The "New Humanitarian" Ethos in Britain : 1870-1918 [1]

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Introduction

Looking at the growth of humanitarian organisations in France and Britain, two different stories emerge. While there are some points of correspondence, the pronounced differences in the origins and ethos of French and British agencies suggests that claims to universality and internationalism within the humanitarian community require closer examination. Indeed, any study of national organisations would reveal that the nature of humanitarian intervention can only be understood within the context of the *particular*, whether that be a specific political, intellectual or cultural milieu. Perhaps surprisingly, then, acts of humanitarian compassion, far from timeless manifestation of human empathy, have a history. It is the purpose of this paper to sketch out the beginnings of organised humanitarian intervention in war from a British perspective. This takes us to the years 1870 – 1918, when a very particular type of humanitarian gift giving began to emerge, distinguished by its emphasis on rational intervention, neutral care and anonymity – an ethos I have labelled elsewhere as ‘calculated compassion’.[2] It is the contention here, that this ‘new humanitarian’ ethos, emerging at a time of mass warfare, rapid communication, and changing political realities, continues to inform humanitarian provision to this day. In this paper, I intend to outline the relationship between social, political and cultural context and the nature of this new humanitarian ethos, paying particular attention to the emergence of two well-known aid organisations in this period: The British Red Cross Society [BRCS] and the Save the Children Fund (UK) [SCF].[3]

Historians have paid scant attention to the origins of humanitarian intervention in Britain. The majority of existing accounts have been penned either by journalists or employees of various aid agencies. While, for the historian, these accounts leave many stones unturned, it would be unfair to criticise too harshly, after all, the ‘origins stories’ they contain were written for purposes other than academic research: either, as backdrops to critiques of present-day humanitarian practices, or as fund-raising and ‘public education’ exercises (indeed one such history had a subscription form attached to its front cover).[4] Nevertheless, within these accounts an interesting, and influential, picture emerges of the ‘pure’ origins of organised humanitarian giving in Britain, in which early aid organisations appear as strictly impartial care giving organisations, devoid of political compromise.

Within institutional histories, these unsullied origins are generally represented as the manifestation of a mature late-nineteenth century civilisation: to care for a stranger according to the sole criteria of their suffering, secularly, independently and ‘rationally’, without expectation of material reward or undue sentimentalism, signified the growth of a new era for humanity.[5] Though such institutions may have had their ups and downs, the picture that emerges is one of the consistency of the new humanitarian spirit, giving it a timeless, a-historic and self-evident quality that requires no analysis. While the nature of intervention and the particular demands of a situation may change, the essential spirit of humanitarian concern remains the same. Thus for these organisations, and the aid workers who have written about them, the socio-political context of their interventions, the particular form these interventions may take at any one time, and their theoretical underpinnings, are of incidental interest next to the story of personal quest, and the beacon of civilisation and compassion these individuals, and their agencies, represent. Indeed, for many years, humanitarian organisations in Britain deemed it unnecessary to keep archival records of their administrative practices. No doubt there were practical reasons for this, but it is also indicative of the fact that such agencies viewed the administration and organisation of their particular interventions as largely incidental, after all, they were simply the outcome of public compassion, and as such largely a-historical. By this reasoning, one cannot archive compassion. We also see this tendency to assume that humanitarian action is the (admittedly sometimes imperfect) outcome of self-evidently 'good intentions', and therefore immune from analytic probing, in the relative dearth of any theoretical enquiry into its premises – a state of affairs less evident in France. Obviously, an overly theorised or systematic approach was seen as anathema to the spirit of spontaneous responsiveness to which relief workers repeatedly subscribed.

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[1] I would like to thank the Groupe d’etude: Médecine et Guerre, for the invitation to give this paper at the University of Paris V, May 2007.

[2] Rebecca Gill, ‘Calculating compassion in war: the “new humanitarian” ethos in Britain, 1870-1918’, PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2005; Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion in War: Humanitarian Relief in Britain, 1870-1918* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming)

[3] The BRCS was originally founded as the National British Aid Society in 1870; SCF was founded in 1918.

[4] Anon., *East Lancashire Branch, British Red Cross Society, An Illustrated Account of the Work of the Branch During the First Years of the War,* Manchester, Sherrat & Hughes, 1916.

