

The Beginnings of the Humanitarian Era in the Eastern Mediterranean

Those who were successful just as those who were poor,
those who went to cafés and night clubs just as those who
have nothing but hunger and homelessness, the war made
orphans of their children and widows of their wives.

—Ragib al-Tabbakh, 1923

Marash, Anatolia, February 9, 1920. As the Armenians of Marash fled their city in the face of civil war and the certainty of massacre, a twenty-three-year-old American Near East Relief (NER) official, Stanley E. Kerr, made the decision to stay behind in the organization's headquarters to care for the hundreds of children and elderly who could not travel. He was one of a tiny handful of Americans who remained in the war-torn city as other relief workers evacuated with the able-bodied and the retreating French army. "Tonight," Kerr wrote to his parents back home in Philadelphia, "the most bitter cold of all this winter. . . . Our orphans, old women and men will remain in our compounds. . . . Perhaps by remaining here we can protect the remaining Armenians from massacre. . . . We are in great danger, but not without hope. . . . No matter what happens remember that I am ready to make any sacrifice even death."¹ For the young American, this was his first real encounter with the full measure of the horrors facing the civilian population of the Eastern Mediterranean in the wake of the "war to end war." For the Armenians of Marash, the massacres, dispossession, and exile they faced that night came only at the end of a generation of war, communal violence, genocide, famine, and disease that had left a quarter of the

Ottoman state's subjects dead and millions displaced: in the Balkans and the Caucasus Muslim refugees fled advancing European armies; Ottoman Armenians who had survived state-sponsored efforts to destroy them as a people filled camps and shantytowns scattered along the outskirts of the major cities of the Levant; and Greeks and Turks on the “wrong” sides of new international borders would be “exchanged”—a euphemism for internationally sanctioned dispossession and forced migration—as nation-states emerged from the ashes of empire.²

Kerr's letter home on that terrible night provides a unique window into the state of mind of a young humanitarian worker in extremis, but also keenly aware of his professional responsibility. Equally, Kerr's presence in Marash, as a professional administrator of a network of orphanages, rehabilitation centers, and schools, is evidence that this violence and disaster, which had caused societal collapse, had prompted a modern—and massive—international humanitarian response that involved diverse aid and relief organizations including NER, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Western and Middle Eastern civil society, colonial governments, and the nascent League of Nations. The juxtaposition of the evident inhumanity of war, civil conflict, and genocide, on the one hand, with the creation of forms of aid for the victims of violence, the establishment of institutions to resettle displaced peoples, and the elaboration of novel, international legal regimes for refugees, on the other, frames the questions raised here. This book traces the origins of modern humanitarianism, from the perspective of its implementation in the Eastern Mediterranean, as both practice and ideology, and connects it to the other dominant ideologies of the interwar period—nationalism and colonialism; it explores humanitarianism's role in the history of human rights and addresses how the concept of shared humanity informed bureaucratic, social, and legal humanitarian practices.

The Eastern Mediterranean was where much of modern humanitarianism was born. This fact tends to be missing from the dominant historiography of the region. Waves of displaced persons and new borders forced the international community embodied in the League of Nations to first define and then manage novel iterations of the “refugee” and the “minority.” The sheer scale of interwar relief needs prompted the replacement of independent missionary-based charity with secular, professional, and bureaucratized intergovernmental forms of aid and development. And, finally, efforts to interdict trafficking in women and children mobilized nongovernmental humanitarian organizations and groups in Europe and the Americas to a degree not seen since the aboli-

tionist movement of the nineteenth century. The region was also where troubling questions were increasingly being asked about what role the international community should play in helping nation-states rid themselves of unwanted religious and ethnic minority populations.

Where the systematic and critical study of human rights and humanitarianism is absent altogether from the corpus of the Eastern Mediterranean's twentieth-century historiography, the region is likewise largely missing from the literature on the global history of both.³ Moreover, the prevailing narrative of the history of human rights mostly emphasizes the post-World War II era, the international reaction to the Holocaust, and the founding of the United Nations.⁴ This project looks further back and locates an origin of contemporary human rights thinking in the practices and failures (and practical failures) of humanitarianism during the late interwar period. Bringing the theory and practice of humanitarianism into the history of human rights makes this project an important contribution to an emerging debate about human rights history and does so almost uniquely in the field from the perspective of the non-West.

Similarly, this book is built around a method that brings an understanding of the intellectual and social context of humanitarianism together with the lived reality of the places where the humanitarian act in its various forms took place. With this approach, I can write about humanitarianism in a comprehensive and transnational way and thus avoid an institutional history or an account that sees humanitarianism as a self-evident manifestation of liberalism, Protestantism, and social reform. This approach also allows me to disentangle—but not disconnect—humanitarianism from colonialism, in contrast to discussions derived from the techniques of colonial and postcolonial studies, which often see humanitarianism as solely a product of the colonial project. No less important is how this method restores a measure of agency to the objects of the Western humanitarian agenda.

I draw from archival sources, especially those of the League of Nations, the Nansen International Office for Refugees, American Near East Relief, the Rockefeller Foundation, and national archives in Turkey, France, Britain, and the United States. In addition, I employ contemporaneous literary and artistic responses, and memoirs and first-person accounts of victims, perpetrators, relief workers, and diplomats in European languages as well as Arabic, Turkish, and Armenian. This breadth of source material allows me to capture the inherent richness of humanitarianism as a problem of social and cultural history in a way

that retains relevance to contemporary debates about the promotion of human rights, and the work of relief and development.

Finally, keeping in mind the work of Kerr and his professionalism and commitment in the face of real danger, I have written a history of humanitarianism that tells the story of a different kind of relationship between some Westerners—Americans in particular, but also others—and the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean. In the first half of the twentieth century, that relationship unfolded in the universe of humanitarian assistance, relief, and teaching; undoubtedly, it was still informed by colonialism, paternalism, and ideas about ethnic and religious superiority, but it was also built around ending the suffering of others and providing safety, and even advanced and professional educational opportunities, to those whose lives had been utterly devastated by war and violence. It was a relationship in which forms of mutual respect, even friendship, could be established based on class and profession, but based on modern conceptions of shared humanity as well; and this sort of relationship was not just possible, but common.

