
Introduction

To be able to talk intelligently about what looks like the extraordinary amount of intervention that occurs in the present-day international system, or about the seemingly original network of contemporary transnational relations, it is useful to be able to compare the present system with past ones. We may discover that the amount of intervention today is not at all that unusual and that the network of transnational relations is far less original than many have claimed.

—Stanley Hoffmann, “Hedley Bull and His Contribution to International Relations,” in *World Disorders Troubled Peace in the Post–Cold War Era*, 1988

I BEGAN MY RESEARCH in Geneva at the end of the so-called humanitarian decade (1990–2000) when the subject and international practice of humanitarian interventions was one of the most controversial matters of discussion in international relations among academics, policy-makers, and the mass media.¹ As Robert O. Keohane wrote in 2002, “saying humanitarian intervention in a room full of philosophers, legal scholars, and political scientists is a little bit like crying ‘fire’ in a crowded theatre: it can create a clear and present danger to everyone within earshot.”² Keohane does not even mention historians, who, with regard to this topic, have always been conspicuous by their absence. The only notable exception is *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*, published in 2008 by political scientist Gary Bass.³

My research looks at the European roots of this concept and international practice during the nineteenth century. I dispute both the assertion that humanitarian intervention is a phenomenon of international relations that appeared after the end of the Cold War and the suggestion that it emerged abruptly during the nineteenth century. I investigate when, where, who, how, and for what reasons a humanitarian intervention was undertaken from 1815 to 1914. Through a nuanced historical analysis, I examine the claims of the intervening states to be aiding humanity, the complexity of state action, the reasons for

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intervention as well as for nonintervention, and the relationship between public outcry and state action. My objective is to underscore the distinctive features of this ever-controversial phenomenon and to shed some light on similarities and differences between nineteenth-century and contemporary interventions.

I focus on the political history of humanitarian intervention, which I think of as being a coercive diplomatic and/or armed (re)action against massacre undertaken by a state or a group of states inside the territory of a target state. Its main motivation is to end massacre, atrocity, and extermination or to prevent the repetition of such events. It is an *ex post facto* event whose objective is to protect civilian populations mistreated and unprotected by the target-state government, agents, or authorities. The adjective “humanitarian” refers to the idea of “saving strangers,”⁴ of helping victims, of protecting foreign, apparently innocent, civilian populations.

This research is about the politics and policies of the intervening governments, the European “great” powers, more specifically Great Britain and France. These two powers, together with Russia, were more actively involved than Austria (Austria-Hungary between 1867 and 1918) and Prussia (Germany since 1870) in the interventions that took place within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Ideally it would have been appropriate to conduct exhaustive research in all the archives of the governments involved, the Ottoman archives included. For multiple reasons related to the time at my disposal and my lack of knowledge of so many different languages, I decided to focus mainly on Great Britain and France. I attempt a *mise en parallèle* rather than a comparative analysis of the role of British and French governments. A number of reasons explain this choice: Great Britain and France both had elected parliaments; the interpenetration of ideas between the two countries is relevant and constant throughout the century, as exemplified by the norms they shared at the societal and international level; British and French diplomats, armies, and public opinion played a crucial role in each of the instances that I examine. I have sought evidence of the existence of a concept and of an international practice of humanitarian intervention in international treaties and diplomatic documents, in parliamentary papers, in various speeches of British and French statesmen, in the press, in the activity of humanitarian lobbies and pressure groups (domestic and transnational), and in the contemporary jurisprudential nomenclature, juridical doctrines, essays, and articles of nineteenth-century thinkers.

The reader of this book must be aware that many other histories of humanitarian interventions await to be written: a cultural and intellectual history of the interventions, a transnational history of the dis-

courses on interventions held by humanitarians in and beyond Europe, a history of the interventions from the perspective of the target state (which can only be written by an Ottomanist) or from the perspective of the victims of massacre and atrocities. Furthermore, it is important to stress that this book does not make the history of the massacres and atrocities that led to the intervention but, more precisely, starts from the accounts of massacres as European observers and diplomats reported them. It was on the basis of those accounts (which might have been accurate or inaccurate, biased or impartial, detailed or vague) that European governments decided whether or not to undertake an intervention to save strangers.

