

OPINION NOTE

The ICRC as seen through the pages of the Review, 1869–1913: Personal observations

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Abstract

The early years of the Review, then called the Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge, provide numerous insights into the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which edited the journal. Since the ICRC was very small in those days and without support staff, one learns a great deal, especially about Gustave Moynier, who led the organization and carried out most of the editing duties at the Bulletin. The reader can trace the role of religious and other motivations, attitudes toward colonialism, the evolving nature of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the ICRC's place therein, and complex relations with States. This early era, as richly recorded in the journal, stimulates a number of questions about further research into ICRC and Red Cross history.

Keywords: Red Cross history, ICRC, Gustave Moynier, Christian charity, colonialism and racism, States and Red Cross actors, humanitarian affairs.

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I started looking into the record of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in some detail during the early 1970s, and have continued to follow the activities of the organization since that time.¹ So I was pleased when the *Review* asked me to read through the early years of its publication and react to what I read about the founding agency of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent

Movement (the Movement). I did so without pretending to be a historian who was writing a complete history. For this project I visited no archives in person in order to supplement the journal. As a historically oriented political scientist with a concentration on international relations, I focused on what the early journal itself might tell us about the ICRC.

Quite a bit, it turns out, because the *Review* was a major instrument of the organization as it sought to shape the Movement *and* advance its own status. The major issues of that era, for both the Movement and the ICRC, were treated by the journal. The journal also revealed a great deal about the central figure of Gustave Moynier and some of his colleagues. The ICRC was very small back then, and the early *Review* was quite personalized. Some of the more personalized material should perhaps not have appeared in print, but it is too late for that concern now. We benefit from that lack of restraint.

I trust professional historians will forgive me for intruding on their turf. Perhaps they can use what follows to enhance their own studies. They may find that most of my observations confirm what they already know. That's fine, because confirmation is part of determining what we think is truth. But they, and especially the general reader, may find something new in what follows. For those who live at great distance from the ICRC's archives, they can certainly learn a lot from the early *Review*, which can be accessed via the internet.² I have chosen to focus on the early motivations of the ICRC, its role in the Movement, how the ICRC viewed States and public international law, and a number of other points that struck me as worthy of further research.

Some people are still confused about the founding of what became the ICRC in 1863, and the development of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC)³ network of agencies. This is not the place to recount the key facts. Suffice it to say that the *Review*, appearing first only in French as the *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* (though the precise title varied for a time), appeared from late 1869. Thus the journal had nothing to say in the present tense about events from 1863 to most of 1869.

Officially, the 1869 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference), meeting in Berlin, asked the ICRC to undertake the task of editing a journal for the nascent network of private aid societies whose central mission back then was to supplement State authorities for better care of the war wounded. But even before 1869, the 1867 International Conference in Paris had discussed creation of a journal, and the ICRC had conducted a survey of interested parties about possibilities and then manoeuvred

1 Throughout the article, I use contemporary names for Red Cross organs and agencies even though it took time for such names to be adopted.

2 The archives of the *Review*, including when it was called the *Bulletin*, can be found online at the Hathitrust Digital Library, available at: www.hathitrust.org; and via Cambridge University Press, available at: www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-review-of-the-red-cross/digital-archive. More recent issues can be found on the ICRC's own website, available at: www.icrc.org/en/international-review-past-issues (all internet references were accessed in March 2019).

3 Hereinafter I use "RC" to avoid spelling out "Red Cross and Red Crescent" in full each time, and to avoid prioritizing the Red Cross over the Red Crescent.

to get the journal published – and edited – in Geneva. The ICRC often operated in this way: taking an initiative but being sure to get agreement from the Conference or perhaps individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) in order to legitimate what it wanted to do. The early ICRC, and above all Gustave Moynier, who was its president from 1864 to 1910, manifested persistent determination and not a little self-interest – but it tried to camouflage particularly the latter trait in a cocoon of modesty and service to others.

Moynier was not only ICRC president but also the editor of the *Bulletin* for about thirty years until age caused him to reduce his workload in the last decade of his life. The ICRC as an organization was tiny in those days, consisting of five to twelve persons. There were no support staff or delegates in the field. Moynier displayed many admirable traits, but a shrewd sense of communication and presentation was *not* one of them. The early issues of the journal constituted less than exciting reading for the most part, consisting of reports from the various National Societies about their central committees (or governing boards): who had died, who had been replaced by whom, their budgets, their statutes, where their sub-units were located, what medals had been designed, who their (upper class) patrons were, how many bottles of wine and cognac had been sent to the troops, etc. The various national units submitted their materials, and then the ICRC translated them into French if necessary, with apparently very little editing.

In a rare burst of candour and lack of diplomacy, the *Bulletin* (meaning Moynier, most probably) observed in print that a Spanish report was not very important.⁴ In this the Spanish were not unique. Even in the fall of 1914 after the outbreak of World War I, the *Bulletin* commenced in pedantic fashion with its usual list of past publications about aid to war victims arranged country by country. When the journal did present an interesting and broad essay, it was often buried in the middle of the issue rather than in a leading spot.

Moynier, the careful lawyer with a reputation for organizational detail, seemed to know well the nature of his journal but could not bring himself to change its format. Perhaps he felt bound by International Conference's resolutions saying the journal should focus on Movement issues. But the *Bulletin* shows no evidence that he lobbied the Conference to alter the journal. He acknowledged on several occasions that it was an in-network publication that was too technical, dealing with organizational details, and with little appeal to the public.⁵ Most national publics lacked knowledge early on about this new international network to aid the war wounded, but the *Bulletin* was obviously not going to correct that problem. For Moynier it was up to the National Societies to

4 “Nouvelles de la Société espagnole”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 27, No. 106, 1896, p. 88.

5 “Remplacement de M. le docteur Maunoir”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1870, especially p. 61, part of a larger essay devoted to RC publications; “Aux abonnés du Bulletin”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 5, No. 20, 1874, pp. 193–194; “Le Bulletin international (41me circulaire)”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 9, No. 33, 1878, pp. 1–7, comprising a review of the journal up to that time; “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 13, No. 50, 1882, p. 74, where the journal is said to be important but not very powerful in overcoming critics of the RC idea.

speak to their publics. With a keen Swiss sense of finances, Moynier wanted more paid subscriptions but apparently knew why they were not forthcoming. It was clear he understood that the journal lacked broad appeal.

However, one starting a new National Society in say, Uruguay, could learn a great deal from the journal about how the more active units of the Movement – the various German-speaking units, or the Russians, or the Japanese, or the Dutch, or the Americans – did it. For those interested in Movement details about structure and function, one could learn a lot from the *Bulletin*, but for general readers it was a non-starter, because it was not designed for them. The *Bulletin* was serious but mostly pedantic, and Moynier was serious but not charismatic. Henry Dunant was the visionary, the crusader; Moynier was the builder,⁶ who laboured persistently, brick by brick. The *Bulletin* was to a great degree a manual about how to do RC masonry.

The ICRC and the Movement

There are essays in the *Bulletin* that make it worthwhile to slog through the other 80% of its contents. These essays clarify the values that animated the ICRC and hence the early years of the Movement. Other essays make clear the ICRC's vision for how to implement Dunant's dream⁷ of a system of private aid societies that would supplement national military establishments. Still others indicate blind spots or complexities in the views expressed in Geneva. On a number of points the views expressed by Moynier, or later president Gustave Ador, were widely shared within the North Atlantic area.

Religious conviction and organizational pride

The *Bulletin* does not hide the fact that the basic impulse driving early developments was the notion of Christian charity. The journal makes this abundantly clear on Moynier's part. Other literature indicates that the same held true for the other "Geneva gentlemen" who founded the ICRC. Henry Dunant was a deeply religious Christian for most of his life, and Dr Appia was similar in many respects to Dunant. Dr Maunoir and General Dufour were practicing Protestants.