TOWARD A THEORY OF MODERN HUMANITARIANISM

Compassion is a definitive element of the modern human experience. *Organized compassion*—the idea at the core of the concept of humanitarianism—is a phenomenon of even more recent origin, especially in the case of compassion for those who are distant and beyond borders. This book was written in part to better understand organized compassion as a historical phenomenon by elaborating a theoretical concept I call *modern humanitarianism*. The concept of modern humanitarianism is both a sign of a turn in the conceptualization of organized compassion and the linked phenomena of suffering, empathy, and sentiment; and a historical benchmark in the way the work of humanitarianism was structured, financed, organized, and implemented. Equally, modern humanitarianism is a phenomenon of late colonialism and its ideologies of race and nation.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, humanitarians sought to alleviate the suffering of others, which could mean early death, starvation, forms of exploitation, and disease; motivated by an ethic of sympathy and sustained by the sentimental narrative, this early humanitarianism was often made an instrument for conversion, especially, to forms of Protestant Christianity.⁵ Early humanitarianism was embedded in religiously driven and episodic forms of missionary activity, abolition, and

attempts to regulate the treatment of soldiers during Europe-based conflicts, the chief example being the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863). In the context of British, French, and American colonialism, humanitarianism featured in the “White Man’s Burden” and the *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission)⁶, and at the core of the military and diplomatic concept of *humanitarian intervention*⁷, which the historian Samuel Moyn has wryly observed was “often exported to foreign lands the savagery it purported to be banishing from them.”⁸

While still possessing elements of its predecessor, modern humanitarianism was envisioned by its *participants* and *protagonists* as a permanent, transnational, institutional, neutral, and secular regime for understanding and addressing the *root causes* of human suffering.⁹ It paralleled the evolution of philanthropy and was distinct in its reliance on social scientific approaches to the management of humanitarian problems—expanding late nineteenth-century notions of “scientific philanthropy” to a massive scale.¹⁰ The participation by Western civil society and publics—and modern forms of advertising—in underwriting and agitating on behalf of humanitarian projects also distinguished this turn.¹¹ Further defining it was the emergence of a new and, to some extent, gendered practice—professional relief work—and the Western middle-class female relief worker; the general ambit of international humanitarianism derived in no small part from elite Western feminists’ work on behalf of women’s rights, suffrage, and social welfare. Critical, as well, was modern humanitarianism’s explicit connection with international peacemaking as both a causative and preventative measure. A final element of modern humanitarianism was the anticipation that the international community—a concept with origins in the late nineteenth century as well—could, should, and would take action on behalf of humanitarian concerns.

By marking the historical turn implicit in the ideology and practices of modern humanitarianism, this work distinguishes the forms of relief, the creation of bureaucratic measures for civilian protection, refugee-based educational initiatives, and plans for social reform from earlier efforts in the region, primarily by missionaries, Islamic institutions, and the Ottoman state, to care for the poor and to settle migrants. Many of those earlier efforts resemble in some form the work of wartime and interwar humanitarians, but they were largely bereft of the ideological content and functional secularity of modern humanitarianism. The elaboration of the theory of modern humanitarianism also allows the humanitarian project in the interwar Eastern Mediterranean to be integrated into a

larger global movement—of Western origin—of an attempted liberal ordering of the world. The political scientist Michael Barnett calls the work of humanitarians and others in this mode of reform and reordering “alchemical humanitarianism.”¹² For Barnett, just as early modern alchemists sought to transfigure base elements into substances of value through science and magic, alchemical humanitarians bring scientific and social scientific methods and the “magic” of compassion, and also the magnetism of modernization and Western material culture, to effect change. And while Barnett’s characterization is somewhat unfair, the spells of alchemists and the work of alchemical humanitarians have often had similar outcomes.

This critique aside, the global nature of modern humanitarianism, the consistency of its form and the style of its implementation, defines it as a universalizing ideology and a unique collection of practices that was in conversation with and nevertheless apart from other prevailing early twentieth-century universal ideologies of governance and social organization—nationalism and colonialism, in particular. In other words, modern humanitarianism stands on its own as an exceptional and little-understood element of that era. This is unfortunate, because in this period humanitarianism became among the chief vessels for the modern expression of compassion on a grand, even industrial, scale and a marker of the degree to which the concept of shared humanity of the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean resonated with broad swaths of Western society. When historians and others study the dominant ideologies of nationalism and colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century, their eyes rightfully focus on the wanton brutality of the time; studying the humanitarianism of that same era is not a correction to that history but rather a way to understand an answer to its underlying inhumanity.

MODERN HUMANITARIANISM AND THE ENDS OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

A similar question about the evolution of the critical concept of shared humanity can be put to the so-called “humanitarian interventions” in the Ottoman state during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The major coercive violent military interventions of that era—the intervention on behalf of Greek independence in the 1820s, the British and French intervention in the communal crisis in Syria and Lebanon at midcentury, and the first and second interventions in

Crete—were mounted ostensibly “against massacre,” to borrow a phrase from the title of historian Davide Rodogno’s elegant study of the rise and decline of intervention. As Rodogno argues, clearly there was a putative “humanitarian” side of these interventions, inasmuch as they were conducted on behalf of strangers and others by states insisting—though not persuasively so—that their immediate interests were not at stake.¹³ Nevertheless, the concert of European states undertaking those efforts did so with clear imperialist ends in mind, and with little concern for the broader social and political implications and repercussions of those efforts—least of all on the Christian minority communities on whose behalf those interventions took place.

The irony, of course, is that humanitarian intervention did not, and could not, prevent the terrible violence during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1890s); the counterrevolution of the Ottoman Second Constitutional period (1909), primarily in Adana; or, later, the mass deportations, rape, and massacres of the Armenian Genocide because of changes in the international system and the growing power and organizational capabilities of the Ottoman government and its military.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the culture of intervention in the Ottoman state over the nineteenth century created in the public consciousness of intervening Western European states a collection of axiomatic truths about Ottoman state, society, and its treatment of non-Muslim minorities. The most important of these was that the Ottoman elite had become, for various reasons, exterior to “Europeanness” itself and that the “Ottoman Empire” was in its essence a barbaric entity beyond the fold of basic civilizational norms; that any domestic efforts at reform would always be inadequate to bringing Ottoman society into modernity; and moreover, that the Ottoman state’s status as a Muslim empire would never allow for the real emancipation of non-Muslims. Critically, these cultural and political axioms and hierarchies played a role in conceptualizing the humanitarian mission during the interwar period. Equally, how previous interventions were understood later and characterized in Western public opinion shaped the way the larger meaning of the First World War would itself be explained. In this sense, the war and the postwar settlements and occupations drew for their humanitarian action on the repertoire of past humanitarian interventions.

The form and content of modern humanitarianism was an overlay both on the previous experience with humanitarian intervention and on the preexisting network of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish charitable institutions and modern Ottoman bureaucracies for care. Modern

humanitarianism, despite the rhetoric of many of its proponents, did not occur in a social vacuum within the Ottoman state and its successors. Indeed, what is often missing from the historical discussion of humanitarianism is this interaction with local forces and institutions.

ISLAMIC CHARITY, OTTOMAN WELFARE
POLITICS, AND THE NATURE OF SUFFERING
AT THE END OF EMPIRE

This book posits the idea that modern humanitarianism is a specific ideology of organized compassion that originated in Western Europe and North America. That should be not be interpreted as meaning that compassion was absent in Eastern Mediterranean society or that local or transnational forms of care and attempts to alleviate suffering did not also originate from places outside the West. Instead, those forms of caring operated by different ethics of sympathy, definitions of suffering, notions of human value, and basic organizational and funding techniques.