[5] For works of this type, see, for eample, S. H. Best, *The Story of the British Red Cross*, London, Cassell & Company Ltd., 1938; M. Dermot, *The British Red Cross*, London, Collins, 1944; A. K. Loyd, *An Outline of the History of the British Red Cross Society from its Foundation in 1870 to the outbreak of war in 1914*, London, [The Society], 1917; Anon., *The Origin, Object and Organisation of the British Red Cross Society*, London, [The Society], 1937

Within journalistic accounts, the emphasis placed on these pure origins is somewhat different. The most prominent example in this category is David Rieff's provocatively argued, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis.*[6] Rieff, an experienced war journalist, argues that modern humanitarian agencies, in pursuing political objectives, and at times supporting military intervention for ostensibly humanitarian ends, have compromised their founding mission to impartially aid the injured and destitute according to the sole criterion of need. Accordingly, in this reading, the clarity of purpose and shining, untarnished intentions of the first generation of humanitarian professionals, has been subsequently obscured by damaging associations with the worlds of politics and the media, resulting in a loss of direction. *A Bed for the Night* is thus a shot across the bows: a call for the humanitarian community to rediscover their original sense of mission.

A similar narrative arc, which traces the sullying of initially wholesome intentions through gradual politicisation, can be found in the work of John Hutchinson, one of the only academic historians of the Red Cross. Hutchinson's *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, a thoroughly researched history of the International Committee of the Red Cross and national Red Cross societies, contends that these agencies lost sight of their founding principles of neutrality and independence through an ever closer relationship with the medico-military planning of national governments on the eve of the First World War.[7]

It can be surmised therefore that existing accounts of the history of humanitarian agencies have been guilty of undue present-mindedness on the one hand, and on the other, a tendency to sanctify the origins of organised humanitarian action, rendering them above analytic inquiry, and identifying them, rather idealistically, with a collective step forward for humanity.

It needs to be said that this paper is not about the business of 'exposing' nefarious or corrupt origins: it not the author's intention to write a 'secret history' of humanitarian scandal; rather, the purpose of this paper is to suggest that the foundations of modern humanitarian practices remain somewhat obscure, and pay historical re-examination, not least because they have shaped aid relationships throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The British Experience

In 1864 the Geneva Convention was ratified by representatives of the major Western European nations, invited to the Genevan home of the newly formed International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC]. The Convention was concerned with distinguishing between the regular and the irregular soldier and with designating medical units, their staff, and patients as 'neutral' (and thus immune from military attack). In doing so, the Convention sanctioned the uniformed soldier as the only legal combatant in wartime, and, for the first time, created a series of war crimes centred on illegal acts of violence in combat situations (specifically by, and upon, those now deemed to have non-combatant or neutral status). The Convention also sanctioned the creation of novel organisations comprising civilian volunteers equipped to transport and provide emergency treatment for wounded soldiers. These would be organised at national level, and would supplement, rather than replace, official medico-military institutions, though both would now be distinguishable by a new symbol: that of a red cross on a white background. The history of the Geneva Convention and the ICRC has received attention elsewhere, suffice to say here that those in attendance, generally military figures, military-medical specialists, or politicians with responsibilities for military matters, saw the benefit of internationally agreed standards and procedures for the evacuation and care of the wounded.[8] In some countries, such as Germany, the state was quick to see the potential of a national body of trained volunteers, and set to work creating a German Red Cross Society. Though not, perhaps, the intention of its Swiss sponsors, the Genevan Convention's emphasis on the neutrality of civilian Red Cross workers quickly took on a distinct meaning. As it was now illegal to fire upon ambulances or their personnel, volunteers and their patients would be protected from wartime attack, in other words, in combat, they operated in newly created 'neutral zones'. However, this designated neutral status was not interpreted to mean that national Red Cross organisations or their staff need be impartial in the aiding of the wounded of both sides, nor that they need be independent from the state.[9] Today the meaning of neutrality in this context has changed: individual Red Cross organisations stress their political independence, their autonomy from individual states – and international governmental bodies – and their commitment to treating the wounded irrespective of nationality or political affiliation. It is thus important not to confuse present-day interpretations of humanitarian neutrality – or the founding sentiments of the ICRC – with the reality of humanitarian practices on the ground in this earlier period.

