

INTRODUCTION

Intra-State Conflicts and the Politics of Aid in Europe, 1917–49: An Introduction

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While the impact of the two world wars and other inter-state conflicts on the history of humanitarianism has been a major area of research for some time now, comparatively little work has been done on the question of how internal wars impacted on the ways in which transnational actors and institutions approached the issue of offering relief to populations caught up in armed conflicts. Through seven articles and a thematic introduction, this collection covers conflicts that occurred in the years 1917–1949 when Europe experienced a remarkable spike in civil war violence, from Russia to Spain, and from Ireland to Greece. Collectively, these articles offer a fresh analysis of the connections between civil wars and the evolution of modern humanitarianism during Europe's mid-twentieth-century crisis, highlighting transnational connections between humanitarian practices and actors across several conflicts.

In 1919, former Russian Red Cross delegate Georges Lodyginsky published an important essay in which he highlighted the peculiar challenges facing the international humanitarian community in the aftermath of the Great War:

We are on the threshold of a new era. The four-year war that has shaken the universe from top to bottom and brought down all the bases of the social order, which until then seemed immutable, must inevitably lead to a long period of national, social and political discord. The future threatens us with countless victims: scattered and ruined families, women, orphans abandoned without means of existence, fathers who have lost the ability to work. In this economic chaos, the coming years appear to us under the veil of a dark and dead-end night.¹

Lodyginsky's intervention, written against the backdrop of the ongoing Russian Civil War (1917–22), was interesting for a number of reasons. While it was unsurprising that Lodyginsky, an ardent anti-Bolshevik and influential figure within the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), bemoaned that 'the class struggle, the political and social passions are getting worse and growing; our country is devastated by the fire, and this fire is spreading... everywhere', he clearly believed that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the collapse of Europe's land empires the following year had wider

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¹Georges Lodyginsky, 'La Croix-Rouge et la guerre civile' [The Red Cross and Civil War], *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge* 1, no. 1 (1919): 1160–1.

implications.² In his view, Europe was entering an era dominated less by inter-state wars than by civil wars, posing specific challenges to humanitarians and their respective organisations:

The new period of civil wars into which we are entering will result in new victims and new sufferings; it imperiously calls us to the creation of a new, harmonious and powerful organisation, which must aim at effective relief to the countless victims of the internecine struggle. It is true that the attempt to come in help to those who have outlawed themselves, to speak of love and mercy in this time of hatred and general stupefaction that surrounds us, will seem vain and problematic to many people. But we think otherwise.³

Lodyginsky argued that humanitarians in general – and the ICRC in particular – needed to adapt to a world that had been transformed by the Great War and the collapse of the states that had previously played an important role in administering humanitarian aid, as well as the onset of internal conflicts such as the one in Russia. Despite his political bias, Lodyginsky's insistence that new strategies had to be developed for a different kind of warfare was absolutely correct and borne out by the events unfolding before his eyes. The Russian Civil War alone, which led to some three million deaths (with the number of civilian casualties far exceeding that of the Great War in Russia) and the exile of a million refugees leaving Soviet Russia after 1917, was one example.⁴ The Finnish Civil War of 1918, which caused the death of 1 per cent of the overall population, was another example, demonstrating the further blurring of any distinctions between combatants and non-combatants. In the improvised prisoner of war (POW) camps set up for the Finnish Reds and their supporters, some 12,500 people perished from hunger and disease – at its peak, more than 80,000 people were interned in the camps without any access to humanitarian aid or inspections.⁵ In Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, the violence unleashed in the pogroms of the White armies and the Atamans caused the death of more than 150,000 Jews.⁶ Food shortages and famines ensued in countries ravaged by civil wars, whether in Russia or Ireland.⁷