Addressing suffering, especially of the poor, orphans, and widows of one's own community, is a central tenet of Islam as well as a practice of the various Christian and Jewish communities that made up the Ottoman state. The particular elements of these practices varied over time. It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss the broader history of charity in Muslim societies. However, in the late nineteenth century, especially in the period after the broad process of state centralization and bureaucratization of the Tanzimat period (1839–1876), modern institutions designed to care for and manage the poor passed from the exclusive control of Muslim clerics as *waqf*, or holy endowment administrators, to a kind of semiprivate philanthropy. Instead, that species of care increasingly fell under the purview of the state. As described in the critical literature on this transitional period by historians Amy Singer, Mine Ener, and Nadir Özbek, the forms of institutional care in the Ottoman state and Khedival Egypt shifted from the realm of imperial patronage to state function in the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Similar to what was happening in other centralizing states in Europe and North America, the management of the poor, the creation of feeding centers, and the expansion of diverse elements of organized care became an aspect of the relationship between the state and *parts* of society. In the political thought of a handful of Ottoman and Egyptian social theorists of the time, this kind of care was even considered a definitive social

contract-like responsibility of the state toward its citizens, particularly citizens who were Sunni Muslims.¹⁶

With that transition in mind, it is important to recall, however, that in this work I make a critical distinction between national or state-based efforts at public good and modern humanitarianism, which is transnational, nongovernmental, or intergovernmental in origin and implementation. This distinction is far from artificial and is important for several reasons. First, modern humanitarianism often functioned in the absence of, or in the face of, the collapse of the state and its institutions, as a consequence of either war or natural disaster. Second, when international nongovernmental or intergovernmental bodies mounted efforts to address suffering, they did so outside of the framework of actual governing. This last assertion is certainly contingent and, as I discuss throughout this work, humanitarian action can and often does play a part in establishing the groundwork for a postrevolutionary or postcolonial government; humanitarian programs have the potential to morph into governmentalized welfare and often possess the texture of governmentality, but simply put, humanitarian organizations are not governments. This distinction becomes even more important when considering the narrow range of action available to humanitarian organizations and intergovernmental bodies in the face of the political and legal needs of refugees, the stateless, and displaced peoples. Third, humanitarianism is driven neither by the same motives that impelled imperial patronage—piety or the creation and reinforcement of networks of clients or taxable citizens necessary for rule—nor by the state’s need to enforce sovereignty and demonstrate its legitimacy. With the emergence of more modern forms of governance in mind, humanitarianism has no need to defend its legitimacy in the language of civil rights or by appeals to voters. Its legitimacy rests in a field that, by the reckoning of its protagonists, is *beyond the political* and is by its very nature legitimate because it explicitly responds to the problems of humanity and human suffering—suffering that is generally decontextualized from the politics that created it in the first place. Consequently, modern humanitarianism, driven by an ethic of neutrality, has often stood in mute witness to the politics and forms of injustice that cause mass suffering. As this work shows, the interwar period is an origin point for the systematic substitution of humanitarianism for the rights of citizens and human rights, politics, and, certainly, social justice, though not always consistently so.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider briefly two key Ottoman institutional forms that emerged in the nineteenth century that were in

conversation with international humanitarianism: the Ottoman Red Crescent Society and the government institutions established to address the suffering of Caucasian and Balkan Muslim refugees fleeing nation-state formation and Russian imperialism. To fulfill international obligations it accepted in agreeing to the Treaty of Berlin, the Ottoman state established the Osmanlı Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti, the Ottoman Red Crescent Society, as its analog of the Red Cross. Though it remained dormant through the reign of Abdülhamid II, the organization was revived by the Ottoman revolutionary elite, including the Ottoman feminist Halidé Edip Adivar, at the time of the Balkan Wars, and it became an important expression of Ottoman modernity.¹⁷ The resurgence of the Ottoman Red Crescent Society evidences the participation by elements at the highest echelons of the Ottoman state in emerging international humanitarian norms, or at least a degree of familiarity with those norms. Somewhat unique in the system anticipated by the Red Cross movement, the Ottoman state was also home to “subnational” non-state Red Cross affiliates, including that of the Armenian Red Cross.

The retreat of Ottoman power through the course of the nineteenth century led to massive population flows from southeastern Europe and the Black Sea littoral, which brought to Anatolia and the Levant a multiethnic population of primarily Muslim migrants, most of whom had been Ottoman subjects from territories that lay across new borders, but were also intellectuals and politicians on the wrong side of revolutionary and nationalist movements. In response, the Ottoman state promulgated the Muhacirin Kanunnamesi (Immigration Law) of 1857 and established the Idare-i Umumiye-i Muhacirin Komisyonu, the General Commission for the Administration of Immigration, which was folded into the reorganized Ottoman Ministry of the Interior in the 1870s, after the calamity of the Russo-Ottoman War.¹⁸ The commission facilitated the flow of migrants into the territory of the state, granted citizenship, organized resettlement, and provided land grants and tax exemptions.

Migrants were distributed throughout the territory of the Ottoman state, but by the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the authorities increasingly pushed them to settle in restive border areas, or where they could confront and help control transhumance nomadic populations; in other places, particularly Inner Anatolia, their settlement was intended to alter demographics in favor of Muslim majorities in the countryside and small villages.¹⁹ The logic of Ottoman immigrant settlement resembled that of other centralizing and colonial states in the same period

that instrumentalized the migrant as a labor resource and a tool to create new loyal citizens or subjects in parts of the state where it was concerned about possible separatist movements or wanted to marginalize the original inhabitants.²⁰ Following the large-scale massacre of Armenians in the 1890s and again in 1909, Muslim migrants were resettled in areas once inhabited by Armenians.²¹ Later, the fact that many Muslim refugees displaced by the Russian occupation of parts of Eastern Anatolia were hurriedly rushed into properties that Armenians were forced to evacuate during the 1915 genocide suggests that Ottoman efforts to ameliorate Muslim refugee suffering was among the motives for Armenian dispossession, extirpation, and extermination.²² Exemplary of this process is a telegram from the Ottoman Interior Ministry's General Directorate of Tribal and Immigrant Affairs to the governorate of Aleppo in the winter of 1916, ordering that in the wake of mass deportations of Armenians from Southern Anatolia:

One portion of the refugees who have fled from the war zones [i.e., from the Russian borderlands] to Diyarbekir shall be sent off to 'Ayntab, Marash and 'Urfa and settled there. Just as the abandoned [Armenian] houses will be used by the refugees in this manner, after the value has been estimated of abandoned property necessary for the provisioning and clothing of the refugees, the immigrants' share of the allocation is also to be calculated and can be delivered over to them as well.²³

The alacrity with which Muslim refugees were resettled by the Ottoman state into homes only recently occupied by Armenians—whom that same state had forcibly displaced—reinforces the conclusion that the displacement of Armenians was far from a temporary measure of war—the explanation provided by the Ottomans—and rather had become a permanent regime of communal dispossession that accompanied mass killing. As discussed later in this work, the Ottoman Red Crescent was deeply complicit in the transfer of Armenian children, another element of that genocide. The late Ottoman experience with this multilayered transfer and resettlement project anticipates a critical engine of social and historical change. The unremitting frequency, throughout the interwar period and into the postcolonial era, of the displacement and dispossession of communities and populations for the benefit of other, but somehow preferred, displaced and dispossessed populations is evidence of organized compassion's most cruel possible logics: the suffering of one community is caused to alleviate that of another.