According to the *Bulletin*, as age took its toll on Moynier, he collected the memorabilia of his life. A central position was given to a print (*gravure*) of Christ on the cross.⁸ The idea of a universal Christian charity was intended to challenge a

6 See, further, Jean des Senarclens, *Gustave Moynier: Le bâtisseur*, Slatkine, Geneva, 2000. There is no English edition, possibly because the book comprises more bland description than searching analysis.

7 I borrow the phrase from Caroline Morehead, *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross*, HarperCollins, London, 1999.

8 Gustave Moynier, Gustave Ador and Ad. D'Espine, "Fondation d'une Société de la Croix-Rouge au Chili (123me Circulaire aux Comités centraux de la Croix-Rouge)", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 40, No. 159, 1909, p. 138.

“savage patriotism”.⁹ One could not count on the masses to naturally demonstrate this Christian internationalism; rather, it was a select few who would have to lead.¹⁰ An elite would have to develop a broad spirit of the fraternity of humanity that was necessary to stand up to barbarism and fanaticism.¹¹ As the Franco-Prussian war raged in 1870–71, Moynier noted that many obstacles to a dynamic Red Cross role had been overcome thanks to God.¹² In the activities of the specialized agency set up at Basel to coordinate Red Cross action in that war, God’s blessings were evident.¹³ Even when some considered that Christian charity had evolved into global humanitarianism, it was still a project designed by God.¹⁴

In the very first issue of the *Bulletin*, Moynier tried to answer a persistent and obviously long-standing criticism of the Red Cross idea. According to him, various anti-war groups existed and the ICRC was sympathetic to their cause, but since war had proven a mainstay of human history, the ICRC was justified in trying to limit its evils. Help for the war wounded was a good place to start.¹⁵ He followed up this opening defence a few issues later with an even clearer scepticism about peace groups.¹⁶ For him, writing in the midst of the Franco-Prussian war, it was clear that even civilized nations fought ferocious battles. He thought peace was just a truce between wars. For him, it was hard to know God’s plan for humankind, but sooner or later war occurred. Thus, he argued, the Red Cross is needed.¹⁷ By the 1880s Moynier was even more convinced that war would continue but that humanitarian progress could be made, even if the RC effort was only a palliative for a chronically bad situation.¹⁸ Moynier and the ICRC combined pessimism about the human condition with optimism about improvements at the margins. A long review of developments in the 1880s was basically optimistic about the RC’s future despite a critical view of State policies, citing such things as greater attention to humanitarian issues in the Crimean War and American Civil War.¹⁹

This original Christian impulse was both dynamic and problematic. The early ICRC was Christian, Protestant and strictly Genevan. Most of its early members, like Moynier, were serious and dedicated to the cause, determined to find a way to translate Dunant’s general vision into a pragmatic, effective and broad institution. Dunant left the ICRC, or was forced to leave it, in 1867, and

9 “Du double caractère, national et international, des sociétés de secours”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1870, p. 160.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 “Travaux du Comité international pendant le dernier trimestre de l’année 1870”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1871, p. 78.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

14 “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, p. 84.

15 “Avant-Propos”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1869, pp. 1–3.

16 “Les Sociétés de secours pendant la guerre de 1870”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 2, No 5, 1870, pp. 1–2.

17 *Ibid.*

18 “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, especially pp. 67–68.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

the others doggedly carried on, probably satisfied if not happy to see the crusading visionary go.²⁰

But what was the fate of Christian charity when the Red Cross idea was projected into societies not even nominally Christian? The ICRC had universal aspirations for its work. Its humanitarian objectives fit relatively well with at least some sectors of what was often called the Christian West. But this attempt to organize aid societies for the war wounded met certain early obstacles in places like Turkey, Persia and Egypt.

These obstacles were clearly noted in the pages of the *Bulletin*. The Ottoman Empire claimed in the 1870s that its soldiers objected to the red cross emblem as a neutral and protective signage in war. The Sublime Porte said it was sympathetic to private aid societies for the purpose of aiding the war wounded (not that it consistently supported such action in an effective way) but that it wanted to use the red crescent, not the red cross, as the emblem for such work. So the ICRC's Christian origins led to problems, first with the Muslim Turks, then with the Muslim Egyptians (originally a part of the Ottoman Empire but with periodic autonomy), and also with the Muslim Persians. Moynier acknowledged that the cross was a symbol that could cause negative feelings in Muslims, even as he first asserted that the Ottomans were not allowed to change emblems on their own.²¹

It should be noted that various countries, like Japan and Thailand (Siam back then), became part of the Red Cross network without insisting on changes to the red cross emblem. They were obviously non-Western but ultimately had no problem with RC objectives stemming from Christian charity. It was too bad that Turkey, in particular, acted otherwise. The ICRC, reproducing a point made by the Swiss government, wished that Turkey had acted like Japan.²² But parties to conflict like Russia (officially Christian in the Tsarist era) agreed to respect the neutrality of the red crescent emblem in battle, on condition that the red cross was also respected. And the 1907 Hague Conference, in dealing with the laws of war, showed that many States accepted Turkey's red crescent.

So the ICRC, which itself did not use the words "Red Cross" in its title until 1875–76, had to be flexible about emblems. The ICRC had proposed use of the red cross emblem by all units of the network in the *Bulletin* in 1873, but did not incorporate "Red Cross" into its name until two years later.²³ By the 1880s

20 Dunant resigned when accused of financial improprieties in his business dealings, but he was apparently pushed out by Moynier. The two did not get along. Later Dunant continued to freelance in advocating for his ideas. In the mid-1870s he sought to create a new Red Cross society in Belgium, but it already had a society for aid to the war wounded linked to the ICRC. "Avis relatif à la Société nationale belge de la Croix rouge et Appel du Comité central serbe (42me circulaire)", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 9, No 33, 1878, pp. 8–11. This type of lone-wolf advocacy by Dunant, leading to competing aid agencies in Belgium, must have driven Moynier mad.

21 Gustave Ador and Gustave Moynier, "Les Destinées de la Convention de Genève pendant la guerre de Serbie", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 7, No. 28, 1876, p. 174.

22 "Considérations soumises par le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge aux membres de la Conférence", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 37, No. 147, 1906, p. 180.

23 "III. Sociétés de secours", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 4, No. 16, 1873, p. 180.

Moynier thought it had become too late to abandon the red cross symbol because “it had become dear to the Aryan race”.²⁴ Moreover, a question of form should not interfere with continuing humanitarian work.²⁵

According to the *Bulletin*, if RC actors were to have a global movement, pragmatism was necessary. Besides, the red cross on a white background, as defined in public international law by the 1864 Geneva Convention (drafted by the ICRC, meaning Moynier and Dufour), was merely the reverse of the Swiss national flag. The red cross emblem had no religious significance. Moynier had made this argument in print at least as early as 1873, even before Turkey challenged the red cross emblem in the 1876–78 war with Russia.²⁶ So the reality of the early ICRC being religiously motivated, with Protestant evangelism in the forefront, eventually yielded to the later ICRC as a secular humanitarian organization. A universal movement required downplaying Western Christian Protestant origins.²⁷

Christian charity was not the only value at work in the early ICRC. It was central, but there was also pride in being Genevan and Swiss. It is probably a fool’s errand to try to say which identity was stronger. Moynier was perhaps not fully diplomatic to have printed in the *Bulletin* a speech he gave to a group in Geneva in 1873. In that talk, he closed a review of ten years of ICRC activity by saying that especially Genevans and Swiss should be proud of what the ICRC had accomplished. He endorsed Swiss patriotism and tried to distinguish it from conceit.²⁸ He was even more undiplomatic or incautious to have printed in the journal another ode to Swiss virtues. In a celebration of twenty-five years of RC activity at the Hotel de Bergues in Geneva, he first recounted in flattering terms the accomplishments of the ICRC itself, saying that the ICRC had achieved a pre-eminent position without seeking it (though this is not entirely true). He then praised Swiss and Genevan authorities (among others), asserting that the Swiss had the best passports in the world. He closed with a toast to Switzerland, suggesting that the ICRC had contributed to the good name of Switzerland abroad.²⁹ In 1899, a book review in the *Bulletin* by Alfred Gautier of the ICRC referred to Switzerland as the chosen land of international philanthropy or charitable works.³⁰

The *Bulletin*, which commenced publication in 1869 as already noted, is largely silent about an early effort by the French to take over leadership of the

24 “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, p. 73.