It was in the context of this unprecedented wave of civil war violence that Lodyginsky called for a surge in humanitarian action in conflicts that had been – according to him – largely absent in Europe since the Wars of Religion or the revolutionary turmoil after 1789. The rapid proliferation of civil wars and the issue of fractured states with contested sovereignty created very specific challenges for organisations that depended on state authorities to grant them access to conflict zones or POW camps. In 1921, the Tenth International Conference of the Red Cross thus adopted official principles governing intervention during civil wars and other internal conflicts. It acknowledged that civil wars affected every type of humanitarian activity on behalf of civilians or prisoners but also grappled with the issue of legitimacy. There could be only one national Red Cross society per state. As states fractured, multiple organisations and multiple authorities vied for the legitimacy conferred by the Red Cross movement's official recognition. The 1921 conference resolutions were the first declaration by

²Ibid. About Georges Lodyginsky, see Michel Caillat and Jean-François Fayet, 'Georges Lodyginsky: un médecin Croix-Rouge sur tous les fronts de la Guerre civile russe', *Le souci de l'autre: soin et intimité en guerre irrégulière*, Mouvement social, no. 288 (July–Sept. 2024): 17–32.

³Lodyginsky, 'La Croix-Rouge et la guerre civile'.

⁴Alexandre Sumpf, 'War Losses (Russian Empire)', in *1914-1918-Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel et al. (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2018); Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Catherine Gousseff, *Lexil russe: La fabrique du réfugié apatride (1920–1939)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008); Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: Les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2020).

⁵Lidia Miliakova and Nicolas Werth, *Le livre des pogroms: Antichambre d'un génocide, Ukraine, Russie, Biélorussie, 1917–1922* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2010), 7.

⁶Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius, eds., *Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2014).

⁷Timothy O'Neill, 'Minor Famines and Relief in Galway 1815–1925', in *Galway History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. Gerard Moran and Raymond Gillespie (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1996), 445–77.

the International Red Cross movement that it had a duty to provide humanitarian aid during internal conflicts, and that victims of civil wars had an uncontested right to humanitarian relief. The 1921 resolutions also asserted that political prisoners taken during internal conflicts merited the humane treatment accorded to prisoners of war by the Hague Convention of 1907.

The 1921 resolutions thus recognised the transformation of the challenge for humanitarian organisations in an age of civil wars that would subsequently lead to Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Convention. Despite the difficulties experienced during the Great War, the number and size of humanitarian organisations mushroomed in response to the enormity of human suffering. The mandate given to the Red Cross alone to inspect POW camps meant that it was in charge of looking after the well-being of nearly nine million people around the world.⁸ The more decentralised nature of the conflicts after 1918, and their occurrence in countries already ravaged by years of conflict, made the work of humanitarian organisations significantly more complex but also more political, not least because the status and role of humanitarian organisations in civil wars had never been clearly defined. Officially intermediaries and intercessors between the belligerents, their participation or intervention in civil wars raised many questions, especially about their neutrality.

In more ways than one, humanitarian actors constituted a social and medical palliative to weakened states, and this dimension took on a much greater importance in the context of civil wars, where each side claimed state legitimacy.⁹ For example, until the final defeat of the Whites in the Russian Civil War, the Red Cross operating alongside the anti-Bolshevik forces constituted the de facto ministry of health, and one of the last operational organs of the White forces. In the exile that followed defeat, for the Whites of the Russian Civil War, as for the 500,000 Republicans fleeing during the *Retirada*, humanitarian organisations that came to their aid did indeed constitute states of exile and substitution.¹⁰ But if humanitarian action was aimed at compensating for the shortcomings of states in disintegrating states (or para-states in the making), it also meant choosing which side to assist through food distribution, medical care and other aspects of provision. The historiography on humanitarianism has long moved away from presenting their actions as neutral and apolitical.¹¹ Beyond the ideological biases specific to each organisation, historians have clearly shown that neutrality is a position that one must have the means to afford, and that several organisations were often dependent on the sides that gave them access to the wounded, refugees or POW camps. But we have yet to fully appreciate the role of these humanitarian actors who – in the name of humanity, and thanks to their claim to neutrality – intervened in these conflicts, while providing aid that was far from neutral and, in several cases, had major consequences for the fate of civilians as well as combatants.