This study leaves aside humanitarian relief and nonmilitary aid, such as the giving of food and medical supplies to a country in crisis—whether because of natural disasters like famine, flood, or earthquake or because of man-made disasters such as war, tyrannical oppression, or revolution. I do not take into account the history of international conflicts having alleged or genuine humanitarian claims and do not examine instances of military interventions to protect a state's own nationals from abuse, which were established practice in the nineteenth century. The British expedition in Abyssinia of 1868 is the archetypal case in point. Its object was to release the British captives whom Theodore, the negus, had detained since November 1863. All the European prisoners were released on April 13, 1868, by an expeditionary corps dispatched from Bombay under the command of Sir Robert Napier. The negus was not deprived of any portion of his territory or forced to make any concession, pecuniary or otherwise. Benjamin Disraeli, then leader of the House of Commons and chancellor of the exchequer, called the attention of Parliament to the "disinterestedness" of British action that did not aim to obtain territory or to secure commercial advantages but was motivated exclusively by moral considerations. Great Britain sought to assess its power and military supremacy as well as its moral supremacy and to vindicate the "higher principles of humanity." The main difference between these interventions and those I deal with here is that the alleged object of the intervention was the protection of strangers. Important similarities among these interventions exist, such as the alleged disinterestedness of the intervening states, their sense of moral superiority, and their utter disregard for the consequences of their actions for other civilian populations. Such was the case in 1900 when the European powers undertook an armed intervention in China to repress the Boxer Rebellion. Their primary goal was to protect European nationals, not Chinese citizens. The intervention indeed resulted in the protection of Europeans and of a number of Christian Chinese from slaughter, but, in the process, hundreds of thousands of innocent

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as well as combatant Chinese were killed by the expeditionary corps, and many women were raped en route to Beijing.

With the exception of the epilogue, I do not make any reference to “massive violations of the most basic human rights.” Such terminology was not in use during the nineteenth century. Today we commonly refer to war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. Of course, none of these concepts existed during the nineteenth century.⁵ I found the terms “mass atrocity crimes,” “mass atrocities,” and “mass crime” equally inadequate for the purpose of this research.⁶ As historian Jacques Sémelin points out, the word “mass” announces the exceptional proportions of the crime under consideration, in the sense that it targets a very large group or a mass of individual victims. The expression “mass crime” suggests that a group that very probably enjoys popular support commits a spectacular crime. In this respect, even though the magnitude of the event and its exceptionality are relevant elements to explain humanitarian intervention, “crime” bears a normative assumption inadequate for nineteenth-century humanitarian interventions.⁷ On the contrary “massacre,” “atrocity,” and “extermination”—which I examine more in detail in chapter 1—were three terms commonly used during the nineteenth century.

BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The concept of rights, including natural rights, stretches back centuries, and the idea of a duty to help strangers did not emerge *ex abrupto* during the nineteenth century. Historically, a number of world religions have encouraged assisting others in dire need; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for example, justify helping others based on charity and their belief that all humans are created in God’s image.⁸ As far as Europe is concerned, since the Middle Ages, the pope and the emperor intervened against the princes violating the fundamental rights of their subjects, and jurists and philosophers debated about the concept of the just war. During the Spanish conquest of America, Francisco de Vitoria put forward the principle of the *ius defendendi innocentes a morte iniusta*, the right to defend innocents from an unjust death caused by their own authorities. This jurist considered that a humanitarian war was permissible and just if it was made in the name of the innocent against the tyranny of native leaders or laws, a tyranny consisting, for instance, of the sacrifice of innocent men or even of the killing of innocent men in order to eat them.⁹ Such a justification, Tzvetan Todorov argues, did not derive from reciprocity: even if this rule were applied to Indians and Spaniards alike, it was the latter who decided on the meaning of

the word “tyranny.” The Spaniards, unlike the Indians, were subject and judge of the decision since it was they who selected the criteria according to which the judgment would be delivered; they decided, for instance, that human sacrifice was the consequence of tyranny, but massacre of local populations was not.¹⁰

