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The Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) as a global humanitarian moment

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Abstract

This article explores the global spread of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement to colonial India. By looking at the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–78) and the intense public ferment the events in the Balkans created in Britain, Switzerland, Russia and India, this article illustrates how humanitarian ideas and practices, as well as institutional arrangements for the care for wounded soldiers, were appropriated and shared amongst the different religious internationals and pan-movements from the late 1870s onwards. The Great Eastern Crisis, this article contends, marks a global humanitarian moment. It transformed the initially mainly European and Christian Red Cross into a truly global movement that included non-sovereign colonial India and the Islamic religious international. Far from just being at the receiving end, non-European peoples were crucial in creating global and transnational humanitarianism, global civil society and the world of non-governmental organizations during the last third of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Humanitarianism; Great Eastern Crisis; Red Cross and Red Crescent; transnational history; world history; colonial India

On 26 August 1876, 4 days before Serbia officially declared war on the Ottoman Empire, an appeal to all Indian Muslims appeared in the Anglo-Indian newspapers. It maintained that Russia had ‘created a rebellion in the northern provinces of European Turkey’ and was threatening not just to invade the Ottoman Empire, but to ‘destroy Islam’. Russian generals had supported the Christian rebels and perpetrated the ‘most abominable of atrocities, butchering men, women, and children professing the Mussulman faith’. It called upon the ‘nobleness of sentiment’ of Indian Muslims and asked for ‘universal sympathy in their [the Ottoman Empire’s and the Muslim’s in the Balkans] favour’. It noted that ‘a society’ was formed ‘called the Red Cross Society in Russia, through which the Russians are forwarding soldiers, arms, provisions and money in aid of the rebels for overthrowing the Mussulman Government’ and ended in an exhortation to replicate the Christians: ‘If the Russians can subscribe money for the overthrow of Islam, cannot the Mussulmans of India also subscribe for relieving the distress of their co-religionists . . . ?’¹

This appeal marks one of the starting points of a sustained humanitarian agitation for the wounded Muslim soldiers, widows and orphans in the Balkans on the Indian subcontinent during the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–78). It is remarkable not just for its adoption of the post-Enlightenment emotional regime of sympathy into an Islamic and colonial fold but also for its call to replicate ‘Christian’ Red Cross practices. The butchered co-religionists, according to the appeal, demanded urgent humanitarian action of the Indian Muslims in the form of donations

[†]This article is dedicated to the memory of my former Ph.D. supervisor C.A. Bayly. I would especially like to thank Tim Harper without whose support this piece would never have seen the light of the day. I am grateful to the reviewers, Toby Matthiesen, Christof Dejung, Francesca Fuoli and Moritz von Brescius for their perceptive comments.

¹*The Times of India*, 26 August 1876, 3.

to a secular cause: the relief to wounded Muslim soldiers, widows and orphans. Importantly, the appeal depicts a humanitarian world in which ‘universal sympathy’ to faraway victims operates along separate religious lines. This appeal encapsulates the story and main questions of this article: how and under which circumstances were Red Cross and Red Crescent ideas and practices, which had been organized into a loose international movement in Switzerland only thirteen years earlier, appropriated in colonial India? In placing India within the wider context of similar developments in Britain, Switzerland and Russia, this article seeks to answer these questions and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the rise of transnational humanitarianism while filling an important gap in the history of the Red Cross movement.

Introduction

A rich body of historical research has examined the emergence of global humanitarianism.² Most studies within this body of research maintain that humanitarianism across large distances emerged in the West and was predominately shaped by Western ideas and practices until the First World War. Michael Barnett has maintained that the humanitarian order ‘is rooted in Western history and globalized in ways that were largely responsive to interests and ideas emanating from the West’.³ Very similarly, Didier Fassin argued that key episodes of modern humanitarianism ranging from the abolitionist movement to the founding of the Red Cross ‘belong to the history of Europe and North America’.⁴

While the current body of research on the emergence of global humanitarianism has enriched our understanding of the abolition of slavery and the emergence of a humanitarian sensibility in the transatlantic world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the consequent focus on Anglo-American political and Protestant religious traditions has distorted, as Abigail Green argued, our understanding of the emergence of global humanitarianism more generally.⁵ This article follows Green’s criticism and sets out to challenge the Eurocentrism of the current body of research. To ‘provincialise Europe’, we have to deconstruct the master narrative of the West and illustrate engagements with globally available forms of humanitarian discourses and practices in the extra-European world.⁶ This article is precisely such an exercise. It seeks to contribute to the recent debate on global humanitarianism from an extra-European perspective.⁷

Founded over 150 years ago in Geneva, the Red Cross is one of the oldest and most distinguished sets of international and non-governmental organizations.⁸ The Red Cross on a white ground has become a ubiquitous modern symbol, marking hospitals and ambulances across

²Peter Stamatov, *Origins of Global Humanitarianism: Religion, Empires, and Advocacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World* (London: Routledge, 2014).

³Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 16.

⁴Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 248. See also, Thomas Haskell, ‘Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2,’ *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 553.

⁵Abigail Green, ‘Humanitarianism in Nineteenth-Century Context: Religious, Gendered, National,’ *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 4 (2014): 1169.

⁶Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁷Mark Frost, ‘Humanitarianism and the Overseas Aid Craze in Britain’s Colonial Straits Settlements, 1870–1920,’ *Past & Present* 236, no. 1 (2017): 169–205; Keith Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

⁸There have, of course, been earlier transnational humanitarian associations such as the *International Shipwreck Society* (ISS), but very few of them have the same historical continuity as the Red Cross. See, Thomas Davies, ‘Rethinking the Origins of Transnational Humanitarian Organizations: the Curious Case of the International Shipwreck Society,’ *Global Networks* 18, no. 3 (2018): 461–78.

the globe. Today, the Red Cross has branches in almost every corner of the earth and counts over a staggering 100 million volunteers worldwide.⁹

Due to its success, it is not surprising that the Red Cross Movement has attracted considerable scholarly attention.¹⁰ The existing body of research on the Red Cross movement is characterized by a focus on national Red Cross societies, their founder figures and the contribution of the national society to the international cause.¹¹ While the copious Red Cross literature on Western Red Cross societies is illuminating in the material it presents, it often unquestioningly mixes the history of the nation with that of the national society.¹² As in the case of the national Red Cross societies, the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) has played a crucial role in writing and promoting its history.¹³

While historians have provided an in-depth picture of the creation of the movement in 1863 in Switzerland and consequent adoptions of the cause in various nations in the West, it is much less clear which processes enabled the movement to spread globally beyond industrialized Western countries. Apart from Japan, the extra-European world, especially the large swathes of the colonized world during the nineteenth century, remain largely irrelevant in historical research on the movement.¹⁴

Research on the Japanese Red Cross Society has illustrated that the care for wounded soldiers advocated by the Red Cross movement was not 'new' to Japan in the 1870s. The Haku-Ai Society, founded in 1877 – later renamed into Japanese Red Cross Society – built on Japanese medical, ethical and humanitarian traditions that preceded the foundation of the Red Cross movement.¹⁵ Likewise, albeit in a later period, it has been shown how the Red Crescent became a central pillar of humanitarian aid in the Muslim world.¹⁶ In this perspective, there was no diffusion of humanitarian ideas and practices from the West to the extra-European world. Instead, people in different localities across the globe began to identify with the Red Cross movement and integrated older ethical, medical and humanitarian ideas and practices within new 'Red Cross' or 'Red Crescent' societies.

This article takes the vantage point not of the European origins of the Red Cross movement, but of the global conditions that enabled colonized Indians to relate to the international and transnational cause of caring for wounded soldiers on the battlefield in the 1870s, a little more than a decade after its foundation.¹⁷

⁹Astrid Heiberg, 'Keynote Address by Dr Astrid N. Heiberg President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,' *International Review of the Red Cross* 81, no. 836 (1999): 837.

¹⁰Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); John Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and The Rise of the Red Cross* (Oxford: Westview 1996); Caroline Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross* (London: HarperCollins, 1998).

¹¹The American Red Cross Society is, probably, the most studied of these national societies. See, Patrick Gilbo, *The American Red Cross: The First Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Gwendolyn Shealy, *A Critical History of the American Red Cross, 1882–1945: The End of Noble Humanitarianism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and A Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹²At times accounts are heavily target-oriented and teleological. For the teleological accounts in the Japanese case, see Frank Käser, 'A Civilized Nation: Japan and The Red Cross 1877–1900,' *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 23, no. 1: 16–7. For the 'Red Cross patriotism' that often served as basis of these histories, see Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity* 6, 256–76.

¹³Pierre Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Institute Henry Dunant, 1985); André Durand, *History of the International Committee of the Red Cross: from Sarajevo to Hiroshima*, (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1984).

¹⁴For Japan, see Olive Checkland, *Humanitarianism and the Emperor's Japan, 1877–1977* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

¹⁵Sho Konishi, 'The Emergence of An International Humanitarian Organization in Japan: The Tokugawa Origins of the Japanese Red Cross,' *American Historical Review* 119, no. 4 (2014): 1129–53; Frank Käser, 'A Civilized Nation'.

¹⁶Jonathan Benthall and Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

¹⁷Christoph Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009).

A growing literature has highlighted how humanitarian ideas and practices were co-constituted in different sites across colonies in the British Empire. From the beginning, humanitarians had a decisively global and transnational outlook on human suffering that often fused domestic with faraway social issues.¹⁸ Despite the simultaneous and connected co-constitution of humanitarian ideas and practices in the colonies and the metropole, it is important to stress moments of disjuncture and exclusion. Thomas Laqueur referring to post-colonial scholarship has aptly pointed out that there was ‘an ever mounting level of imperial violence against imperial subjects beyond the limits of sentiment’.¹⁹ The ‘age of empire’ in the last third of the nineteenth century witnessed a new wave of European imperial expansion, a surge of violence in the colonial world buttressed by the rise of scientific racism, the hardening of racial boundaries and the establishment of European civilizational and legal exclusivism.²⁰

Imperial humanitarianism in Britain had lost much of its critical momentum in the 1870s. It became – like its middle-class constituency – increasingly aligned to new imperialism and more chauvinistic forms of nationalism.²¹ Crises of empire, above all the Indian Rebellion or Mutiny, shattered the belief in the ability of humanitarians and missionaries to transform natives into civilized subjects of empire and led instead to calls for revenge.²²

Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarianism was not outside these broader historical trends. Despite universal pretensions, the Geneva Convention of 1864 and the emerging international humanitarian law were by no means universal during the nineteenth century. Even if implicit, it was clear that only sovereign nations could sign the Geneva Convention.²³ The exclusion of extra-European people, however, was not just implicit. European humanitarians repeatedly and openly discarded the possibility of non-sovereign, extra-European people participating within the movement. When, for instance, in the summer of 1873, the high-ranking diplomatic Japanese delegation – the *Iwakura* mission – visited Geneva, Gustave Moynier (1826–1910), president of the ICRC, argued that it would be ‘childish to demand of savages or barbarians, still singularly numerous on the surface of the globe, to follow this example [of the Red Cross]’.²⁴

Likewise, when the delegates at the international Red Cross Conference in Karlsruhe in 1887 were discussing if European Red Cross societies should make provisions for wounded soldiers in extra-European wars, the Dutch delegate argued that to give relief to wounded soldiers ‘in oriental

¹⁸Alan Lester, ‘Obtaining the ‘Due Observance of Justice’: The Geographies of Colonial Humanitarianism,’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, no. 3 (2002): 277–93; David Lambert and Alan Lester, ‘Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy,’ *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 3 (2004): 320–41; Harald Fischer-Tiné, ‘Reclaiming Savages in ‘Darkest England’ and ‘Darkest India’. The Salvation Army as Transnational Agent of the Civilizing Mission,’ in *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development*, eds. Carey Watt and Michael Mann (London: Anthem, 2011), 125–64; Robert Skinner and Alan Lester, ‘Humanitarianism and Empire: Introduction,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012): 729–47; Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines Across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Tony Ballantyne, ‘Moving Texts and “Humane Sentiment”: Materiality, Mobility and the Emotions of Imperial Humanitarianism’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 17, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁹Thomas Laqueur, ‘Mourning, Pity, and The Work of Narrative in the Making of “Humanity”,’ in *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, eds. Richard Wilson and Richard Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33.