The aim of this special issue is therefore twofold. It first seeks to examine the impact of civil wars on humanitarian practices, discourses and norms in the context of European civil wars from 1917 to

⁸ Elisabeth Piller and Neville Wyllie, 'Introduction: Humanitarianism and the Greater War', in *Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914–24*, ed. Elisabeth Piller and Neville Wyllie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 3.

⁹ Mary Vincent, 'Political Violence and Mass Society: A European Civil War?', in *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914–1945*, ed. Nicholas Doumanis (New York: Oxford Academic, 2014).

¹⁰ David Alegre and Javier Rodrigo, 'Before the Convention: The Spanish Civil War and Challenges for Research on Refugee History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2022): 196–217; Sergei S. Ippolitov, 'Rossiiskaya blagotvoritel'naya deyatel'nost' na territorii deistvii belykh armii i v emigratsii (1918–1924 gg.)' [Russian Charitable Activity on the Territory of Operations of the White Armies and in Emigration (1918–1924)] (PhD diss. (*kandidat nauk*), Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy gumanitarnyy universitet, Moscow, 2000), 58–64; Laura Branciforte, *El Socorro Rojo Internacional en España (1923–1939): Relatos de la solidaridad antifascista* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2011); Francisco Alía Miranda, *La otra cara de la guerra: Solidaridad y humanitarismo en la España republicana durante la guerra civil, 1936–1939* (Madrid: Sílex, 2020).

¹¹ Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Fabian Klose, *In the Cause of Humanity: A History of Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Johannes Paulmann, ed., *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Christian Topalov, ed., *Philanthropes en 1900: Londres, New York, Paris, Genève* (Grânes: Creaphis, 2020); Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

1949 (but also with an openness to conflicts that occurred outside Europe at the time, such as the Rif War). It then explores the role of humanitarian actors and networks in a more connected history of civil wars, placing both humanitarianism and civil war at the centre of an intertwined cartography of contemporary conflicts. As humanitarian organisations can be compared to armies or companies in that they are organisations that give feedback on experiences, we will see if we can detect learning curves, traumas or lessons learnt from one conflict to another. As will become apparent, humanitarian practices evolved over time and have become a common feature of humanitarian intervention in civil wars. For instance, the Red Cross visits to political detainees, which emerged in the context of POW camp visits during the Great War, were soon broadened to political prisoners and eventually became a staple of humanitarian action during civil wars. After the defeat of the Republicans in Spain, defending the rights of political prisoners remained a way for the vanquished to keep their cause alive.¹²

In addressing these issues, we do not have to start from scratch. The literature on modern humanitarianism in particular has grown substantially in recent years. The study of Western philanthropic practices since the eighteenth century has greatly enriched our understanding of the dialectics of armed conflict and the expansion of humanitarian organisations, through research dedicated to relief operations in times of war, anti-slavery movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, development programmes launched by religious missions or colonial and postcolonial interventions and responses to epidemics such as HIV and Ebola. Inside this dense and rich field, the literature on emergency relief operations aimed at alleviating the consequences of famine and warfare has contributed to a deeper knowledge of the relationship between inter-state wars and humanitarianism from the late nineteenth century onwards.¹³

The field of ‘war studies’, broadly defined, has also been transformed by the insights gained by historians working on the complex interplay between inter-state or decolonisation conflicts and the evolution of humanitarian laws, practices and ideas, be it in relation to the histories of POW, refugees or hunger and disease. This history of humanitarian aid in wartime has managed to move beyond institutional accounts, which was, until recently, distinctly hagiographic. Moreover, through critical analyses of the history of British and American NGOs, historians have been able to decipher the ideological roots of Western humanitarian institutions and highlight their links with conservatism and even colonialism.¹⁴ And beyond the institutional approach, historians have shown the emergence of a community of experts invested in international organisations, at a time when the League of Nations

¹²Sophie Baby, *Juger Franco? Impunité, réconciliation, mémoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2024), 95–119.