During the sixteenth century Alberico Gentili put forward the concept of the aid of the oppressed (*plena est justitia quae defendit infirmos*) and raised the notion of sovereign accountability.¹¹ In two sections of Book 2 of *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, Hugo Grotius dealt with the measure of war against the immoral, and the waging of war on behalf of others. Grotius spoke of a legal right rather than a moral duty to come to aid and to wage a war on behalf of the oppressed subjects of another sovereign when the oppressed are powerless. In those circumstances, he claimed, it is open to another sovereign to assert the rights of the oppressed subjects and intervene on their behalf.¹² During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the prevailing idea among legal scholars was to restrict as much as possible the grounds for legal intervention of a state in the internal affairs of another.¹³ Emer de Vattel criticized Grotius’s assertion that a sovereign may take up arms to punish a nation guilty of an enormous transgression of the laws of nature (a nation that treated its subjects with inhumanity). In his view, such a claim opened the door all sorts of abuses. As Samuel Pufendorf did before him, Vattel referred to one possible exception to the principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of another sovereign state: the case of a third party intervening to assist the oppressed subjects of a tyrannical sovereign. It was only after the oppressed subjects had broken the “political bond” with the tyrant that a third party might intervene on behalf of the oppressed.¹⁴ By the beginning of the nineteenth century the principle of nonintervention in the domestic affairs of another sovereign state had become central in relations between European states. In chapter 2 we shall see that the theory and practice of humanitarian intervention expanded on the edge of this very fundamental pillar of international relations.

The idea that each individual on Earth has some basic rights was central in Immanuel Kant’s “cosmopolitan law,” which suggested a third sphere of public law, in addition to constitutional law and international law, in which both states and individuals have rights, and where individuals have these rights as “citizens of the Earth” rather than as citizens of particular states. Eighteenth-century philosophes argued that the secular and universal aims of the humanitarian spirit went beyond maintaining and preserving order and aimed to transform, to improve, and to regenerate humanity. The humanitarian ideal of the philosophes was to ban war, impose religious tolerance, forbid torture, improve

hygiene and health, promote science, eradicate poverty, develop education, abolish slavery, and recognize that humanity has fundamental rights. The humanitarian spirit, as it emerged in France—in Europe and the Americas—during the late eighteenth century, derived from and developed in an intertwined, sometimes parallel and sometimes opposite, sense to Christian charity and encompassed ideas of secular benevolence (*bienfaisance*) and philanthropy.¹⁵

The “rights of man” were a centerpiece of the age of democratic revolution. Historian Samuel Moyn claims that those *droits de l’homme et du citoyen* meant something different from today’s human rights. For most of modern history, he argues, rights have been part and parcel of battles over the meanings and entitlements of citizenship and therefore have been dependent on national borders for their pursuit, achievement, and protection. In the beginning they were invoked by a people to found a nation-state of their own, not to police someone’s else. They were a justification for state sovereignty, not a source of appeal to some authority—like international law—outside and above it.¹⁶ Nineteenth-century British and French cultivated elites included among the natural rights of humanity the rights to life, property, equality before the law, and religious freedom. Some thinkers argued in favor of the universality of these rights, but during the nineteenth century these rights were not universally protected through mechanisms of international enforcement. Arguably, humanitarianism and humanitarian intervention lie alongside the concept of the rights of man, although it would be wrong to draw to hasty conclusions or misleading heroic views of human rights in the nineteenth century.

As a matter of fact, in Britain as well as in France “humanitarian” and later “humanitarianism” were negative terms implying excessive sentimentalism—the kind of sentimentalism that reached back to the Protestant revolution of sentiments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whose key ingredient was sympathy, the capacity to identify with the suffering of others, which enabled charitable practices to be built on an interior emotional and spiritual foundation.¹⁷ These two terms were kept separated from the terms “human” and “humanity” (*de l’humanité*).¹⁸ Moreover, one should also keep in mind that the roots of nineteenth-century humanitarian movements were remarkably diverse and motivated by radically different principles. In western Europe, national and transnational humanitarianism originated in the politics and philosophy of eighteenth-century liberalism. Throughout the nineteenth century humanitarianism cut across political orientations and was also associated with religious and political projects as diverse as Quaker pacifism, Protestant evangelicalism, Great Power imperialism, Catholic social democracy, and grassroots democratic socialism. The ar-

ray of activities included under the label “humanitarian practices” was similarly diverse and ranged from aid to poor people and food aid to full-scale military intervention.¹⁹