²⁰Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of empire 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987); C.C. Eldridge, *Disraeli and the Rise of a New Imperialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).

²¹Andrew Porter, ‘Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery and Humanitarianism,’ in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 3, The nineteenth century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 198–221.

²²The Indian mutiny of 1857 was a watershed moment in this regard. See Nancy Paxton, ‘Mobilizing Chivalry: Rape in British Novels About the Indian Uprising of 1857,’ *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 1 (1992): 5–30; Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²³Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and The Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Frédéric Mégret, ‘From ‘Savages’ to ‘Unlawful Combatants’: A Postcolonial Look at International Law’s ‘Other’,’ in *International Law and Its Others*, ed. Anne Orford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 265–317.

²⁴*Bulletin international des sociétés de secours aux militaires blessés [henceforth: Bulletin international]* 5, no. 17 (1873): 11. Translation is mine as are henceforth all the following in the article.

wars . . . will always be difficult, if not impossible, because these [wars] will be fought with native people, who do not know of the existence of the Red Cross'.²⁵ The 'standard of civilisation' served to exclude non-sovereign, non-European people from officially participating in the international domain and in international humanitarian schemes during the nineteenth century.²⁶ The Red Cross movement was no exception in this regard.²⁷

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Alan Lester and David Lambert have untangled the complex geographies of colonial humanitarianism at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Relying on Tony Ballantyne's conceptualization of empires as 'webs', they have shown the 'spatially extensive webs of communication' that undergirded global humanitarian discourses and practices and how new humanitarian organizations served as 'hubs' within these webs. They have pointed to the importance of metropolitan 'centres of calculation' in which data obtained at the peripheries of empire was assimilated, processed into a coherent humanitarian discourse and disseminated outwards again, and the 'war of representation' with competing interests, such as the settlers, the humanitarians had to fight.²⁸ This article tries to build on this insightful research and expand our understanding of the geographies of global humanitarianism.

However, the vital role of modern religions in the emergence of global humanitarianism towards the close of the nineteenth century has not yet received enough attention.²⁹ Four primary considerations guide the focus of this article on religion.

First, modern religions formed important global and transnational webs of communication that preceded European imperial expansion and the nation state. Invigorated by the transport and print revolutions, religious webs of communication consolidated into more formalized 'empires of religion' during the nineteenth-century overlapping, but also reaching beyond specific European empires and states.³⁰

Scholars have started to conceptualize these religious webs of communications from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as 'religious internationals'. A host of 'voluntary transnational organizations' were formed within these religious internationals that crystallized 'around international issues'. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu religious 'internationals' in this more formalized sense came into being by the mid-nineteenth century, albeit these religious webs of communication have been much older.³¹ Many of the pan-movements emerging in the late nineteenth century can be seen as part of these religious internationals as they often had intense religious dimensions.³²

Second, religion decisively shaped the new public and associational culture, voluntarism and social reform. Religious thought and practice increasingly reached beyond traditional clerical elites and

²⁵ *Verhandlungen der vierten internationalen Konferenz der Gesellschaften vom Rothen Kreuz abgehalten in Karlsruhe vom 22. bis 27. September 1887* (Berlin: Starcke, 1887), 139.

²⁶ Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

²⁷ The popular self-image of Switzerland and the Red Cross as innocent bystanders to colonialism has been deconstructed. See, Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné, eds., *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

²⁸ David Lambert and Alan Lester, "Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy" and Alan Lester, 'Obtaining the 'Due Observance of Justice': The Geographies of Colonial Humanitarianism'; For the empire as webs, see Tony Ballantyne, 'Race and the Webs of Empire: Aryanism from India to the Pacific,' *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2, no. 3 (2001).

²⁹ Michael Barnett and Janice Stein, *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁰ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*. For the idea of a single Atlantic culture in which religion, philanthropy and reform bound middle-class America and Britain together, see J. MacLear, 'The Evangelical Alliance and the Antislavery Crusade,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1979): 141–64.

³¹ Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities Since 1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–2.

³² However, pan-movements and religions were not always entirely congruent, see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Louis Snyder, *Macro-Nationalisms: A History of the Pan-Movements* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984).

extended deep into the new public sphere. Historians of religion have emphasized the intensely public dimension of modern religions as they variously pointed to the ‘popular’ quality of Catholicism and Protestantism, the ‘public’ nature of (pan-)Islam or ‘populist’ elements of Hinduism during the nineteenth century.³³ The construction of the nation itself became suffused in religious symbols and narratives.³⁴

Third, modern religions were in intense competition with each other. As religions consolidated themselves into ‘world religions’, lines of allegiance and affiliation sharpened.³⁵ In the European context, the popular religious mobilization had been most evident during the ‘culture wars’.³⁶ Religions, however, were not just in conflict with the state, but also in competition with each other. In the extra-European context, missionaries were constantly attacking religions they encountered, branding illogical or cruel practices and demanding reform or conversion.³⁷ A distinguishing feature of the culture wars were book, tract and pamphlet wars that were waged between different religions and denominations in the new print sphere and on public spaces in Europe and Asia.³⁸ To nineteenth-century contemporaries, religion was more than having a specific personal ‘faith’. They saw themselves as part of an organic, trans-temporal entity, a sort of religious civilization, thus often invoking an ancient ‘Christian’, ‘Jewish’, ‘Islamic’ or ‘Hindu’ civilization. Due to heavy religious competition, stereotypical views of religions gained ground in which members of religions were ascribed a few essential qualities.³⁹ Religion became an important and heavily contested badge of identity.

Fourth, beneath pamphlet and book wars, there was increasing convergence and connection between world religions. Despite the heightened conflict between religions, there was also much cooperation, mutual learning and institutional sharing. If Christian missionaries served as ‘ideological and organizational catalysts’ in colonial India, Indians were quick not only to appropriate the association and to adopt the printing technology of the missionaries, but also in developing similar forms of religious outreach by engaging in schooling, teaching and humanitarian activities.⁴⁰ By the last decades of the nineteenth century, there existed numerous religiously informed reform societies in all parts of India. As in Europe, where the Christian concept of *caritas* was reworked into the modern and secular concept of charity, Hindu and Islamic notions of social

³³Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978); Mark Noll, David Bebbington and George Rawlyk, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond 1700–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Adeeb Khalid, ‘Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Islamic Unity and its Uses,’ in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 201–2; Kemal Karpat, *Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22, 221–3.

³⁴Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, eds., *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

³⁵Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

³⁶Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁷Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

³⁸Kenneth Jones, ed., *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian languages* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2002), 78–86.

³⁹Such a totalizing influence of religion is evident, for instance, in William Wilson Hunter’s famous book title *The Indian Muslims: are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?* (1871), but also in the anti-Catholic literature, see Edward Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968).

⁴⁰My argument is partly inspired by Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24–48.

service served to imagine a broader community and foster social activism.⁴¹ In this perspective, the abolition of slavery within the evangelical and protestant international was pivotal in establishing a humanitarian sensibility, but humanitarian discourses and practices were quickly taken up for other causes by people across the globe.

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This article relies on what a growing body of research has conceptualized as ‘affective communities’ to explain why colonized people in India were appropriating and adopting humanitarian Red Cross and Red Crescent discourses and practices. Affective communities are tied together by a shared repertoire of historically contingent, culturally and socially shared emotions of belonging.⁴² The religious ecumene formed the most obvious affective community for nineteenth-century contemporaries.

Humanitarian action and fundraising, however, were not just based on affective communities, they depended on ‘humanitarian narratives’ that bound the reader to the faraway sufferer. Humanitarian narratives described the bodily suffering of victims in extraordinary detail and established a story of causality between the victim, evil and effective and morally urgently needed action of the reader.⁴³ Humanitarian narratives were at their most effective when the victims were portrayed as being ‘embedded in exactly the sort of nexus of social relations as those of their readers and auditors.’⁴⁴ Akin to Judith Butler’s concept of ‘grievability’ of all lives, Laqueur shows that humanitarian narratives emerged from the claim of certain groups or individuals ‘to be regarded, to be noticed, to be seen as someone to whom the living have ethical obligations.’⁴⁵ The main object of this article will be to scrutinize and examine the production and reception of humanitarian narratives about suffering wounded Muslim soldiers, widows and orphans in colonial India.

‘Neutral’ humanitarianism that provided impartial help to both sides, akin to today’s humanitarian sector, was inexistent during the late nineteenth century. Instead, humanitarian action and fundraising were defined by and negotiated through the categories of religion, gender, the nation and a sense of belonging to a specific affective community.⁴⁶

Moving away from the institutional perspective, this article suggests that it is useful to think of the Red Cross as a social movement that provided modular forms of collective action and historically learned ‘repertoires of contention’ to different actors across the world so that they could organize themselves and act upon their ideas and conceptions of humanity, war, the international and the citizen.⁴⁷

Taking the availability of news from the battlefield as a precondition for the emergence of Red Cross humanitarianism, there is a more specific argument to be made at which point in time we can talk of Red Cross humanitarianism as a global phenomenon. The proliferation of personal letters and impressions printed in newspapers and the war reporter turned war into a ‘spectacle’ full of stories of individual tragedy, suffering and heroism with which the reader could emotionally identify by the 1850s.⁴⁸ Detailed, visual and imaginative news was a distinguishing feature of the emerging mass press.⁴⁹

⁴¹Carey Anthony Watt, *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴²Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions After Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁴³Thomas Laqueur, ‘Bodies, Details, and Humanitarian Narrative’, in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 176–204; See also, Karen Halttunen, ‘Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture.’ *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (1995): 303–34.

⁴⁴Thomas Laqueur, ‘Mourning, Pity, and The Work of Narrative in the Making of “Humanity”,’ 42

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 39; Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

⁴⁶Green, ‘Humanitarianism in nineteenth-century context’.

⁴⁷Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸Mitchel Roth, *Historical Dictionary of War Journalism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

⁴⁹David Sachsman and David Bulla, eds., *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013); Patricia Cline Cohen, *Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

The telegraph was pivotal in facilitating emotional identification with suffering faraway soldiers.⁵⁰ It was, however, only by the 1870s that hitherto regional networks were integrated into a telegraphic ‘world cable network’ that spanned the globe and allowed for timely transmission of news across vast distances.⁵¹ In 1866, it still took the *Times of India* 13 days to publish a telegraphic account of the battle of *Königgrätz*, the decisive battle of the Austro-Prussian War. By 1871, the average transmission time of a message from Britain to the Indian subcontinent shrank to 6 hours and 7 minutes.⁵²

The interlocking of the local sphere of print culture with telegraphic news was to be central in creating a global media sphere. The wide availability of printing presses as ‘engines of sympathy’ produced affective and imagined communities beyond specific localities.⁵³ By the 1870s, the ‘age of commercialisation’ had reached Britain, Switzerland, Russia and the vernacular press in India.⁵⁴ From this point in time, telegraphic news from the battlefield could be printed almost simultaneously in different locations. It enabled people in different localities across the globe to relate to wars, to frame their humanitarian narratives, and to organize humanitarian fundraising and action accordingly. The structural preconditions for people to relate to faraway sufferers across different regions emotionally were thus set in the 1870s. It is from this point in time that we can speak of Red Cross humanitarianism as a global phenomenon.