¹³Margaret Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty, and the Rise of Humanitarianism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011); Jon Arrizabalaga, ‘War, Empire, Science, Progress, Humanitarianism: Debate and Practice within the International Red Cross Movement from 1863 to the Interwar Period’, *Asclepio: Revista de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia* 66, no. 1 (2014): 30; Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, *L’humanitaire en guerre civile: La crise du Biafra, 1967–1970* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2018); Sébastien Farré, Jean-François Fayet, Valérie Gorin and Jean-François Pitteloud, ‘Face à la famine: Mobilisations, opérations et pratiques humanitaires: Introduction’, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 22, no. 6 (2015): 855–9; Guillaume Lachenal and Bertrand Taithe, ‘Une généalogie missionnaire et coloniale de l’humanitaire: Le cas Aujoulat au Cameroun, 1935–1973’, *Le Mouvement Social* 227, no. 2 (2009): 45–63; Frédéric Le Marcis, Luisa Enria, Sharon Abramovitz, Almudena-Mari Saez and Sylvain Landry B. Faye, ‘Three Acts of Resistance during the 2014–16 West Africa Ebola Epidemic: A Focus on Community Engagement’, *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2019): 23–31; Vin-Kim Nguyen, *The Republic of Therapy: Triage and Sovereignty in West Africa’s Time of AIDS* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Pablo la Porte, ‘“Rien à ajouter”: The League of Nations and the Rif War (1921–1926)’, *European History Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011): 66–87.

¹⁴See for example Emily Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022); Mary Elisabeth Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914–1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

opened a new chapter in the modern history of global governance, and after a Greater War that acted as a catalyst.¹⁵

But this historiography has focused mainly on inter-state wars and European interventions in the context of decolonisation in the post-1945 period, possibly because the 1949 Geneva Convention was more explicit about the significance of intra-state conflicts than any previous international convention. By contrast, the existing literature pays limited attention to the multitude of conflicts or wars being waged beyond the realm of inter-state wars before 1949. Among these wars, civil and internal conflicts were humanitarian theatres of their own. Yet two of the most recent syntheses of the field gave almost no space to European civil wars.¹⁶ Conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) certainly have a special place in the history of humanitarianism, especially the history of modern refugeedom.¹⁷ But these conflicts are still seen as catalysts for practices that were already in the making in the history of inter-state conflicts. This may be due to the absence of any comparative study of civil wars outside the political science literature. In the historical literature, comparative or interconnected interpretations of civil wars have not yet been the subject of systematic study, as was noted recently by David Alegre and Javier Rodrigo. Historians have only rarely taken up the subject of ‘civil war’, and the literature about these phenomena remains insular and poorly interconnected.¹⁸ One of the main reasons for this is undoubtedly that historical studies of civil wars still tend to be nation-centric and somewhat exceptionalist in terms of their analytical framework, evolving in parallel with a historiography of humanitarianism that is highly transnational and sometimes even remote from local political issues.

Although the two world wars were crucial episodes in shaping the nature of modern humanitarianism, the articles gathered in this special issue suggest that we cannot fully understand the transformation of humanitarian causes and mobilisations without looking back to the civil wars that ravaged parts of Europe between 1917 and 1949. After all, Europe was the epicentre of a wave of extremely violent and polarising civil wars in this period, from Russia and Ukraine in the East to Finland in the North, Ireland and Spain in the West and Greece in the South. Some (though not all) of them occurred in the shatterzones of Europe’s land empires where social revolution, nation-building and competing ideas for the future of the emerging states provided a fertile ground for inter-community violence. While the question of humanitarian intervention in civil wars was always complicated – not least in relation to the issue of state sovereignty – the relationship between humanitarianism and civil war remained intense during the period in question and many contemporary humanitarian actors have had the dual experience of intervening in an inter-state war and in civil wars.¹⁹