As to the late-eighteenth-century campaign in favor of the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery, one can pinpoint a number of features that help relate it to nineteenth-century humanitarian interventions. The campaign undoubtedly projected humanitarian actions beyond national boundaries. The abolition movement reveals that men and women whose own rights were assured by their governments could mobilize effectively to assert what they took to be the rights of humanity. The campaigns, and to some extent the military operations undertaken by the Royal Navy, bear similarities to the international practice I deal with in this book. There is evidence that for some early-nineteenth-century political elites the naval operations to end the slave trade represented a useful precedent when discussing the grounds upon which to intervene on behalf of the Ottoman Greeks from a military as well as legal point of view (see chapter 3). If one looks at the modalities of these operations, the British naval actions to end the slave trade were the result of international multilateral agreement, for the Royal Navy acted on an international mandate to suppress the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade. The operations were also the outcome of political actions of influential pressure groups such as the Clapham Sect (or Clapham “saints” as contemporaries derisively tagged the sect), led by William Wilberforce.²⁰ In the case of the abolition campaign, reformers succeeded in arousing sympathy and awakening moral qualms so powerfully as to mobilize political action that, though certainly colored by self-interest, actually led to actions on behalf of people who were “other” in the fullest sense.²¹

The abolitionists gave birth to the politics of pressure groups, including mass petitions, publication of magazines and tracts, holding of public meetings, appealing to public opinion, and founding of voluntary societies.²² The importance of public opinion was included in the solemn public declaration of ministers of eight European powers on February 8, 1815, regarding the African slave trade, which now had to be regarded, “by just and enlightened men, in all ages, as repugnant to the principles of humanity and of universal morality.” The ministers of the principal European states mentioned that “the public voice in all civilized countries” demanded the suppression of slavery, and that the universal abolition of it was “conformable to the spirit of the age and the generous principles of the allied powers.”²³ In fact, however, the trade in slaves and slavery were not universally banned. Military actions had a limited scope and were biased and selective. The British government limited the military action of its navy to the abolishment of

the trade in slaves, not slavery itself.²⁴ The British government's strategy for ending the slave trade was to have such trafficking labeled as piracy, thus making the slaves "contraband" (i.e., property) and justifying its actions because maritime rights governing commerce enabled it to seize and board ships sailing under non-British flags suspected of carrying contraband slaves. The British navy undertook international policing actions against pirates rather than against a target state. The scope of the military action was very limited, with the exception of the destruction of the port of Algiers in 1816 to end the white slave trade in the Mediterranean Sea.²⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century there would not be a single armed intervention on behalf of African slaves on the African or American continents. British and other European governments did not regard black, non-Christian Africans as human beings whose rights should be protected in the same way as those of suffering Christians were.

The doctrine of the just war, the idea of a right to life for each individual on Earth, the practice of international police action, the organization of domestic and transnational pressure group and other philanthropic societies with humanitarian purposes all existed before the nineteenth century. What was specific to the international concept and practice of humanitarian intervention during that century, when nationalism rose, during the heydays of imperialism, of the struggle of mastery in Europe and beyond? Under what circumstances—if any—did the European powers consider massacre of foreign civilian populations as sufficient motive to undertake a military operation? Can we find examples in the nineteenth century where states looked beyond their own territorial and colonial borders, beyond their own immediate economic and security interests, beyond *realpolitik*, to demonstrate—by acting to halt or avert new or continuing massacre and atrocity—that they indeed had "purposes beyond themselves"?²⁶ The purpose of this book is to answer to those questions.

QUESTIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND ISSUES

This book focuses on the Ottoman Empire because, during the period examined, the coercive interventions "on grounds of humanity" took place in that empire (the target state) and on behalf of Ottoman Christian populations. The precedent and rationale for these interventions and the parameters of the discourse related to them were inextricably bound up with the image of and geopolitics pertaining to the Ottoman Empire. One of my initial assumptions is that the origins of humanitarian intervention lay in a specific relationship between the European

powers and the Ottoman Empire, known as the “Eastern Question.” I look at European international relations and the place of the Ottoman Empire within the international system at a time when the European powers increasingly saw it as under their tutelage. To prevent or cure internal disorders in the Ottoman Empire, the European powers took into consideration two solutions: its dismemberment (a radical remedy impossible to enforce for various reasons) or its modernization through the implementation of reforms. In urgent cases, when violent counter-insurgency campaigns undertaken by the Ottoman authorities led to disturbances and massacre, the European powers authorized themselves to intervene militarily in the empire. I analyze whether the intervening states acknowledged the existence of a given threshold (quantitative—the number of people slaughtered—and/or qualitative—the way they were killed, the kind of atrocities perpetrated against them) beyond which a massacre might have triggered intervention. I show whether systemic or local circumstances, political situations, and criteria, *ratione personae* or *ratione loci*, determined a humanitarian intervention or inaction.

