treaties. On the contrary, humanitarian activity continued, and in many respects peaked, in the aftermath of the war. Not only did "hunger know no armistice" (as Near East Relief remarked in 1919), but the crumbling of empires, the re-drawing of maps, and the acrimonious transition from war to peace economies only increased civilian suffering. The founding of major humanitarian organisations like the American Relief Administration (1919) and Save the Children (1919) and the appointment of a High Commissioner for Refugees by the League of Nations (1921) exemplify the seminal broadening of the humanitarian field *after* much of the fighting was over. Bruno Cabanes has even located the "origins of humanitarianism" in this period.[29]

It is precisely this transcendence of the war's common geographical and temporal boundaries that makes humanitarianism so rewarding a subject for the student of the First World War. It offers a unique opportunity to study the global ramifications of what has long been seen as predominantly European event and to follow them into the 1920s. In this way, the study of the humanitarian field of action, its actors, agendas, and challenges seems an ideal field in which to test and refine recent conceptual frameworks, like that of the geographically and chronologically more extensive "Greater War".[30]

While this global, multifaceted nature of the humanitarian field of action makes it a fascinating topic of study, it also renders it more difficult to locate truly representative patterns. It is partly for this reason that, as Rebecca Gill has noted, when it comes to the significance of humanitarianism in the First World War, the jury is still out. Generally speaking, I would agree with Watenpaugh and others that the era of the Great War was a milestone in the development of a "modern humanitarianism", with humanitarian groups becoming more bureaucratic, secular, and professional.[31] Moreover, Bruno Cabanes makes a convincing case that the aftermath of the Great War constituted a major step

towards the codification of human rights. For the first time, humanitarians began not only to present war sufferers as deserving victims of public charity, but also to articulate the idea that these sufferers were fundamentally entitled to the food, care, and shelter they received.[32] Still, it is important to caution against sweeping statements and broad generalisations. The era of the Great War is best characterised as a *transitionary period*, when *traditional* and *modern* humanitarian actors, techniques, and concepts stood side by side. Just as a true codification of human rights was still decades out, we should be careful not to overstate the "modern" nature of humanitarianism at the time. The (archivally convenient) study of large humanitarian organisations ought not to blind us to the traditional, parochial nature of much international charity. The move from faith-based to secular humanitarianism, for example, must not be overstressed because even the most modern, efficient, non-sectarian American endeavours continued to draw heavily on faith-based funds and rhetoric. In the same vain, the war's prominent humanitarians, whom Branden Little points to, included both "managerial types" like Herbert Hoover and embodiments of personal compassion like Swedish nurse Elsa Brändström (1888-1948) - also known as the "Angel of Siberia". It is this confluence of traditional and modern elements that makes for the unique promise and challenges of studying humanitarianism in the era of the Great War.

What all forms of international humanitarianism had in common, however, was their entanglement in the politics and geopolitics of the time. Although humanitarians liked to portray their work as serving "purely humanitarian" objectives, their relationship with governments and broader political agendas was far more complex. Particularly with regard to the United States, we have a number of excellent studies on the larger, broadly political significance of humanitarianism. As scholars have shown, humanitarian engagement overseas shaped American notions of the war and their own role in it long before and long after they were officially part of it.[33] Especially in the aftermath of the war, American humanitarian groups bolstered US foreign policy. Semi-public organisations like the American Relief Administration served as chosen instruments for policies that the government officially shied away from. By providing food, clothing, and shelter to Eastern and Central Europeans, American humanitarian groups were part of an informal effort to stabilise Europe against both reactionary militarism and Bolshevist unrest. What is more, even the most independent of American humanitarian organisations usually conceived of their assistance as part of an *American* peace-building endeavour. Herbert Hoover, for example, categorically refused to pool American resources with other countries because – for the sake of both the American image abroad and of donors at home – US assistance had to be visibly American.[34] This policy, indeed, raised US prestige, its perceived efficiency, and its moral capital, thereby facilitating its commercial expansion in Europe in the 1920s.[35] Wittingly or not, humanitarian action was deeply embedded in the politics of the time.

Concluding Remarks on Future Research

In this context, I would like to emphasise two broader fields that deserve more scholarly attention.