25 *Ibid.*

26 “IV. Conclusion”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 4, No. 16, 1873, p. 242.

27 Insufficient documentation in 1863–64 has fuelled debate about the red cross emblem. Given the strong religiosity of Dunant, Moynier and others, it is hard to believe the cross had no religious symbolism. On the other hand, a red cross on a white background was in fact the reverse of the Swiss national flag, and the leaders of the early RC efforts were indeed Swiss.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 243. Later in this piece I comment on ICRC relations with Swiss officials in Bern.

29 “La journée du 26 octobre 1888”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 20, No. 77, 1889, especially pp. 15–17.

30 “Ouvrages reçus et publications nouvelles”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 30, No. 118, 1899, p. 65.

Movement and relocate its headquarters to Paris. This was in actuality successfully resisted by the all-Swiss, all-Genevan ICRC, despite some appearances of flexibility. While historical retrospectives were published by Moynier in the *Bulletin*, they never went fully into those details – and certainly not candidly.³¹

Later in the mid-1880s, when the Russians sought to replace the all-Swiss ICRC with an international body, the ICRC was clear in the journal about its opposition to what the Russians were proposing. The ICRC would first profess to be neutral about the proposal, then make clear it was opposed. The Russians would have had the members of the new central body elected by National Societies. The ICRC found the Russian proposals impractical, which they were in part because they would have also had the new RC central body pass judgment about State war crimes. Being the central node in RC communications, the ICRC could delay action – as well as having an important platform for its own views. The Russians complained repeatedly about the lack of timely action on their proposals, and the ICRC denied stalling, improbably blaming tardiness on force majeure.³² Crucially, the ICRC manoeuvred to keep the Russian proposals as one package. Thus, what was impractical – i.e., having a RC organ rule on State war crimes – was combined with what was not so impractical – i.e., replacing the ICRC with an international organ elected by the National Societies.³³ Once again, the ICRC manoeuvred effectively on behalf of its traditional position. Genevan and Swiss identity was at work. The shifting Russian package of proposals, launched about 1884, was finally voted down unanimously at the 1897 International Conference in Vienna.³⁴ The ICRC had planted so many seeds of doubt that even the Russian Red Cross Society did not vote for its own initiative.

The ICRC at one point used a power-politics argument to justify the *status quo*: whoever has legal authority has power to give orders, but who then would execute those orders? What material forces would be put at the disposal of this new authority? If it had no such resources, what would become of its authority? Existing arrangements, with the ICRC at the centre, were sufficient according to the ICRC. There were no big gaps necessitating other arrangements. According to this argument, one could study the Russian proposals in the future but the *status quo* should be continued.³⁵ This is a clear example of the ICRC using its central position in the Movement, and the *Bulletin*, to take a specific stand about itself and the Movement. It was not always hesitant to advocate for its own views and interests – absolute neutrality had its limits in Movement politics. Or as the author Anne Patchett, in her acclaimed novel *Bel Canto*, has the fictitious and

31 See, further, John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1996, pp. 82–89 and *passim*. This is essential reading on RC history but is rarely quoted by ICRC authors, perhaps because of its acerbic tone.

32 “Travaux confiés au Comité international par la Conférence de 1884”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 63, 1885, p. 98.

33 *Ibid.*

34 “La Conférence internationale de Vienne”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 28, No. 112, 1897, p. 308.

35 Edouard Odier, “La Troisième Conférence des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 15, No. 60, 1884, p. 190.

neutral Swiss ICRC delegate Messner say about a hostage situation in South America: “The Swiss never take sides We are only on the side of the Swiss.”³⁶

After the Russian initiative had been laid to rest, one could later find in the *Bulletin* some evidence of frustration over the fact that the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 were dealing with subjects that overlapped with the 1864 Geneva Convention (GC), and thus that the all-Swiss ICRC and the Swiss government did not have a monopoly on being central to legal developments regarding the laws of war – particularly care of the wounded. This is not to deny that some developments of those Hague Conferences were helpful to the ICRC in trying to limit war’s evils, like the adoption of the Martens Clause.³⁷ Then there were other developments outside the RC (and Swiss) framework that proved beneficial to the development of humanitarian principles, such as the St Petersburg Declaration of 1868.³⁸ Still, the ICRC (or the Swiss government) was sometimes vexed by those outside the RC process taking up subjects covered in the 1864 GC, including even the revision of that treaty.

There are other articles in the *Bulletin* presenting a historical review in which the reader finds the ICRC praising the ICRC, or even Moynier praising Moynier. For example, in 1905, maybe still smarting from Dunant’s Nobel Prize in 1901, Moynier reproduced in the *Bulletin* his letter to the editor of the *Tribune de Genève*. In it he noted some of the accomplishments of the ICRC under his leadership. He also threw in a put-down to Dunant, who was said not to have even been a member of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare, a sub-committee of which became the ICRC (in fact, Dunant was a member of that sub-committee, without being a member of the parent body).³⁹ The immediate context was a fundraising effort by the Swiss Red Cross, the president of which was a Swiss German. Clearly Moynier wanted the Swiss public to know about himself and the ICRC, and its origins in Geneva, and not to get it confused with the Swiss Red Cross – with non-Genévans being prominent in the latter’s leadership.

36 Anne Patchett, *Bel Canto*, HarperCollins, New York, 2001, p. 88. Her novel is based on a real-life incident in which the ICRC was involved; see Michel Minnig, “The Lima Hostage Crisis: Some Comments on the ICRC’s Role as a ‘Neutral Intermediary’”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 38, No. 323, 1998, pp. 293–303, available at: www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/article/other/57jpcg.htm.

37 “Until a more complete code of the laws of war has been issued, the High Contracting Parties deem it expedient to declare that, in cases not included in the Regulations adopted by them, the inhabitants and the belligerents remain under the protection and the rule of the law of nations, as they result from the usages established among civilized peoples, from the laws of humanity and the dictates of public conscience.” See “Martens Clause”, *How Does Law Protect in War? Online*, available at: <https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/martens-clause>.

38 “Considering that the progress of civilization should have the effect of alleviating, as much as possible the calamities of war; That the only legitimate object which States should endeavor to accomplish during war is to weaken the military force of the enemy; That for this purpose, it is sufficient to disable the greatest possible number of men; That this object would be exceeded by the employment of arms which uselessly aggravate the sufferings of disabled men, or render their death inevitable; That the employment of such arms would, therefore, be contrary to the laws of humanity ...”

39 Gustave Moynier, “Appel en faveur de la Croix-Rouge suisse et lettre de M. G. Moynier”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 36, No. 143, 1905, pp. 209–210.

It is not irrelevant that Moynier's father, André, had been part of the Genevan political elite that was forced out of local office by more liberal political forces in 1848, with the son decamping to Paris to finish his legal studies. Gustave Moynier's return to Geneva, his rise in the world of social welfare work, and then his presidency at the ICRC offered an opportunity for his family and the conservative *haute bourgeoisie* of which it was a part to reclaim a certain status and prestige.⁴⁰ The point here is that Genevan and Swiss identity, and acceptance in those circles, was important to Moynier. Those identity factors, along with Christian principles, helped drive his work ethic and his determination to accomplish great things – which he did. The *Bulletin* did not often refer overtly to these Genevan and Swiss factors, but one could glimpse them now and then in the pages of the journal. Identity politics was also to affect the ICRC in the future.⁴¹

Christianity, colonialism and racism

The Christian impulses of the ICRC and Moynier had blind spots, as was true of much – but not all – of the rest of the nominally Christian West. Moynier fully bought into the view that the Christian West constituted a group of civilized nations⁴² which then undertook colonialism in large measure as a civilizing mission and “white man's burden”. It cannot be overstressed how widespread was this justification of colonialism. One of the ways in which non-Western nations like Japan, and then various nations in South America, proved that they were civilized was, to Moynier, by consenting to the 1864 GC and then taking seriously the establishment of National Societies. Moynier often utilized the dichotomy of civilized and uncivilized nations in the pages of the *Bulletin*, and non-Western elites, starting with the Turks and followed more effectively by the Japanese, could indeed enter the preferred group. It is fairly easy to deduce from those pages that sub-Saharan Africa was among the most “uncivilized” areas.