The section below briefly examines the construction of affective communities that bound the Balkans to Britain, Russia and Switzerland. This sets the stage for the main focus of this article: the reception and production of humanitarian discourses and practices in colonial India.

The Balkans and affective communities in Britain, Russia and Switzerland

In summer 1875, an uprising of Christian subjects in the Ottoman province of Herzegovina triggered a chain of events that led to the Russian-Ottoman War. What historians have labelled as the ‘Great Eastern Crisis’ of 1875–1878 witnessed a series of intricate diplomatic negotiations on the international level, a string of popular uprisings, two armed hostilities and eventually a large-scale war between the Russian and the Ottoman Empire (1877–78).⁵⁵ The Great Eastern Crisis saw the widespread use of violence against civilian populations, extensive and sensationalist newspaper reporting from the battlefields.

A growing number of travelogues, missionary activity and reports about the Christian minorities living in the Ottoman Empire transformed the Balkans into a ‘Christian borderland.’ The Great Eastern Crisis gave birth to a liberal internationalism that perceived it as the moral, religious and humanitarian obligation of ‘Europe’ to intervene on behalf of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶ At the same time, a more assertive pan-Islam evolved in the Islamic world. As Khanates and Islamic powers rapidly fell prey one after the other to European imperialism, the Ottoman Empire began to assume a central place in these pan-Islamic world views. Pan-Islam perceived the

⁵⁰Gustave Moynier, *Droit des gens: étude sur la Convention de Genève pour l'amélioration du sort des militaires blessés dans les armées en campagne (1864–1868)* (Geneva: Cherbuliez, 1870), 12.

⁵¹Daniel Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 20–24, 40, 51–52.

⁵²Amelia Bonea, ‘Telegraphy and Journalism in Colonial India, c. 1830 to 1900s,’ *History Compass* 12, no. 5 (2014): 393.

⁵³Tony Ballantyne, ‘Moving Texts,’ 15; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁵⁴Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016), 64–83.

⁵⁵Richard Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question, 1875–1878* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁵⁶Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide, and the Birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and The Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 141–79.

Ottoman Empire as the last important Muslim Empire, as guardian of the holy sites and as pivotal for the continuance of Islam as a world religion and civilization.⁵⁷

Due to an increasingly globalized media sphere and new means of communication, people in different localities began to relate to the events in the Balkans. They organized themselves to defend what they perceived as affective communities. Wounded soldiers, widows and orphans became the central ethical reference points around which humanitarian claims were formulated, and aid was organized. The Balkans came to form a highly contested, imagined space where different affective communities competed for moral hegemony.

* * *

The Bulgarian agitation from July to December 1876 in Britain decrying the atrocities on the Christian population committed by the Ottoman irregulars in Bulgaria and the perceived pro-Turkish stance of the British government on the one hand and the countermovement consisting of pro-Government forces, Conservatives and part of the traditionally Russophobic British establishment that denounced Russia and its massacres on the other have been scrutinized in detail.⁵⁸ It will suffice for our purpose to briefly focus on how humanitarian narratives and action were constructed and negotiated through the categories of gender, race, the domestic and examine the important role of modern religion as webs of communication and mobilization.

The Bulgarian agitation was a social protest movement that sought to hold the establishment to account. It relied on well-established modular forms of social action and learned repertoires of contention.⁵⁹ Local meetings adopted specific resolutions, which had been proposed in the newspapers, and sent petitions to the Foreign Office.⁶⁰ The Great Eastern crisis was a 'golden age' of the philanthropic public meeting and new journalism blending social protest with faraway suffering.⁶¹

The humanitarian narratives established were shrill and sensationalist. Janarius MacGahan who had been sent by the liberal *Daily News* to Bulgaria to investigate did not pretend to be impartial.⁶² His vivid descriptions of little babes 'spitted on bayonets', the 'horrid details of the vilest outrages committed upon women' and the infamous scene of 200 children and women burned in a church in Batak captured the imagination of Britons.⁶³ The same applied to humanitarian counternarratives describing the plight of massacred Muslims.⁶⁴ These humanitarian narratives were geared to a mass readership, designed to trigger outrage and to mobilize public support.

The atrocities campaign in Britain did not veil its hostility towards Islam and the Turk. Countless articles and speeches decried the 'immoral' Turks as 'irredeemable, irreclaimable, sensual wretches'.⁶⁵ The alleged rape of Christian women that 'lust still more inhuman, bestial

⁵⁷Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918–1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877–1924)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Jacob Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Ram Lakhan Shukla, *Britain, India, and the Turkish Empire, 1853–1882* (New Delhi: Peoples Pub. House, 1973).

⁵⁸David Harris, *Britain and the Bulgarian Horrors of 1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); Richard Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (London: Nelson, 1963); Richard Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question, 1875–1878* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Ann Saab, *Reluctant Icon: Gladstone, Bulgaria, and the Working Classes, 1856–1878* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁹Charles Tilly, "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834," *Social Science History*, 17, no. 2 (1993): 253–80.

⁶⁰Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion: Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 84.

⁶¹Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian agitation*, 29; Andrew Griffiths, *The New Journalism, The New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁶²Janarius MacGahan, Eugene Schuyler, *The Turkish Atrocities in Bulgaria: Letters of the Special Commissioner of the "Daily News", with An Introduction and Mr. Schuyler's Preliminary Report* (London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co., 1876), 10–11.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 26, 11, 27–31.

⁶⁴'Atrocities' and 'massacres' on Muslims were frequently reported in major British newspapers, see for instance 'Atrocities', *The Times*, 9 August 1877, 6.

⁶⁵*Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 April 1876, 5.

and savage [than the killings]’ – transformed ‘the Turk’ not just into a murderer, but also into a rapist.⁶⁶ Following the reports about the Bulgarian atrocities, longer standing discourses about the harem and Oriental suppression of women quickly amalgamated into an image of the Turk as an aggressive sexual monster that raped Christian women and sold their children as slaves.⁶⁷ Social Darwinism and the rise of human racial classification saw the Turk classified as ‘Tartar’ or ‘Scythian’, one of the ‘lowest races’ especially prone to violence.⁶⁸ The Great Eastern Crisis popularized racialized notions of the Turk and Islamic savagery that were incompatible with Western, Christian civilization.

The countless allegations of rape of Christian women mirrored those of the Indian Mutiny and demanded chivalrous action of British men to protect Christian women from oppressive Muslim men. This more aggressive assertion of British national and imperial prestige became an essential part of British masculinity from the 1870s onwards.⁶⁹ The highly gendered and sexualized discourse was especially repulsive to British women’s reformers. Across the political spectrum, British women were leading fundraising activities in Britain and many of the humanitarian initiatives in the Balkans. Fundraising and humanitarianism by British women became one of the distinctive features of ‘feminine’ liberalism.⁷⁰

Tales of ‘monstrosities’ and ‘atrocities’ of the Turk or the Russian in these humanitarian narratives represented more general negotiations of anxieties about race, gender and sexuality that came increasingly to the forefront in the interconnected age of empire. As the Gothic monster, ‘the Turk’ or ‘the Russian’ came to symbolize ‘the perfect figure for negative identity’ which demanded a reaction and constructed the virtuous human, British and Christian.⁷¹

Religion was instrumental not just for framing the humanitarian narrative and describing good and evil, it served as a crucial web of information and mobilization. After two religious revivals, Victorian contemporaries were quick to appropriate the events in the Balkans into Christian imaginings. Prophetic literature was flowering during the Great Eastern Crisis.⁷² Like many other contemporaries, W. T. Stead, one of the prime agitators of the Bulgarian campaign, saw the ‘spontaneous’ agitation as following a divine plan and was convinced that he was following ‘God’s voice’.⁷³

Religion provided a unique infrastructure to mobilize popular support. Church services were used to broadcast preselected news about atrocities and to collect subscriptions.⁷⁴ W. T. Stead, conscious about the organizational power of this infrastructure, was eager to establish a formal ‘Bulgarian Sunday’ and to utilize the ‘elaborate machinery of the Churches & Chapels’.⁷⁵ Stead’s

⁶⁶*Daily News*, 19 August 1876, 3.

⁶⁷Ruth Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Edward Ziter, *Imagining the Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 54–93.

⁶⁸Geoff Watson, ‘Representations of Central Asian ethnicities in British Literature c. 1830–1914,’ *Asian Ethnicity* 3, no. 2 (2002): 137–51.

⁶⁹Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and The New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁷⁰Dorothy Anderson, *Balkan Volunteers* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), 9–22; Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 75–123; Eugenio Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42–3.

⁷¹Here, I rely on Halberstam’s investigation into Gothic monsters. See Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and The Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 22.

⁷²Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, 161–2.

⁷³John Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of A Newspaper: An Account of the Temperaments, Perturbations and Achievements of John Morley, W.T. Stead, E.T. Cook, Harry Cust, J.L. Garvin and three other editors of the Pall Mall Gazette* (London: Methuen, 1952), 104.

⁷⁴For Canon Liddon’s mixing of news with preaching, see John Octavius Johnston, *Life and letters of Henry Parry Liddon* (New York: Longmans, 1904), 205–6, 214.

⁷⁵Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, 167, 136–38, 137.

editorials were often following the style of nonconformist preaching in using powerful language, vivid and emotional material.⁷⁶ The existing religious infrastructure in Britain was central in providing important hubs for the dissemination of information, in mobilizing public support and in establishing streamlined humanitarian narratives.

Religious webs of information were also critical in how the atrocities campaigners in Britain gained access to information in the Balkans. American missionaries decisively shaped the perceptions of the events in the Balkans. However, due to their ongoing missionary operations in the Ottoman Empire and the USA strict neutrality during the Great Eastern Crisis, they remained in the background.⁷⁷

It would, however, be wrong to attribute the reaction of the British public solely to the Protestant international. Instead, a wide variety of different groups were drawn to the Bulgarian atrocities campaign because it resonated with local concerns. Many of the newly enfranchised middle classes had become disillusioned with the establishment in London by the 1870s.⁷⁸ Chief amongst these were Nonconformists and Dissenters deeply worried about the Education Act of 1870 and political developments that marginalized them. They perceived the fate of Christians in the Balkans as mirroring their fight against 'second-class citizenry' in Britain.⁷⁹ Regional aspirations, especially of provincial centres, were also important as Bulgarian atrocities campaigners repeatedly stressed the importance of the North or their locality in leading the agitation. The Bulgarian massacres 'assumed symbolic significance and could be coloured differently by different groups.'⁸⁰ By localizing and translating Bulgarian massacres into regional and local contexts, it offered local actors a way of expressing their ideas and conceptions of humanity, war, justice, the international and the citizen.

The emotionally heated public debate and the great divide it created in British society predetermined the humanitarian initiatives that followed. The reports about massacres soon provoked calls for 'practical sympathies' for the victims. Measures ranged from humanitarian fundraising to humanitarian missions, sending generals and volunteers to the Balkans.⁸¹ By the end of 1876, there were so many funds for the support of the Christian victims that many contemporaries confused them.⁸²

The National Aid Society (to become the British Red Cross society later) was first staying true to the letter of the Geneva Convention in maintaining that it could only give relief in wars between sovereign nations not during insurgencies. Under public pressure and competition of the St. John of Jerusalem, it, however, changed its stance.⁸³ It was furiously attacked in public for even proposing to give relief to both sides.⁸⁴

When the Conservatives and pro-Government forces recovered, a host of Turkish and Ottoman funds were set up. In the polarized public debate, one had to take a side, either for

⁷⁶Simon Goldsworthy, 'English Nonconformity and The Pioneering of the Modern Newspaper Campaign: Including the Strange Case of W. T. Stead and the Bulgarian Horrors,' *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 391–2.