From the perspective of the history of modern humanitarianism, what is most important about the larger context of the Ottoman state's

project of settling and supporting displaced Muslims is the historical memory produced by the Turkish state that the community of contemporary Western humanitarians exhibited little concern for Muslim suffering relative to the immense attention paid to that of Anatolian non-Muslims in the same period. Indeed, the response to the suffering of Muslim migrants during the half century preceding the end of Ottoman rule has no analog in the form and content of the way Armenian, Balkan Christian, and Greek suffering had been woven into Western political discourse and public opinion. Explaining the way in which suffering is drawn into the *humanitarian imagination*—or is left out—and then calls into being a humanitarian response is a key concern of this book. The evident lack of response to Muslim suffering by Western humanitarians, or even the acknowledgment of Muslim suffering, colored the way modern humanitarianism was encountered in the late Ottoman period and into the interwar era in Muslim majority states. Moreover, that belief has shaped humanitarianism's contemporary historiography in the post-Ottoman milieu, including how it features in forms of Turkish nationalist discourse and the outsized role it plays in the corrosive modern practice of genocide denial, in which Western indifference to Muslim suffering is a common trope in both popular and academic literature.²⁴

Nevertheless, it is critical to remember that the leadership and beneficiaries of the work of the migrant resettlement administration were primarily and purposefully Sunni Muslim subjects-citizens of the empire—and in particular those whose ethnicity and origin was deemed most useful to the state—highlighting the fact that the function of organized compassion at the level of the Ottoman state tended to follow sectarian, and sometimes ethnic, lines; the state tended to accept responsibility for its Muslim subjects alongside the general if unstated expectation that needy non-Muslims would be cared for by their own communal institutions. The segregation of state assistance extended to which communities received food and medical aid from it and which did not during the war. With the onset of the Armenian Genocide in 1915, the Ottoman state made the equivalent of war on a subset of its own citizens, placing that subset in a state of exception and denying to it the basic civil protections, rights, and care that it extended to other communities. In concluding his discussion of both the close attention paid by Ottoman authorities to the outbreak of disease in Muslim refugee populations—and the assistance provided to those groups—and the utter lack of assistance provided to Armenian deportees at the same time, historian Taner Akçam writes of the state's archives:

In contrast to the enormous amount of energy, concern and resources that went into the care and resettlement of Muslim refugees and immigrants, one will search the archives in vain for *any* such messages throughout the entire period of the deportations [1915–1917] that reflect anything close to this level of concern for the care and protection of the Armenian deportees, much less for detailed lists of instructions and resource allocations.²⁵

Armenians and other non-Muslim communities like the Assyrians were placed beyond the circle of care that the Ottoman state drew around its own Muslim majorities—albeit imperfectly so. That systematic and structural denial of care and violation of rights continued into the 1920s, most notably as the successor state of modern Turkey denationalized refugee Armenians outside its borders, prevented the return of others, and implemented fierce discriminatory policies toward the tiny minority that remained.

Modern humanitarianism in the Eastern Mediterranean took shape in the delineated regimes of caring and exception, as well as in the face of the Ottoman state's largely effective efforts at mass extermination of a minority group. Hence, despite the universalist impulse of modern humanitarianism, as it was put in practice during and after World War I, its objects tended to be non-Muslims—with notable exceptions. To cite only a few examples among many: American faculty at Beirut's Syrian Protestant College sent field hospitals to care for wounded Ottoman soldiers in the Beersheba and Gallipoli theaters of war in 1915; they also established soup kitchens that fed needy Muslims and Christians throughout Lebanon. Perhaps the most sustained cooperation between international humanitarianism and Ottoman institutions took place in the capital, Istanbul. In the first two years of the conflict, the Ottoman Red Crescent Society engaged in joint operations with the War Relief Board of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) in general relief work, primarily through soup kitchens and orphanages that fed and cared for Muslims, Christians, and Jews in and around the city. However, that cooperation had ended by 1916. The break was explained by the RF's Istanbul representative, Edward R. Stoerer, as a result of a feeling on the part of the Ottoman political elite "that it was undignified to receive active help from the outside and an inclination to resent the suggestion that it was necessary. Though at all times money given outright to them to be administered by their own agents would have been acceptable."²⁶ After the war, NER hospitals in places like Marash and Imit were open to all sick and wounded.²⁷ More important, distinguishing the Ottoman state's concerns about the way accepting foreign humanitarian assistance might

undermine its legitimacy or sovereignty, or indeed how the ruling Young Turk military junta believed that aid could help real or imagined enemies of the state, from a prevailing contemporary narrative of Turkish national victimization is critical to understanding how choices were made by both Western humanitarians and the Ottoman state about which groups received assistance and why.

Doubtless, early twentieth-century ideas about race and religious preference informed the choices international humanitarians made in the aftermath of the Great War. However, their efforts were directed toward the Armenians rather than toward Turkish-speaking and other Muslim victims of the war because of the practical reality that the former had faced genocide and dispossession, were living in refugee camps in Egypt, Syria, Greece, and the Soviet Union, and were being prevented by the Republic of Turkey from going home. They were stateless, had no legal standing under international law, and were wholly reliant on Western humanitarian institutions and organizations for their mere survival. They had become *homo sacer*, in the sense used by philosopher Giorgio Agamben; the Ottoman state and its agents had stripped them of the attributes of humanity, including civic belonging, and those that were not killed outright became possessors merely of “bare life” [Gk. ζωή: *zōē*].²⁸ Western observers at the time, like the RF’s Stoerer, echoed the unprecedented quality of this loss among the Ottoman Armenians, writing in his confidential 1917 report that “the desert south of Aleppo was filled with the struggling mass who had seen the foundations of all possible living destroyed in such a way that their initiative and resistance had disappeared.”²⁹ Critically, the concept of *homo sacer* describes the way that the hegemonic and sovereign power reduces human beings to bare life and then exposes them to persisting structural violence. Hence, that violence was directed not just against the bodies of the sufferers, by exposing them to starvation, disease, rape, and murder, but also against the political and social community that victims had inhabited—all of which was compounded by the act of displacement and concentration: the victims were put out of place and into exile in unfamiliar lands, where they were at the mercy of the very institutions and agents of the state that had dispossessed them.