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[6] David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, London, Vintage, 2002.

[7] John Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, Oxford, Westview Press, 1996.

The British Government, in contrast, did not actively pursue the idea of civilian volunteers. Only later, after the debacle in South Africa (1899-1901) rendered the failings of British medico-military planning obvious, and when the success of other nations' Red Cross Societies had become apparent, did the British Government intervene directly. By this time, however, a respected British Red Cross Society [BRCS] was already in existence, headed by Sir Robert Loyd-Lindsay, a well-known hero of the Crimea, and the beneficiary, in his role as Chairman of the BRCS, of notable public generosity from the Franco-Prussian War onwards. This BRCS prided itself on its independence from the government, indeed, for the hierarchy of the organisation, its credibility rested on its civil status. Once again, however, it would be incorrect to interpret the BRCS's stated neutrality as a commitment to the impartial treatment of wounded on both sides of a conflict, should Britain be at war; nor did it mean that the BRCS was politically impartial. On the contrary, its outlook was distinctly coloured by its hierarchies' associations with both the Conservative Party and the military establishment.[10] Indeed, Loyd-Lindsay was a Conservative MP, and sought to use his Red Cross work – particularly the platform it gave him to intervene in international disputes – to successfully wrangle promotion to the Foreign Office.[11]

It becomes evident, therefore, that the foundation of national Red Cross organisations cannot be told straightforwardly as part of the story of the ICRC. The BRCS though nominally part of the international Red Cross movement, did not identify strongly with the Genevan organisation, failing, for instance, to send a representative to its international conferences. Locating a spirit of international collaboration and commitment to impartial action independent of the nation states proves elusive for this period. Any call for Red Cross agencies to re-discover their politically neutral and impartial origins thus rests on a rather romantic image of their foundation.

The ICRC then, did not pass down to national agencies a set of procedures and practices, a ready-made institutional framework, nor a clearly defined role model for the Red Cross volunteer. It is the contention of this paper that, between the years 1870 and 1918, it is possible to discern in Britain the emergence of a distinct humanitarian ethos and an institutional *raison d'etat* that made little reference to the Geneva Convention. If this ethos was not passed down from a higher authority, where, precisely, did its origins lay? Firstly, it is necessary to relate this development to the British response to international events, particularly the changing nature of warfare in this period. This is not to say that national Red Cross agencies throughout Europe did not share some features, but rather to argue that their foundations are less the result of a shared spirit of collective endeavour, and more the outcome of a correspondence of national concerns in this period. Nevertheless, it is important to note that individual Red Cross societies had their own relationship to the ICRC, and that shared concerns refracted differently within each nation, giving each agency a unique flavour. It is also necessary to note that the Red Cross was not the only organisation involved in the distribution of voluntary aid to the wounded in war. Indeed, the 1870-1918 period saw a surge of voluntary activity in wartime. While there was a long history of gift giving in war (generally to one's own, or a favoured, side), these post-1870 agencies can be distinguished by a shared ethos, encompassing both a rationale of action and distinctly novel, semi-professional, relief practices. Once again, we need to de-centre our analysis of modern humanitarian relief, and avoid a preoccupation with the ICRC in Geneva.

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[8] Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*; Caroline Moorhead, *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the history of the Red Cross*, Harper-Collins, London, 1998; Angela Bennett, *The Geneva Convention: The Hidden Origins of the Red Cross*, Sutton Publishing, Gloustershire, 2005.

[9] Thus, in the Franco-Prussian War, the first major war in which national Red Cross agencies played a role, the French Red Cross aided French wounded and the Prussian Red Cross aided German wounded. The ICRC adopted a co-ordinating role, acting as an information bureau and POW exchange.

[10] From its outset, the BRCS adopted a policy by which it would aid the wounded of both sides in the event of British neutrality (as was the case in the Franco-Prussian War, the BRCS's first intervention), but would provide exclusive aid to British wounded should Britain be a belligerent.