A further axiomatic assumption of this book is that a government *always* acts according to a given set of perceived interests. Hence even a truly humanitarian intervention responds to an interest. What distinguishes humanitarian intervention from other kind of interventions is its main motivation, that is, to save strangers from massacre. The intervention can be humanitarian when political leaders, state agents, and policy-makers see saving the lives of strangers as an act of “moral capital,”²⁷ when it follows a domestic political concern (i.e., the decision of leaders and policy-makers to act according to the demands of public opinion), notwithstanding whether policy-makers empathize with the victims of massacre.²⁸ As David Forsythe points out, states do care about their international reputation, and “moral” behavior reinforces a positive reputation at home and abroad. Indeed “moral policies” may compel further ethically motivated behavior not originally envisaged by the state. In this way, a humanitarian morality can become politically useful and can reshape state interest in unintended ways.²⁹

An intervention can be humanitarian even if it is directed only to saving the lives of a particular group of peoples and ignores the sufferings of other populations. It will certainly be selective and biased, but it can still be humanitarian. On the contrary, if it can be demonstrated that humanitarian motives are a pretext to enhance political, imperial, strategic interests of the intervening state(s), an intervention cannot be qualified as humanitarian. If from a theoretical point of view it is possible to draw clear lines and to define what is or is not humanitarian with respect to an intervention, things are different when confronted

with real situations—when for instance, humanitarian and imperialist impulses of domestic constituencies tend to coincide. Was nineteenth-century humanitarianism nothing more than a rhetorical tool, the fig leaf concealing policies in the self-interest of the intervening states? Is it possible to disentangle humanitarian motives from other motives determining the interventions of the European powers?

I examine the motives and modalities of interventions against massacre and deal with some of the aspects related to their effectiveness, outcomes, and (intended and unintended) consequences. We shall see that nineteenth-century humanitarian interventions were generally carried out collectively. Before undertaking the intervention, European powers usually reached a collective agreement guaranteeing the “disinterested” nature of the intervention. Disinterested meant that none of the European powers would seek any unilateral advantage, such as territorial conquest, through their military action. The military operation was not an act of self-defense, nor did it lead to a permanent military occupation or to a peace treaty signed with the target state (which distinguished it from an act of war against the target state). We shall also see what would happen when massacre, atrocities, and extermination occurred but the European powers did not reach a collective agreement, and how far, without such an agreement, some European powers were ready to go to save strangers. As Bass puts it:

The great powers had to convince each other that their purported mercy mission was not just a foil for imperial expansion. So the intervening states had to impose limitations on themselves. There were a number of established techniques of self-restraint: delineating [the] sphere of justifiable intervention for each of the great powers, delegating to regional powers, putting time limits on humanitarian interventions, restricting the size of the military force, forswearing diplomatic and commercial advantages from a humanitarian mission, and, above all, multilateralism. All of these devices helped make humanitarian intervention safer.³⁰

Undoubtedly, in the early to mid-nineteenth century, the term “humanitarian intervention” would have been meaningless to many individuals this book deals with (see chapter 2). Part of my argument is that the idea of intervention to end massacre began to emerge as a way to protect the right to life of a restricted group of people in the early nineteenth century, prior to the creation of a proper legal definition of the intervention. A legal concept and discourse on states’ action intending to assist suffering humanity deprived of the right to life crystallized by the second half of the nineteenth century. It was during the 1870s that campaigners, pamphleteers, journalists, and international legal schol-

ars pointed to historical precedents that had taken place early in the century. European political elites and policy-makers situated and understood early-nineteenth-century interventions in terms of religious and/or political worldviews that could not admit the indiscriminate killing of a religious community. Hence, one of the issues examined in this book is the extent to which the intervening states responded to the suffering of others regardless of their ethnic or religious identity.³¹ Did the European powers consider massacre, atrocity, and extermination of any population as an intolerable wrong that needed to be redressed? Did they systematically undertake coercive intervention against massacre? Did they intervene because the Ottoman government showed itself to be unwilling or unable to protect its populations? Or did they intervene because of the widespread sentiment of identity of a great majority of Europeans with suffering Christianity? Was it because non-Christian populations and/or authorities massacred Christians that interventions took place?

If nineteenth-century humanitarian interventions were not based on secular universalism and if they did not systematically transcend boundaries of religion (and therefore both the Christian identity of the victims of massacre and the Muslim religion of the alleged perpetrators are key explaining factors), is it correct to consider these coercive actions as acts of religious imperialism?