It is not unrelated that when Moynier summarized in the *Bulletin* the rules for recognizing new National Societies by the ICRC, applicant organizations had to, *inter alia*, serve the entire nation without regard to place of birth, gender, religion or political orientation – but one could discriminate on the basis of race.⁴³ The racially

40 See, further, Irène Herrmann, *L'humanitaire en questions: Réflexions autour de l'histoire de Comité International de la Croix-Rouge*, Cerf, Geneva, 2018.

41 After 1919, some in the American Red Cross tried to push the ICRC to the margins and create a more powerful and controlling Red Cross central organ, somewhat similar to the Russian proposals of 1884–97. This effort was strongly and successfully resisted (for the most part) by the ICRC, which had no trouble seeing that its future was endangered. The League of Red Cross Societies, now the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, was created, but without overarching authority. See, further, David P. Forsythe, “The International Red Cross: Decentralization and Its Uses,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2018, pp. 61–90; Irène Herrmann, “Décrypter la concurrence humanitaire: Le conflit entre Croix-Rouge(s) après 1918”, *Relations Internationales*, Vol. 151, No. 3, 2012, pp. 91–102.

42 For one example among many, see G. Ador and G. Moynier, above note 21, p. 165.

43 “Conditions d'existence des Sociétés nationales de la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 36, No. 143, 1905, p. 152, Rule 6.

segregated American Red Cross had been recognized by the ICRC in 1882. The International Conference could have objected to the rules for recognition practiced and then codified by the ICRC, linked to Conference resolutions in a circular process, but it did not. Racism was clearly widespread in the North Atlantic area in his time. One doubts that there was a black official in any of the National Societies then in existence. All of the major European powers were colonial powers and acted on the basis of an assumed white superiority.

Moynier and presumably the rest of the ICRC clearly had a dim view of people of colour, especially Africans. This was made embarrassingly clear in an article in which black Africans of that time were said to be too savage and primitive to associate with humanitarian values.⁴⁴ Humanitarian progress had certainly been achieved by “the Aryan race”, as shown by the widespread adoption of the red cross emblem;⁴⁵ Africans, however, were another matter. Let anyone still be in doubt about the view from Geneva, a later essay argued that the idea of the Red Cross was thought up by whites, who were at the top of the ladder of civilizations, whereas blacks, as in the Congo, were characterized by excessive and ingrained savagery.⁴⁶ In these views the white ICRC was a product of its times as part of the European upper classes – although there were occasional European voices criticizing colonialism and racism. It was not just in the US South that the Christian religion was broadly infected with racism.

The deeply troubling example of the Congo Free State is treated only incompletely in the *Bulletin*, with important points left out. King Leopold of Belgium took control of the Congo Free State as his personal property in 1885, selling commercial interests to investors who, like the king, were greatly interested in economic gain, mainly involving rubber. The result was horrific for the local inhabitants. One close observer later held that the murders, mutilations, torture and other widespread abuses added up to genocide.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, various Western sources generated such negative publicity about the Congo that in 1908 Leopold was forced to relinquish the territory to the Belgian State, which then ruled it in only slightly better condition until independence in 1960. Moynier was King Leopold’s consul general in Switzerland from 1890 to 1904. The *Bulletin* is silent as to whether negative publicity about the Congo Free State caused Moynier’s 1904 resignation as its representative based in Geneva.

The *Bulletin* recorded such facts as the creation of the Congolese and African Red Cross Society, controlled by white Belgians with offices in Belgium. It was supposed to be a National Society for all of black Africa, not just for the Congo – an idea accepted by the ICRC, since it could now claim that the RC idea

44 “La Croix-Rouge chez les Negres”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 41, 1880, p. 5.

45 “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, p. 73, building on a discussion of RC progress “within the limits of the ‘civilized zone’” at p. 71.

46 “L’avenir de la Croix-Rouge au Congo”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 34, No. 136, 1903, p. 219.

47 Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghosts: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York, 1998.

covered all of Africa.⁴⁸ Red Cross good deeds in the Congo basin were listed, such as hospitals created and medical missions dispatched, but the overall situation was never mentioned – not by the Belgian Red Cross and not by the ICRC, despite ample publicity given by various sources to the horrors taking place. Of course, Moynier’s close association with Leopold’s commercial objectives was never mentioned in the journal.

The situation was more or less comparable in Southwest Africa (now Namibia). As Imperial Germany moved into the area in 1884 as part of the great carve-up of Africa, the German military ruthlessly suppressed local opposition during the first decade of the twentieth century. The general consensus now is that the German action constituted genocide, particularly against the Herero people. Modern Germany appeared to accept this view in 2015, although various disputes continue.⁴⁹

In the *Bulletin*, one can read of the activities of the German Red Cross in assisting wounded and sick German soldiers both in Southwest Africa and upon their return back home. There is no mention of the German Red Cross treating wounded Herero under the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The German Red Cross finally mentioned the Herero in its report to the *Bulletin* in 1908 – as a menace to the German colony.⁵⁰ There is no mention of the overall context, either by the German Red Cross or by the ICRC.⁵¹

Then there was the matter of atrocities by British forces, or irregulars operating with British forces, after the battle of Omdurman in Sudan in 1898. It was a fact that many of the wounded Dervishes were killed after the battle, as the British Empire operating out of Egypt secured its control of the Upper Nile. European parties recorded the events, which led to much controversy back home. Moynier, for the ICRC, supported a dubious British official version of events, reprinting in the *Bulletin* pretty much the same debatable story that the British government offered to Parliament. According to these questionable accounts, the uncivilized Dervishes had committed atrocities themselves and tried to kill any

48 Gustave Moynier and Edouard Odier, “Formation d’une Société congolaise et africaine de la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 20, No. 78, 1889, pp. 76–80.

49 Jason Burke and Philip Oltermann, “Germany Moves to Atone for ‘Forgotten Genocide’ in Namibia”, *The Guardian*, 25 December 2016, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/25/germany-moves-to-atone-for-forgotten-genocide-in-namibia.

50 “La Croix-Rouge allemande au Sud-Ouest de l’Afrique”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 39, No. 155, 1908, pp. 186–187.

51 One of the oddities about the *Bulletin* was that it reported the activities of not only the German Red Cross but also those RC units representing Prussia, Hesse, Bade, Württemberg and Bavaria. These latter were presented as independent units and not as sub-units of one German RC, even after early 1869, when the Germans agreed on one superior RC body sitting in Berlin. There was supposed to be only one National Society per State that had ratified the 1864 GC. Of course, in France for a time there were three aid societies using the RC name. Also, early on the *Bulletin* reported on the activities of an American sanitary (medical) commission even though the United States had not yet ratified the first GC and had no RC society by that name. It was as if Moynier was desperately eager to include the Americans in the RC network and skipped over inconvenient facts. Despite Moynier’s reputation for careful organization, there are quite a few oddities or inconsistencies evident in the journal. To cite another example, the complex and ever-changing British Red Cross was often referred to as the English Red Cross, a fact which probably did not aid RC expansion into Scotland.

medical persons who attempted to help them, so it was understandable that the British – who were not directly involved – had encountered difficulties.⁵² It seemed to be a case of the ICRC supporting colonial forces of whatever nationality in their “civilizing mission”, or displaying a preference for the Anglo-Saxons,⁵³ or both. British responsibility for war crimes against the wounded of a defeated “primitive” army seemed unimportant to the ICRC.