Beginning in the postgenocide period, Armenian intellectuals and relief workers—against that view from the perspective of perpetrator—began to employ the Western Armenian word *խլեակ* (*khleak*), which originally meant “wreck,” as in shipwreck, to distinguish human beings in that distinct state of existence from victims of previous episodes of communal violence or other forms of internal displacement. The title of

Dr. M. Salbi's 1919 description of the work of the Egyptian Armenian Red Cross and British relief workers at the Armenian refugee camp in Port Said, *Aleakner ew khleakner*—*Waves and Wrecks*—is evocative of the notion of humans nearly drowned and washed up on shore with nothing remaining but their emaciated and barely sensate being—a being whose survival was possible only with the help of others beyond their own community. Armenian refugees from the mountains near Antakya in the Ottoman province of Alexandretta are the subjects of *Waves and Wrecks*. That community had violently resisted a deportation order in 1915. In the face of massacre, a French naval vessel evacuated survivors, who were brought by sea to British-controlled Egypt. The rescued were placed in what was among the first examples of an organized refugee camp, complete with ordered ranks of identical factory-made tents, barbed-wire fences, and militarized security.³⁰ The word *khleak* conveys further the meaning of the remnant of a thing uprooted, destroyed, and fragmented, and indeed by the 1970s had become the way Western Armenian speakers, including those living in exile in Lebanon and Syria, but also in the Americas, denoted the survivors of the genocide.

A central theoretical contribution of this book is the argument that modern genocide's stripping away of the political, social, and moral tendons that connected Ottoman Armenians to their own individual human being, human communities, and then broader humanity—in other words, the process that made Armenian citizens of the Ottoman state into *khleakner*—prompted a specific and equally modern form of humanitarianism. That humanitarianism addressed more than just a response to their bodily suffering, but rather embodied a bureaucratically organized and expert knowledge-driven effort to repair their human being, reconnect them to their communities, and restore them to humanity.

Ottoman Muslims had suffered terribly in the war and its aftermath, especially during the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922, but the political, cultural, and social elements of that suffering were different; Ottoman Muslims had not faced massive and systematic governmental persecution, dispossession, and denationalization. The multiethnic communities in Anatolia and Istanbul that were recast as Turks as the project of modern Turkish nationalism unfolded would be their nation's definitive and preeminent ethnicity, hold onto religious prerogatives as Sunni Muslims, and enjoy a modicum of rights, including to property and nationality; they had a state and all that it entailed. The very nature of Armenian suffering distinguishes it from the suffering of the late Ottoman state's preferred citizens; that difference does not deny the



FIGURE 1.1. Ottoman Armenian refugees from Musa Dağı at the Port Said refugee camp, ca. 1916. The men are being marched out of the camp by British military officials to a nearby work site. Note the ranks of mass-produced tents. Glen Russell Carrier, United States, photographer, Near East Relief. Courtesy of Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University, NERC.484, AKP061.

suffering of any, but rather helps explain the humanitarian reason for humanitarianism's imperfect universality (figure 1.1).

Again, like Agamben and others—particularly Zygmunt Bauman, who sees in the death camps of the Holocaust the synecdochic *nomos of modernity*—my own sense is that the deportation caravans, which delivered Armenian victims of organized state violence and extirpation to the deserts of Mesopotamia, are equally definitive of the rules of that modernity and are not the exception to those rules.³¹ Perhaps uniquely, in the case of the destruction of the Armenians of Anatolia, other durable rules that imposed ethnic and religious subordination on non-Muslims seemingly outside of the modern were also in play, evidence of the potential oscillation between modern and nonmodern in the commission of genocide.

Those rules have cast long shadows across the history and practice of modern humanitarianism.

MISSIONARIES, HUMANITARIANISM, AND SECULAR EVANGELICALISM

A key argument of this book is that modern humanitarianism represents a significant shift away from the work of Protestant Christian missions

and missionaries in the non-West. By the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the lead-up to World War I, the Ottoman state's absence from the sphere of care for non-Muslims—orphans, hospitals, education—was filled not just by local Christian communal institutions but also with a collection of Protestant missionaries from Scandinavia, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. The study of Protestant missions and missionaries in the Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean (but less so in Ottoman Anatolia) has attracted a great deal of attention—both a function of the ready availability of source material in Western languages and the somewhat unique position missionaries had as representatives of the West, but not necessarily, as in the case of American and Scandinavia missionaries, Western colonizing powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. Pioneering work in the field by historians Inger Marie Okkenhaug, Ussama Makdisi, Ellen Fleischman, Heather Sharkey, and Nazan Maksudyan, among others, paints a historical picture of the remarkably complex relationships that emerged in the late nineteenth century between Western missionaries and local Christian communities.³² These historians emphasize how the initial intent of the Western missionary presence in the Middle East—the conversion of Jews and Muslims to Protestant Christianity—failed. In the face of that failure Western missionaries turned instead to the transformation of resident Christians—primarily Coptic, Apostolic Armenian, and Eastern Orthodox Christians, who spoke a variety of languages, including Arabic and Greek—into Protestants. It became a question less of converting non-Christians to Christianity than of replacing what the missionaries saw as “primitive Christianity”—replete with what they considered superstitions, Oriental trappings, and theological inadequacy—with a modern Christianity that embraced an individuated relationship with Christ, literacy, moral hygiene, and technological progress. As a consequence, missionaries became increasingly involved in the education, health care, and social development of the growing community of once “primitive” Christians who were now Armenian Presbyterians or Palestinian Anglicans.

A commitment to the care and moral uplift of that community was central to the institutional evolution of the Syrian Protestant College, which in the interwar period was renamed the American University of Beirut.³³ The humanitarian contribution of the college, its faculty, and its students, as well as those of similar institutions in inner Anatolia and the Ottoman capital, plays a large role in this book. As described by Makdisi, the college through the second half of the nineteenth century slowly

deemphasized its mission to convert and instead began to position itself in the region as a conduit through which modernity itself would be instituted. The belief in conversion was not abandoned entirely. Instead, conversion, it was believed, would be realized in the fullness of time as a consequence of the moral reordering of the region. The semisecularization of the missionary project likewise allowed the foreign faculty of the college and similar institutions to interact more freely with broader changes in Ottoman society, including engaging young Muslim men and women in Western-style secondary and higher education.

While many of the individuals in the theater of humanitarian action had their origins in the region as missionaries, as did most of the organizers of the humanitarian project of NER, collectively they stood at the culmination of a secularizing movement in the missionary project, in which the goals and methods of evangelism gave way almost entirely to addressing the suffering of human beings and developing institutions for their care, social development, and education. That process of secularization is again outside the framework of this book, but is more broadly reflective of changing trans-Atlantic ideas about religion, the relationship between national culture and religious authenticity, and, as discussed above, the emergence of the practice of “scientific philanthropy,” in particular by the Rockefeller Foundation, which shifted resources toward the secular project and away from the traditional missionary one.