[11] In one example, Loyd-Lindsay sought unsuccessfully to accompany the British deputation to the Berlin Conference (1878) by persuading Disraeli of his credentials in international affairs after time spent with the BRCS in the Balkans during war with the Ottoman Empire.

For the remainder of this paper, I will outline the nature of this ethos, and demonstrate its origins in the cultural formations, concerns and anxieties of late-nineteenth century Britain. It origins lay not just in the preoccupations of Loyd-Lindsay and the founders of new humanitarian agencies, but also in the aspirations, background and writings of the first generation of volunteers. Though the number of new-style aid agencies in this period was substantial, I will here limit myself to a brief discussion of only three, not least because they were the ones to become permanent institutions: the BRCS, the Save the Children (UK) [SCF] and the Quaker Friends' War Victims Relief Committee [FWVRC].

"Rational Compassion"

What, then, was so distinct, about the humanitarian practices that emerged in late-nineteenth century Britain? How did they differ from previous wartime gift giving? I argue that these interventions were set apart through the articulation of a new humanitarian ethos in this period, distinguished by a commitment to the impartial alleviation of suffering – and to make suffering the sole criterion for care. In this, the humanitarian ethos shared much with medical ethics, not surprisingly, given that most volunteers were doctors, or aspired to be professional nurses. However, as we shall see, medical ethics alone do not explain the emergence of this ethos. Aid was to be allocated according to need, not according to rank, nationality (unless Britain was at war), or the opportunity for political or religious conversion. In the sanitised, almost sanctified, ideal of the ambulance or hospital – this new 'neutral zone' on the battlefield - the volunteer responded only to the suffering of the patient, his or her responsive compassion and sensitivity elevating them above political or ideological considerations and making them ideal conduits for the public's sympathy and generosity. This notion of individual responsiveness to specific instances of suffering was important, for it signalled the volunteer had no ulterior motive, was neither operating under an ideological compulsion nor desirous of introducing systematic reform. And yet, the volunteer was not sentimental or swayed by a 'bleeding heart', on the contrary, they had an enlightened, detached sensibility able to make a rational calculation of relative need and distribute aid accordingly. It was here that new humanitarian roles and practices were in evidence, for such calculations required a system for measuring need, a set of procedures to systematise such interventions, and a degree of professionalism. Thus, we see in this period the development of administrative procedures, such as the novel use of the survey, and of humanitarian 'experts' skilled in the logistics of distribution and the computation of statistics. Here then, we have the elaboration of a novel humanitarian ethos, resting on the notion of 'rational compassion', or, as these new volunteers would often express it, 'the balance between head and heart'.

Inherent in the elaboration of this ethos are two related phenomena: firstly, the role of the humanitarian practitioner had as its corollary the role of the humanitarian subject, or recipient of impartial aid; secondly, responses to suffering require representations of suffering, and it is possible to detect the emergence of particular humanitarian narratives of suffering and response in this period. In terms of the recipients of aid, it is important to note that the emphasis placed on suffering as the sole criterion of intervention can deny the individuality of the recipient and turn them into subjects of intervention rather than partners in gift giving, thus they become, first and foremost, the wounded body or the hungry mouth. This has certain ramifications, for privileging the intentions and sensibility of the volunteer over the articulated needs of the recipient has meant that the criterion for humanitarian 'success' has often rested on a self-assessed and self-regulated sense of accountability to the donor rather than the recipient. Furthermore, the notion that the care of suffering takes place in a designated 'neutral zone' has obscured the (usually unlooked for) geo-political influence such intervention can have, for example by freeing up the military to direct resources away from medical care and thus sustain a war effort. In certain instance, the First World War, in particular, the elevation of the Red Cross hospital as a 'neutral', almost spiritual, space, deliberately obscured its lack of independence (her 'neutrality' was gendered - witness the common portrayal in fund raising posters of female Red Cross workers as angels).