Individual stories show that civil wars have been just as important – sometimes even more so – in the lives of some humanitarian actors. Herbert Hoover’s work in Belgium and then in post-civil war Russia is a case in point, as are the experiences of humanitarian aid workers in Greece during the German occupation and the civil war that followed. Throughout our special issue, there are ‘recurring characters’ or groups with a background in several civil wars, such as Dmitriy Manuisky (from the Russian Civil War to the United Nations (UN) commission on Greek refugees) and Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko (from Ukraine to Catalonia), as well as Western diplomats serving in civil war

¹⁵Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Gatrell, *Empire*; Piller and Wylie, *Humanitarianism*. For a critical reassessment, see Laura Robson and Joe Maiolo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025); for a more positive assessment, see Susan Pedersen, *The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁶Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Silvia Salvatici, *A History of Humanitarianism, 1755–1989: In the Name of Others* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

¹⁷Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁸David Alegre and Javier Rodrigo, ‘Civil Wars: What Is Wrong with History?’, *War in History* 21, no. 1 (2023): 1–20.

¹⁹Kimberly A. Lowe, ‘Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty: Red Cross Intervention on behalf of Political Prisoners in Soviet Russia, 1921–3’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 4 (2014): 652–74; David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

hotspots such as Petrograd or Barcelona. These paths can be traced back to the many transnational biographical trajectories of humanitarians, such as those of Francesca Wilson (active successively in the Balkans during the Great War, in Vienna and then in the Spanish Civil War), Ruth Parmelee (a Christian missionary witness to the Armenian genocide, then active in Greece in 1922) and Laird Archer (overseas director of the Near East Foundation).

Similarly, humanitarian actors played a central role within the different sides involved in the civil wars, far from the neutrality they tried to display during conventional conflicts. In Russia, it could even be said that the humanitarian organisations working alongside the Whites were the last functional institutions of the anti-Bolshevik camp.²⁰ In Spain, the humanitarian aid provided by outside powers was a form of disguised support for one or other opposing faction, just as the practices of charity and reconstruction were a means for Francisco Franco to consolidate his victory by selectively distributing aid to the civilian population, enabling the Nationalist camp to emerge victorious and pursue its policy of persecution.²¹

This was of course not unique to the Spanish Civil War. Humanitarian organisations always reflected or implemented the political agendas and cultural backgrounds of philanthropic actors. For instance, the birth and evolution of humanitarian interventionism as a tool for warfare and peace-making was intrinsically linked with the politics of the Eastern Question – giving a way for Europeans to meddle in the Ottoman imperial space.²² In this context, humanitarianism operated according to a pro-Christian and anti-Muslim bias.²³ Scholars agree that, during the nineteenth century, the idea and practice of humanitarian intervention became a fixture in international politics, not least in relation to the protection of Christian minorities in South-Eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean.²⁴ Moreover, recent studies have gone further, showing that intervention in the Levant on the grounds of ‘justice’ and ‘humanity’ was intrinsically linked to the notion of civil war and internal troubles. European interventions caused more unrest and even fuelled civil war, which in turn called for further interventions to benefit European powers.²⁵

This nexus between humanitarianism and civil war seems to have regained a certain vitality in the context of the Russian Revolution and then the civil war that lasted until the Reds’ victory. Just as the anti-Ottoman bias and Eastern Question shaped Western humanitarianism before 1914, the Russian Civil War injected a new political dimension into humanitarian action. Anti-communism was a structuring element of humanitarian action in the wake of the Great War, within several organisations that intervened in Russia, and later in Spain and Greece. To take the Red Cross movement alone, it already owed a great deal to the patronage of imperial Russia and so to conservative circles for its development: it was thanks to funding from the tsarina that Henri Dunant was able to carry out his actions.²⁶ Within the Red Cross movement, it was the Russian Red Cross that remained, until 1917, one of the most powerful national organisations in the network. In the context of the Russian,

²⁰Jean-François Fayet, ‘The Russian Red Cross in the Civil War’, *Quaestio Rossica* 9, no. 1 (2021): 188–202.