In general, as Britain, France, Germany and other European powers took control of non-Western areas by force in the glory days of colonialism, metropolitan National Societies followed. As auxiliaries to national military establishments, they organized RC branches in conquered areas. So, for example, as the French moved into Southeast Asia and North Africa, the *Bulletin* duly recorded French Red Cross activity in Indochina, Tunisia, Morocco, etc. There was no commentary from the ICRC about the Western violence and even atrocities that were at the heart of this expansion of “civilization” and “Christian” principles. Rather, via the *Bulletin*, the ICRC enthused over the spread of the RC idea to formerly uncivilized areas, noting that this was a positive benefit from war.⁵⁴

Some might object that one should not hold the nineteenth-century ICRC to the standards of the twenty-first century. That is a fair point. Much of the West at the time saw colonialism as having brought the rule of law, some economic development, and more education to colonized areas;⁵⁵ indeed, some in the West still consider this to be the case. The ICRC did not have delegates in the field in those days, and perhaps some candid reporting from the scene might have altered views in Geneva. In any event, there *were* nineteenth-century voices objecting to abuse of locals in places like the Congo Free State and other Western-dominated areas. The ICRC did not lend its voice to that chorus. As it helped organize RC assistance to various conflicts in the non-Western world, it had the opportunity to offer its comments, as it did on other subjects. But concerning the dark side of colonialism, Moynier and the ICRC and the International Conference were all silent – at least according to the pages of the *Bulletin*.

Structure of the Movement

From the beginning, the ICRC has been remarkably consistent about stressing the decentralized nature of the RC network. While the ICRC expressed pride in its accomplishments in nurturing and bringing to fruition the Red Cross idea as expressed by Henry Dunant, it never sought to command or control other RC

52 “Les Blessés de la Bataille D’Omdurman”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 30, No. 117, 1899, pp. 40–41; “Les Blessés de la Bataille D’Omdurman”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 30, No. 118, 1899, pp. 109–113.

53 See discussion below.

54 For a telling treatment of the “civilized” French supposedly spreading enlightenment values, including human rights, to Egypt via repression and atrocities, see Juan Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East*, St Martins Griffin, New York, 2007.

55 See, for example, Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and the Demise of the British World Order*, Penguin, London, 2002. In this book, Ferguson attempts a balance sheet of the positive and negative aspects of British and Western colonialism.

agencies. It vigorously and shrewdly defended its position as the central communications node in the network, and it did not hesitate to identify as the founding agency of the Movement and as having a special role to play regarding the Geneva Convention. As early as 1886 it referred to itself as the promoter and champion of that treaty, not leaving that activity to Swiss federal authorities. While it flirted with the idea of centralized enforcement of “Geneva law” as established by States, it did not push for centralized enforcement early on. It discussed the idea of some sort of union or federation of the National Societies, but it never showed in the *Bulletin* how to reconcile the idea of an RC union with the untrammelled independence of the National Societies.⁵⁶ The unity of the RC network remained strictly moral in these early days.⁵⁷

Back in 1864 at an informal meeting of individuals interested in the Red Cross idea, the American Charles S. Bowles—who was an observer at the diplomatic conference of that year—spoke in a favour of a hierarchical network of actors that would be regulated by an authoritative central organ. General Dufour, the first president of the ICRC, spoke strongly against the idea, arguing that the network should be decentralized; Dunant was present and did not object to this, indicating agreement with Dufour. For Dufour, uniformity of detail was unimportant.⁵⁸ This indicated that the ICRC as a whole was on the same page; it was not just Moynier that favoured a loosely organized network of humanitarian agencies.

In 1870 Moynier made clear in print his unwavering view of the various National Societies, saying that each was independent and manifested “self-government”.⁵⁹ The ICRC was merely the “intermediary” among these independent units, which derived their energy and support from being entirely national, not international.⁶⁰ At that time the organization said that its place was not on the battlefield; that role was for the national units. Moynier’s early position was that each National Society was free to use whatever emblem it wished. This position of course changed, but Moynier never changed his view about the independence of each national unit, whose accomplishments would be stifled by centralized authority.⁶¹ The ICRC would help with communications but sought no authority over others.⁶² The resolutions of International Conference were non-binding since the National Societies manifested complete autonomy.⁶³

56 “Congrès d’hygiène et de sauvetage, rapport de M. Gustave Moynier sur la VII^{me} question de la 2^{me} section”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 8, No. 29, 1877, pp. 13–25; “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, pp. 74–75.

57 Gustave Ador and Gustave Moynier, “Le Bulletin international (41^{me} circulaire)”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 9, No 33, 1878, p. 5.

58 “Une Conférence oubliée de la Croix-Rouge à Genève en 1864”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 15, No. 59, 1884, pp. 133–134.

59 Moynier used the English phrase, in “Du double caractère”, above note 9, p. 160.

60 *Ibid.*

61 “III. Sociétés de secours”, above note 23, p. 179.

62 *Ibid.*

63 “Projet de conférence internationale à Vienne”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 10, No. 39, 1879, p. 66.

Common ideals would hold the Movement together.⁶⁴ The only Conference resolutions that were binding were those from 1863, because they were essential; without those resolutions, there would be no RC network.⁶⁵ Otherwise, National Societies were totally independent.⁶⁶

The ICRC liked to project the view of itself as a disinterested actor with no legal authority and no special interests. In this self-image, it was an unofficial group from a small nation. It had simply been good at producing agreement within the RC network and had helped limit the scourge of war – including through the development of international law. It was completely independent of strategic politics and only sought to preserve its own freedom of action.⁶⁷ It is probable that the ICRC argued so strongly for the autonomy of National Societies in order to protect its own independence. If this was an early conscious strategy, it was to prove very useful not only in defeating Russian proposals for centralization but also after 1919.⁶⁸ It may also have been the case that the ICRC was influenced by the Swiss national political system, which manifested a relatively weak centre and relatively strong cantons.

A young and decentralized RC network did work tolerably well in the Franco-Prussian war and in the various Balkan wars. Neutral National Societies did send medical personnel and material – and money – to help victims. Specialized RC agencies created by the ICRC to collect information and coordinate aid were created and were busy in Basel, Trieste, Belgrade, Lourenço Marques, etc. The latter agency indicated some European interest in war victims in southern Africa due to the various Boer wars; of course, there was a European connection via the British and Dutch. Under the ICRC vision of the Movement, humanitarian aid did increase and war victims did benefit. The operation of the Movement in the 1912–13 Greek-Turkish war was sizable enough so that in retrospect it constituted a practice run in some ways for the Great War of 1914–18.

Despite its belief in a decentralized system, the ICRC spent much time and energy trying to get National Societies to implement the resolutions of the International Conference both in peace and in war. The ICRC view was paradoxical: the National Societies were totally independent, but they should follow the Conference's resolutions voluntarily. For example, in the late 1890s the Turkish Red Crescent considered what to do about a for-profit company using the red crescent emblem on its product, with a percentage of sales going to

64 *Ibid.*

65 “Organisation générale et programme de la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 29, No. 116, 1898, p. 186.

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 186–187.

67 “Un dernier mot”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 31, No. 124, 1900, pp. 223–225.

68 See above note 41.

Turkey's National Society. The ICRC urged rejection of that idea, citing a resolution of the International Conference that had met in Karlsruhe.⁶⁹

From time to time Moynier slipped into the Mother Hen mode of pecking at various National Societies. The Turkish Red Crescent lacked vitality and had even collapsed at times. The Austrian Red Cross was disappointing in the lack of aid sent to the various Balkan wars. Montenegrin individuals had asked Geneva for help, but they were not a recognized RC society and had no local means for action.⁷⁰ All this was not terribly diplomatic; nor was it entirely diplomatic for Moynier to single out certain National Societies as good examples, such as those of Germany, the Netherlands and Russia, implying by contrast that other national units were not (and mentioning the French and the Swedes as among those trying to emulate the better examples).⁷¹ At times Moynier could let his righteous indignation overwhelm his sense of diplomacy, as when he chastised neutral National Societies for not caring enough about the Balkan wars compared to the Franco-Prussian war.⁷²

It is not clear what kind of feedback the Mother Hen articles triggered, but later issues of the journal were mostly more circumspect. However, in 1905 an unsigned piece castigated the Uruguay government for its lack of cooperation with the local National Society in an ongoing civil war.⁷³

Overall, while the ICRC might prod in various ways, such as by circulating questionnaires and otherwise asking if National Societies had done this or that, and while Moynier might even criticize with a tone of righteous indignation, the ICRC never sought formal authority over other RC agencies. The International Conference would pass resolutions as non-binding recommendations, and the ICRC would follow up in various ways to try to get them implemented.⁷⁴ It also manifested a right of initiative which included sending representatives *sur place*. For example, it decided on its own to send an observer to directly report on what was happening in the Greek-Turkish war of 1912–13.⁷⁵ It had sent an observer to the German-Danish war back in 1864. No other RC actor asked it to take such action.