Related to this first point is the second phenomenon, for it is evident, given that the response to suffering is at the heart of this ethos that any intervention without clear instances of suffering would be invalid, and render the volunteer open to suspicion. To this end, the representation of suffering is crucial: not only do humanitarian agencies respond to representations of suffering made in the media, or by other parties, agencies are also actively engaged in the representation of suffering themselves, both to legitimate their interventions and to appeal for funds. The representation of suffering often follows a pattern, starting with a panoramic overview – usually in statistical, or possibly visual, form – before giving way to piquant stories of intimate suffering as experienced by an individual or perhaps family group. Often these small-scale stories will centre on the young, infirm, old, or female. Certainly, the representation of suffering corresponds with the evaluation of need: some are more 'worthy' of attention than others. It is also easier to configure female, young or old recipients as members of the 'neutral zone' of care: it is less easy to represent men of military age, however hungry or injured, as 'neutral'.

These narratives of suffering are significant, for not only do they once again deny the recipient a voice (indeed, such a voice, that a militant female recipient who refuses her 'victim' status, for instance, could unstable the humanitarian project), but they also condition the selective nature of humanitarian aid. Who is perceived as a 'worthy' beneficiary, and receives what and when, is often linked less to an impartial criterion of suffering, and more to the 'successful' representation of such suffering – and this is reliant on a number of outside factors. These include the access of the media, the political/ cultural sympathies of volunteers and donors, racial prejudices (such as which races 'feel' pain more acutely, and which lack a civilised sensitivity to pain), and wider geo-political factors that bring certain groups to attention over others.

This is significant for another reason: the rather limited scholarship on humanitarian narratives has tended to assume that volunteers responded to representations of suffering located in external sources, such as the media, or public inquiries.[12] It would follow therefore, that while humanitarian workers may respond to selective representations of suffering, but they do not themselves engage in a 'selection process' – i.e. they are essentially 'responsive' to, rather than 'active' in, the identification of 'worthy' recipients. Yet, it is often the case that humanitarian practitioners, while seeking to position themselves as responding to suffering, will also be actively engaged in the representation of this suffering through the identification of 'humanitarian crises'. Thus, for example, humanitarian volunteers in the Balkans during the late nineteenth-century wars with the Ottoman Empire not only responded to media reports of suffering, but also sought to represent this suffering as eligible for relief to a readership at home (either in letters to influential patrons, supporters or the press, or through journalism and literature). In certain cases then, humanitarian workers often 'respond' to incidents of suffering they themselves have selected and represented. Suffering becomes not only the ends of, and criterion of, humanitarian intervention but also its means. Humanitarian narratives of suffering thus emerge in tandem with the new humanitarian practices of the late-nineteenth century – such practices do not emerge later, as a straightforward, unmediated 'response' to the horrors of war, despite the self-presentations of humanitarian volunteers. Humanitarian practitioners often, therefore, create their own specific causes out of the welter of global pain. It is in researching *whose* suffering is thus represented and deemed 'worthy' at any one point in time that the emergence of the humanitarian ethos is most clearly situated in the preoccupations, intellectual traditions, political affiliations of its practitioners. Thus if aid is 'neutral' at the point of giving, it is far from 'neutral' in the particular selective practices engaged in prior to intervention. Any notion that modern humanitarian practices were the outcome of a transcendental and international 'spirit' of civilised impartiality responding to 'worthy' suffering wherever it was known to occur, in which the particular incidents of intervention are largely incidental, therefore rings false.

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[12] Thomas Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative', Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

So, if we cannot look to Geneva for the origins of a transcendental spirit of civilised concern, where did the new humanitarian ethos in Britain originate? Should we assume that it was enunciated by the founders of new humanitarian organisations, such as the BRCS and SCF, at committee level, and handed down, fully realised, to their volunteers? Such an assumption would fundamentally misconceive the nature and origins of this ethos. To understand its elaboration we must look not only at the aspirations of Loyd-Lindsay and the founders of new agencies, but also to the volunteers themselves, at the context in which they gained access to the battlefield, at their aspirations, and at their self-representations in their subsequent written reflections. We must also note, that while the rationale of action enunciated by various volunteers, in a range of agencies, was often expressed in similar terms of 'rational compassion', it is also true that the specific inflection, and investment, each volunteer made in this ethos was different, and rested upon their personal and political outlook, intellectual background, and sense of purpose. It is thus necessary to place the first generation of humanitarian volunteers in the context of the social and cultural networks of ideas, institutions and people to which they belonged.