²¹Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco’s Spain, 1936–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²²Gary J. Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

²³Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁴For all their different emphases, see Brendan Simms and David J. B. Trim, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Fabian Klose, ed., *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Alexis Heraclides and Ada Diaila, *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Mark Swatek-Evenstein, *A History of Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

²⁵Ozan Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798–1864* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

²⁶Jean-François Fayet, ‘Le CICR et la Russie: Un peu plus que de l’humanitaire’, *Connexe: Les espaces postcommunistes en questions* 1 (2019): 55–74.

Finnish and Irish Civil Wars, the Red Cross movement was therefore populated by actors linked to this conservative humanitarianism, and even by members of the former Russian Red Cross.

A connected history of humanitarianism in civil wars must therefore focus on the anti-communist animus of the humanitarian aid sent to these different conflicts. As Kimberly Lowe's article in this special issue clearly shows, the resolutions adopted by the ICRC in 1921 were a direct consequence of, and response to, the Russian Civil War. The ICRC was populated by former members of the Russian Red Cross, or leaders of the new national Red Cross organisations directly descended from it, or from countries concerned about the rise of communism. While the 1921 resolutions used the language of universal humanitarian principles, the record of the Tenth International Conference indicates that the authors – and supporters – of these resolutions had a specifically anti-Bolshevik intent. The resolutions were designed to enable humanitarian interventions against Soviet Russia and other communist revolutionaries. In this sense, the most radical development in the humanitarian practices of the Red Cross responded not to the Great War but specifically to the revolutionary violence in Eastern Europe from 1917 to 1921.

If the 1921 resolutions of the ICRC seemingly expanded its remit of activity to include intervention in civil wars and internal conflicts, these changes were also watched eagerly by participants in these conflicts. They saw humanitarianism as a mechanism for drawing attention to their struggle and potentially legitimating their cause under international humanitarian law. In her article, Lia Brazil explores how activists petitioned the Red Cross to intervene in three internal conflicts that occurred during the years 1922 to 1926, namely the Irish Civil War (1922–3), the suppression of independence movements in Montenegro (1919–24) and the Rif War (1921–6). Her article probes connections and intersections between these conflicts to understand why humanitarian intervention, particularly in the form of the Red Cross movement, captured the imagination of guerrilla leaders and insurgents during internal conflicts. In doing so, she illustrates the international and transnational influences that shaped their appeals to Geneva, including women's internationalism, pan-Islamism and diasporic nationalism. Her article highlights the international dimension of civil wars in this period, generated by the possibility of humanitarian intervention. Yet at the same time, in all three case studies, insurgents and their supporters often characterised the conflicts as struggles against imperial power as well as civil wars. By analysing their appeals to the ICRC, Brazil probes the boundaries between 'civil' or 'internal' conflicts and imperial warfare, and the limits of humanitarian intervention.

While the first wave of civil wars in twentieth-century Europe came to an end in late 1923, the subject continued to weigh on the minds of those involved in shaping humanitarian practices, many of whom remained hostile to communism. Georges Lodyginsky, for example, who had been very active in the debates on humanitarian intervention in Soviet Russia, became a founding member of the International Anti-Communist Entente, based in Geneva. This organisation set up several branches in Europe, including in Spain and Fascist Italy. This link between anti-communism and humanitarianism continued unabated and is clearly illustrated by the actions of delegates from humanitarian organisations and diplomats active in relief operations in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. As Nathan Rousselot's contribution demonstrates, French diplomats who took part in front-line humanitarian action in Spain (aid for refugees, financial support for displaced persons, etc.) had been chosen because of their previous experiences during the Russian Civil War. This direct biographical link between the Russian Civil War and the Spanish Civil War profoundly shaped the aid given to Spain. These diplomatic actors took part in espionage and refugee filtration operations under the guise of humanitarianism. Far from being neutral and impartial, their selective approach to humanitarianism as well as their frequent reports to Paris had a resolutely counter-revolutionary character, which would also shape France's stance towards Republican refugees during the *Retirada* following Franco's victory.