⁷⁷Bulgaria had been a field of American missionary enterprise since the late 1850s. American missionaries were entangled in the national revival, see Tatyana Nestorova, *American Missionaries Among the Bulgarians, 1858–1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); James Clarke, *Bible Societies, American Missionaries and The National Revival of Bulgaria* (New York: Arno Press, 1971). For the vital role of the Robert College as 'nerve centre' during the Bulgarian campaign, see James Clarke, 'Americans and the April Uprising,' *East European Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1977): 422 and Edwin Pears, *Forty years in Constantinople* (London: H. Jenkins, 1916), 15–6.

⁷⁸Freda Harcourt, 'Disraeli's Imperialism, 1866–1868: A Question of Timing,' *The Historical Journal* 23, no. 1 (1980): 87–109.

⁷⁹Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, 147–238, 154.

⁸⁰Saab, *Reluctant Icon*, 201.

⁸¹See, for instance, the report on different experienced Russian generals and an American general who had fought during the Civil War in the ranks of the Serbian and Montenegrin armies. *The Morning Post*, 6 June 1876, 5.

⁸²Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 115.

⁸³Harriet Wantage, *Lord Wantage, V.C., K.C.B.: A Memoir by His Wife* (London: Smith, 1908), 218–20.

⁸⁴For Farley's and Canon Liddon's reactions, see *Daily News*, 19 August 1876, 6; Anderson, *Balkan Volunteers*, 11.

the Turks or the Slavs. The *Stafford House Committee* was, for our purpose, the most important.⁸⁵ Invoking the memories of the ‘horrible Crimean winter’, it appealed for warm clothes and subscriptions for the ill-equipped Ottoman soldiers in the Balkans in December 1876.⁸⁶ It was complemented by the powerful *Turkish Compassionate Fund* with which it cooperated.⁸⁷ These pro-government funds depended on the help of the extensive network of British consular personnel and informal contacts to the Ottoman elite. They promoted a vision of British imperial stewardship.⁸⁸ The triple aim – in line with government policy – was to maintain a British sphere of influence, to appease Ottoman calls for British military intervention and to appear as a neutral imperial power in face of Muslim protest in the colonies.⁸⁹ The heated debates preconditioned humanitarian fundraising in Britain. A ‘neutral’ humanitarianism that provided impartial help to both sides akin to the humanitarian sector today was inexistent.

* * *

Equally important for Indian discourses and practices was the vocal pan-Slav movement in Russia. It perceived Russia to be organically connected to the Slavic people in the Balkans and strove to liberate and unite them under Russian leadership. The Slavs were the heirs of the Byzantine Empire. Pan Slav intellectuals and writers gave voice to dreams of a united Orthodox Slavic space reaching from Russia to Bulgaria, and a ‘liberated’ Constantinople reconstituted as ‘ancient Tsargrad’. This messianic and deeply religious pan-Slavic unity was rendered possible by the loosened censorship and the reforms of the new tsar Aleksandr II from 1855 onwards.⁹⁰

A popular movement, at times in confrontation with the cautious tsar and Russian officialdom, enthusiastically saw an opportunity to put ideas into practice when Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire at the end of July 1876. Russian cultural luminaries threw their weight behind the pan-Slavic agitation. Tchaikovsky composed the *Marche Slave* to help the Slavonic Charity Committee.⁹¹ Leo Tolstoy’s (1828–1910) last instalment of *Anna Karenina*, on the other hand, was not published because the pan-Slavic editor of the *Russian Herald*, Mikhail Katkov, was infuriated with Tolstoy condemning the pan-Slavic volunteers going to the Balkans in the novel.⁹²

Pan-Slav committees in Moscow and St. Petersburg began to recruit volunteers for the war and raised money for ostensibly humanitarian purposes. Amid pan-Slavic fervour, the Russian Red Cross under the leadership of the tsar’s wife together with the Orthodox church collected subscriptions and provisions for the wounded soldiers and Slav refugees.⁹³

* * *

The Great Eastern Crisis also preoccupied the centre of the Red Cross movement in Geneva. Appalled by the fate of Bosnian refugees in Montenegro, the ICRC and its president were eagerly looking for a precept to justify an intervention. The intention of the ICRC to intervene was

⁸⁵Stafford House Committee, *Report and Record of the Operations of the Stafford House Committee for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Turkish Soldiers* (London: Spottiswoode, 1879).

⁸⁶*The Morning Post*, 13 December 1876, 1, 4.

⁸⁷W. Burdett-Coutts, ed., *The Turkish Compassionate Fund: An Account of Its Origin, Working, and Results* (London: Remington, 1883).

⁸⁸Michelle Tusan, ‘At home in the Ottoman Empire: Humanitarianism and the Victorian Diplomat,’ in *The Cultural Construction of the British World*, eds. Barry Crosbie and Mark Hampton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 77–94; Michelle Tusan, *The British Empire and The Armenian Genocide: Humanitarianism and The Imperial Politics from Gladstone to Churchill* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 45–9.

⁸⁹Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 104–5.

⁹⁰Hans Kohn, *Pan Slavism, Its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953), 131–80; Barbara Jelavich, *Russia’s Balkan Entanglements, 1806–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 143–98.

⁹¹David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study, Vol. 2, the crisis years (1874–1878)* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1982), 100–1.

⁹²Jeffrey Brooks, ‘How Tolstoevskii pleased readers and rewrote a Russian myth,’ *Slavic Review* 64, no. 3 (2005): 538–59.

⁹³MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism*, 115–27.

certainly not to the letter of international law that foresaw the application of the Geneva Convention only in wars amongst sovereign nations.

When the Great Eastern crisis broke out, the ICRC wrote to the Red Cross society in the Ottoman Empire but did not receive any answer as the society laid dormant since the death of its founder.⁹⁴ In October 1875, the board discussed to ‘provoke the adhesion of the prince of Montenegro to the Geneva Convention’ to get a foothold in the conflict. After having received a letter from the Montenegrin prince, the ICRC immediately sent a mission to Montenegro to facilitate the foundation of a national society.⁹⁵ It accepted the accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the Geneva Convention despite them not being sovereign nations.⁹⁶ The newly established Red Cross societies in Montenegro, Serbia and later Bulgaria, were all led by nationalists.⁹⁷

A new Ottoman Society for the relief of wounded soldiers constituted itself at the end of July 1876. The new society proposed to introduce the Red Crescent as a distinct symbol since the Red Cross was often associated with the Christian cross, and therefore ‘injured the sensitivities of the Muslim soldier.’⁹⁸ The Red Crescent was introduced as an *ad hoc* solution as a distinct Muslim sign and remains one of the main symbols of the movement until today.⁹⁹

Reports about massacres perpetrated by Ottoman soldiers consequently began to dominate the pages of the journal of the ICRC. According to a report, Ottoman soldiers had cut off the arm of a Serbian Red Cross functionary with the Red Cross brassard on it and slashed the symbol to pieces with their sabres.¹⁰⁰ This was a ‘savagery’ Moynier located ‘in the ingrained hate of the Muslims towards Christians.’ Despite an Ottoman elite that seemed to have been willing to ‘associate itself to the charitable Christian views’ the ‘Turkish nation, in its entirety, fed hostile prejudices towards the Red Cross’.¹⁰¹

Throughout the Eastern Crisis, the ICRC was far from impartial and neutral. The ICRC almost exclusively condemned Ottoman atrocities while similar incidents on the opposing side were either portrayed as acts of some irregulars or as wrong allegations.¹⁰² Moynier and the ICRC, however, were not alone in their stance. They were acting along the lines of the epistemic community of international law scholars, most of whom argued for European intervention.¹⁰³ Whereas, the Red Cross founders had deliberately downplayed religion in the early years of the movement, it came increasingly to the forefront during the Great Eastern Crisis.

Affective communities in colonial India

Articles about the British atrocities campaign, the pan-Slavic ‘fever’ in Russia and the activities of the ICRC in Geneva were readily available in India. The emerging pan-Islamic humanitarian movement sought to emulate and rival the Russian and British efforts.

⁹⁴For the foundation of the Ottoman Red Crescent by an Austrian refugee, see W.F. List, A. Kernbauer, and Th. Kenner, ‘Karl E. Hammerschmidt: Humanist, Naturwissenschaftler und Narkosepionier,’ *Anaesthesist* 47 (1998): 65–70.

⁹⁵Jean-François Pitteloud, ed. *Procès-verbaux des séances du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge: 17 février 1863–28 août 1914* (Geneva: Institut Henry Dunant, 1999), 365, 368–70.

⁹⁶*Bulletin international* 7, no. 27 (July 1876), 117–19.

⁹⁷Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 110.

⁹⁸*Bulletin International* 8, no. 29 (Jan. 1877): 36.

⁹⁹*Ibid.* 8, no. 30 (April 1877): 41–7; Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, 300–12.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.* 7, no. 28 (Oct. 1876): 173.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁰²See, for instance, *Bulletin International* 7, no. 26 (1876): 66–8.

¹⁰³Davide Rodogno, ‘European Legal Doctrines on Intervention and the Status of the Ottoman Empire within the ‘Family of Nations’ Throughout the Nineteenth Century,’ *Journal of the History of International Law* 18, no. 1 (2016): 5–41.

In contrast to previous analyses, this article argues that the Indian agitation on the subcontinent was both humanitarian and political.¹⁰⁴ It was a ‘public pan-Islam’ emerging from civil society, as opposed to the ‘state pan-Islam’ embraced by the Ottoman State as a legitimizing ideology.¹⁰⁵ Older conceptions of an organically connected spiritual community of Muslim believers (*ummah*) merged with modern notions of humanity and humanitarian help in the evolving Islamic religious international.

Urban centres such as Madras, Bombay and Calcutta provided a new layer to the older networks with their central nodes revolving around Islamic centres of learning, Indian Islamic princely states, clericals and notables. This emerging Islamic cosmopolitanism was less elitist than the usual highly learned Indian–Persian–Arab networks.¹⁰⁶

By mid-July 1876, humanitarian activities to help wounded Muslim soldiers in the Balkans started.¹⁰⁷ Most of the early appeals did neither invoke the Caliph nor his spiritual authority. At times, appeals even explicitly took a stand against raising subscriptions for ‘the old and vast [Ottoman] Empire’, but urged to distribute any collected money instead to ‘widows, orphans, or families of the martyrs who may fall victims in the war.’¹⁰⁸ Early appeals were often submitted anonymously to newspapers.¹⁰⁹ Such a cautious stance has to be seen against the backdrop of the extreme suspicion with which the British colonial government was watching popular Muslim movements since the Mutiny in 1857 and the Wahhabi ‘conspiracy’ of the 1860s and 1870s.¹¹⁰

But soon a public and modular form of the collection of subscriptions was proposed:

‘[appeals for the help of wounded soldiers] should be printed and distributed to every individual belonging to the Mahomedan faith, or the selection of representatives being made in Districts named as a committee . . . These representatives should elect a president and secretary and appoint central committees, general committees and sub-committees throughout India . . . To prevent the subscriptions from going to the wrong coffers, we propose that the whole proceedings, etc., be published once a week . . .’¹¹¹

A modern ‘charity market’ with its stress on publicity and financial accountability emerged in colonial India almost contemporaneously as in Britain.¹¹² What was remarkable was how these suggestions gave a new shape to centuries-old Indian Islamic charitable and philanthropic practices. It was not anymore a donation to a Sufi order or to an Islamic religious endowment (*waqf*), but an open appeal to a faraway cause that was seen as intimately linked to Islam and the holy places.¹¹³

The Indian government reacted with alleged neutrality towards the humanitarian agitation in India. Far more important in the colonial perspective was the loyalty of Indian Muslims to the British, especially after the Russo-Ottoman War had broken out in 1877 and an official

¹⁰⁴Drawing partly on Ottoman sources Özcan interprets the agitation as guided by the Porte and the Sultan, see Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877–1924)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 64–78. Shukla provides a more detailed examination, has, however, neglected much of the transnational connections. See, Shukla, *Britain, India, and the Turkish Empire*, 94–120.