Turning, then, to these first volunteers, we need to understand the uniqueness of their position as civilian volunteers offering neutral aid on the battlefield, and some of the reactions with which they met. Given that many of these volunteers were women, we also need to be attuned to the gender-specific nature of some of these reactions – and to the responses they generated. The neutral civilian relief worker was certainly a novel presence on the battlefield; nevertheless, a range of non-military actors, including the 'battlefield tourist' and the female 'camp follower', as well as soldiers' wives, often accompanied an army on active service. More recently, the Crimean War had witnessed another civilian presence: the female nurse, famously led by Florence Nightingale (though Nightingale's nurses differed from civilian relief workers by dent of their exclusive work with the British military). Any association in the minds of the public between British Red Cross volunteers and the work of Florence Nightingale was rather more welcome than not, given her standing, though, in fact, Florence Nightingale expressed private doubts about the merits of civilian, rather than state, medical care for the military. However, a link with battlefield tourists or camp followers was most certainly un-welcome. Furthermore, the military itself feared that not only might a civilians on the battlefield 'meddle', but they would impose standards and create expectations inimical to an efficient, and if need be ruthless, fighting force. Would such people not seek root and branch reform, or impose an alien ideology on the army? It was in the context of a certain suspicion as to their purpose, therefore, that many volunteers set out to France on their first assignment as Red Cross workers.

It is thus more than incidental that so many early Red Cross workers sought to write up their experiences as memoirs. Instead, we can see these first-person testimonies as an attempt at personal accountability, a by-product of which was the carving out of a niche for the civilian volunteer on the battlefield. It is here, I would argue, in these new humanitarian narratives, that the modern humanitarian sensibility was forged, and the role of the relief worker established, rather than in the disembodied words of the Geneva Convention. So how did these pioneering relief volunteers represent their work?

Here, I have only time for a brief overview.[13] The first thing to note is that these narratives are all written in the first person, and deal with events at a personal, rather than general, level. This perspective heightens frequent claims that the author had come to relief work through a personal calling, born of a heightened sensitivity to the particular suffering of the wounded soldier, rather than any systematic desire to alleviate conditions in the military per se. This then was a matter of heartfelt conscience and a responsive empathy, rather than ideological commitment. And yet at the same time, this 'responsiveness' to the body of another was not improper or in any way sensual, but rather the product of an informed and rational sensibility able to bestow a proportional, reasoned and measured response. Many of these first-person accounts of relief work read as an educated travelogue, in which the battlefield, and hospital, are not depicted in excited, passionate terms, but rather reflected through the lenses of the cultured observer. Thus, the picturesque nature of the battlefield and its environs were commented upon and a knowledge of ancient history was displayed. The author appears refined and aesthetic in temperament – able to respond sensitively to beauty and to suffering, but, unlike perhaps the romantic poet, also able to rationally calculate the appropriate response and not give in to unmediated sentiment. It was in the articulation of this notion of a 'reasoned application of sentiment', that the ethos of 'calculated compassion' was set forth.

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[13] A more detailed analysis of these new humanitarian narratives can be found in my PhD thesis, chapter 1.

In one such account, the author Mrs H. Templar, recalled her experiences thus:

My object in asking to be allowed to wear the Red Cross, was to work, and try as much as lay in my power, to alleviate the sufferings of my fellow-creatures, quite regardless of nation or creed, and to devote myself to the 'Labour of Love'. I most sincerely hope I succeeded, and certainly my patients were always very grateful and content. [14]

In another account of relief work in the Franco-Prussian War, the authors again testified to their genuine purpose, and underscored this with their 'cultured' depictions of the landscape of war:

No idle curiosity brought us to the seat of war: we formed part of what was called, in France, 'the English Column,' sent from 'the British National Society for the Relief of the Sick and Wounded in War [the precursor to the BRCS]

The meadows were fresh and green, the trees just stirred their branches to the slight summer breeze, but down below were long lines of dark figures; they changed places every now and then, and here and there were little tiny black dots, that seemed to explode in a puff of white smoke that went up slowly, to linger against the blue sky before it dispersed. Beyond were heavier white clouds of smoke and a dull eco on the air. The little black dots were skirmishers, and the long lines of troops in order of battle; the smoke came from cannon and rifle, but the golden sunshine threw a halo over all and softened down the distant outlines, and that was our view of the great battle around Sedan. A battle is very pretty ten miles off, very exciting on the spot, very dreadful when it has ended, and all that is left … is the agony on the battle-field of those lying there.' [15]