It is worthwhile for readers to bear in mind that when Europeans dealt with massacres taking place in the Ottoman Empire, they ignored the appalling record of violations of the right to life in their respective colonies. They forgot, whether deliberately or not, the fact that equality before the law and religious freedom in their own states, let alone colonies, did not exist.³² European diplomats and acknowledged experts wanted the Ottoman government to legislate for equality and citizenship while, in a former Ottoman territory like Algeria, French authorities ruled in a far more intolerant, discriminating, and despotic way than the Ottomans had ever done. Europeans intervened militarily when the "barbarous" Ottomans used the same "savage" methods to repress insurrection they systematically used in their own colonies. As Bass puts it, the British largely missed the irony of carrying on their debates about Greek suffering during the 1820s while simultaneously discussing how to deal with an Indian mutiny and festering Catholic grievances in Ireland. After Indians massacred Britons in Delhi and Kanpur in the summer 1857, the British sadistically slaughtered Indians by the hundreds, burning old women and children alive, and smearing Muslims with pig fat before killing them. The Earl of Carnarvon, Disraeli's colonial secretary, spoke inside the cabinet for the Bulgarians in 1876, just a few years before he launched widespread brutal reprisals

against the Zulus in 1879. In 1876–79, at the height of British public rage over the Bulgarian horrors, an epic drought took the lives of untold millions of Indians. When the Armenian massacres and intervention in Crete took place, the British were at arms against the Boers in South Africa, famous for its barbarities against local populations, white and black.

Humanitarian interventions undertaken by European governments were based on the same basic assumptions of imperialism. The intervening governments and the vast majority of humanitarians involved in the campaigns in favor of intervention were firmly convinced that massacres and atrocities were the direct consequence of the “barbarous” Ottoman government. And, toward the end of the century, imperial racism toward Muslims played a recurring role in moving European humanitarians and some policy-makers to action. The European “most civilized” nations contrasted their “superior” civilization with that of a “barbarous,” “uncivilized” target state, prone to inhumanity, whose sovereignty and authority they contested. Since the early nineteenth century the rationale of intervention was saving fellow Christians in the short term and exporting “civilization” (European civilization) in the medium term. We should bear in mind that the Europeans attempted to end the massacre and avoid its repetition, and at the same time they wished to impose their civilization where the intervention had taken place. Many humanitarians who supported imperial expansion at home shared with European leaders few “compunctions about imposing changes on foreign countries,” including the Ottoman territories.³³ Any restraint the intervening states showed after an intervention had taken place was related to the political complexity of the Eastern Question rather than to any respect for Ottoman sovereignty. It is in the dichotomy civilization/barbarism, which, as we know, substantially varied between the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that humanitarian and imperialist impulses of Europeans intersected. It was the presumption of superiority of the European civilization that, throughout the nineteenth century, shaped interventions against massacre in the Ottoman Empire.

The end of the ancien régime in France, the extension of suffrage in Britain, the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery in European colonies, and the economic and technological breakthroughs of the Industrial Revolution all lent a conviction even to radical social critics that French or British political cultures were unimpeachably superior to those of the rest of the world.³⁴ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, theories of progress became more triumphalist, less tolerant of cultural differences and more specifically national. As historian Peter Mandler puts it, a “*civilizational confidence*” began to pervade political

discourse in both Britain and France.³⁵ With Napoleon Bonaparte political power and conquest became justified, sometimes in a missionary manner, in terms of the values of progress and civilization they were presumed to embody. Later the concept of civilization would be increasingly employed as an instrument of political expansion beyond Europe and as the cultural legitimation of European imperialism.³⁶ The comparatively subtle developmental gradations put forward by eighteenth-century intellectuals, such as Scottish thinkers Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, were reduced to a crude dichotomy between European civilization and extra-European barbarity or savagery.