What I argue with this work, however, is that the shift toward a secular humanitarianism refocused the impulse that motivated missionaries from conversion to addressing the bodily, and, in many cases, the root causes, of the political and social suffering of the *objects of humanitarianism* (the victims of war, rape, famine, disease). In other words, the concept of faith driving the missionary’s work was replaced with a distinctly secular kind of moral reasoning: *humanitarian reason*. Reacting to a concept proposed by anthropologist Didier Fassin, I envision the *problem of humanity* facing the object of humanitarianism as a *problem for the humanity* of the subject of humanitarianism (the professional relief worker, the donor, the international institutional bureaucrat, the former missionary). Moreover, that reasoning was based on a confidence in the efficacy of *professionalism*, buttressed by social science, advanced medicine, and public health, to address those problems. In Fassin’s use, the concept of humanitarian reason has become the moral economy and part of the social imaginary of modern Western society itself.³⁴ Here my use is much more limited to humanitarian sub-

jects and the immediate political and social environments they inhabited, but it is still suggestive of a historical point of origin for the idea itself. More important, employing this conceptual framework of humanitarian reason, I can challenge the notion that the reason of humanitarianism is simply, after Hannah Arendt, the transfer of modern human compassion—as opposed to pity—to the generic stranger.³⁵ The history of modern humanitarianism tells us that at the center of humanitarian reason is a project of *unstrangering* the object of humanitarianism, a process whereby the humanitarian subjects' actions are less about assisting those who are strange and different, and more about helping those found to be knowable, similar, and deserving. As discussed throughout this work, humanitarian reason employs a vast box of linguistic, historiographical, and representational tools, literary and moral archetypes of gender, class, and race, and narratives of civilization to effectively unstranger the humanitarian object and make its problems into a *problem for humanity*.

MODERN HUMANITARIANISM AS A HISTORICAL PROBLEM

This book is in part a response to the need to provide the practice of humanitarianism, in its dual modes of emergency relief and development, with a historical and intellectual genealogy that disentangles, but also explains, its connections with other kinds of aspirational idealism—in particular human rights. Such a project helps clarify humanitarianism's further entanglements—in the past, with colonialism, and in the present, with neoliberalism and the corporatization and militarization of humanitarian action. Theorists and practitioners have a growing sense that humanitarianism, in the form of humanitarian governance, is being called on to expand its range of action into fields of human activity that have been entirely neglected (the protection of the rights of sexual minorities or the challenge to rights posed by anthropogenic environmental degradation, for example) or just generally considered the purview of the state.³⁶ Practitioner groups, in particular, have been increasingly interested in the history of humanitarianism. Beyond just the quasi-military bureaucratic formulation of “lessons learned,” these groups have expressed the importance of introducing disciplinary historical thinking into the standard reflective practice of aid workers and development officials.³⁷

This need also arises from the broader intellectual project of human rights history and the history of human rights. Human rights and modern humanitarianism have an intertwined history, but, as this book shows, it is often difficult to identify how human rights thinking influenced humanitarianism or vice versa. What is clear, however, is that the two concepts have moments of intense historical intersection, especially in the morass of humanitarian failure that preceded World War II and in the violent sorting out of populations and partitions that immediately followed.³⁸ Exploring questions about the early relationship between the two can inform contemporary debates about rights-based development, and about the interest of governmental and intergovernmental humanitarian organizations in human rights.³⁹ In these debates, it is critical to show how concepts like neutrality, selectivity, and non-governmentality became elemental features of the practice of humanitarianism, as well as how rights abuse (civil, human, or national) figures in the historical conceptualization of human suffering. Humanitarianism's contemporary focus on neutrality—regardless of whether or not it is actually achieved—was part of the interwar historical experience, but so too were concerns about what would today be called restorative justice, rehabilitation, and communal and cultural survival. Equally, modern humanitarianism, like human rights, is a potentially totalizing, even utopian, ideology that aspires to be beyond the political, while at the same time being driven by some very powerful social engines and very political politics.

The debate over the genealogical relationship between humanitarianism and human rights has most recently been taken up in *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (2014), by a leading historian of modern France, Bruno Cabanes. He contends that humanitarianism in the aftermath of the Great War was built around the concept he calls *humanitarian rights*, which were invoked and defended by the various humanitarian projects of the League of Nations and international organizations like Save the Children and Near East Relief. In Cabanes's formulation, these humanitarian rights were understood as collective in the case of minority rights, or individual in those that belong to children and women *as victims*; these humanitarian rights are distinct from human rights, as the latter evolved in the period after World War II. Part of Cabanes's evidence comes from the fact that there was a great deal of overlap among the members of activist organizations, especially those advocating women's suffrage and early advocacy for the interdiction of the trafficking of women and children.

Cabanes places the European historian Mark Mazower, and presumably Samuel Moyn and me, in the category of scholars who “claim that there is neither progression nor continuity between the era of humanitarian rights and the modern era of human rights.”⁴⁰ Cabanes’s characterization of my work is correct insofar as it confirms my sense of the lack of gradual linear evolution connecting modern humanitarianism to the legal and cultural formulation of modern individual human rights. However, Cabanes’s assertion of humanitarian rights raises significant questions, and from my understanding of the work of humanitarian organizations and individuals in the Eastern Mediterranean, I see little evidence that such a concept was at work in any meaningful way. This is not just a simple definitional distinction: explaining the motivations and values of humanitarian subjects as a manifestation of their own rights thinking about humanitarian objects is deeply problematic. As I discuss throughout this work, the simple fact is that humanitarianism was often used as a substitution for rights and politics, especially those associated with citizenship and national belonging, and was certainly not a parallel rights regime that stands in the genealogy of human rights.⁴¹ It is the case that relief workers and others from Western democracies brought their own conceptions of citizenship rights and personal histories of activism to the Eastern Mediterranean, but they did not translate those concepts into humanitarian practice. Rather, the reason of humanitarianism pivoted not on the rights of the victim of war or genocide, but on the humanity of those providing assistance and, to a lesser extent, the humanity of those receiving it. This holds true as well for the linked concept of human dignity, which is very much a religiously influenced doctrine and not a right. And while the “right to have rights,” as described by Hannah Arendt—an idea that germinated in the failure of the interwar minority rights regimes—is related to the notion of shared humanity (but more so to the kinds of political communities neither empires nor humanitarian organizations can form), shared humanity itself does not constitute a rights formula.

Historian Michelle Tusan, whose primary focus is the relationship between British imperialism and the politics of liberalism in the Middle East, argues in a similar vein that “humanitarianism and human rights should not be considered separate, unrelated subjects of study. In the case of the Armenian Genocide, this means reading ‘crimes against humanity’ as an early category of human rights justice with its basis in humanitarian ideals and imperial institutions that defined premeditated massacres against civilians as a morally reprehensible and prosecutable

offense.”⁴² Ultimately, Tusan conflates the rhetoric used to justify “humanitarian intervention” with human rights. It is difficult to draw a connection between British diplomatic posturing on the treatment of Armenians and postwar war crimes trials against some of the Young Turk perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, especially as the accused were exchanged for British prisoners of war and legal and ethical human rights regime. This is not a critique of the evidence Tusan marshals to show that British policy makers, under immense domestic pressure, mounted modest efforts on behalf of the Armenian minority of the Ottoman state as part of its self-declared “humanitarian empire.” However, her claim that these efforts constitute human rights prosecutions and interventions layers unjustifiably violent humanitarian intervention with human rights. The same evidence indicates that British action was motivated not by a universal notion of human rights, but rather by a transient identification of the utility of Armenians to geopolitical ends and as an act of Christian solidarity for a Christian “nation” at risk. Tusan’s evidence, drawn primarily from statements and writings by representatives of the British Empire itself, can just as easily be used to show that the empire engaged in what political theorist Jeanne Morefield describes as the “politics of deflection”—that is, employing a nostalgic narrative of imagined liberal imperialism to defend a cynical and illiberal foreign policy.⁴³ As Tusan shows in her own article, and as I discuss in the penultimate chapter of this work, the collapse of Britain’s war crime process and abandonment of Armenian national aspirations, both accomplished so easily in the face of a resurgent Kemalist Turkey, calls into real doubt the level of commitment to human rights, let alone humanitarian ideals, of this “humanitarian empire,” even for a population with such immense public support in Britain as the Armenians.