After the Franco-Prussian War, the BRCS published a report of its activities. The Committee, much as individual volunteers, were also operating in response to outside constraints, not least the desire to respond to press criticism that Red Cross officials were often no more than sight-seers, and, certain allegations of corruption levelled at those donning the Red Cross insignia (such as robbing the dead). As with any organisation that relied on charitable subscription, it was also necessary to publicly account for its activities and its allocation of funds. At Committee level, the BRCS had thus to convey a sense that it was both the un-ideological conduit for a genuine and heartfelt public sympathy for the wounded French and Prussian soldier, as well as a regulated, efficient and systematic organisation. As the Report stated, "Charity the most unbounded was ready to open the hand of succour to the sufferers, and nothing appeared wanting but a competent machinery for administering the public munificence."[16] Its credentials as genuinely responsive, rather than pre-meditated or ideological, were displayed through repeated reference to, and quotation from, the letters and accounts of its volunteers in the field. Thus, the Report captures a sense of the spontaneous, ad-hoc, though rational, nature of the volunteers activities as represented in their writings.

At the same time, the author of the Report (Loyd-Lindsay) introduces another narrative: that of administrative efficiency, calculated through number of patients treated. Thus, the Report contains endless – and essentially meaningless - statistics serving no other purpose than to present the BRCS as accountable and systematic. Yet in institutionalising an ethos of calculated compassion, the BRCS incorporated an unwinnable dilemma: a simultaneous commitment to efficiency and heartfelt response. The danger of appearing, on the one hand, ideological, over-rationalised, and bureaucratically inflexible, and on the other, sentimental, idealistic and whimsical, has plagued humanitarian organisations since their foundation, and presents an ongoing, and unsolvable, paradox. It has also bestowed a legacy by which the 'success' and credibility of humanitarian endeavour is measured according to the genuineness of the givers' 'good intentions' and the 'efficiency' of their administration – rather than the through an analysis of the consequences of such interventions. Moreover, the persistent notion that humanitarian organisations and their staff occupy a neutral, rarefied niche on the battlefield, has also been engendered by this dual emphasis on the non-ideological, heartfelt, compassion of the care-giver, and the impersonal, impartial efficiency of his or her endeavours. Once again, this has had a lasting legacy, for it is only recently that humanitarian practitioners are questioning the possibility of ever remaining 'neutral' in their actions, when their very presence can have unlooked for consequences in conflict situations (with aid often becoming, for example, part of the unofficial war economy).

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[14] Mrs H Templar, *A Labour of Love Under the Red Cross During the Late War* (London, Simpkin, Marshall and Co, 1872), p. viii

[15] Emma Maria Pearson and Louisa Elisabeth MacLaughlin, *Our Adventures During the War of 1870*, 2 Vols, (Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1871), p. 4 and p. 203

[16] Report of the Operations of the British National Society for Aid to The Sick and Wounded in War During the Franco-Prussian War 1870-71 Together with a Statement of Receipts and Expenditure and Maps, Reports and Correspondence (London, Harrison and Sons, 1871), BRCS Archives, Ref: D50 A1, p. 3