69 Gustave Moynier, "Consultation sur l'emploi du Croissant-Rouge", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 29, No. 114, 1898, pp. 62–65. Over time the ICRC and the National Societies were successful in legally limiting the red cross and red crescent emblems to humanitarian uses, mainly via national legislation but also by public international law – not that new laws prevented all misuse or scams.

70 "L'insurrection dans l'Herzégovine", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 7, No 25, 1876, pp. 1–4.

71 "III. Sociétés de secours", above note 23, p. 182.

72 "L'insurrection dans l'Herzégovine", above note 70, especially p. 2.

73 "La Croix-Rouge uruguayenne pendant la guerre civile de 1904", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 36, No. 142, 1905, pp. 144–145.

74 Morehead, above note 7, writes that the ICRC did not do much to shape National Societies. This is both true and false. The ICRC did not command, and it tolerated great variety in structure and function, but it did shape the National Societies in various ways. Without the ICRC's prodding and hectoring, the Movement would have been even more fractured than it was

75 "L'assistance aux prisonniers dans la guerre des Balkans: Visite à l'Agence internationale, aux Croix-Rouges serbe et grecque et au Croissant-Rouge", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 44, No. 175, 1913, p. 201.

Moynier continued to put his faith in the spirit of the Red Cross as an international moral code that would triumph over bellicose nationalism – at least for RC agencies. This, despite seeing clearly in the Franco-Prussian war how difficult, indeed impossible, it was for the French and Prussian aid societies to act in a neutral way. Yet he continued to insist that the Movement should be decentralized, with totally independent National Societies and with no authoritative centralized body. It was a good formula for expanding the Movement and broadening humanitarian action in piecemeal fashion. It was not a good recipe for marshalling the putative resources of the Movement for maximum independent, neutral and impartial impact, as each National Society could decide to go its own way.

Moynier's views added up to an inconsistent position, papered over by a faith in RC ideas as a moral code. He consistently saw the dangers of narrow or even bellicose nationalism by *States*. He wanted to believe that the very same nationalism in *nations* could be checked by a universal and neutral humanitarian spirit as nurtured by social elites like himself. Yet that belief was undercut by the facts of the Franco-Prussian and other wars. Certain kinds of nationalism warped nations as much as States, and Moynier noted that not just State policy but also national public opinion could be belligerent.⁷⁶ The contradiction could only be resolved by stressing the role of social elites and *neutral* RC actors, even as the National Societies of belligerent States largely departed from independent, neutral and impartial assistance. Consistent with this view, the relatively neutral ICRC eventually became more active in the field, as each National Society became more and more a quasi-State agency and thus subject to the pull of militarized State interests.⁷⁷

This dogged optimism, leading to shifting ICRC policies, characterized the early ICRC as a whole. In 1906, the *Bulletin* published an erudite essay signed by Dr Adolphe Ferrière taking issue with pessimists about the human condition like Darwin, Spencer, Hobbes and Huxley. In a book review essay about the Russian Peter Kropotkin, Ferrière argued that RC history showed evolutionary progress in social cooperation. Christian charity had evolved into global solidarity. There was a social fraternity. There was more cooperation about humanitarian assistance. Savage competition could be limited by social development.⁷⁸ And there was indeed some humanitarian progress between 1863 and 1914, due in part to the dedication and even nagging of the ICRC.

The ICRC and States

Humanitarianism and social reform were “in the air” in the North Atlantic area in the middle of the nineteenth century – witness the activities of Florence Nightingale

76 “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, p. 67.

77 Hutchinson, above note 31, is exactly right that most National Societies became militarized and nationalized.

78 Adolphe Ferrière, “L’entr’aide et la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 37, No. 147, 1906, pp. 191–195.

and Clara Barton, in addition to Henry Dunant. When the ICRC got started in 1863 as a spin-off of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare, there were numerous other private groups active to improve the human condition, whether focusing on the domestic results of the industrial revolution or international war or both. There was, for example, the Order of St John of Jerusalem, which was formally integrated into the British Red Cross for a time. There was the network of the Society of Samaritans, which often interacted with RC agencies in various nations. Most States lacked broad welfare policies, and a multitude of private agencies attempted to fill the void.

From the very start, the ICRC led by Moynier sought to link what became the Movement to State approval and support. In part the early focus on the war wounded made this necessary, because such a focus required the cooperation of national military establishments. In part it happened because the lawyer Moynier and the ICRC wanted to utilize public international law to endorse their values, and it was States that made that law. And in part it happened because the ICRC and other RC actors had a positive view of the governmental role. For the ICRC and many other RC actors, they were close to State authorities and in some cases inseparable from them. In any event, Moynier and the ICRC sought to create in each State *the* officially recognized aid agency. This status could only be conferred by governments speaking for States. The ICRC and the rest of the Movement were successful in these objectives, but their success came with a price – and that price was not being able to push States beyond what they were then willing to accept.

By the time the *Bulletin* commenced publication in 1869, the embryonic ICRC had already worked closely with the Swiss State to produce an international treaty to neutralize the war wounded and those that attended them. ICRC officials were close to, and sometimes part of, the Swiss state. Moynier and Dufour were part of the Swiss State delegation that voted for the 1864 GC. Moynier represented Switzerland in various conferences devoted to social welfare public policies. General Dufour had been high in the Swiss army, and Dr Appia had consulted with it on medical matters, as had Dr Maunoir. Dunant was an outsider, but the rest of the original ICRC was not. Moreover, almost all Swiss males were citizen soldiers, subject to call-up for military duty. This Swiss pattern found an echo in many of what became the National Societies. Members of the upper classes had the time and money to devote to social welfare, and they often overlapped with political elites. There were exceptions, as per Clara Barton and the conflicted evolution of the American Red Cross. At one point the *Bulletin* published a list of upper-class notables who had sponsored or endorsed various RC agencies,⁷⁹ and some of these notables were also State officials. Indeed, any number of RC officials were also State officials.

RC organizations were supposed to be independent and non-political in the context of partisan and strategic politics. They were to be private rather than public/governmental. The pages of the *Bulletin* indicate that rigorous attention to these

79 “Les protecteurs princiers de la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 29, No 113, 1898, pp. 5–6.

points was often ignored by the early ICRC, both in its own policies and in its lack of commentary about other RC units. To take just a few leading examples (in addition to Moynier and Dufour being part of the 1864 Swiss delegation that adopted the first GC), ICRC member Edouard Odier was part of the Swiss delegation to the Hague Conference of 1899 – and Swiss ambassador to Russia. The Belgian minister of war was named head of Belgium’s National Society,⁸⁰ and President William Howard Taft became president of the American Red Cross. When the ICRC set up a coordinating agency in Belgrade for the Balkan war in 1912–13, it put in charge the local Swiss consular official, who remained Swiss consul general even as he put on his ICRC hat.⁸¹ We have already noted that Moynier himself became consul general for King Leopold and his Congo Free State. The examples could be expanded *ad nauseam*.