Yet the ideas, practices, and historical participants in human rights and humanitarianism are intertwined in the sense that where humanitarianism failed, it created a space in which human rights thinking and innovation was one of several possible alternatives. Still, simply envisioning humanitarianism as a proto human rights system, or a teleological human rights in practice without a historically evident human rights in theory, is quite simply anachronistic and has the impact of obscuring some of the reasons, practices, outcomes, and failures of modern humanitarianism.

These contested histories of human rights, and the possible overlap of human rights with other ideologies, forms of governance, and social movements, are passing through a stage reminiscent of the discussions

about nationalism in the 1980s occasioned by its critical revisions by Ernest Gellner in his *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) and Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* (1983.)⁴⁴ Though an imperfect analogy, the need to ascribe an antiquity to human rights—as nationalists do for nationalism’s nations—flows from a desire to confirm human rights’ genuineness and authenticity that might be lacking were its relative novelty confirmed. Human rights as a basis for action, social justice, and a more humane international legal and social order does not require a lengthy history. On the contrary, a deep history of human rights seems of little concern to contemporary international legal scholars, activists, and practitioners; only when the concept is abstracted from practice by historians does a “long tale” for human rights emerge. But a history that misreads human rights in any moment of expressed humanity or compassion, the public justification for the “humanitarian” machinations of empires, or the assertion of other kinds of civic or communal rights undermines the fact that the modern formation of human rights as a culture and tool for justice exists in the setting of the recent past and was the product of the collective ingenuity of men and women who had lived through (and survived) the mid-twentieth century’s humanitarian failures. In sum, the application of a history of modern humanitarianism to the practical understanding of the origins of human rights, especially its experience outside of Western Europe, is among the motivations of this work—even if that history emphasizes the moments of disjuncture, rather than just the intersection, between the two.

Driving it as well is a broader and related historiographical question that populates the tensions inherent to contemporary social history of the colonial and postcolonial non-West: how can we use Western state, intergovernmental, and foundation archives to write about humanitarianism in a way that does more than repackage a kind of diplomatic or institutional history in which the history of non-Western people is retold from a Eurocentric perspective? That question is raised by the fact that the amount of source material produced by humanitarian organizations and intergovernmental bodies is truly immense, and dwarfs that produced by the objects of humanitarianism themselves. This is certainly the case for those records held by the League of Nations at the United Nations archive in Geneva, which are readily accessible and in European languages. That archive, despite its origins in an international organization, is still very much a colonial archive. As a colonial archive it tends to flatten the historical experience of the peoples in the Eastern Mediterranean toward whom its programs and policies were directed. Often, stud-

ies of the League and its work in the region, as a consequence of a failure to employ local sources—Turkish, Armenian, Arabic, and Kurdish—also fail to grasp how the League functioned to facilitate European domination of the non-West. This approach ignores the League’s sometimes overt and sometimes subtle paternalism, and the role it played in legitimizing and perpetuating colonialism and later nationalism. Critically, as a history of the League of Nations and its humanitarianism emerges, it should interrogate—and, where necessary, reverse altogether—the way in which the archive constructed its own reality. In addition, as the League’s archive is vast, better preserved, and much more accessible than other “indigenous” archives (as a function in part of colonialism, but also, as in the case of Syria and Iraq, civil war), we should be conscious of how that might skew the way we formulate basic historical questions. Moreover, among the functions of the colonial archive is to deny the objects of humanitarianism as colonial subjects access to authoritative speech or the right to control their own representation.

The NER’s archival record, located at the Rockefeller Archive Center in upstate New York, is more fragmentary as a consequence of institutional indifference, but it too is vast and is only now beginning to be fully cataloged.⁴⁵ The close relationship between NER, the US State Department, and the various foundations affiliated with the Rockefeller family means possible lacunae in the organization’s own archives can be filled with correspondences, reports, and communications with those other bodies. Nevertheless, the temptation with these sources is to adopt their narrative form and reproduce stories of proposals and projects as they were initiated at the center and then implemented in the field. The result is a kind of antiquarianism and overly repetitive “laundry lists” of the activities of relief workers and descriptions of refugee camps, feeding centers, and resettlement programs that do little to explain modern humanitarianism as an ideology and practice. Such a history cannot explain the moment of encounter between humanitarianism’s subjects and objects, or the effects on its objects after the subjects go home. Moreover, the very nature of the historical study of humanitarianism tends to cloud from view the objects of the humanitarian act, rendering them silent and at the same time magnifying the role of the subject. Chiefly this is because the history that humanitarianism produces about itself is a catalog of its institutional features, the projects and motives of the relief workers and others involved in making it work.⁴⁶ What I have sought to do in this work, instead, is focus on the point of juncture where policies, personnel, and programs meet, and

where the intentions, expectations, and prejudices of the center often crumble in the face of the realities of the periphery.

More to the point, the practice of humanitarianism itself disallows for the inherent complexity of the individual objects of humanitarianism, reducing their history and experience into a single universal title or type: the sufferer, the refugee, the orphan. It is as though to sustain the individual and her unique human being, that being must first become a not-quite-human or perhaps deformed item in a bureaucratic taxonomy.⁴⁷ The history of humanitarianism at its best must not reproduce this reduction to blank categories; a real burden is placed, therefore, on the historian to show how humanitarianism changes and transforms its objects and subjects, much like the trauma that precipitated it in the first place. Most important, he must not lose sight of their humanity and listen where he can to their voices. As I have argued elsewhere, this is the way the historian can unleash as a tool of method his empathetic imagination and retain the *humanity* of his work (and himself) when confronted with so much hate, violence, loss, and *inhumanity*.⁴⁸