The first is the complex relationship between the national background of humanitarian actors and the

international, universal notions of humanitarianism. Despite pioneering work by Heather Jones and John Hutchinson, we know still comparatively little about the tensions between the international Red Cross movement and the national and nationalist Red Cross societies.[36] Moreover, we ought to know more about how humanitarian action and rhetoric fostered or challenged wartime alliances. How did concrete humanitarian cooperation foster commonalities among the different allied nations? And how did joint humanitarian projects help forge moral and emotional alliances with non-allies? Looking back, many Americans, for example, felt that their humanitarian campaigns on behalf of Armenians and Belgians had presaged their entry on the side of the Allies. Likewise, we ought to know more about how humanitarian sentiment could *challenge* wartime alliances. For example, German humanitarians faced the delicate moral and political dilemma of reconciling their sympathy with suffering Armenians with the larger German commitment to its Ottoman ally. Moreover, I think there could be fruitful comparative and/or transnational studies on the humanitarianism of the neutrals. With the exception of the United States, they have attracted all too limited attention. In general, the ways in which all sides sought to wield the *moral capital* of humanitarianism deserves systematic research. For example, we still lack a detailed study of the early years of the International League of Red Cross Societies, which was founded in 1919, partly to exclude the former Central Powers from humanitarian cooperation and thus to continue inter-Allied leadership in what had then emerged as a prestigious policy field. Such a study might offer a rewarding test case to explore the relationship between humanitarianism and power politics in the era of the Great War.

Finally, we know relatively little about the attitudes and agendas of individual and national *recipients* of humanitarian aid. Rather than taking public proclamations of gratitude at face value, we should critically investigate their own discrete ambitions. Germany, for example, embraced post-war American child aid as an opportunity to project a politically expedient victim status to an otherwise disinterested and hostile American public.[37] Moreover, we should take seriously the social psychology of aid and its implication for donor-recipient relations, on an individual *and* international level. There is, for instance, evidence that against the backdrop of American positions on European war debt, American post-war relief – for all the good it did – also caused considerable resentment. For example, as the United States insisted on full repayment of French war debts, its humanitarian assistance to French children inspired not just gratitude, but quite considerable ill-will at having to accept American "alms". For all their couching in terms of international goodwill, donor-recipient relations are built on a pronounced power asymmetry, whose tensions and complications deserve further critical attention.

Rebecca Gill is a senior lecturer in Modern History at the University of Huddersfield. She is the author of *Calculating Compassion in War: Humanity and Relief, Britain 1870-1914* (Manchester University Press, 2013) which looks at the origins of British humanitarian organisations such as the British Red Cross Society, and the Friends' War Victims Relief Committee. She is now working on a project on Emily Hobhouse's relief and reconstruction work in the aftermath of war in South Africa and Europe (www.emilyhobhouselettersproject.wordpress.com).

Branden Little is an Associate Professor of History at Weber State University in the United States. He specializes on humanitarian interventions in the era of the First World War. Little earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Berkeley (2009). Foremost among his relevant publications is "An Explosion of New Endeavours: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era," in First World War Studies (2014). He has published four articles in *1914-1818-online*, and essays on the Junior Red Cross, the American evacuation of Europe in 1914, and Belgian relief networks. He also edited a special issue of First World War Studies titled "Humanitarianism in the Era of the First World War" (2014).

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Notes

1. ↑ See Barnett, Michael: Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism, Ithaca 2011; Rodogno, Davide / Vogel, Jakob / Struck, Bernhard (eds.): Shaping the Transnational Sphere. Experts, Networks, and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s, New York 2014; Klose, Fabian: The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention. Ideas and Practices from the Nineteenth Century to the Present, Cambridge 2016; Paulmann, Johannes: Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century, Oxford 2016. See, too, the website of the Global Humanitarianism Research Academy, in collaboration with the ICRC (http://ghra.ieg-mainz.de/about). History of humanitarianism is also a core strand of the activity of the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, University of Manchester (www.hcri.ac.uk).

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12. ↑ Little, An Explosion of New Endeavours 2014, pp. 2; 4.

13. ↑ Paulmann, Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid 2016, p. 3.

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