¹⁰⁵Khalid, “Pan-Islamism in Practice,” 201–2.

¹⁰⁶Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁷*The Times of India*, 24 July 1876, 3.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 31 July 1876, 2.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 7 August 1876, 2, *The Times of India*, 17 August 1876, 2.

¹¹⁰Julia Stephens, “The Phantom Wahhabi: Liberalism and the Muslim Fanatic in Mid-Victorian India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2013): 22–52; Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *Wahabi Movement in India* (Calcutta: Mukhopadhyay, 1966).

¹¹¹*The Times of India*, 7 August 1876, 2.

¹¹²Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870–1912* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 59–98.

¹¹³Gregory Kozłowski, *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

proclamation of holy war (*Jihad*) by the Sultan was feared.¹¹⁴ Permission for subscriptions for the wounded soldiers was granted in most cases by local government and police authorities, except at the headquarters of the Deoband movement.¹¹⁵

Antagonistic feelings between British officials and the Indian public intensified when the Bishop of Calcutta publicly condemned the Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans.¹¹⁶ Reports about English officials sending money to wounded Serbian soldiers further contributed to the polarization.¹¹⁷ A fierce battle between the Anglo-Indian papers that supported the Serbians and the vernacular papers that pleaded for aid to the Ottomans ensued, leading to a 'war of representation' to whom Indians should extend their moral franchise.¹¹⁸

While these quarrels attested to the heated atmosphere, humanitarian fundraising on the sub-continent was almost exclusively pro-Ottoman. A committee consisting of 'wealthy classes' was first constituted in Madras.¹¹⁹ Later formalized into the *Anjuman-i-Islamia Madras* it began to petition local and Indian government to hold to the alliance with the Ottoman Empire, sent memorials to the Queen and the Viceroy, and above all started to collect subscription 'for the purpose of rendering relief to the wounded soldiers, widows and orphans in Turkey'.¹²⁰

In Bombay, a 'great meeting' of Muslims was convened in the *Jamma Musjid* under the auspices of the *Anjuman-i-Islam*. It had just been founded earlier the same year to ameliorate the educational, social and moral state of the Muslim community in Bombay.¹²¹ Its main initiators, the influential Tyabji clan and the Rogays represented the new bureaucratic and trading classes in Bombay.¹²² Badruddin Tyabji co-founded the Bombay Presidency Association in 1885 and became the first Muslim to preside over the Indian National Congress in 1887.¹²³

The uprisings in the Balkans afforded the young *Anjuman-i-Islam* an opportunity to distinguish itself. There was an 'immense crowd', of 'at least four thousand' persons in the main hall of the *Jamma Musjid* on 24 September 1876. The report of the meeting stressed the diversity and the 'extremely picturesque' image of all the dresses of the different Muslim communities assembled. Apart from almost the whole of the Tyabji clan and Mohamed Ali Rogay, there was also Rahimtulla Mohamed Sayan – a Bombay lawyer who became the second Muslim to chair the Indian National Congress in 1896 – and a whole range of important Muslim representatives, clerics and doctors present.¹²⁴ A petition was read which appealed to the Queen to remain on friendly terms with the Ottoman Empire. It maintained that the reports of the atrocities in Bulgaria were 'wholly one-sided and grossly exaggerated'. Streets were canvassed to collect signatures for the petition to the Queen and everywhere there was, in the words of the reporter, 'the beau ideal of a zealous follower of Islam'. The article concluded that 'this meeting was by far the largest and most important ever held by the Mussulman community in Bombay'.¹²⁵ The Bulgarian

¹¹⁴For the Viceroy's reactions, see Lord Lytton Papers, The British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, London (hereafter cited as IOR), MSS Eur, E218/19 Pt. 1-3.

¹¹⁵For Hyderabad and Lucknow, see *Anwar-ul-Akbar*, 1 January 1877, *Oudh Akbar*, 12 February 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 5, 102. For the Saharanpur district, see *Najim-ul-Akbar*, 24 December 1876, IOR, L/R/5/54, 5.

¹¹⁶Even the Viceroy was infuriated, see Lord Lytton Papers, IOR, Mss.Eur E.218/19 - Pt. 1, 190.

¹¹⁷*Rahbar-i-Hind*, 21 November 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 679.

¹¹⁸*Samaya Vinod*, 1 December 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 709.

¹¹⁹*Urdu Akbar*, 19 August 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 429, 103.

¹²⁰*Nur-ul-Anwar*, 5 November 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 646.

¹²¹Christine Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India: Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840–1885* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 229–35 and Nile Green, *Bombay Islam*, 34–48.

¹²²Husain Tyabji, *Badruddin Tyabji: A Biography* (Bombay: Thacker, 1952), 83. For the Rogays, see Aziz Ahmad, 'Afghani's Indian Contacts,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89, no. 3 (1969): 479.

¹²³A.G. Noorani, *Badruddin Tyabji* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1969), Moin Shakir, *Muslims and Indian National Congress: Badruddin Tyabji and His Times* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1987).

¹²⁴*Eminent Mussalmans* (Madras: Natesan, 1926), 113–28.

¹²⁵*The Times of India*, 25 September 1876, 2.

agitation and its vitriolic rhetoric against the Ottomans and Islam were deeply offensive to Indian Muslims and heightened fears about the downfall of the Ottoman Empire.

Eight days later, the *Anjuman-i-Islam* in Bombay held a special meeting at the private residence of Ali Rogay for the purpose of raising subscriptions for ‘wounded soldiers of the Turkish armies’ and ‘orphans and widows of those who died in the field’. Twenty-thousand Indian rupees were collected on the spot. The report maintained that the collection of subscription ‘would also do credit to their [the Indian Muslims] humanity’.¹²⁶

A similar meeting of ‘respectable’ Muslim citizens was held shortly afterwards in Calcutta. The initiating figure was Abdul Latif (1828–93), one of the foremost early Muslim reformers and public servants in Bengal.¹²⁷ Around 600 people met in Calcutta’s town hall to show their sympathy for Turkey on 7 October 1876. There was more of an air of old Indian Muslim nobility in Calcutta, as the Mysore family – exiled to Calcutta after the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799 – the son-in-law of the ex-king of Oudh, and a representative of Gwalior princely state were present. The Indian bureaucratic middle classes of the uncovenanted service – ‘pleaders, *munshis* (secretaries/writers), and collegiate students’ – took the leading part in the proceedings, but also *nacodas* (Muslim shipping merchants), and lower classes such as *Khitmutgars* (native footmen) and *dingi majis* (riverboat men) were well represented. As in Bombay, the meeting was perceived to be the most important meeting for Muslims ‘that has ever been held in the Town Hall... in Calcutta’. Chairing the session, Abdul Latif, was careful not to use a ‘scholarly Urdu’, but only the ‘most familiar vernacular’ so that those of the lower classes, would understand him. In a lengthy speech, he argued that the alleged massacres might have happened, but ‘conclusive and positive proof was wanting’. A committee was established to collect subscriptions for the wounded Ottoman soldiers, widows and orphans.¹²⁸ Soon this committee established local subcommittees across Bengal to collect subscriptions.¹²⁹

Committees mushroomed across the Gangetic plain.¹³⁰ Such committees mixed anxieties about the fall of the Ottoman Empire, with a protest against the one-sided and exaggerated description of the events in the Balkans and the denigrating portrayal of Muslims while raising subscriptions for the wounded Ottoman soldiers, widows and orphans. In the South, apart from Madras, there were committees instituted in Bangalore and the princely state of Hyderabad.¹³¹ Smaller Muslim princely states, such as those on the Kathiawar peninsula, Gondwana in central India or Rampur in the United Provinces joined the agitation. The absence of others, such as Bhopal, for instance, was deplored.¹³² Vernacular newspapers noted support from Muslims as far as Rangoon and Moulmein (Burma).¹³³ The amount of money raised was often seen as representative of the spirit and stature of a particular location in the Muslim world.

Like in Britain, these committees were fluid, maintaining informal links to each other and were not managed by an umbrella organization. The agitation followed the trajectory of the wars in the

¹²⁶*The Times of India*, 2 October 1876, 2.

¹²⁷Abdul Karim, ‘Nawab Abdul Latif and Modern Education of the Muslims of Bengal,’ *Islamic Studies* 9, no. 4 (1970): 279–93; Abdool Luteef, *A short account of my public life* (Calcutta: Newman, 1886).

¹²⁸*The Englishmen*, 9 October 1876, 3.

¹²⁹*The Pioneer*, 18 November 1876, 3.

¹³⁰For Lucknow, *Anwar-ul-Akbar*, 1 January 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 5; Baroda, *Anand Lahri*, 17 November 1876, *ibid.*, 676; Amritsar, *Rahbar-i-Hind*, 21 November 1876, *ibid.*, 679; Dacca, *Nurul-Anwar*, 10 February 1877 and *Benares Akbar*, 28 June 1877; *ibid.*, 103–4, 441; Aligarh, *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 11 April 1877, *ibid.*, 222; Mirzapur, *Nur-ul-Anwar*, 14 April 1877 and *Benares Akbar*, 5 April 1877, *ibid.*, 256, 293; Gorakhpur, *Oudh Akbar*, 19 June 1877, *ibid.*, 424; Rawalpindi and Abbottabad, *Koh-i-Nur*, 16 June 1877, *ibid.*, 424; Gurdaspur, *Rahbar-i-Hind*, 23 June 1877, *ibid.*, 441; Rampur, *Oudh Akbar*, 26 June 1877, *ibid.*, 442–443; Bulandshahr, *Ashraf-ul-Akbar*, 1 July 1877, *ibid.*, 460.

¹³¹For Bangalore, *Vrit Dhara*, 7 May 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 324; Hyderabad, *Nur-ul-Anwar*, 12 May 1877, *ibid.*, 348.

¹³²For Kathiawar, *Vrita Dhara*, 8th January 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 19; Gondwana Princely state, *Urdu Akbar* (Akola), 7 October 1876, L/R/5/53, 569; Rampur, *Sholai Tur*, 8 May 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 324; Bhopal, *Punjabi Akbar*, 7 July 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 474.

¹³³*Urdu-Akbar*, Akola, 29 June 1877; IOR, L/R/5/54, 461.

Balkans. Starting as both a protest movement against the Bulgarian agitation and a humanitarian movement, the relief of wounded soldiers took off in earnest after Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The fundraising activity in India led to an amount of 1,052,003 Indian rupees (£227,509) being transferred from India to the Turkish Consul in Constantinople.¹³⁴ This roughly equalled that collected by the Bulgarian atrocity campaigners in Britain (£250,000).¹³⁵ The enormous amount collected on the subcontinent is remarkable, as India was under much more economic distress, suffering from a severe famine and had significantly lower living wages.