But this anti-communism gradually came up against competition in the form of an alternative humanitarianism developed first by Soviet Russia, then by European communist movements, and

subsequently in Eastern Europe after the Second World War. The International Red Aid movement, which was very active during the Spanish Civil War, included figures who rose to political prominence during the Russian Civil War, such as Elena Stassova, Willi Münzenberg and Julian Marchlewski. Alba Martinez and Mercedes Yusta's article in this special issue offers an analysis of this alternative humanitarianism, built against the bourgeois, conservative and patriarchal values of Western humanitarianism. A central moment in this development was the Spanish Civil War, when people of multiple nationalities and backgrounds mobilised to assist the civilian population. While we know a lot about the humanitarian organisations that operated in Spain, there are still very few exhaustive studies that have explored this phenomenon from a gendered and transnational perspective. Their article contends that the humanitarian activism that developed in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s and, in particular, as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War, was shaped by a transnational network that was fundamentally female, in which women with diverse political experiences converged, but where the suffragism of the beginning of the century, as well as the pacifism and anti-fascism of the 1930s, occupied a central place.

Beyond the persistence of anti-communism and the rise of communist-led organisations in humanitarian intervention, we can see that the response of the communist, socialist and nationalist movements to the humanitarian challenges of civil wars remained a central preoccupation after the end of the Second World War. In his article on the Greek case, Panagiotis Karagkounis's contribution clearly shows how humanitarian support during the Greek Civil War (1945–9) was not only weaponised as a recompense to anti-communist/loyalist groups. But this support also charted the spatial and logistical objectives of the counter-insurgency campaign in a context of conservative politics of the early Cold War. Extending the discussion about humanitarian intervention in civil wars beyond the Spanish and Russian cases,²⁷ Karagkounis explores the humanitarian intervention in the 'first battleground' of the Cold War, namely the Greek Civil War. From 1941, multiple humanitarian organisations distributed aid to famine-stricken Greece. United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) intervened in Greece in 1943 and remained involved until its dissolution in 1947. As the civil strife intensified, around 850,000 civilians were displaced during the royalist counter-insurgency operations against the communist rebels, while humanitarian groups received the mandate by the royalist government to feed, accommodate and rehabilitate these populations. Most of these relief workers had grappled with the wartime famine and hinged on the restoration of the pre-war political system to solidify their presence in Greece. Karagkounis's article explores how the distribution, or withholding, of aid determined the forced displacement. Furthermore, it explores the antagonism between humanitarian organisations such as United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Near East Foundation (NEF) and UNRRA, and the so-called development aid, as institutionalised by the European Recovery Program in 1948. The last part of his article discusses how the humanitarian practices implemented in Greece provided 'lessons' for the UN's early peace-building activities around the globe.

In sum, the essays brought together in this special issue showcase new perspectives on the impact that the near-simultaneous and historically unprecedented proliferation of civil war violence in Europe had on humanitarianism, its further politicisation and debates about how to intervene in intra-state conflicts that challenged the authority of the state as the main interlocutor of humanitarian aid. The essays showcase what Peter Gatrell, John Horne and Elisabeth Piller in the concluding essay of this special issue call the 'dialectic of humanitarianism' – the reciprocal tendency of the violence of civil wars and the mobilisation of humanitarian aid for its victims, to reinforce each other. Humanitarianism in this age of civil war was both formative and ambiguous, raising the important

²⁷ Frank Dikötter, 'Coping with Famine in Communist China (1949–62)', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 22, no. 6 (2015): 917–28; Andrea Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War: Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1996); Richards, *Silence*; Nicolas Werth and Alexis Berelowitch, *L'État soviétique contre les paysans: Rapports secrets de la police politique* (Paris: Tallandier, 2011).

issue of the modalities and legitimacy of humanitarian intervention even more acutely than during the Great War. The civil wars that succeeded it were also formative simply because many of the key players in the humanitarian field were shaped by them. The centrality of the experience of civil wars in the lives of several humanitarians invites us to take a more integrated and transnational look at the history of violence in the twentieth century.