I want to end this paper by making a further point: that this new humanitarian ethos should not be understood as the 'corporate identity' of an individual institution, but rather attested to by relief workers and their organising committees across a range of new agencies. Here I would like to highlight two contemporaneous networks of relief workers, the Quakers, and a group of feminist-pacifists who were active in the Boer War, and would go onto be instrumental in the creation of the Save the Children [SCF], who both also attested to an ethos of 'calculated compassion'. Yet, they were also often antagonistic to the BRCS's activities. To understand this, we again need to appreciate that this ethos was invested with shades of meaning, and served particular functions, and that these subtly different meanings can only be understood through attention to the contexts in which they were articulated. For SCF, and the earlier Boer War Committee of which many of its members had been involved, access to the battlefield and post-war sites of conflict was particularly contentious. An ethos by which the relief worker's impartiality, and heartfelt concern for the 'victim', was stressed was essential in attempts to avoid accusations of ideological or political involvement. This band of feminist-pacifists were part of a strong network of liberal agitators, with a history of campaigning on controversial issues. In both the Boer War and in Central Europe following the First World War, these women sought to provide aid to those deemed 'enemy' civilians. It was therefore doubly important not only to underline their own impartiality and 'charitable' rather than 'political' status but also to emphasise the 'victim' status of those they were aiding. Humanitarian acts were therefore imagined as taking place in a 'neutral' sphere away from the geo-political realities, and by extension, the 'victims' were 'neutral' too. An emphasis here was placed on the woman and the child as the archetypal victim, deflecting attention from a more complex reality in the Boer War, in which women were often providing military and moral support for their male relatives, and in post-First World War Germany and Austria, when aid workers would often feed a whole family through access to a child.

For the Quakers, slightly different issues were at play. The Quakers had a history of providing aid in wartime, and so their activities in the 1870-1918 era were not without precedent. Nevertheless, this period also saw a period of 'renaissance' in the Quaker movement in Britain, which saw a new generation of relief workers come to the fore. Although these aid workers placed themselves in a long tradition of service in their writings, this period of Quaker relief work was also distinct in both its organisation and its practices. Quakers in this period testified to an ethos of calculated compassion much like their colleagues in the BRCS and SCF. Once again, although this found expression in later reports, this ethos had its origins in the self-representation of volunteers. For the Quakers, the importance of this ethos can be understood through reference to their faith – the Society of Friends is a 'democratic' religion, placing individual conscience and service above clerical authority. But this ethos also owed something to their wider work in the community, which was – much like the outlook of the feminist-pacifists who formed SCF – becoming increasingly 'professional', in terms of social research and policy. Moreover, the Quakers sought to move away from an association with 'souperism', the linking of charity with attempts at religious conversion, and thus the notion of 'neutrality' took on a specific importance. For a faith that was becoming increasingly socially active after a period of 'Quietism', the Quakers were also emerging as a dissenting political voice, especially on issues such as colonial policy, militarism and poverty. Pacifism was emerging as a key part of Quaker identity in this period, and it was a combination of this, along with a more 'professional' interest in social work, that informed both Quaker opposition to the BRCS in this period (for aiding soldiers, and thus by extension the military) and their relief practices, which were often followed a social research/ work model.

To briefly conclude, this paper has outlined the error of focusing overly on Geneva as the source of the modern humanitarian ethos and modern humanitarian practices. While the new laws of war and their 'torchbearers', the Swiss elders who made up the ICRC, provided the parameters for new forms of civilian intervention in war, it was the volunteers in the field who gave meaning to 'neutral' care giving and carved out roles and a set of practices for themselves. These roles and practices were shaped less by any abstract adherence to these new legal provisions – for legislating for something is not the same as activating and breathing life into it – and more on the one hand, by a need to secure access to war zones and deflect any suspicion, and, on the other, by new 'professional' practices in both nursing and social work. Attention to agencies apart from the BRCS also shows us that the origins of modern humanitarian practices cannot be located solely in Geneva. This is obvious in the work of the SCF and Quakers, both of whom were primarily concerned with the welfare of the civilian in conflict situations: an area as yet undefined in international law, and outside the remit of the ICRC. In the case of the SCF, rather than follow an abstract code of practice emanating in international law, it actively re-interpreted such law and sought to win its amendment through a recognition of the Rights of the Child. Thus, it is important to reiterate that the specific meaning given to such 'neutral' roles in war differed, that 'neutrality' was enacted and understood differently according to the investments made in such an ethos and the outlook of individual practitioners. Hence, neutrality was deemed compatible with political activism, whether liberal campaigning or Conservative party politics. It is thus a mistake to assume that the founders of modern humanitarian organisations operated according to our own understandings of neutrality, or were somehow able to operate in a de-politicised sphere, away from the glare of the media, and directed by the principles and protocols of the ICRC in Geneva. Any calls to return to an original neutrality of humanitarianism's 'founding fathers' must thus ignore the history of such organisations