* * *

The fear of Muslim decline featured heavily in discourses on the subcontinent. Indian vernacular newspapers described Russia's aims as 'extermination of the Mussalman faith'.¹³⁶ If 'the Farangis [Franks, e.g. Christians] succeeded in seizing Turkey, Islam will soon cease to exist', one editor warned its readers.¹³⁷ For a long time, Muslims in India would never have believed 'how Delhi could possibly be left without a king. Constantinople will simply sink into the same condition in which Delhi and Lucknow are now'.¹³⁸ The fate of Islam on the Indian subcontinent was juxtaposed with an imaginary fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Russian imperial expansion had generated large-scale violence and massive displacements.¹³⁹ The Russian conquest of the Muslim Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand in Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s had led to a new wave of violence amongst the native Muslim population which was invoked by Indian papers to illustrate that Russia was as guilty of massacres as the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁰ 'At Kokand eighty thousand innocent men, women, and children were driven out of their homes and butchered . . . If we were to speak of all atrocities that have hitherto been perpetrated upon the Mussalmans by the Russians, the hearts of our audience would burst with grief, a vernacular article maintained.¹⁴¹

In 1877, as massacres of Cossacks on Muslims in the Balkans were reported, anxious calculations were made how many Muslim children had been left fatherless: 'The death of twenty thousand soldiers means that as many thousand women have been made widows and that eighty thousand children have been left fatherless, supposing four to be the average number of children for each. How miserable must be the state of these widows and orphans, suffering from hunger and thirst'.¹⁴² The consensus in the vernacular press was that the 'cruelties of the Bashi Bazouks fall into insignificance compared with the cruelties of the Cossacks'.¹⁴³

There was much anger amongst Indian Muslims about the Bulgarian atrocities campaigners, their one-sided mobilization for the Christians in the Balkans and their unwillingness to extend the moral franchise to Muslim victims. One vernacular newspaper maintained that 'no dictionary could help natives to understand European terms such as 'justice' and 'treaty obligations'. The unnecessary shedding of blood during wars in Europe and the killings of the Turks in the Balkans were all 'standing proofs of the . . . high civilisation of Europe. If it is your [Europe's] 'policy' to devastate a country with fire and sword, to dishonour women, and stab children with bayonets, why do you complain of Nadir Shah? Why do you fill your histories with descriptions of cruelties and barbarities committed by Changez Khan [Genghis Khan]? . . . Those notorious

¹³⁴The total amount was mentioned in a letter of the Turkish Consul at Bombay to the proprietor of a vernacular paper, see *Punjabi-i-Akbhar*, 9 March 1878, IOR, L/R/5/55, 201.

¹³⁵Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 75.

¹³⁶*Anwar-ul-Akhbar*, 1st October 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 548.

¹³⁷*Koh-i-Nur*, 30 December 1876, IOR, L/R/5/54, 6.

¹³⁸*Benares Akbar*, 2 November 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 633–34

¹³⁹Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

¹⁴⁰Januaris MacGahan, *Campaigning on the Oxus, and The Fall of Khiva* (London: Sampson, 1876); *The Times of India*, 26 October 1876, 2.

¹⁴¹*Mihi Darakhshan*, 21 June 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 442.

¹⁴²*Oudh Akbar*, 23 June 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 426.

¹⁴³*Khair Kwah-i-Alam*, 7 August 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 542.

tyrants, too, did nothing more but what is now being done in Europe. Besides, they had no such deadly firearms as the Krupp gun, and the Henri-Martini [Martini–Henry] rifle.¹⁴⁴

The editor of the vernacular newspaper acutely dissected the ambivalence and blind spots of the discourse of European civilization and humanity during the age of empire. From the perspective of colonized natives, Europeans only invoked humanity if it was of use to great European powers. The violence produced by the expansion of European imperial powers and the violent colonial reality, however, did not trigger pity or a humanitarian response. This intensely anti-imperial humanitarianism of colonized Indians was a direct assault on the one-sidedness of European notions of humanity during the age of empire. Indian Muslims increasingly demanded that Muslim and colonial suffering was seen and recognized in the imperial metropole and the world.

Crucial for emotional identification with the suffering on the battlefield on the Indian subcontinent was how the events in the Balkans fused with local grievances. Indian vernacular newspapers followed the events in the Balkans with great interest. Commenting on the Debate in the House of Commons on 6 August 1876 an Indian vernacular newspaper, for instance, argued that Britain had to ‘drive away discontent from the land by pursuing a just and human policy; let her [Britain] deal with the princes and people of India fairly; and then she can wait and watch the progress of Russia in Central Asia in the confidence’.¹⁴⁵

Such an argument is representative of many of the Indian opinions brought forward in the vernacular press concerning Russia’s imperial expansion. It linked the question of foreign policy to native loyalty and grievances of racial exclusion on the subcontinent. By ‘treating princes . . . of India fairly’ the article referred to the Baroda affair. The Indian public (as well as the British liberal press) had been incensed by the ‘arbitrary’ and ‘legally unjust’ deposing of Mulhar Rao, the ruler of Baroda, a large Princely State in Western India.¹⁴⁶

Indian loyalty, in the view of many Indians, was also bound up with a good and ‘humane government’. A series of high-profile incidents of racially motivated killings of Indians by British officials fuelled the feeling of humiliation. In the, perhaps, most notorious case, a certain private MacGrath suddenly killed three Indians at a public parade, only to be acquitted later on the grounds of insanity. Numerous similar cases across India coincided with the MacGrath ruling.¹⁴⁷ Vernacular newspapers were full of reports on how the British treated the ‘natives as uncivilized animals’¹⁴⁸ and how the English would not hesitate to ‘kill them [Indians] as wild pigeons’.¹⁴⁹ Vernacular papers often voiced a sense of deep racial injustice which excluded them from being treated humanely by Europeans. ‘O ye natives! You are no better than labourers! Labour hard to earn your livelihood and prostrate yourselves in obeisance before the fair complexion . . . you are only a semi-barbarous people’, a vernacular article lamented.¹⁵⁰

Reading the events in the Balkans in the light of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and colonial rule, vernacular newspapers perceived the Bulgarian insurgents often as ‘mutineers’. The British had crushed the Indian Mutiny violently. There was, in the view of Indians, thus no reason why the Ottoman suppression of the uprisings in the Balkans should deserve any international sympathy.¹⁵¹ Indians had been suffering the same degree ‘at the hands of British rulers’ as the Christian insurgents in the Balkans, vernacular papers argued.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁴ *Mashir-i-Qaisar*, 3 February 1878, IOR, L/R/5/55, 106–7.

¹⁴⁵ *The Sadadarsh*, 30 August 1875, IOR, L/R/5/52, 420, 423.

¹⁴⁶ Judith Rowbotham, ‘Miscarriage of Justice? Postcolonial Reflections on the Trial of the Maharaja of Baroda, 1875,’ *Liverpool Law Review* 28 (2007): 377–403.

¹⁴⁷ *Punjab-i-Akhbar*, 20 May 1876, *Najum-ul-Akhbar*, 1 June 1876 and *Punjab-i-Akhbar*, 10 June 1876, IOR, L/R/5/52, 245, 265, 278.

¹⁴⁸ *Wakil-i-Hindustan*, 21 August 1875, IOR, L/R/5/52, 393.

¹⁴⁹ *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 7 July 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 527.

¹⁵⁰ *Vakil-i-Hindustan*, 29 June 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 465.

¹⁵¹ *Anjuman-i-Punjab*, 3 November 1876, IOR L/R/5/53, 649.

¹⁵² *Vakil-i-Hindustan*, 14 December 1876, *ibid.*, 741.

Indian Muslims usually juxtaposed the problems of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans with the decline of the Muslim position in India. Their ‘ancestors commanded armies’ a vernacular weekly deplored, now Muslims were left to ‘rot to administer a British district.’¹⁵³ The scion of Muslim reform and advocate for the introduction of English education amongst Muslims in India, Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98), struck a similar cord. In a lengthy article, he saw the uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia linked to the dominant influence of Muslim religious scholars (*maulvis*) who ‘mix every question coming before them with religion or with what they had themselves laid down.’¹⁵⁴ Having founded the Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College in the same year, the events in the Balkans served as an evocative example of the danger of Islamic downfall if Muslims would not adopt Western education and Western institutions of governance.¹⁵⁵

The Russian-Ottoman quarrel was not as distant to Indians as it was to Britons. A Russian invasion of India was a possible scenario that raised great anxieties. In early September 1875, news about military mobilization in Afghanistan caused further worries.¹⁵⁶ India had been deliberately disarmed, it was argued, and many Indians ‘felt more like women [than men]’.¹⁵⁷ Native emasculation was a dominant theme in the vernacular newspapers during the Eastern Crisis. Such debates have to be seen in the context of the manifold pre- and early colonial Indian military traditions.¹⁵⁸ The Indian Mutiny of 1857 had led to an abrupt and keenly felt process of demilitarization and disarmament amongst local key groups and middle men.¹⁵⁹ The martial traditions and the military ethos, however, continued to play an essential part in the self-perception of these elites. Laments about emasculation, fears of native decline, racial humiliation and the loss of the martial spirit amongst the Indian population often merged with calls for loyalty and a renewed cooperation between Indian and British elites.¹⁶⁰

The idea of final Muslim destruction sometimes triggered calls for a holy war (*jihad*). The concept of *Jihad* on the subcontinent during the Russo-Ottoman War, however, did not denote a religiously induced means of killing infidels or overthrowing British rule. It was most often used in the sense of sending volunteers – armed or humanitarian – to the battlefields as was done in the Russian and British context.¹⁶¹ The terms ‘*Jihadis*’ and ‘volunteers’ were often used interchangeably as the translator of the vernacular newspapers noted.¹⁶² The figure of the *jihadi* mostly served as a mythically imbued image for Muslim self-sacrifice in times of war.¹⁶³

The proclamation of *Jihad* nevertheless constituted a red line for British colonial authorities. The public subscriptions for Ottoman wounded soldiers, Muslim widows and orphans was a conscious attempt by Muslim social reformers to channel Muslim public sentiment, to infuse it with the respectability and high esteem charity and Red Cross humanitarianism enjoyed in Britain.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵³*Sadarsh*, 26 July 1875, IOR, L/R/5/52, 362.

¹⁵⁴*Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 15 October 1875, IOR, L/R/5/52, 538, 539.

¹⁵⁵David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹⁵⁶*Sayyid-ul-Akhbar*, 1 September 1875, IOR, L/R/5/53, 437–8.

¹⁵⁷*Louh-i-Mahfuz*, 1 September 1875, IOR, L/R/5/52, 488.

¹⁵⁸Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of The Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁵⁹Thomas Metcalf, *Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857–1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

¹⁶⁰Thus the frequent call to form volunteer corps, see *Vakil-i-Hindustan*, 22 July 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 370.

¹⁶¹For similarities of humanitarianism and Islamic militant practices, see Faisal Devji, ‘The Terrorist as Humanitarian,’ in *Social Analysis*, 53, no. 1 (2009): 173–92.

¹⁶²*Lawrence Gazette*, 8 August 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 409. There are scattered references in the vernacular papers about a handful of Indian Muslims who allegedly went to the battlefields. See, *Naiari-Azam*, 3 January 1877; *Oudh Akhbar*, 9 June 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 19, 395.

¹⁶³The *Anwar-ul-Akhbar*, 1 October 1876, IOR L/R/5/53, 548. This is in line with the exceedingly broad meaning of *Jihad*, see Rudolph Peters, ‘*Jihad*’ in *The Oxford encyclopedia of the Islamic world*, ed. John Esposito (vol. 3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252–56.

¹⁶⁴Luteef, *A Short Account of My Public Life*, 29–30.

In India too, humanitarian narratives fused with local grievances and were negotiated through the categories of gender, race, the domestic and the belonging to a specific affective community. Wounded Ottoman soldiers in the Balkans unfolded an evocative power because they could be regarded as being in the same social nexus as Indian Muslims: a people subjugated and violently put down by Russia, a violent European imperial power, and the Slav nations both having little regard for the humanity of Muslims, their history, civilization and religion. The Bulgarian agitators decrying massacres on Christians in the Balkans appeared one-sided against the backdrop of imperial and everyday colonial violence.