Then there was the matter of States being invited to the International Conference from 1867 on. True, State attendance provided an official endorsement for the RC network, and the RC network could not advance international humanitarian law without the cooperation of States. But how could the International Conference be private and non-political when States were involved – with voting rights? The ICRC for some reason turned a blind eye to, or at least had a loose conception of, the ideas of RC independence and non-political status as a private actor. One reason was that the ICRC was too close to, and overrated the humanitarian nature of, the Swiss government. This orientation was to come back and bite the ICRC during World War II.⁸²

When Moynier, in particular, strategized about how to build the Movement, he often carefully calculated how to deal with States – the above confusion notwithstanding. Almost immediately after the ratification of the 1864 GC, there was an effort to revise it. Certain wording needed to be clarified, and the changing nature of warfare meant that there were victims from naval warfare, not just from land armies. A set of proposed revisions to the 1864 GC existed from 1868, but certain important States were not enthusiastic about further legal obligations in armed conflict. The ICRC frequently consulted with the Swiss government about how to proceed, or even whether to proceed, and there were

80 F. Sigart and François Bougard, “Présidence de la Société belge”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 41, 1880, p. 14.

81 “L’assistance aux prisonniers dans la guerre des Balkans”, above note 75, p. 200.

82 In the 1940s, the ICRC Assembly – the organization’s governing board – contained several individuals who were simultaneously Swiss federal officials in Bern. Swiss State policy was to cooperate with the Nazis, especially regarding banking and refugees, and not to antagonize Berlin unduly. The issue came up in the ICRC Assembly of how hard to press the Nazis on various humanitarian issues, and whether to do so publicly. All these ICRC top officials wearing two hats urged caution and discretion, as did a few other Assembly members. While the Swiss government *per se* did not pressure the ICRC to appease the Nazis, the situation *circa* 1942 indicated that ICRC independence as a private actor was compromised by the presence of these Swiss State officials. See Isabelle Vonèche Cardia, *Neutralité et engagement: Les relations entre le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (CICR) et le Gouvernement suisse 1938–1945*, SHSR, Lausanne, 2012. The modern ICRC Assembly forbids outside memberships that present a conflict of interest with the organization’s humanitarian objectives. Of course, one still has to apply general rules to specific cases. See, further, David P. Forsythe, “A New International Committee of the Red Cross?”, *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 17, No. 5, 2018, pp. 533–549, about contemporary conflicts of interest among Assembly members including the president.

sometimes differences of opinion.⁸³ A second GC, revising the first, was not adopted until 1906. The *Bulletin* sometimes recorded the view that it was unwise to antagonize governments, since they were in a position to advance or hinder RC objectives⁸⁴ – one thus had to calculate, for example, when the time was right to seek more public law aimed at helping war victims. Moynier certainly tried to make such calculations.

Moynier could be sceptical about States, perhaps excepting the Swiss authorities in Bern. He recognized that States might indeed consent to the 1864 GC for the protection of wounded soldiers but then violate its terms. He was at least partially a political realist who understood the power of nationalism and governments' pursuit of amoral national interests. When a newly declared State located in the Amazon basin sent a letter to the ICRC offering to ratify the 1864 GC, Moynier understood clearly that it was not about pledging support for humanitarian values but about claims to independence for a new State because of profits to be made from the area. Rather than just pass on the letter to the Swiss authorities who registered State acceptance of humanitarian treaties, Moynier used the *Bulletin* to expose the game for what it was.⁸⁵

The early ICRC did not want the RC network to get involved in charges of State violation of the 1864 GC, arguing that an RC role would serve no useful purpose.⁸⁶ The ICRC did get involved, not in terms of passing judgment but in terms of publishing claims and denials in the *Bulletin*. The initial caution proved well founded. For a time, the *Bulletin* published charges and counter-charges arising from various wars, with no apparent benefit to anyone. It eventually stopped the practice at some point after the present era of study.⁸⁷

Moynier, however, did not hesitate to call out at considerable length the Ottomans for their violations of the 1864 GC in the war with Russia during 1876–78, especially after the first phase of that war, during a long truce.⁸⁸ In this he was reflecting the widespread European view that the Ottoman Empire was the sick man of Europe (it followed that the Turkish Red Crescent was also sick, which it was for much of the time). Moynier was much more critical of the Ottomans than about other parties to the conflict (including Serbia and Montenegro), whose records under the 1864 GC were not perfect, so there was some bias on the part of the ICRC against the Turks. Much later, the ICRC (i.e.,

83 “Une nouvelle démarche relative à la ratification des articles additionnels à la Convention de Genève”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 14, No. 54, 1883, pp. 59–63. The Swiss Red Cross also expressed its views on this matter.

84 See, for example, Gustave Moynier and Edouard Odier, “Congrès international des œuvres d’assistance en temps de guerre (103e circ.)”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 31, No. 123, 1900, p. 134.

85 “L’Etat libre de COUNANI et la Convention de Genève”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 35, No. 137, 1904, pp. 10–11.

86 “Conférence préparatoire à la Conférence Internationale de Vienne”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 2, Nos 7–8, 1871, pp. 181, 183–184.

87 See, further, Lindsey Cameron, “The ICRC in the First World War: Unwavering Belief in the Power of Law?”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 900, 2016, pp. 1099–1120, available at: www.icrc.org/en/international-review/article/icrc-first-world-war-unwavering-belief-power-law.

88 G. Ador and G. Moynier, above note 21, pp. 164–176.

Moynier) somewhat defensively tried to justify this tilt by saying that the events in question were uncontested.⁸⁹ It was also the case that the victims of some Turkish behaviour were Christians from Russia and the Balkan areas.⁹⁰

As the Franco-Prussian war unfolded, Moynier wrote a personal essay advocating the establishment of an international court to resolve claims about war crimes. He thought world public opinion would sustain such a court's judgments. He was affected by the Alabama claims arbitration stemming from the American Civil War, a successful arbitration panel that sat in Geneva. He even drafted a statute for such a court.⁹¹ But this was not a formal proposal in the name of the ICRC, and this personal thinking-out-loud did not result in concrete developments; States were not ready for such action. Later, with more experience, Moynier still recognized the need for an authoritative court to enforce humanitarian law, but he concluded that such a body was unattainable because States would not consent to it. They would not use arbitration or judicial settlement concerning themselves and the laws of war. Moynier then rethought his earlier optimism about courts; at best, he wrote, maybe some kind of mock court could educate.⁹² Nevertheless, he retained a strong belief in the role of international law, and he helped establish – and was active in – the Institute for International Law, originally based in Ghent.

In general, the ICRC and Moynier tried to be careful about projecting RC activity into situations where a key State was opposed. In the various Boer wars in southern Africa around the turn of the century, before any Boer State was formally recognized by other States, the ICRC was careful to obtain the consent of the United Kingdom before encouraging RC assistance from the Netherlands or elsewhere.⁹³

To cite another example of this caution, the Spanish Red Cross wanted the ICRC to act on behalf of Spanish citizens who had been taken prisoner during the fighting between rebels and the United States – the new sovereign in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Washington was predictably unenthusiastic about this outside involvement, especially by Spanish sources, and so was the ICRC. The ICRC (i.e., Moynier) declined to get involved on a variety of grounds: that the RC network should concentrate on the war wounded and not on all the ills that might arise from fighting (even though RC actors were already involved in all sorts of activities pertaining to prisoners of war (PoWs), natural disasters, etc.); that previous inquiries had not led anywhere, either with the American Red Cross or the rebels; and that only the US

89 “2. Questions de fait”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 31, No. 124, 1900, p. 219.

90 See discussion below, where I discuss the case of the Armenians.

91 “Note sur la création d’une institution judiciaire internationale propre à prévenir et à réprimer les infractions à la convention de Genève, par M. Gustave Moynier”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 3, No. 11, 1872, pp. 122–131.

92 “L’avenir de la Croix Rouge, par M. Gust Moynier”, above note 5, p. 78.

93 “Les insurrections dans l’Afrique Australe”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 12, No. 45, 1881, p. 11. See, further, Daniel Palmieri, “How Warfare Has Evolved – a Humanitarian Organization’s Perceptions: The Case of the ICRC 1863–1960”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 900, 2015, pp. 985–998.

government could say what démarches might be allowed given the demands of military necessity.⁹⁴ Since part of the ICRC's position did not accord with the facts, namely that RC actors should concentrate only on the war wounded, it was fairly clear that Moynier did not want to run the risk of irritating the United States through further action.