For midcentury intellectuals, such as François Guizot or John Stuart Mill, barbarous societies, including the Ottoman Empire, fell outside the community of nations and norms of international law.³⁷ These views on civilizations reinforced the idea of the European countries' fitness to spread the civilization beyond Europe and to introduce it where, presumably, it did not already exist. Midcentury Europeans saw no harm, indeed saw much good, in an imperial "civilizing mission" over the world's "children" (those peoples who had not yet grown up into civilization) and supported the expansion and consolidation of European rule over non-European subjects primarily on moral bases. The lack of a European *standard of civilization* became one of the justifications for imperial domination of non-Europeans.³⁸ The civilizing mission claimed to bring the benefits of European social, political, economic, and cultural arrangements to the "dark" reaches of Earth to create humanity where none had previously existed. Non-Europeans became fully human ergo "civilized" (or vice versa) in European eyes by becoming Christian, adopting European-style structures of property rights and territorial political arrangements, and entering the growing European-based liberal international economy.

During the second half of the century, the superiority of the European civilization remained uncontested, though doubts concerning the civilizing character of the imperial and colonial enterprise emerged, in Britain at least, after the 1857 Indian Mutiny and more markedly so after the 1865 "rebellion" in Morant Bay, Jamaica. By the 1870s the failure of the project to modernize and Christianize was widely accepted. As historian Ronald Hyam eloquently puts it, the sympathetic and optimistic fundamental belief in equality and perfectibility of humankind disappeared, and efficiency replaced improvement as the keynote of good administration.³⁹

Contrary to Britain, in France, the *mission civilisatrice* acquired a greater currency under the Third Republic. Historian Alice Conklin notes that the notion of a civilizing mission rested on fundamental assumptions about the superiority of French culture and perfectibility of

humankind. It implied that France's colonial subjects were too primitive to rule themselves but were capable of being uplifted.⁴⁰ The civilizer had duties, moral and humanitarian. Ameliorating (*la mise en valeur*) colonized populations through "superior" French science constituted one aspect of the mission. Abolishing slavery, ending all forms of "feudal vestiges," and eradicating indigenous languages and customs, pestilence, poverty, and ignorance were central to the French understanding of their civilizing mission. The supreme ambition of the civilizing mission was the pursuit of moral progress and was ultimately meant to make men and women out of colonial "savages" and "barbarians" (*en faire des hommes*).⁴¹

No differently from the case of other European imperialisms, when translated into acts the civilizing mission meant brutal submission, violence, and utter, arrogant disregard of other peoples' most basic rights. Furthermore, whether in their colonies the French presumed to be the bearers of civilization, they often looked at the Ottoman Empire as a feudal, ancien régime-type of government. French rulers committed massacre and atrocities, which, in his 1841 *Essay on Algeria*, Tocqueville argued were justified by France's imperial goal. The French must be prepared to use violence against civilians in ways that would be unconscionable in Europe—to burn harvests, ruin soils, and capture unarmed men, women, and children. The struggle against local Arab leader Abdel-Kader, led by extreme violence, had the full approval of Prime Minister Guizot, the man whose lessons Tocqueville had so much admired. Guizot claimed that humanitarian and philanthropic attitudes would have prolonged the war. In the end the "generous intention of the colonizers" justified a *despotisme du sabre* by France in Algeria.⁴² In the European view, the Ottomans lacked any "generous" intention, hence their massacres were totally unjustified. This was the main difference between "civilized" and "uncivilized" rule. Nineteenth-century humanitarian interventions shared with the civilizing mission the firm belief in the superiority of European morality, religious beliefs, and political systems, and the certainty of military and technological domination. One difference did exist. Whereas in the colonies bringing civilization entailed the *despotisme du sabre* and resorting to massacres in the case of humanitarian intervention, the "generous intentions" of the Europeans aimed at ending massacres of fellow Christians. Admittedly, these interventions were selective in the kinds of problems they targeted and in the types of people who deserved to be rescued.

Toward the end of the century a racist "objective scientific basis" would justify the "superiority" of Western culture and Western dominance as being the expression of scientific laws rather than an accident of power politics.⁴³ In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, "at

the height of Britain's imperial power, moral and political justifications of empire receded from the forefront of debates about the nature and purpose of imperial rule. Earlier ethical justifications of empire were displaced as new sociological understandings of colonial societies began to function as *de facto* explanations for imperial rule.⁴⁴ By the early twentieth century, in the perspective of the Europeans, "civilization" was a hypothetical basis for global order in a world of hierarchy.⁴⁵ When the First World War started a juridical doctrine of humanitarian intervention, though still debated and controversial, had been established and looked back to a jurisprudential corpus that by then was almost a century old.