* * *

Though the humanitarian movement for the relief of wounded Ottoman soldiers preceded the Great Famine of 1876–78, it received a great thrust by it. The Great Famine of 1876–78 was one of the worst humanitarian disasters in India, in which an estimated 7.2 million Indians perished.¹⁶⁵ It triggered a humanitarian movement across the British Empire that rallied British humanitarian figureheads such as Florence Nightingale and culminated in an impressive £600,000 collected. It prompted intense debates about the native agency, the efficacy of customary charity on the subcontinent and the ability of imperial humanitarianism to alleviate the suffering of natives in the colonies.¹⁶⁶

However, one has to be careful not to overestimate the ramifications of this imperial humanitarian movement on the Indian subcontinent. The Great Famine witnessed one of the most restrictive and inhuman colonial policies with regards to famine relief in British colonial history. Following the liberal economic policy that the state should not intervene in private trade and grain prices under any circumstances, eager to correct what was considered ‘extravagance’ of the last famine relief, and afraid of setting a precedent that would lead to an Indian Poor Law, the famine relief of the colonial state during the Great Famine of 1876–78 was guided by financial expediency and a laissez-faire approach.¹⁶⁷

Even if a satire of Indian newspapers rather than reality, the *Anti-Charitable Contributions Act of 1877* epitomized the extremely tense relationship between the colonial government and local humanitarianism.¹⁶⁸ Humanitarianism by Indians was decried as ‘indiscriminate charity’ by colonial administrators as it attracted large crowds in cities, allegedly encouraged dependency amongst the undeserving poor and was perceived to be unscientific and inadequate. The colonial administration first discouraged and later only accepted private humanitarian action by Indians as subsidiary to government relief justifiable for the necessitous poor, destitute children in orphanages or day nurseries. The main relief effort of the colonial state revolving around the coercive work camp had little use for public charity.¹⁶⁹

William Digby and his collaborators who initiated the metropolitan fundraising campaign too were channelling most money to local committees dominated by missionaries as they believed

¹⁶⁵Ira Klein, ‘When the Rains Failed: Famine, Relief, and Mortality in British India,’ *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 21, no. 2 (1984):199, 209–11.

¹⁶⁶William Digby, *The Famine Campaign in Southern India (Madras and Bombay Presidencies and Province of Mysore) 1876–1878, vol. 2* (London: Longmans, 1878); Christina Twomey and Andrew May, ‘Australian Responses to the Indian Famine, 1876–78: Sympathy, Photography and the British Empire,’ *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 2: 233–52; Gill, *Calculating Compassion*, 75.

¹⁶⁷Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and The Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2002), 25–59;

¹⁶⁸The *Anti-Charitable Contributions Act of 1877* was a skit in the Indian newspapers, not a reality as it is often maintained in the scholarship on the great famine, see Kate Currie, ‘British colonial policy and famines: some effects and implications of free trade’ in the Bombay, Bengal and Madras presidencies, 1860–1900,’ *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991), 23–56; Mike Davies, *Victorian Holocausts*, 39–40; The original source is quite clear about this, see Digby, *The Famine Campaign*, vol. 2, 55.

¹⁶⁹B.M. Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India, 1860–1965* (2nd ed. London: Asia Pub. House, 1967), 102–33; Hari Shanker Srivastava, *The History of Indian Famines and Development of Famine Policy, 1858–1918* (Agra: Sri Ram Mehra, 1968), 131–71.

them to be more reliable than Indians.¹⁷⁰ The Great Famine of 1876–78 led to increased Christian missionary activity and large numbers of conversions following missionary administered relief.¹⁷¹ Indian vernacular newspapers were outraged ‘that during the famine thousands of children fell into the hands of the Relief Committee and are now being brought up as Christians.’¹⁷² Such a stance illustrated a broader Indian sensibility that suspected Western humanitarian aid to be a religious means of conversion. The anxiety about the Christian conversion of helpless Muslim orphans in the Balkans motivated many Indians to contribute to the humanitarian movement.

As the famine unfolded, Christian missionaries began to decry the collection of funds for Ottoman wounded soldiers and pointed to the ‘poor of their own’ in India that needed relief. Vernacular papers were quick to dismiss the ‘narrow-mindedness’ of Christian missionaries.¹⁷³ Indians did not necessarily see a contradiction between famine relief and the humanitarian agitation for the wounded Ottoman soldiers. On the contrary, in a sort of proto-nationalist perspective, many Indians saw humanitarianism spirit as a precondition to prosperity in India: ‘If the Mussalmans and Hindus of India learn to sympathize with their suffering fellow-subjects, as the Mussalmans of Amritsar do with the Turks, the miseries of India will soon be over, and prosperity will dawn upon her [India].’¹⁷⁴

Despite the enormous loss of life, local humanitarianism during the Great Famine met with hostility of the colonial state. A belated and ill-defined response by the colonial state and late fundraising in the imperial metropole could do little to stem mass starvation and death on the Indian subcontinent. The conjuncture of the humanitarian agitation for the wounded Ottoman soldiers and the Great Famine, however, helped to foster a general humanitarian atmosphere, a golden age of the committee and fundraising activities across India.

* * *

After the big meeting of the Muslims in Bombay, the secretary of the *Anjuman-i-Islam* immediately embarked for Mecca.¹⁷⁵ He regularly wrote back to the *Times of India* to inform the readership about his travels. Besides entertainment and an educational purpose, the travelogue also attempted to illustrate how the recent humanitarian agitation in India enhanced the standing of the Indian Muslims in the Islamic heartlands as the representative of the Bombay *Anjuman-i-Islam* was welcomed by religious and political dignitaries in the Hijaz.¹⁷⁶

The mutual visits of representatives, the sending of letters and communications intensified as the Eastern Crisis progressed. By December 1876, a letter from two Sufis from Baghdad was widely circulated. It stressed the destruction of Muslim villages and towns, the murder of innocent children and appealed to Indian Muslims for humanitarian help.¹⁷⁷ Similar letters were received from Mecca, translated into the vernacular languages and widely distributed.¹⁷⁸ A Persian address by a ‘society of learned Turks’ illustrated ‘the importance of assisting the Turks, calling the texts of the Quran and Hadis [reports or accounts of what the Prophet Muhammad said] to their help’. Such addresses implied that Islamic law demanded to help the Ottomans.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁰Leela Sami, *Famine, Disease, Medicine and The State in Madras Presidency (1876–78)* (unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, University of London, 2006), 140–1.

¹⁷¹Missionaries in India frequently tried to exploit the social, economic and human tragedies during famines, epidemics, and natural disasters for conversion, see Dick Kooiman, ‘Change of Religion as a Way of Survival,’ in *Religion and Development: Towards an Integrated Approach*, eds. Q. van Ufford and M. Schoeffleers (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), 167–85; S.K. Datta, *The Desire of India* (London: CMS, 1908), 180–1.

¹⁷²*Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 31 December 1875, IOR, L/R/5/53, 24.

¹⁷³*Rahbar-i-Hind*, 14 August 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 556–7.

¹⁷⁴*Rahbar-i-Hind*, 21 November 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 679.

¹⁷⁵*Times of India*, 9 November 1876, 3.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 21 April 1877 and 28 April 1877, 3.

¹⁷⁷The letter seems to have originated from the Sufi Jiladi shrine (*Abdul-Qadir Gilani*) in Baghdad. *Rahbar-i-Hind*, 16 December 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 742.

¹⁷⁸*Benares Akhbar*, 2 November 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 634; *Nusrat-ul-Akhbar*, 11 April 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 255.

¹⁷⁹*Mihr-Darkshan*, 11 January 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 31–2.

In anticipation of the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the Ottoman Consul at Bombay forwarded an address by clerics from Mecca thanking Indian Muslims for the help hitherto received.¹⁸⁰ Emanating from high-ranking clericals in the Islamic world or Ottoman officials these letters served to establish a sense of reciprocity and mutual acknowledgement.

The 'Turkish Relief Fund' of the Ottoman Empire even sent an official to India to stimulate further subscriptions.¹⁸¹ Abdul Latif and other leading exponents of the Indian humanitarian agitation were conferred the *Order of the Medjidie* by the Sultan for their distinguished services to the Ottoman Empire after the war.¹⁸² Increased travel, mutual acknowledgement and exchange between elites within the Islamic religious international maintained the affective community of Muslims.

The telegraph in combination with local printing presses kindled an intense excitement:

'The outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war has called into existence daily newspaper in many cities, which publish latest telegraphic news and find a most ready sale in the bazar at the rate of one pice a copy. Crowds of men throng the printing-offices, each man eager to get the first copy struck off by the press. This is indeed the first occasion in the annals of India which has called forth such enthusiasm and excitement among the Mussalmans.'¹⁸³

Three dailies in Allahabad, Meerut and Delhi were established to exclusively publish Urdu translations of telegraphic news relating to the Russian-Ottoman war. Newspaper presses across India began to print small sheets with news from the front that were sold for one pice (1/4 anna).¹⁸⁴ The British penny press had found its Indian counterpart in the pice newspapers sold in the bazaars across the subcontinent. As in Britain, the Great Eastern Crisis was a watershed moment for new journalism blending local concerns with the news from the Balkans. The public demand for information was so high that the Lucknow newspaper *Avadh Akhbar* became a daily paper in June 1877. It provided visual illustrations, devoted columns to news from the battlefield and sent war correspondents to the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80).¹⁸⁵ Mosques, shrines and temples became central places for the collection of money. Sermons, news from the battlefield and appeals for the wounded Ottoman soldiers were read next to each other in the Friday prayers.¹⁸⁶ As in Britain, the religious infrastructure was central in mobilizing public support and in providing hubs for the dissemination of information from the battlefields.

News from the battlefields dominated the everyday life. So excited and nervous were Indian Muslims by the events in the Balkans that they had even troubles to eat and sleep:

'If his [Gladstone's] object be to inflict a defeat upon the Conservative party, he is at liberty to do so. But it is by no means just that the accomplishment of his object should involve the ruin of thousands of Turkish families... They [the Indian Muslims] have already sent lakhs of rupees to Constantinople for the relief of the Turks and are still collecting subscriptions for the same purpose; anxiety has made food and sleep distasteful to them; it is their first duty to make themselves acquainted with the latest telegraphic news of the war every day at dawn...'¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ *Nusrat-ul-Akhbar*, 11 April 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 255.

¹⁸¹ *The Times of India*, 4 December 1876, 3.

¹⁸² Luteef, *A Short account*, 39.

¹⁸³ *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 25 May 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 378–9.

¹⁸⁴ See, note in IOR, L/R/5/54, 380, 443.

¹⁸⁵ Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 362–5.

¹⁸⁶ *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 19 June 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 424.

¹⁸⁷ *Oudh Akhbar*, 17 August 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 559.

Before long Urdu love poems (*ghazals*) were composed about the conflict.¹⁸⁸ The Russo-Ottoman War motivated Ratan Nath Dhar Sarshar (1846–1903) to write one of the first best-selling Urdu novels, *Fasana-e-Azad* (The Tale of Azad). Inspired by *Don Quixote*, mixing it with the great Urdu tradition of epic romances (*dastan*) and satirical sketches, it was serialized in the Lucknow newspaper *Avadh Akhbar* during the Great Eastern Crisis and enjoyed enormous success.¹⁸⁹ The regular sketches of the novel merged cultural production, the growing sphere of print culture, and telegraphic news.