In general, the ICRC was mostly deferential to States despite some scepticism about their policies, and Moynier was reluctant to have the RC involved in civil wars, which were not covered by the 1864 GC, during this era. He explicitly refused involvement in a civil war in Uruguay.⁹⁵ He tried to distinguish national uprisings and responses by a National Society, as in Spain during the Carlist unrest, from ICRC involvement as part of an international RC response. He was opposed to the latter in civil wars.

On the other hand, the American Red Cross and other RC actors jumped into the controversy in Turkey about the Armenians *circa* 1905. The ICRC, too, joined in the international chorus of criticism about Turkish policies. As already noted, most sectors of European opinion did not think highly of the declining Ottoman Empire, and in this case the ICRC showed little respect for Turkish sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction. Of course, the Armenians were considered to be Christian, which figured into the mix of motivations by some outsiders. There was a pattern of Europeans engaging in "humanitarian intervention" when it was a matter of Christian victims of the Ottoman Empire, whether in Greece, Bulgaria, Lebanon or Anatolia.⁹⁶

Over time the ICRC became well known to States because of practical and legal activity related to wars and other situations involving violence. It achieved considerable status in diplomatic circles. Moynier was named honorary president of the 1906 diplomatic conference for revision of the first GC. The price for this status was a continued caution or conservatism in the ICRC's policies. The ICRC proved reluctant to vigorously push States further than they wanted to go, at least in public diplomacy. It developed a long-term view, always hoping for future progress via cooperation with States even if the pressing issues of the moment went unresolved because of State non-cooperation.

Future research

The *Bulletin* is a rich source of material about the ICRC from its early days to World War I, and already this essay is longer than originally intended. In this section I

94 "Les Prisonniers de Guerre aux Philippines", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 30, No. 118, 1899, pp. 90–91.

95 "La Croix-Rouge uruguayenne pendant la guerre civile de 1904", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 35, No. 138, 1904, p. 128.

96 Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*, Knopf, New York, 2008. Money for the Armenians from the American Red Cross was channelled through US government officials, another breach of the line between public and private, non-political and political.

briefly mention a few points drawn only from this era that seemed important, but for which space and time compel me to omit full discussion and documentation.

From the *Bulletin* it is clear that the ICRC was extremely dedicated and serious about its work. Dr Ferrière authored a series of essays reviewing the literature on military medicine, and this series seems thorough and well informed. It would be interesting to know how much such efforts in the *Bulletin* led to improved medical practices, both in the RC network and among national military units. There was a prodigious amount of reading and translating done by various members of the ICRC related to wounded soldiers and other war victims. What impact did it have?

Relatedly, one theme evident in the *Bulletin* was how to get wounded soldiers off the battlefield quickly and on to proximate medical treatment. There were articles and drawings about stretchers carried in different ways – on bicycles, on pack animals, in mountainous terrain, on skis, on sleds, by vehicles, in train cars; with the injured sitting up rather than lying down; with the battlefield lighted up at night by new lamps; with different types of surgical field hospitals. I thought at one point that if I read one more essay about stretchers, I would collapse and need one myself. More seriously, it would be interesting to know if this concern by RC actors, coordinated and spread by the ICRC, was ahead of the curve of knowledge in national military circles, and if the published material actually improved the treatment of victims. Did anyone pay attention to the *Bulletin* on this important subject?

Did other members of the ICRC, or the Movement for that matter, express any concern or try to control in any way the evident personal biases of Moynier? He clearly did not like Henry Dunant, and when Dunant shared the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, the *Bulletin* published a churlish article pointing out that Moynier had really developed the ICRC and pushed the RC network forward, winning a prize from a French organization for his efforts. Moynier clearly favoured Clara Barton and publicly took her side when there was a brouhaha in the American Red Cross over leadership issues *circa* 1904. She was a friend of the ICRC, and the *Bulletin* gave more space to her death in 1912 than it had to Dunant's in 1910. But she was not a superb administrator, and the finances of the American Red Cross were not in order. Those trying to get her to retire had some valid reasons. The articles in the *Bulletin* took her side in a needless and heavy-handed way. For that matter, Moynier said such nice things about the American Red Cross – favourable comments not found in the *Bulletin* about any other National Society – that one might wonder why he developed such views. At one point Moynier saw the Americans as the new and powerful leaders of Christian civilization.⁹⁷ Yet he knew of brutal US policies in the Philippines, because he mentioned them in the journal.

97 Henry Dunant was born Jean-Henri Dunant; he came from an Anglophile family and preferred to be called Henry. Gustave Moynier also seemed to favour the Anglo-Saxons, but if he preferred to be called Gus, we have no record of it.

Early on it became clear that the Movement would focus on more than just the war wounded in international war. The National Societies needed something to do in peacetime besides think about the next war, and many of them were already active regarding national and international responses to natural disasters when recognized by the ICRC. For example, some RC units were active regarding industrial accidents. Dr Ferrière of the ICRC wrote about those rejected by the military because of mental health problems, and the lack of attention to that kind of health issue. Concern for the wounded fairly quickly led to interest in PoWs, refugees and other victims. When the ICRC set up an agency in Basel in 1870 to coordinate aid for wounded soldiers in the Franco-Prussian war, it collected information about PoWs. By 1913, Dr Ferrière was prescient in saying that attention to PoWs in the future would greatly augment the RC's good deeds. As early as 1909, the *Bulletin* used the general phrase "suffering humanity" to refer to RC concerns. Does the ICRC and/or the Movement have a particular focus or niche? Are there limits to ICRC and RC concern about individuals in dire straits? Where does the RC focus stop? Is there a debilitating "mission creep"?⁹⁸

It was evident that much of the actual work done by RC units was done by women. In a few cases the National Society was led by a woman, such as Clara Barton and then Mabel Boardman in the American Red Cross. Mostly the pattern was male leadership but with a heavy reliance on female staff. There was even the occasional remark, including by the Queen of England, about RC work being women's work. Some national RC units were virtually all female, such as France's Union des Dames and Association des Dames. Why was it, then, that all of the attention to, and recognition of, women in the *Bulletin* had no apparent impact on the ICRC, which had no female members on the top board during 1863–1917? Given this absence, it was ironic that an ICRC report in 1913 noted that the Serbs had failed to utilize women effectively in their National Society and health services, compared to some other Balkan organizations.

There are many other interesting points to be raised from reading the early days of the *Bulletin*, but not all readers of this article may be ICRC junkies – so perhaps it is time to stop for now.

Conclusion

Some readers may think I have been too critical about the ICRC, and particularly Moynier, for the period under review. In this regard I relate two personal anecdotes. I saw one internal ICRC document some years ago that referred to me as a friend of the organization – which was accurate. I also recall what one former

98 The author was part of a study team which asked these questions in the mid-1970s as part of the Tansley Report or "Big Study" of the Movement. Our conclusions and even our questions had little impact on anyone. For a brief introduction, see Donald D. Tansley, "Reappraisal of the Role of the Red Cross", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 14, No. 155, 1974, pp. 71–75. Tansley's final report, with supporting studies, was much longer, but length does not equate with influence.

ICRC official said to me – namely, that one has to do the objective analysis before one can praise.

There are several ICRC assertions about RC history in the *Bulletin* that are actually true. One of these was that the ICRC was the gearbox in the RC machinery. The ICRC and particularly Moynier were committed to limiting the destruction of war and dogged in their pursuit of that objective, with the very demanding goal of building an RC network recognized as *the* universal and official aid institution – initially for situations of violence. Two treaties on humanitarian law were concluded in 1864 and 1906, thus laying a big part of the foundation for what is today widely called international humanitarian law. The ICRC was deeply involved in both treaties and mostly responsible for the first. The ICRC and especially Moynier achieved a great deal in the era reviewed, all of which was then followed up by other ICRC leaders in subsequent eras. There is a lot to be proud of in the historical record up to World War I.

The fact that the ICRC and Moynier were indeed proud, and brimming with *amour propre*, and that as human beings they were imperfect and made mistakes common to their times, is simply part of the record. Subsequent eras are equally interesting, and the *Bulletin* and then the *International Review of the Red Cross* got much better. But that is grist for a future mill.