Building from a new social history of World War I in the Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean, the body of this book does not begin with a humanitarian act, but rather with a decision *not* to help.⁴⁹ The first year of World War I in the Eastern Mediterranean was accompanied by late fall rains and the multiyear appearance of swarming locust. The environment compounded the effects of requisitioning, conscription, and the end of any semblance of civilian rule. It was a period marked by food shortages, loss of export markets, and the internment of foreign nationals. As I describe in the next chapter, rains that created the conditions for the locusts also caused the Euphrates River to rise above its banks, flooding the Ottoman provincial capital of Baghdad. Though American diplomats asked the American Red Cross (ARC) and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) to help, no help was forthcoming. However, at the same time, large amounts of aid were being raised by a vast network of humanitarian subjects in the United States and the region to help ease the effects of the war and locusts on communities in Jerusalem and Beirut. Comparing and contrasting the different responses, chapter 2 explores how the humanitarian imagination is formed, especially through the process of “unstrangering” the humanitarian object, and then enjoins action. In this case, the cause of Beirut and Jerusalem, enlarged into humanitarian thinking as the Holy Land, helped build a coalition of Progressives, Zionists, Protestant missionaries, liberal intellectuals,

extraordinarily wealthy men, and Arab and Armenian immigrant groups, who formed political organizations and philanthropic foundations centered in New York City. From that coalition emerged the practices, media strategies, idealism, and ethics—the repertoire—of American modern humanitarianism in what those Americans saw as the “Near East.” Much more so than the American experience with war relief in Europe, the work of American committees and organizations, including the AJC and the forerunners to NER, embraced modes of colonialism—most importantly a civilizing mission—without possessing a colony, and consequently without the attendant brutality.

The repertoire of Western humanitarianism in the Eastern Mediterranean and elsewhere was buttressed by the emergence of a new genre of writing about suffering. Epitomized by the work of Roger Casement, the Anglo-Irish diplomat who penned a 1905 report critical of the European management of the Congo, this new style of writing created humanitarian knowledge that was foundational to the project of modern humanitarianism itself. Central to that creation of humanitarian knowledge was a movement away from the sentimental narrative generally, and, in the Eastern Mediterranean, missionary accounts in particular. Both forms had been deeply important to mobilizing support for abolition and nineteenth-century “humanitarian interventions.” Instead, the humanitarian report adopted a forensic, evidence-based, and ethnographic method, and in the years before World War I, even a legalistic approach. Critically, the report could document the systemic (that is, root) causes of human suffering and then build a portfolio of solutions.

This kind of report looms large in the history of humanitarianism in the Eastern Mediterranean. In chapter 3, I show how reports across the era—intended to intervene in European, American, and Ottoman public spheres—shaped perceptions about Ottoman state-society relations and defined the specific meaning of neutrality in the practice of humanitarianism in the years before World War I. Moreover, the format of the report made it possible for observers of the region to understand *as it was happening* that Ottoman Armenians faced genocide. The cumulative effect of that knowledge populated the humanitarian imagination, and indeed aspects of it were used to generate financial and political support for humanitarian efforts; they became the controlling narrative in the way the Near East was constructed as a discrete unit and perceived by humanitarians for the remainder of the interwar period. The report also became important to the presumed objects of humanitarian-

ism: in this period, Armenians and other groups who had fallen victim to atrocity began to generate humanitarian knowledge for use within their own communities and in support of domestic, international, and diasporic relief efforts.

The end of World War I and the occupation of the Eastern Mediterranean by European forces created conditions under which the limited American humanitarian effort was expanded into a massive relief and development program directed by NER. In part, that program sought to use the humanitarian presence as a means to an end of the social, political, and moral reordering of the region—a project I call *American humanitarian exceptionalism*. Chapter 4 explores the limits of that exceptionalism through the historical experience of professional relief workers like Stanley E. Kerr and the physician Mabel Evelyn Elliott. It places their work in the context of NER's greatest failure: the attempt to recreate postgenocide Armenian communities in south-central Anatolia (1919–1923). Focusing on the professional development of the relief workers, I use the events of the disaster to explore why humanitarians were prepared, as Kerr was, to risk their own lives in the aid of others. In the wake of the failure, NER changed its focus to children and the work of establishing an Armenian community in refuge and exile. A few of the children—the objects of humanitarianism—served by NER left evidence of their encounters with this humanitarian project. Chapter 4 continues by bringing those voices into conversation with the relief workers and the broader project of “Americanization” to begin an argument for how American humanitarianism contributed to the form of the Armenian diaspora.

That diasporic community was also formed by the historical experience of the recovery first by Armenian exile philanthropic groups and NER and later the League of Nations—the rescue movement—of thousands of young people who had been trafficked or transferred from their families during the genocide. Reflecting on the particular form of suffering that was endured by children, young adults, and their families, chapter 5 examines the intersection of the form of humanitarianism envisioned by the League and the collapse of Ottoman sovereignty and beginning of European colonial rule. That humanitarian response was built, in part, on an expanding definition of what constituted suffering. Beyond bodily suffering, the League's actions indicate that many in the emerging international community felt that other forms of suffering should elicit a humanitarian response. Focusing on the work of the Rescue Home in Aleppo and the Neutral House in Istanbul, chapter 5

explores the way rescue transgressed social norms and was in fact resisted by the Turkish-speaking Ottoman elite—as well as Sunni Arabs—who saw in the humanitarian project a threat to forms of social dominance. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of that situation for modern humanitarianism itself, in which the humanitarian act is seen as evidence of colonialism and subversion, rather than an act derivative of shared humanity, and is constitutive of resistance, rather than cooperation.

With the collapse of efforts to create a state for Armenians in the face of that resistance, the League of Nations elaborated a humanitarian response to the various forms of Armenian suffering, including statelessness, but also the loss of communal and cultural integrity that accompanied exile. Chapter 6 examines how the international community, in the form of the League, first created the Armenians as the “most deserving” objects of humanitarianism only to abandon support for their national aspirations in the face of a resurgent Republic of Turkey. I use this chapter to discuss the formation of the interwar international humanitarian regime for refugees, and the limited efforts to help those refugees settle, but not assimilate—especially when the distinctive nature of their community was useful to European colonialism. The emergence of this regime for refugees also forced humanitarians to imagine possible legal remedies that brought them into conversations about human rights and their possible utility, or inaccessibility, in the years before the Second World War.

The book concludes with a discussion of the end of the massive modern humanitarian effort of the interwar period and the attempts to translate the humanitarian presence into a permanent regime for development, education, and reform. In chapter 7, I follow historical and policy threads into the post–World War II era, and in particular the Cold War–era US development “Point Four Program” in the region, while also examining the legacy of humanitarian population transfer and its relationship to the theory of genocide and the origins of its canonization as the “crime of crimes” in international human rights law.

As I have written this book and thought about the nature of the archives and the kinds of sources I have used—and reflected on my own emotional responses to the individual stories of loss, cruelty, survival, and resilience, especially of children—I find myself feeling what it must be like to be a curator of a great museum, where only a small portion of what is held in storage can ever be shared and explained. This may be

among the first books examining modern humanitarianism and its reach in the Eastern Mediterranean, but it certainly will not be the last, nor should it be. I hope, instead, that it will be considered a starting point to a historical conversation that better connects history, historians, and humanitarians to vital questions about what it means to be human, to suffer, and to have compassion.