The Russian-Ottoman War also gripped other Indian religious communities. At the public meeting in Calcutta, the first Indian judge of the Calcutta High Court, Pran Nath Saraswati expressed the ‘cordial sympathy which they [Hindus] felt with the movement’. In Bombay, a member of the *Poona Sarvajanic Sabha*, one of the oldest and most renowned social reform organizations in Western India, expressed its support publicly.¹⁹⁰ The *Rast Gofar*, an early Parsi newspaper founded by Dadabhai Naoroji, enthusiastically embraced the humanitarian agitation. It considered it to open ‘a new era in the history of Indian Mussulmans’ and was especially delighted to see that the Indian Muslims ‘have begun to realize the right of public assembly and public discussion’.¹⁹¹

There are frequent references of Hindus and non-Muslims contributing to subscriptions at public meetings.¹⁹² These were not just selfless donations to a cause they sympathized with but often perceived as being important to foster a sense of unity and a prerequisite to national prosperity.¹⁹³ The fear of a sort of religious and cultural extermination that Muslims voiced during the Eastern Crisis was often transposed onto Asia as a whole:

‘It makes us exceedingly uneasy to reflect on the possibility of everything Asiatic being absorbed in the powerful civilization of Europe. The Hindoo, who had a glorious past, exists now but in name. The younger sons of Asia, the Buddhist and the Muhammadan, now keep up her prestige. With the downfall of Turkey will commence the decline of the Muhammadan power; and then it will be difficult for the Buddhists to hold their own Asia.’¹⁹⁴

* * *

The humanitarian movement in India received a further impetus by news about the formation of the Stafford House Committee in London in December 1876. The Duke of Sutherland, who was close to the Prince of Wales, joining the cause for the relief of the wounded Ottoman soldiers, caused excitement on the Indian subcontinent.¹⁹⁵ After the outbreak of the war, Syed Ahmed Khan forwarded the subscription of his committee in Aligarh to the Duke of Sutherland.¹⁹⁶ In Lahore, a ‘sub-committee subsidiary to that constituted in London’ was founded with Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner of the *Anjuman-i-Punjab* as honorary secretary.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁸Ralph Russell, *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 26–52; *Oudh Punch*, IOR, IOR, L/R/5/54, 797–8; *Nusrat-ul-Akbar*, 11 November 1877, IOR, L/P&S/7/16, Home Department, No. 111 of 1877.

¹⁸⁹Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 179–80.

¹⁹⁰Fredrick Wyman, *The War: A Summary and Compilation of All Historical and Current Information in Connection with The Present War & The Eastern Question* (Calcutta: Wyman, 1877), 76.

¹⁹¹*The Times of India*, 3 October 1876, 3.

¹⁹²*Benares Akhbar*, 5 April 1877; *Sholai Tur*, 8 May 1877; *Khair Khwah-i-Alam*, 19 June 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 293, 324, 426.

¹⁹³*Rahbar-i-Hind*, 21 November 1876, IOR, L/R/5/53, 659.

¹⁹⁴*The Sadharani*, 30 September 1877, IOR, L/P&S/7/16, Home Department, No. 96 of 1877.

¹⁹⁵*The Oudh Akbar*, 12 February 1877, IOR, L/R/5/54, 102. The Duke of Sutherland had accompanied the Prince of Wales on his highly publicised tour in India in 1875–6, see William Russell, *The Prince of Wales’ tour: a diary in India; with some account of the visits of His Royal Highness to the courts of Greece, Egypt, Spain, and Portugal* (2nd ed. London: Sampson, 1877).

¹⁹⁶*The Times of India*, 26 April 1877, 3.

¹⁹⁷*The Morning Post*, 2 March 1877, 5.

An appeal to the British public in December 1876 brought in a sum of £4,515 for the Stafford House Committee, yet the funds grew only slightly until May 1877. At this point in time, the ‘inhabitants of Hyderabad’ almost doubled the amount available to the Committee in London. The handsome sum of £5,300 by the people of a princely state in India outstripped the previous contribution of the British public.¹⁹⁸ Through the early contribution of the people of Hyderabad the Stafford House Committee was able to enlist the experienced Vincent Barrington-Kennett (1844–1903), who had served under the Red Cross Society during the Franco-German, Carlist and Serbian wars.¹⁹⁹

The transnational and imperial connections were also pivotal for the spread of the Geneva Convention to the battlefields during the Russo-Ottoman War. The openly hostile course of the ICRC towards the Ottoman Empire during the Eastern Crisis limited its influence on the Ottoman military establishment. When rumours about Ottoman massacres were spreading towards the end of August 1877, it was Vefyk Ahmad Pasha, the erstwhile emissary of the Stafford House Committee, who was sent by the Grand Vizier ‘for the distribution amongst the Turkish troops of a Turkish translation of the Geneva Convention’.²⁰⁰ Indian Red Crescent humanitarianism, ironically, was aligned to Conservative imperial humanitarianism that was eager to present itself as a mouth-piece of the dissatisfied Muslims in India to further its interests.

As the events in the Balkans unfolded, Indians began increasingly to develop an Islamic universalism. The ‘executive committee’ in Calcutta under the leadership of Abdul Latif published an appeal that was widely reprinted on the subcontinent, and also found its way into British newspaper columns. It addressed ‘the humane of all Creeds’ and employed a humanitarian language typical for Red Cross appeals in its insistence on humanity and overcoming political boundaries: ‘Let us discard the arena of politics and unite in an errand of mercy amidst the embattled hosts.’ Referring to the Geneva conventions, readers were reminded that ‘such acts of international fellow-feeling and kindness are permitted by the law of nations to neutrals’. The appeal was remarkable in its universal, cross-religious call for help. Christians were made aware that the Ottoman army also had a considerable number of Christian soldiers in its ranks that ‘share[d] the common danger and misery of warfare.’ Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians were all specifically addressed as communities and pointed out that the Ottoman Empire was also central to their community. The appeal ended in an emotional crescendo: ‘Christians, Jews, Hindoos, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsees! – We appeal to you all in the sacred name of humanity to aid us in our cause to the best of your power.’²⁰¹ Helping wounded Ottoman soldiers was not just an Islamic matter, but a question of humanity that concerned all major religious communities.

Humanitarianism of Indian Muslims had its blind spots in dismissing the suffering of Christians in the Balkans. However, Indian Muslims had certainly a more universal aspiration than Gladstone, the Bulgarian atrocities campaigners or the ICRC in Geneva that did little to enlist the sympathies of other religious communities with their vitriolic rhetoric, the repeated attacks on Islam and their sense of civilizational and racial superiority.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to redefine our understanding of the Great Eastern Crisis 1875–78 as a global humanitarian moment. The massacres and wounded soldiers initiated frantic action at the ICRC headquarters, and inspired broad popular humanitarian movements in Britain, Russia and India. These developments were a protest against human suffering on distant battlefields in the

¹⁹⁸Stafford House Committee, *Report and record of the operations*, 2.

¹⁹⁹Peter Morris, ed., *First aid to the battlefield: life and letters of Sir Vincent Kennett-Barrington (1844–1903)* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992).

²⁰⁰*Liverpool Mercury*, 28 August 1877, 7.

²⁰¹Wyman, *The War: A Summary*, 102–3.

Balkans. At the same time, they sought to alleviate that suffering. War reporting, the telegraph, a burgeoning local press and increased mobility created ways of emotionally relating to the suffering of faraway people. The extensive webs of communication and mobilization of religious internationals and pan-movements brought into existence transnational affective communities that bound the people in Britain, Russia and India emotionally together with the suffering wounded soldiers, widows and orphans in the Balkans.

The relief of wounded soldiers and the modular committee formed the central repertoires of contention around which people in different locations were able to take action and to organize themselves to alleviate the suffering. A global media sphere created competing, yet intertwined affective communities, which united and synchronized humanitarian practices and discourses. From Manchester to Geneva, St. Petersburg and Calcutta, meetings were held, the enemy decried for his 'barbarous' massacres, and subscriptions collected to relieve the suffering of the wounded soldiers on the battlefield.

Rather than perceiving the introduction of the Red Crescent as fragmentation of a universal symbol, however, this article has shown that the Red Crescent initiated the taking over of Red Cross humanitarian discourses and practices into an Islamic fold. It transformed the Red Cross movement into a truly global movement that stretched from Britain to colonial India and beyond.

Transnational humanitarian aid was not organized in an independent, neutral or technical sector. To whom to extend the moral franchise was heavily contested and negotiated through the categories of gender, race, the domestic and the belonging to a specific affective community. Instead of positing neutral and universal humanitarianism, this article has examined how the normative idea of helping wounded soldiers on the faraway battlefields was cannibalized, localized and re-universalized in colonial India.

Humanitarianism was neither the exclusive creation of the West, nor was it shaped exclusively by the interests of the West. The humanitarian pan-Islamic movement as it emerged during the Great Eastern Crisis was a creation of its own. It self-consciously appropriated what it deemed useful from other religious internationals and pan-movements.

This article illustrated that Red Cross humanitarianism in the colonies was not a state-led or institutionalized as in Europe and Japan, but instead sprang up from civil society. Such popular humanitarian agitations were urgent, yet fluid phenomena. They quickly gathered momentum, mobilized the masses and created unity in times of international crisis, but they also rapidly evaporated afterwards. In that sense, the Great Eastern Crisis also marked the onset of global popular humanitarianism that preceded the more militarized global humanitarian moment of the First World War.

The dispersed availability of news from the battlefields and local printing presses in the last decades of the nineteenth century established rival webs of communication that increasingly challenged the imperial metropole as 'centre of calculation'. Rival webs of humanitarian communication and mobilization cut across modern European empires and fundamentally changed the geography of global humanitarianism. Local sub-centres emerged that began to dispute the humanitarian narratives of the metropolitan centre. These horizontal connections not just between colonies, but also across different religious internationals were pivotal for the creation of a global humanitarian sensibility, albeit the vertical links to the imperial centre were to remain significant. Intense 'wars of representations' attested to this more multcentred and contested global humanitarian world.

The history of global humanitarianism, this article contends, needs to be more attentive to empire not only as connecting web but also as a major field of contention and disruption. The violence associated with European imperial expansion and colonial rule was only possible by dehumanising large parts of the colonial world. The attack on the circumscribed concept of European humanity and the anti-imperial humanitarianism coming to the fore during the Great Eastern Crisis were a reaction to the closing of the Western humanitarian sensibility in

the last decades of the nineteenth century. The alternative visions of humanity and humanitarianism that emerged during the Great Eastern Crisis became a constitutive element of anti-colonial nationalism leading to the *Khilafat* movement.

The public agitation of the Great Eastern Crisis turned into a template of Indian Muslim humanitarian action and politics up to the First World War. It culminated in humanitarian missions of Indian doctors to the Balkans in 1912–13, to the creation of a ‘British Red Crescent Society’ in London and to consequent humanitarian missions to today’s Libya in 1911–12 and the Balkans in 1912–13.²⁰² During the Balkan Wars (1912–13), subscriptions from India made up more than 50% of the total income of the Ottoman Red Crescent Society.²⁰³ Donations from the Indian subcontinent were thus substantial in sustaining the Islamic humanitarian Red Crescent sphere.

Humanitarian fundraising and action was not a selfless gesture to a faraway cause. Instead, humanitarianism served as a unifier and constructed the virtuous and civilized Muslim as an ethical subject and as an equal part of humanity. The pan-Islamic affective and imagined community was everything the colonial reality was not: a world of sympathy in which the Indian and the Muslim victims of imperial violence were ethical subjects that were regarded as people with equal rights, having a respected culture and religion, and being regarded as ‘manly’ citizens on the same footing as Europeans.

²⁰²Burak Akçapar, *People’s Mission to the Ottoman Empire: M. A. Ansari and the Indian Medical Mission, 1912–13* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); British Red Crescent Society, *The Work of the British Red Crescent Society in Three Continents, 1912–1914* (London: British Red Crescent Society, 1915).

²⁰³“The All-India Medical Mission”, *The Comrade*, 24 May 1913, 414.