A last issue I wish to pin down here concerns the role of public opinion. During the nineteenth century some massacres had a greater impact on public opinion and policy-makers than did others. The massacres of Christians by a "barbarous," infidel state clearly aroused the interest of public opinion all over Europe more than did the massacres of Muslims in Central Asia. Massacres of Ottoman Christians attracted sustained interest and attained political significance within the societies of potential intervening states because, in my view, there was a close connection between Christians and compassion during the nineteenth century. In some circumstances those concerned found a way to address their concerns at the domestic and eventually the transnational and international levels. Specific individuals made a priority of massacre and of the political questions related to solving the recurrence of massacre—a priority that lasted beyond initial protests, the setting up of organizations, and institutional commitment. (This was the case with the Eastern Question Associations founded in the aftermath of the Bulgarian Atrocities of 1876; see chapters 6–10). Every European state—even the autocratic Russian government—had to take into account public opinion movements. And in late-Victorian Britain, while not yet a full democracy, the government had to build a consensus not just among elites but also among the middle and working classes. In the case of Great Britain, the growth of domestic mass media and faster communication were vital for the Philhellenes in the 1820s as well as for William Gladstone's campaigners. Whereas during the 1820s the London Greek Committee remained largely an elite group, Gladstone's latter-day supporters had access to more newspapers, with bigger circulation and farther reach. The *Times* had fewer than six thousand readers in 1822 but as many as seventy thousand in 1876. Throughout the century the electorate grew, too. The first Reform Act came in Britain in 1832, followed by the second Reform Act in 1867, which by itself doubled the size of the electorate. The press had to reach almost two million voters. The 1867 franchise reform sent a large number of new

voters into the mix, just in time to read the gruesome news of massacres in Bulgaria. Bass argues that this meant more pressure on the British government to act.⁴⁶ The hypothesis that public opinion mattered for each and every intervening state seems very sensible indeed. It also seems important to stress the increasing role of the masses with respect to the political life of European states. At the same time, it should be noted that public opinion could be manipulated, as it was in France under Napoleon III, who strictly controlled the French press in 1860 at the time of the intervention in Ottoman Lebanon.

In *Freedom's Battle*, Bass looks at the way freedom at home helped promote freedom abroad, arguing that for the activists who campaigned in favor of intervention, military actions in the Balkans and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire were intended to promote independence. *Against Massacre* examines the motives of intervention, starting from the assumption that European governments were little interested in freeing Balkan or Middle Eastern populations. As far as those who campaigned in favor of interventions are concerned, this book emphasizes that for some "massacre" figured at least as prominently as "freedom." Other campaigners ignored the issue of bestowing freedom (i.e., independence) or referred to freedom as the rights of Christians to be ruled fairly by a government respectful of their lives, their religion, and their equality before the law. Speaking about freedom at home and abroad, Bass dwells on the force of what he calls "free press" reporting on foreign atrocities. He argues that the new mass media played an increasingly crucial role throughout the nineteenth century as an *ante litteram* CNN. Hence Bass claims that the existence of mass media was the first crucial step toward a humanitarian intervention.⁴⁷ For what reasons, on the various occasions this book deals with, when freedom was denied and massacres took place, did humanitarian intervention not take place, despite an impressive mobilization of national and transnational public opinion? It is certainly true that credible information about foreign atrocities coalesced the interests and moral concerns of public opinion, and that without the mass media public opinion would return to worrying about more parochial concerns. Why, then, when reporters emerged as a distinct professional class with some professional standards, did military humanitarian interventions take place less often than in the early nineteenth century, when there were very few professional reporters around?⁴⁸

I will attempt to demonstrate that nineteenth-century humanitarian interventions were not necessarily products of increasing democracy, a free press, and the increasing importance of the principle of self-determination. In fact, the most likely conditions for such an intervention to take place were in the conservative venues of the old Concert

of Europe's diplomacy. The rise of international law doctrines on intervention did not bring about an increase of this international practice for a number of reasons, mainly related to the nature and conditions of the international system in the late nineteenth century. It is precisely because of the centrality of the Eastern Question as a key factor for understanding the history of humanitarian intervention that I go beyond the study of intervention in Greece (chapter 3), Lebanon, Syria (chapter 4), and Bulgaria (chapter 6) and examine cases relating to interventions in Crete (chapters 5 and 9) and the Ottoman Macedonian provinces (chapter 10), as well as the 1890s massacres of Ottoman Armenians (chapter 8), a notable case of nonintervention that I consider to be of the utmost importance in understanding the limits of this international practice.